

Beyond Justice

Reading Alma 42 in the Context of Atonement Theories

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In Alma 42, Alma teaches his son Corianton about the atonement in a statement laden with legal vocabulary. Terms such as *law*, *judged*, *just*, *justice*, *injustice*, *punishment*, *probationary*, and *penitent* dominate the message, in company with such concepts as the execution of the law, the infliction of punishment, and punishment being affixed to violation of law. By all appearances, Alma sets forth what theologians call a juridical view of atonement (one concerned with the administration of justice). The problem as Alma states it is that “all mankind were fallen” and because of disobedience were “in the grasp of justice” and “cut off” from God’s presence. The solution, Alma says, is that “God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:14–15). On their face, Alma’s statements seem typical of classical juridical conceptualizations of the atonement. However, a close,

contextualized reading of his statements and the larger argument in which they appear reveals that Alma actually challenges certain legalistic ways of understanding the atonement and divine justice, even as he draws upon valuable aspects of a juridical view in order to help his son understand what he must do to receive God's gift of salvation.

Nevertheless, among members of The Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints, Alma 42 has often been used as a basis for teaching a rather rigid, transactional, legal model of salvation focused on the demands of law and the satisfaction of justice, a model that has at times become a dominant and almost default way of understanding the atonement in Church discourse.¹ Its popularity parallels a trend in broader Christianity, from the Middle Ages to the present, to view atonement primarily as the satisfaction of divine justice through "substituted punishment."²

Alma's framing of atonement in Alma 42 is not the only way scriptural authors have understood this centrally important subject. It isn't even the only way Alma himself taught about it. While teaching people in the land of Gideon, for example, Alma described the atonement in very different terms that movingly emphasized divine empathy and succor (Alma 7:11–13). In both the Book of Mormon and the Bible, we find diverse metaphors and models of atonement. Authors variously describe Christ's redemptive act as a payment, sacrifice, vicarious suffering, victory, means of healing, means of liberation, or means of reconciliation, to name a few. Theologians have drawn upon these metaphors or models of salvation to formulate broad theories that conceptualize atonement primarily as a kind of ransom, a satisfaction of justice, or a means of moral transformation.³ Surprisingly, the presence of such a diversity of views has not posed much of a problem in Christian history. On matters of the *person* of Christ, Christians have debated, held synods, called councils, hammered out creeds to define orthodox positions, and divided into factions over theological differences. But when it comes to the *work* of Christ, Christians have generally agreed that Christ saves, without conclusively defining how or enshrining any single explanation as

correct.⁴ “The central Christian belief,” C.S. Lewis wrote, “is that Christ’s death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start. Theories as to how it did this are another matter. A good many different theories have been held as to how it works; what all Christians are agreed on is that it does work.”⁵

Along similar lines, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf stated, “I have tried to understand the Savior’s atonement with my finite mind, and the only explanation I can come up with is this: God loves us deeply, perfectly, and everlastingly. I cannot even begin to estimate ‘the breadth, and length, and depth, and height . . . [of] the love of Christ.’”⁶ Finite minds, even brilliant ones, can scarcely be expected to comprehend “an infinite atonement.”⁷ We might think of the ancient Buddhist fable in which blind men feel different parts of an elephant and come to different conclusions about what an elephant is: the man at the elephant’s side thinks an elephant is like a wall, the one at its leg thinks an elephant is like a tree, the one at the trunk says the elephant is like a snake, and so on.⁸ They each capture some partial truth based on their own experience, but each one’s explanation is incomplete. The elephant is larger than they are yet able to perceive. Spiritually, all of us in mortality see imperfectly, “through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12). The infinite atonement, broader and greater than human minds can conceive of in its entirety, is not reducible to one single metaphor, model, or theory. Not only is God’s redeeming love more vast than we can comprehend, but human needs, experiences, and minds are more diverse than one model can contain. Receiving the testimony of multiple scriptural witnesses gives us a rich, fuller, more complex view than any single approach by itself.⁹ At the same time, there is value in considering individual, distinctive views of atonement like the one in Alma 42; in context, we can often perceive why a particular approach is meaningful in a given author’s circumstances while remaining open to consider its limits and the potential merit of other models.

This chapter contextualizes Alma’s teachings in Alma 42 within the Book of Mormon narrative and within the long Christian

conversation on theories of atonement. After overviewing scriptural models and theological theories of atonement, I will examine Alma's discussion of atonement in Alma 42; explore ways Alma steers away from a view of atonement in which God is punitive and toward a broader understanding of divine justice that includes mercy, grace, and compassion; and compare this to Alma's teachings on atonement elsewhere. Reading Alma 42 closely as well as seeing it in its broader context yields an appreciation for the richness of the scriptural witness on the atonement, with a healthier overall balance and greater insight into how it applies to people in widely diverse circumstances.

Scriptural Models of Salvation

In the earliest writings of the New Testament, the undisputed letters of Paul, we already find multiple ways of conceptualizing Christ's redemptive act. Paul employed different models of atonement to advance various arguments he made to different groups of people. Sometimes he interwove disparate metaphors in a single passage.¹⁰ For him and many Christian authors after him, differing models of atonement were not exclusive categories but could overlap and serve as multiple approaches to understanding salvation.

The judicial analogy

In places, Paul uses courtroom terminology to illustrate the process of salvation. The problem is sin: all human beings, Jew and Gentile, have violated divine law and stand guilty before God, sentenced to death (Romans 3:9–10, 23; 6:23). The solution is God's gracious gift of Jesus Christ, who died as an "atonement" (Romans 3:25 NRSV; KJV "propitiation"). When human beings accept this gift by faith, placing their trust in God and in Christ, they are "justified"—placed in a right standing with God in which they receive a remission of sins and in effect are given the verdict of not guilty (Romans 3:24–25).¹¹ (This model, of course, provides a major basis for more expanded juridical theories of atonement in later centuries.)

The participationist model

In other places, Paul frames the human problem as a struggle against the cosmic, unseen powers of sin and death. Christ won a decisive victory over these destructive forces through his death and resurrection. By placing faith in Christ and joining with him, human beings, on their own powerless against sin and death, find saving power in Christ and participate in his victory. When Paul speaks of being “in Christ” or undergoing things “with Christ,” he is employing participationist thinking. For example, through baptism we experience a type of Christ’s death and resurrection, and thereafter share in Christ’s victory and “newness of life” (Romans 6:3–4; 8:1; 1 Corinthians 15:57; Galatians 2:20).

Recapitulation and transformation of humanity

Paul describes Christ as a second Adam who reversed the effects of the fall by acting in obedience while Adam had been disobedient (Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45–49). Because of this, human beings can come to Christ and be regenerated in “a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NRSV; Galatians 6:15).¹²

The great exchange

Paul also writes about Christ’s saving act as a benevolent exchange in which Christ took humanity’s burden and in turn gave humanity his blessedness and righteousness. The idea of vicarious atonement figures importantly in this approach; Christ somehow assumed a role or took on a burden in humanity’s place. Paul sometimes uses chiasmic poetry to describe the dramatic reversal of fortunes resulting from this exchange: “[God] made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21); “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Reconciliation

Paul sometimes describes salvation as the reconciliation of God and humanity, two parties who had been alienated from each other (Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18–20). Here the main problem is estrangement from God, and the main objective of salvation is to restore connection, belonging, relationship with God.¹³ Like two people at odds with each other over some disagreement or offense might be restored to friendship through the intervention of a mediator figure, so humanity is reconciled to deity, its relationship to God mended through the intercession of Jesus Christ.

Sacrifice

Drawing upon the imagery of animal sacrifices performed in the Jerusalem temple, which were described as making atonement (covering) for the sins of the people (Leviticus 19:22; 1 Chronicles 6:49; 2 Chronicles 29:24), Paul describes Jesus's death as "a sacrifice of atonement" (Romans 3:25 NRSV; KJV "propitiation," also "expiation"). The author of Hebrews uses this same metaphor, though in a different way, arguing that Christ's "once for all" sacrifice for sins was superior to the animal sacrifices that had to be offered year after year in the temple (Hebrews 10:1–18).

Ransom/Redemption

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus states that the Son of Man had come "to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Greek word translated "ransom" (*lytron*) refers to the manumission price paid to free a slave, a prisoner of war, or a captive debtor.¹⁴ Paul, too, used a form of this term in stating that Christ's death brought "redemption" (*apolytrōsis*, Romans 3:24; 8:23), a buying-back, a release secured by payment of ransom. In this view, the problem is that sin results in a kind of debt or captivity, and the solution is the perfect payment made by the Son of God. However, these New Testament passages

do not specify whether the ransom is paid to God, to Satan, or to some other figurative creditor such as justice.

Healing

In places, scriptural authors refer to Christ's saving work primarily as healing. In this view, humanity is spiritually and physically wounded by sin, death, and the hardships and injustices of life; Christ is the great physician who restores the wounded to wholeness.¹⁵ As Jesus announced at the beginning of his ministry, "[The Lord] hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted" (Luke 4:18; see Matthew 4:23; 13:15; Mark 2:17; John 12:40; 3 Nephi 18:32).

Theories of Atonement

Drawing upon the preceding diverse biblical metaphors and models, theologians have developed overarching theories of atonement that can be grouped into three main categories: Christ the Victor, juridical satisfaction, and moral transformation.¹⁶ One way to understand the basic differences between these three main theories (as theologians have pointed out) is that each in turn emphasizes what people have thought to be the demands of Satan, the demands of God, and the needs of humanity.¹⁷

Christ the Victor

Swedish theologian Gustaf Aulén's important 1931 book *Christus Victor* brought culminating expression to a view that drew upon key New Testament passages and the writings of Christian thinkers from the second century forward.¹⁸ The Christ-the-Victor conception of the atonement seems to have been the earliest and most dominant view until the twelfth-century rise of scholastic philosophy. In this view, disobedience brought humanity under the devil's power and hold, but Christ saved humanity by winning a victory over the devil (see Mark 3:27). Various authors have seen the death and resurrection of Christ as achieving victory, paying a debt, winning a spiritual

battle, or playing a trick on the devil. This last view, an ancient one, held that through the crucifixion God fooled the devil or made a bargain with him. Many Christians in modern times have not felt comfortable with this view, but in its favor, it and other Christ-the-Victor viewpoints do address what countless people have learned through their own experience—that sin seems to hold tremendous power over us and we need God’s help to overcome it.¹⁹

Juridical satisfaction

Around AD 1100 a Benedictine monk, Anselm of Canterbury, explained atonement using medieval concepts of honor in feudal society.²⁰ Humans owe God obedience like vassals who vow fealty to their local lord in his castle; disobedience dishonors God and requires either punishment or some form of satisfaction. Since humans owe God everything, theirs is an infinite debt that only the divine Son of God can pay. During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin expressed similar ideas, but favored the imagery of monetary debts or legal proceedings. Instead of honor that needed to be satisfied, they focused on divine wrath that demanded punishment; Christ bore God’s wrath on the cross as a substitute for sinners, whose guilt was transferred to him. These ideas formed the basis for what has come to be known as the penal substitution model, or substitutionary atonement. While this view does draw upon many scriptural ideas (the problem of sin, the image of divine wrath, justice/justification, the suffering of Christ, “great exchange” passages), it seems at odds with other scriptural truths (the love and unity between the Father and the Son and the benevolence of God) and raises concerns about divine complicity with violence and cruelty.²¹ One Christian theologian writes, “The risk of this account is that, if distorted, it can make ‘God’ or ‘God the Father’ seem like the villain of the story, with Christ the hero who wins our freedom.”²² According to two other theologians, “The logic of punishment, which requires the Son to bear the Father’s wrath, has been criticized not only for its moral and legalistic rigidity, which engenders guilt as a condition for

forgiveness and denies that God is free to forgive, but [also] as a form of ‘divine child abuse,’ a projection of the worst human impulses.”²³ Though an understanding of atonement as vicarious punishment has become the prevailing view among most Protestants and Catholics, the shortcomings of this view have led many Christian thinkers over the past millennium to contemplate alternative ways of understanding atonement.

Moral transformation

In the twelfth century, French theologian Peter Abelard objected to the apparent cruelty of prevailing views of atonement.²⁴ Rather than focusing on Christ’s suffering and death as substituted punishment, he emphasized its effects on human hearts. The crucifixion demonstrated the depths of God’s love for humanity. When this divine love is really understood, it inspires life-changing gratitude and the will to live a godly life. Thus, Abelard and theologians who have followed in his steps are said to have developed a moral transformation or moral influence theory of atonement. While avoiding the problem of implying that God is violent or cruel, a strictly moral-influence view risks reducing Christ to a mere example and raises questions about whether Christ’s suffering and death were necessary or accomplished anything objective.²⁵

Modifying the Juridical View in Alma 42

The issue that calls forth Alma’s juridical explanation of atonement in Alma 42 is his son Corianton’s misgivings “concerning the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner”; Corianton thought it was “injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery” (Alma 42:1). Corianton may have been influenced by Nehorite universalism (teachings that God would save all humanity; Alma 1:4) or doctrines of Korihor (that there is no such thing as sin, and therefore no need for Christ or an atonement; Alma 30:12, 17).²⁶ This would explain Corianton’s objection to the idea of “the punishment of the sinner”

(Alma 42:1). More crucially, Corianton was at odds with God; his understanding of punishment was such that he thought God was not just, fair, or right in his actions and character. As much as Corianton needed to understand divine justice, he also needed his relationship with God to be mended; he needed reconciliation and healing.

Alma dismantles Corianton's misconceptions by teaching the reality of sin, human agency, and accountability for choices. He begins (in Alma 42:2–12) by appealing to the story of the first parents in Eden—for Alma, the paradigmatic story for understanding human agency, justice, and redemption. The fall was not a punishment God had imposed on the first parents but a consequence “which *man had brought upon himself* because of his own disobedience” (Alma 42:12; emphasis added throughout).²⁷ This teaching resonates with other Book of Mormon passages emphasizing that it is not God who punishes so much as human beings who by doing iniquity bring destructive consequences upon themselves (see Helaman 14:29–31; Alma 3:19, 26–27; 41:7).

Alma next segues into discussing justice and how the atonement appeases justice and makes mercy possible (Alma 42:13–15). Here Alma employs terms used in juridical and satisfaction models of atonement, but he does so with a twist. As discussed above, traditional juridical models risk giving the impression that God is wrathful, punitive, and uncompassionate; that God the Father cruelly punished Christ; and that atonement is a cold mathematical equation, mechanistic in its workings, and controlled by such abstract parameters as law and the satisfaction of justice. Alma avoids or reduces these problems by continuing to emphasize human agency, by carefully distinguishing between the demands of justice and the acts of God, and most important, by describing atonement in a way that provokes a new understanding of justice.

It is instructive to notice the use of active and passive voice in the verbs in Alma's discussion. Man “brought upon himself” the fallen state “because of his own disobedience” (Alma 42:12). The active voice here underscores agency—human actions and their results. The

consequences of the fallen state, however, appear in passive voice: “it *was appointed* unto man to die”; “our first parents *were cut off* both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 42:6, 7, 9, 11). The passive voice depersonalizes justice; the consequences are not punishments God inflicted but results the first parents brought about by their own actions.²⁸ Throughout the chapter, the passive voice continues to decouple consequences and demands of justice from the person of God, in the process distinguishing Alma’s view of atonement from those built upon concepts of divine wrath: “there *was a punishment affixed*”; “it *shall be restored* unto him according to his deeds”; “evil *shall be done* unto him” (Alma 42:18, 22, 27, 28).²⁹ Elsewhere, similar distancing is accomplished by abstraction; it is not God who punishes, but “*the law inflicteth* the punishment” (Alma 42:22).³⁰ But abstractions receive less emphasis than persons with agency. Alma uses the active voice to call attention to the actions of the principal agents in the process of salvation—God and human beings (by their response to God).

Within Alma’s entire discussion in Alma 42 there are only three actions God himself takes overtly, each indicated using the active voice: First, God “*drew out* the man, and *he placed* at the east end of the garden of Eden, cherubim, and a flaming sword” (Alma 42:2). Alma presents this as a merciful act; it gave humanity “a probationary time, a time to repent” (Alma 42:4; compare 42:22). Second, in order to rescue humanity from “the grasp of justice” and bring about “the plan of mercy,” “*God himself atoneth* for the sins of the world” (Alma 42:14–15). Here Alma does not describe salvation as Jesus Christ suffering a punishment demanded by God the Father; the words *Father*, *Jesus*, and *Christ* do not appear at all in Alma 42. Rather, Alma points to God himself making atonement, consistent with the Nephite Christology that describes Christ as God; for example, Abinadi taught that “*God himself shall come down* among the children of men, and shall redeem his people” (Mosiah 15:1).³¹ Of course Alma understood Jesus Christ to be the atoning savior and refers to Christ by name in places throughout Alma 39–41, but as he takes up a juridical

approach to atonement in Alma 42, he avoids one of the biggest problems with the model—the risk of implying God the Father’s cruelty toward his Son. If one adopts the Nephite perspective that God, the Creator himself, assumed the burden of making atonement for all his creation in order to redeem all who are willing to repent, much of the potential problem with juridical ways of thinking about atonement is resolved. Third, “God *bringeth about* his great and eternal purposes,” one of which is “the salvation and the redemption of men,” the other implicitly being the preservation of agency, leaving the possibility that human beings may choose not to repent, to their “destruction and misery” (Alma 42:26).

Fittingly, then, Alma also employs the active voice when describing the human response and the freedom to choose—humans can *repent* (Alma 42:17): “whosoever will come may *come* and *partake* of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come” (Alma 42:27). Alma uses active imperatives in his closing admonition to his son: “Let these things trouble you no more,” he urges, regarding Corianton’s prior misgivings about punishment and God’s justice. “Only let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance. . . . do not endeavor to excuse yourself” (Alma 42:29–30).

In this version of a juridical model of atonement, Alma, as Terry L. Givens observes, “develops a doctrine of the atonement in such a way as to reclaim the principle of justice from a kind of Platonic abstraction or the equivalence with God himself and to situate it in the context of human agency. This may well be one of [the Book of Mormon’s] greatest theological contributions.”³²

A Broader Understanding of God’s Justice

Alma’s teaching also beckons Corianton and us as readers to expand our understanding of divine justice. One could take away from Alma 42 a narrow view of divine justice based on a simple dichotomy of justice versus mercy—an idea that these two concepts are competing

opposites and that since God is just and mercy cannot rob justice, divine justice must be defined and defended in rigorist terms. One commentator on Alma 42 states, “To be just, God must impartially mete out rewards or punishments in relation to his children’s obedience or disobedience.”³³ Is this really a fair description of God’s activity or character? The repeated refrain of God’s people seems to indicate otherwise: “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. . . . *He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities*” (Psalm 103:8, 10; compare Exodus 34:6–7). On one occasion God’s people even confessed, “Thou our God hast punished us *less than our iniquities deserve*” (Ezra 9:13). The rigid definition of God’s justice cited above stems from a simplistic reading of Alma 42 and does not account for the mercy and graciousness that is also part of the divine nature.

At first glance, Alma does seem to present justice and mercy as separate vying interests, but this presentation occurs beneath the umbrella of a rhetorical strategy that resembles one used by other theological thinkers in Christian history. Anselm constructed his logic of atonement *remoto Christo*, “apart from Christ” or “with Christ at a remove,” discussing the human condition as if there were no Christ and no atonement as a way of clarifying the difference Christ makes.³⁴ Several scriptural authors employ a similar strategy, describing what humanity’s fate would be without God’s intervention—without Christ or an atonement.³⁵ In parts of Alma 42, Alma employs a kind of *remoto Christo* logic. We see this in his statement, “If it were not for the plan of redemption, (laying it aside) . . .” (Alma 42:11). In the course of this reasoning, justice and mercy are separate vying forces only theoretically—in the hypothetical situation in which there is no Christ and no atonement—but of course Alma holds the atonement to be a reality and thus holds God to be *both just and merciful*, “a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15).

In Alma’s discussion, justice and mercy may also appear to be separate vying forces when human beings refuse to repent (see Alma

42:22–24). Again, however, this hypothetical situation is part of a rhetorical strategy, in this case an argument of *sine paenitentia*—without repentance, human beings cannot receive God’s mercy in its fullness and thus remain subject to the claims of justice. It is the choice to repent, to turn to God, that opens us to receive the full measure of God’s gifts. This logic is central to how Alma exhorts Corianton to repent. But it is important to notice that this separation of justice from mercy is not found in the character or activity of God; it results only in the experience of the human being who chooses not to receive the mercy that is *always* part of God’s activity and character.

Alma’s statements that set justice and mercy as opposites are midpoints in his reasoning, but they are not where he is trying to direct Corianton or us as readers. By the end of the chapter, he is pointing toward a more integrated view that urges an understanding of God’s redemptive action as at once just and merciful: “let the justice of God, *and his mercy, and his long-suffering* have full sway in your heart” (Alma 42:30). The atonement shows God to be “a perfect, just God, *and a merciful God also*” (Alma 42:15). Alma urges Corianton to see God’s justice, mercy, and long-suffering not in isolation but in combination, as a holistic quality of God that can have full sway in one’s heart with transforming effect.

I do not think Alma is merely saying that justice and mercy are, as one writer described them, “compatible qualities in God,” but that *justice and mercy in combination can itself be seen as a higher definition of divine justice*.³⁶ If we believe that God’s thoughts are not ours, and his ways are not ours, but are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8–9), we should expect his concept of justice to be beyond what we tend to imagine.³⁷ Our metaphors drawn from courtrooms and the activities of human lawyers and judges may serve to a point, but will hardly capture what an infinitely good God means by justice. Alma points to a divine rightness that includes mercy. If we think of justice as connoting rightness, we may see divine justice more broadly as God’s way of righting what is wrong and establishing rightness, or righteousness, and may readily appreciate that fixing what is wrong in us will take

mercy. Both the Hebrew term *tzedeqah* used in the Old Testament and the Greek *dikaïosynē* used in the New Testament, with their variants, imply not just justice or justification but more broadly this very sense of rightness.

Jesus taught and embodied this higher sense of justice in many instances, one of the clearest being his parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16). Those who worked only one hour received a full day’s wages, as did those who had worked all day. In a sense, the master’s actions were not fair, not strictly just—and that is the whole point. The master was not just according to narrow, human ways of thinking based strictly on merit; he was just by generously, graciously providing what each one of his willing day laborers desperately needed.³⁸ In this he established rightness. Grace and mercy are not alternatives or rivals to divine justice; they are essential parts of it. That is what Alma urges Corianton to recognize, and what Jesus describes. The master of the vineyard represents God’s way of setting things right; he embodies a concept of divine justice that surpasses narrow, human notions by establishing what is right with generosity—enacting justice and mercy.

Unaddressed Needs Pointing beyond Alma 42

The curious reader of Corianton’s story may be left with a number of unanswered questions. As Alma concludes teaching his son, he states that Corianton’s calling “to preach the word unto this people” remains in place (or is now restored; Alma 42:31). Later references to Corianton in the Book of Mormon describe him as a faithful, upright man of God; all indications are that he forsook his sins and led a transformed life.³⁹ The Book of Mormon narrative does not provide an account of how this took place; we have three accounts of young Alma’s own dramatic repentance (Mosiah 27; Alma 36, 38) but nothing comparable in Corianton’s story. Yet close examination of Alma 42 has suggested that Alma’s explanation of the interworkings of justice, law, agency, punishment, and mercy addressed what was not just

an intellectual hurdle for Corianton, not merely doctrinal misconceptions, but more importantly Corianton's own strained relationship with God. His father's teachings helped him (in a way implied but not made explicit in the text) come to a new understanding of God's character, feel swayed by that understanding (Alma 42:30), and be reconciled to God.

In this respect, Alma's teaching in Alma 42 reduces a major problem with juridical theories of atonement, though it does not escape the problem entirely: juridical models do not generally address how the atonement transforms a person's life. They attempt to explain a logic of redemption from a legal point of view; they do less to address human needs. Even after Alma has somewhat tempered the cold arithmetic of the juridical model by pointing to examples of God's compassion in the process—God's merciful granting of time to repent, God's respect for human agency, God's graciousness in making atonement himself to redeem humanity—the explanation by itself remains a relatively cerebral, mechanistic way of understanding salvation. Yet Corianton and all human beings are not merely intellectual; we are emotional, spiritual, physical, irrational, and impulsive. All these sides of us need transforming in the process of repentance and redemption. That Corianton does experience such transformation indicates that, in addition to what we can infer from Alma 42, there is more to his story than we read here. The content of Alma 42 points beyond itself to other passages that must be considered alongside it.

Alma himself provides the reader of the Book of Mormon a rich supply of additional material on atonement. In Alma 7, Alma teaches a humble, believing people in the land of Gideon (Alma 6:8; 7:6). To this faithful audience, whose needs differ from Corianton's, Alma teaches of Christ's redemption in remarkably different terms from those he used in Alma 42; the words *law*, *justice*, *punishment*, *probationary*, and *penitent* make no appearance. Rather, Alma emphasizes the full range of human suffering that Christ would experience, the divine empathy Christ would acquire by this, and thus the perfect ability Christ has to succor human beings in all their infirmities and

difficulties (see Alma 7:11–13). In this empathy and succor model, the atonement addresses not just the problem of human sin but also of human pain, sicknesses, weakness—physical and spiritual—and mortality. Christ would suffer “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; . . . the pains and the sicknesses of his people”; he would “take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people”; he would “take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12). Alma mentions sin last: Christ would suffer “that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance” (Alma 7:13).⁴⁰

In Alma 5, Alma addresses the people in the land of Zarahemla, where he saw wickedness in the church (Alma 4:8–12). Though he does discuss judgment (Alma 5:15–36), Alma does not teach a juridical model of atonement to this group of people; the words *law*, *justice*, *punishment*, *probationary*, and *penitent* once again do not appear in this sermon. Rather, as Alma teaches about “the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins” (Alma 5:27), he focuses on describing the transforming effects of the atonement, using a broad palette of metaphors: to be changed by Christ is to have a mighty change of heart, to awaken out of a deep sleep, to awaken unto God, to have one’s soul “illuminated by the light of the everlasting word,” to have the bands of death broken and the chains of hell loosed, to have one’s soul expand, to sing redeeming love, to be born of God, and to receive his image in one’s countenance (Alma 5:7, 9, 14). Alma knew these transformative effects in a personal way, through his own experience of being rescued by Christ from pain and darkness and being brought to joy and light (Mosiah 27:23–29; Alma 36:10–20; 38:6–8).

Reading these and other scriptural passages in company with Alma 42, we might fill in the gaps of Corianton’s story and imagine the spiritual transformation and succor that came to him as he came to understand God’s character and the need to repent. We might also

recognize with the apostle Paul that legalistic ways of thinking about salvation are inadequate. Paul came to realize that one had to move beyond letter to spirit, beyond questions of one's legal standing with God to a trusting and transformative relationship with God, beyond justification to sanctification. The basis of faith had to shift from the Torah to Christ. "For God has done what the law . . . could not do: by sending his own Son" (Romans 8:3 NRSV).

Conclusion: Embracing the Multiplicity of Views

I believe that situating Alma 42 among other scriptural and historical explanations of atonement yields insights that are crucially important in religious education and pastoral care. To illustrate this, I share with permission an experience of one of my students. When he was seventeen years old and just a few weeks from beginning his full-time mission for the Church, he was driving to his early-morning seminary class when, while making a turn, he accidentally struck a man on a motorcycle. There was a moment of shock and confusion over what had just happened, then the tumultuous accident scene of witnesses, police, an ambulance, and the horrifying realization that the motorcycle driver had died on impact. My student was devastated at what he had done. He wept in anguish, and in the days and weeks that followed he agonized over the guilt he felt. Thoughts of the atonement pressed upon his mind, but he could not understand how the atonement could help him when what he had done had been an accident, not a deliberate act. "I hadn't sinned," he said. "I didn't need to repent." Yet he could feel no comfort in this, but only a crushing grief. That finally began to change when he came to realize that Christ's salvation included more than forgiveness of sin, that it also brought healing to broken hearts and strength to deal with mortal difficulties apart from sin. Alma's teachings in Alma 7:11–12 were key to his realization, and it began to bring him a sense of peace. Somehow, prior to then, his church experience had given him the impression that the atonement was exclusively about sin and forgiveness.⁴¹

That is an impression one might get from Alma 42 alone (and the talks and media resources based on it), especially without close, contextualized reading. But Alma's juridical exposition, as we have seen, was given with nuance in a very particular context; in other settings, to other audiences with different needs, Alma taught about atonement differently. Awareness of this should steer us away from imposing any single model as the one exclusive or preferred way of understanding salvation. For a friend of mine who left the Church, one of the reasons for his disaffection was discomfort with the violence and cruelty of God implied in a rigid, penal-substitution view of atonement. Though our scriptures and heritage preserve other ways of thinking about atonement, the overemphasis given to that view in his church experience eventually became harmful to his faith. We will be more edifying teachers and fellow saints if, instead of reading superficially or insisting dogmatically upon a single way of understanding the infinite atonement, we will appreciate and embrace the rich subtlety and variety of views we have in our scriptural and historical inheritance and affirm the essential proclamation of the good news of Christ. B. H. Roberts stated (quoting a saying dating to the early seventeenth century), "In essentials let there be unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity."⁴² The essential gospel message is that Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection are redemptive and healing. Theories, models, and metaphors used to explain how they work are, as C. S. Lewis said, "mere plans or diagrams to be left alone if they do not help us, and, even if they do help us, not to be confused with the thing itself."⁴³ With charity, we might remember that some particular way of understanding atonement may be valued or needed by one person, but less helpful for another. Alma himself, a tireless minister of the word from the time Christ rescued him and transformed his life, would be less interested in theories of the atonement than in whether our souls, this day, are alive with its effects.

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Notes

With thanks to Nick Frederick, Joseph Spencer, Jason Combs, Lauren Ellison, Avram Shannon, Jan Martin, Dallas Taylor, Kerry Hull, and Sperry Symposium reviewers for their dialogue, feedback, and encouragement.

1. For example, the juridical formulation in Alma 42 provided the primary scriptural basis for Boyd K. Packer's April 1977 general conference address, "The Mediator," later popularized by a 1995 church video that dramatized Elder Packer's parable of a debtor, a creditor, and a mediator who illustrate the logic of the atonement. The essay "Atonement of Jesus Christ" at the Church's website (<https://www.ChurchofJesusChrist.org/topics/atonement-of-jesus-christ>) begins by defining atonement in terms of penal substitution ("to atone is to suffer the penalty for sins"), cites Alma 42:6–9 first among all scripture references in the essay, and emphasizes a juridical view ("We need someone who can satisfy the demands of justice—standing in our place to assume the burden of the Fall and to pay the price for our sins"; the word *justice* appears three times in the article, while *grace* appears only once). See also H. Donl Peterson, "The Law of Justice and the Law of Mercy," in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), discussed further below.
2. William C. Placher, ed., *Essentials of Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 189: "this 'substituted punishment view' has become the dominant theory of salvation or soteriology for most Catholics and Protestants."
3. Eugene TeSelle and Daniel Patte, "Atonement," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, ed. Daniel Patte (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81–82; James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 11–20. For short, accessible introductions to metaphors, models, and theories of atonement in Christian history, see Placher, *Christian Theology*, 183–220; Stephen Finlan, "Jesus in Atonement Theories," in *The Blackwell*

Companion to Jesus, ed. Delbert Burkett (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 193–212; and Frances Young, “Atonement,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed., ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1998), 143–48. For a recent book-length treatment, see Beilby and Eddy, *The Nature of the Atonement*. Publications by Latter-day Saints on theories or models of atonement include Eugene England, “That They Might Not Suffer: The Gift of Atonement,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 3 (1966): 141–55; Lorin K. Hansen, “The ‘Moral’ Atonement as a Mormon Interpretation,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 1 (1994): 195–227; Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 143–96; Eugene England, “The Good News—and the Bad,” review of *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*, by Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *BYU Studies* 38, no. 3 (1999): 191–201; R. Dennis Potter, “Did Christ Pay for Our Sins?” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 4 (1999): 73–86; Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 205–8; Jacob Morgan, “The Divine-Infusion Theory: Rethinking the Atonement,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39, no. 1 (2006): 57–81; Blake Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Problems of Theism and the Love of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006), 189–284; Seth R. Payne, “Alma and Anselm: Satisfaction Theory in The Book of Mormon,” 22 December 2006, <https://sethpayne.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Alma-and-Anselm.pdf>; Deidre Green, “Got Compassion? A Critique of Blake Ostler’s Theory of Atonement,” *Element* 4, no. 1 (2008): 1–21; Tyler Johnson, “Empathy and the Atonement,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2016): 105–21; Blake Ostler, “Atonement in Mormon Thought,” blakeostler.com/docs/atonementInMormonThought.pdf; Joseph Spencer, “Alma and Amulek: Atonement,” in *As Iron Sharpens Iron: Listening to the Various Voices of Scripture*, ed. Julie M. Smith (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016), 105–18; Fiona Givens and Terryl Givens, *The Christ Who Heals: How God Restored the Truth That Saves Us* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017); and Nathan Oman, “Standing

- betwixt Them and Justice,” in *God Himself Shall Come Down: Reading Mosiah 15*, ed. Andrew Smith and Joseph Spencer (forthcoming).
4. Placher, *Christian Theology*, 188.
 5. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; repr. New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 54.
 6. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Gift of Grace,” *Ensign*, May 2015, 107; compare Bruce R. McConkie, “The Purifying Power of Gethsemane,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 9: “In some way, *incomprehensible to us*, his suffering satisfied the demands of justice, ransomed penitent souls from the pains and penalties of sin, and made mercy available to those who believe in his holy name” (emphasis added).
 7. 2 Nephi 9:7; 25:16; Alma 34:10–14; compare “infinite goodness” in 2 Nephi 1:10; Mosiah 5:3; 8:3; 28:4; Helaman 12:1.
 8. The earliest appearance of this fable may be in *Udāna* 6.4, a Buddhist text of the first millennium BC; see John D. Ireland, *Udāna and the Itivuttaka: Two Classics from the Pali Canon* (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2007), 9, 81–84. The tale was popularized in poetic form in the modern West by John Godfrey Saxe, “The Blind Men and the Elephant,” in *The Poems of John Godfrey Saxe* (Boston: Osgood and Co., 1872), 259–61. Both sources apply the parable to religious disputes. In *Udāna*, the parable is told in the context of feuding brahmins and monks who assert that their own view is right and all others false. The parable concludes: “Some recluses and brahmins, so called, / Are deeply attached to their own views; / People who see only one side of things / Engage in quarrels and disputes” (Ireland, *Udāna*, 84). Similarly, Saxe concludes the fable with a moral set in verse applying it to theological disagreements: “So, oft in theologic wars / The disputants, I ween, / Rail on in utter ignorance / Of what each other mean, / And prate about an Elephant / Not one of them has seen!” (Saxe, *Poems*, 261; emphasis in the original).
 9. For a more technical argument of essentially this position, see Joel B. Green, “Kaleidoscopic View,” in *Nature of the Atonement*, 157–85. Another recent work that resists reducing the meaning of Christ’s salvation to a single theory while also exploring the strengths and weaknesses of individual theories as they apply to church life is Peter Schmiechen, *Saving*

Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

10. For example, in 2 Corinthians 5, Paul employs terms and images related to justification, substitution, sacrifice, new creation, reconciliation, and investiture (being clothed/endowed; Greek *endýō*).
11. This summary of the judicial and participationist models and parts of the discussion following draw upon Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 406–10. For Paul, accepting Christ’s atonement by faith included being baptized (see Romans 6:3–4).
12. In the second century, Irenaeus commented on Paul’s “second Adam” soteriology: “The Word, recapitulating Adam in Himself, [did] rightly receive a birth, enabling Him to gather up Adam [into Himself].” Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.21.10, trans. ANF 1:454. By succeeding where Adam had failed, Christ restored to humanity the “image and likeness of God” from the original creation, lost since the fall. Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 32. Christian theologians after Paul found great meaning in his “second Adam” model as they considered it in terms of Platonic thought: “Plato had taught that individual objects have their reality by participating in eternal and unchanging forms. Fido is a dog and Socrates is a human being because they participate, respectively, in the forms of ‘dogness’ and ‘humanity.’ The forms are ultimately ‘more real’ than the particulars that participate in them. Under the influence of such ideas, early Christian theologians found it easy to speak of how humanity had been transformed since Christ united it with divinity. ‘Having become what we are,’ Gregory of Nyssa wrote, ‘He . . . again united humanity to God’” (Placher, *Christian Theology*, 188; quoting Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 12.1, trans. NPNF2, 5:241).
13. Under a reconciliation-oriented model, each aspect of the human response to Christ’s atonement can also be seen in terms of relationship: to have faith is to trust Christ; to repent is to turn to Christ and to partner with Christ in the process of spiritual growth; to be baptized is to enter a covenant with Christ, to formalize the relationship; to receive the companionship of the Holy Spirit is to walk with Christ, to live in Christ.

14. The phrase “for many” alludes to “the blood of the new testament, which is shed *for many*” in Mark 14:24 and more distantly to Isaiah 53:11–12, which speaks of God’s righteous servant bearing iniquities and thereby justifying “many.”
15. For Latter-day Saint discussions of Christ’s work as healing, see Dallin H. Oaks, “He Heals the Heavy Laden,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 6–9; and Givens and Givens, *Christ Who Heals* (see note 3 above). For a theological discussion of a healing model of atonement, see Beilby and Eddy, *Nature of the Atonement*, 117–55.
16. The summary following draws upon Placher, *Christian Theology*, 189–90; and TeSelle and Patte, “Atonement,” 81–82.
17. Beilby and Eddy, *Nature of the Atonement*, 12–20.
18. Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1931).
19. See the discussion in Placher, *Christian Theology*, 189. To early Christian writers such as Augustine, the devil overreached by trying to lay claim on the sinless Jesus; the cross was a trap that resulted in the devil’s defeat (see Augustine, *Sermones* 263.1). C. S. Lewis, who was influenced by the thought of Augustine, drew upon this idea in depicting Aslan’s defeat of the white witch in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.
20. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo: Why God Became Man*, F. S. Schmitt, *Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1940–61), 2:39–133; for an English translation, see Eugene R. Fairweather, ed. and trans., *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, vol. 10, *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 100–183.
21. For a Latter-day Saint discussion of the problem of violence in some atonement theories, see Green, “Got Compassion” (see note 3 above).
22. Placher, *Christian Theology*, 190.
23. TeSelle and Patte, “Atonement,” 82.
24. See, for example, Peter Abelard, *The Fathers of the Church: Mediaeval Continuation: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Steven R.

- Cartwright (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011); key excerpts in Fairweather, *Scholastic Miscellany*, 276–87.
25. For an example of reducing Christ to a mere example, see Kenneth Woodward, “What Mormons Believe,” *Newsweek*, 1 September 1980, 68. Having consulted writings of a few Latter-day Saints who ascribed to a moral-influence theory of atonement to the exclusion of all other views, notwithstanding the diverse scriptural witness, Woodward infamously wrote: “Unlike orthodox Christians, Mormons believe that men are born free of sin and earn their way to godhood by the proper exercise of free will, rather than through the grace of Jesus Christ. Thus Jesus’ suffering and death in the Mormon view were brotherly acts of compassion, but they do not atone for the sins of others. For this reason, Mormons do not include the cross in their iconography nor do they place much emphasis on Easter.” See the critique of this statement in Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life’s Experiences* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1–3 and throughout the text. Morgan, “Divine-Infusion Theory,” 60, offers this explanation of some problems with moral-influence theory: “Keep in mind that according to the moral-influence theory, the *only* purpose for Christ’s suffering was to provide an example. If someone were run over by a train because she was pushing her child to safety, we would see this self-sacrifice as a moving example of love. However, if she were to jump in front of an oncoming train just to set an example (without saving someone in the process), it would make no sense at all. If the act does not accomplish anything objective, then what is it setting an example of?”
 26. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 4:41–51, 411, 550.
 27. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 207.
 28. For comparison, see Thomas Schreiner, “Revelation,” in *ESV Bible Expository Commentary*, vol. 12, *Hebrews-Revelation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 534–35. Schreiner discusses the use of passive voice in the book of Revelation, where it upholds divine sovereignty while differentiating between what God *does* and what God merely *permits*.

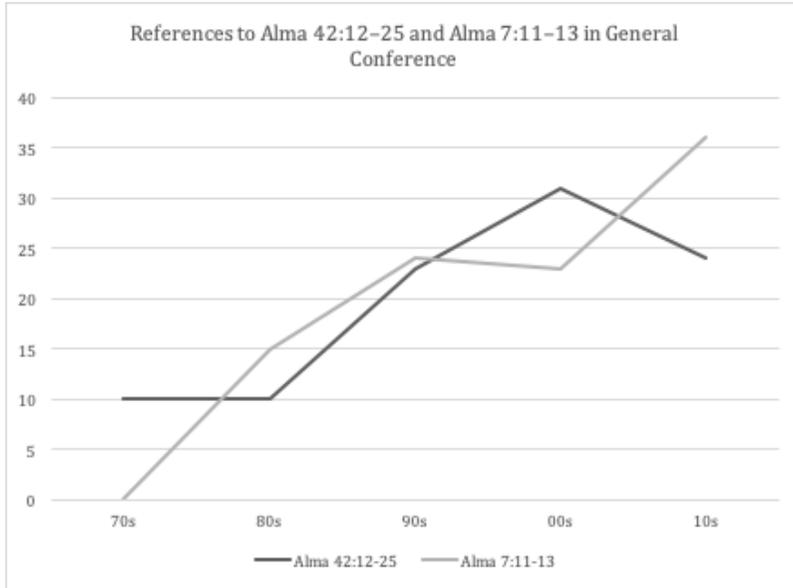
29. One exception is Alma 42:9, where the passive voice implies an act of God (the “divine passive”): “it was expedient that mankind should *be reclaimed* [by God].” For New Testament examples of the divine passive, see Matthew L. Bowen, “‘Thy Will Be Done’: The Savior’s Use of the Divine Passive,” in *The Sermon on the Mount in Latter-day Scripture*, ed. Gaye Strathearn, Thomas A. Wayment, and Daniel L. Belnap (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 230–48.
30. Other active voice verbs used to indicate the action of abstractions include “mercy claimeth the penitent,” “mercy cometh because of the atonement,” “justice exerciseth all his demands,” and “mercy claimeth all which is her own” (Alma 42:23–24).
31. Compare Mosiah 13:34 and the way 13:34 and 15:1 bookend Mosiah 14.
32. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 205.
33. Peterson, “Law of Justice,” 216. As we have seen, Alma characterizes justice as the consequence of human choices more than God’s meting out of rewards and punishments. Peterson also states, “Like Corianton, we prefer to focus on God’s love, compassion and mercy and ignore the fact that our Heavenly Father is a God of justice also.” However, (1) it is not certain that Corianton was focusing on God’s love, compassion, and mercy; as I have noted, it seems likely that Corianton was not thinking of mercy at all, because he had been influenced by doctrines of Nehor and Korihor that negate the need for mercy entirely by denying the existence of sin. (2) Our inclination to seek a broader understanding of divine “rightness” that encompasses mercy is not merely a matter of human preference or self-interest, for, as shown here, our scriptures themselves emphasize God’s love, compassion, and mercy as essential qualities of the divine (and our own experience teaches us this is what God is like), calling into question an overly narrow definition of divine justice.
34. Placher, *Christian Theology*, 212.
35. See, for comparison, Romans 1:18–3:26; 2 Nephi 2:5–9; 9:8–9; and Alma 34:9.

36. Peterson, "Law of Justice," 215–20; compare 2 Nephi 11:5; for Nephi, the plan of deliverance results from the Lord's embodiment of grace, justice, power, and mercy in combination.
37. See Isaiah 55:6–7. The context of the statement in Isaiah 55:8–9 that God's thoughts and ways are higher than man's is an urgent appeal for Israel to repent and turn to the Lord with the assurance that God will have mercy and abundantly pardon. Thus, when verse 8 states, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts," the implication is that God's mercy, God's willingness to forgive, is beyond what humans have imagined. We human beings can conceive of strict justice and tend to imagine God acting according to our human definition of justice, but that view is far too limited. Compare 1 Corinthians 2:9 and Ephesians 3:20.
38. See Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Laborers in the Vineyard," *Ensign*, May 2012, 31–33; Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 77: "The principle in the world is that he who works the longest receives the most pay. That is just. But in the kingdom of God the principles of merit and ability may be set aside so that grace can prevail." For other episodes in which Jesus teaches or embodies this principle, consider how Jesus overrides the strict punishment demanded by the law of Moses in the episode of the woman accused of adultery (see John 8:1–11); Jesus's repeated quotation of Hosea 6:6, "I will have *mercy*, and not sacrifice," prioritizing mercy over rites prescribed in law (see Matthew 9:13; 12:7); Jesus's teaching that those who give will receive "a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over" (Luke 6:38 NRSV), that is, not leveled, not strictly just in conforming to the instruments of human measurement, but overflowing generous; and Jesus's discussion of "the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith" (Matthew 23:23). See also Isaiah 43:25, where the Lord forgives Israel *for his own sake*, not on the basis of Israel's merits. For a discussion of how God's justice includes mercy and how human beings can practice this kind of justice in society, see Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010).
39. Alma and his sons "were all men of God" (Alma 48:18); Corianton with his brothers and fellow teachers contributed to the peace and prosperity of

the church among the people of Nephi (Alma 49:30); Corianton, like his brother Shiblon, “was a just man, and he did walk uprightly before God; and he did observe to do good continually, to keep the commandments of the Lord his God” (Alma 63:2).

40. Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines *succor*: “Literally, to run to, or run to support; hence, to help or relieve when in difficulty, want or distress; to assist and deliver from suffering.” The book of Hebrews also contains passages suggesting an empathy-succor model of atonement; see Hebrews 2:17–18; 4:14–16.
41. A similar story appears in Hafen, *Broken Heart*, 10, in a chapter entitled, “The Atonement Is Not Just for Sinners.” Interestingly, there are indications that the description of atonement in Alma 7 is rising in popularity in Latter-day Saint discourse relative to Alma 42, perhaps reflecting its perceived value and relevance to daily life in ways similar to those expressed by my student. Since the 1970s, references to Alma 7:11–13 in general conference have risen from none in the 1970s, to thirty-six so far in the current decade, surpassing for the first time the number of general conference references to Alma 42:12–25 (research and chart by Dallas Taylor, using scriptures.byu.edu):

Decade	References in General Conference to Alma 42:12–25 (any combination of verses)	References in General Conference to Alma 7:11–13 (any combination of verses)
1970s	10	0
1980s	10	15
1990s	23	24
2000s	31	23
2010s, through 2017	24	36



42. B. H. Roberts, Conference Report, October 1912, 30; compare Marco Antonio Dominis, *De Republica Ecclesiastica, Libri X* (London: Ex officina Nortoniana apud Io: Billium, 1617), 676: “unitatem in necessariis, in non necessariis libertatem, in omnibus caritatem.”
43. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 56 (see the discussion on pages 54–56). Note that every model and theory is “grounded in biblical metaphors, none of which should be taken too literally or made the sole focus of reflection” (TeSelle and Patte, “Atonement,” 82).