

Answers to Apologetic Index's criticisms of Moral Government Theology

by Jonathan Duttweiler

[Apologetics Index](#)
states MGT teaches that...

God does not fulfill some of His own prophecies.

Moral Government Theology Actually Teaches that...

...God is relational in His approach to ruling the moral universe. Prophecies for the most part are conditioned upon the response of the human beings to whom the prophecies are addressed, even when spoken in emphatic terms. A perfect example of this is in the book of Jonah. God emphatically states to Jonah, " Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." (Jonah 2:2 ASV) Jonah therefore goes to Nineveh and declares, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh **shall be** overthrown." Now, notice that Jonah puts **no** conditions upon this prophecy - Jonah declares that God **will** destroy Nineveh in 40 days. What actually transpired, however, was that Nineveh was not destroyed. Scripture states that they repented, "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God **repented** of the evil which he said he would do unto them; and he did it not." (Jonah 2:10, ASV). Now, either Jonah was a false prophet and failed to declare **ALL** that God had told him (in which case, the scriptures themselves are in error, for they tell us God **changed** His mind) or in fact, God saw the overwhelming change in the hearts of the people of Nineveh and was so moved that He changed His mind as well and did not bring to pass the prophecy which He had told Jonah to prophesy. Exodus 23:23-33 is another example of prophecy which is not strictly fulfilled. God promises to drive out **all** the inhabitants of Palestine before them (Ex. 23:27 NKJV) "I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn [their] backs to you." But what actually transpired, as we read in Joshua 16:10, is that **all** of the inhabitants were **not** driven out. "And they drove **not** out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer, *but the Canaanites dwell in the midst of Ephraim unto this day*, and are

become servants to do task work."

God changes His mind and is not immutable.

Moral Government Theology simply teaches what the scriptures teach. The example cited above from Jonah should be sufficient to show that God changes His mind, but there are literally dozens of examples in scripture showing God having a change of heart and mind. Gen. 6:7, for example, states "And Jehovah said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the ground; both man, and beast, and creeping things, and birds of the heavens; for it **repenteth** me that I have made them.'" (ASV) 1 Samuel 15:11, "'It **repenteth** me that I have set up Saul to be king; for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments.'" (ASV) And Jeremiah 18:7-10 is God's own declaration of the reasons why He changes His mind. "'[At what] instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy [it]; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, **I will repent** of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And [at what] instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant [it]; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then **I will repent** of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.'"(KJV) There are many more that could be quoted here, but this seems sufficient to make the point.

Now, as far as denying the so-called immutability, or static changelessness, of God as taught by traditional theologians, we must state that the bible itself denies such a doctrine. The concept of immutability stems, not from scripture, but from Platonic and Neo-platonic philosophy and does not find support in scripture. With this criticism, detractors of MGT fall into a logical fallacy, argument by definition. They assume a definition of God as *orthodox*, and then attack any view that fails to meet that definition. Moral Government Theology affirms that God is Infinite and Perfect, and that He is changeless in His character. The MGT view of God, rather than detracting from God's perfection, elevates His moral character and perfection.

MGT does deny that God is immutable according to the Reformed theological definition. The Reformed understanding is founded upon a false dichotomy, vis. the Platonic notion that to be perfect is to be unchanging. This view presupposes that any change in that which is perfect must necessarily be a change for the worse. This is demonstrably false. Consider a **perfectly** accurate watch: As this is written, the watch registers 7:47. However, 10 minutes ago it registered 7:37 and ten minutes from now it will register 7:57. Is the change in the watch ten minutes from now a change for the "better", suggesting the previous state was imperfect, or a change for the worse, suggesting the previous time was the "perfect" one? Not at all. The watch **perfectly** reflects the time, **whatever** time it is! (William Hasker, in his chapter in *The Openness of God* deserves credit for this illustration). Compare this with an *immutable* watch which always registers 7:47. This watch is only accurate, or *true*, twice daily. To say that any increase in God's knowledge is to make Him less than perfect is simply to conform to the Platonic view of the Universe in which everything exists from all eternity. This stands in stark contrast to the biblical doctrine of creation Ex Nihilo and the biblical picture of God Who thinks new thoughts and has new experiences. Simply by stating in order for God to be perfect He must be "immutable" is an insufficient argument. Moral Government Theology affirms that God is perfectly faithful and asserts that the biblical statements concerning any unchange-ability in God speak to the faithfulness of His character and promises.

*God does not have
sovereign control over
earthly events.*

This criticism is based upon another theological presupposition, vis. what it means for God to be "sovereign". Those who make this criticism hold to the view of *meticulous control*, i.e. that God determines and controls every event, no matter how minute or how large, which ever has, does, or will occur in the Universe. While MGT does not dispute that God is the sovereign ruler of the Universe, it does dispute (along with other Arminian traditions, the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the early Church Fathers, and others) the manner in which He exercises His rule and authority. MGT

affirms that God *sovereignly created* a Universe in which *loving relationships*, and therefore creaturely freedom, is the overriding concern. Thus, simply because one asserts that God is *able* to exert an irresistible causative force upon everything in the Universe, including moral agents, does not mean He *does* so. Calvinism teaches God rules by arbitrary and eternal decree. MGT asserts God is relational and created human beings for true, reciprocal, loving relationships and so rules in the realm of moral agents by moral persuasion, which is termed "moral government."

God does not know His future actions.

This is an example of either a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of Moral Government Theology, which is common in the writings of those critical of MGT. MGT does teach that the future, contingent, moral choices of free moral agents are not possible objects of **absolute** foreknowledge. Thus, even God's own future choices are not necessarily fixed and certain in the mind of God. *However*, those things which God **determines** to bring about in accordance with a predetermined plan are certainly known to Him. A perfect example of this is the Incarnation and Atoning death of Jesus Christ.

God does not know ahead of time the free decisions of humans.

While strictly a true statement, MGT does not insist that God knows **nothing** about the future, but rather that absolute, exhaustive foreknowledge of future contingencies is not possible (As Jonathan Edwards admits). By contingent is meant "not logically necessary;" or "not necessitated : determined by free choice" (Definitions Webster Dictionary Copyright © 1996 by Merriam-Webster, Incorporated) For an event (or choice) to be contingent, there must be the element of "may" or "may not". IF God knows with **absolute certainty** every future event, choice, action, etc., then nothing is contingent, or truly free. This is not to say that many future actions and choices of human beings are not known to God as *probabilities*, perhaps even *approaching* certainty. An interesting look at this issue may be found in L. D. McCabe's, [*The Foreknowledge of God*](#), particularly chapter 9, [*God's Estimate of Probabilities*](#).

MGT also does **not** deny that God *determines* many

things, and thus knows much about the future. As Joel Hayes states in his work, *The Foreknowledge of God* (1890) "Of course, God knows more concerning both the past and the future than we do or than the idols did. But there is no evidence here that he foreknows all things. Indeed, he does not state that he foreknows more than he has foreordained." MGT **does** deny, however, with a vast multitude of Christians, that God determines **everything** that happens, **every** choice that is made. MGT's position allows God to be the God revealed to us in scriptures rather than imposing a neo-Platonic hermeneutic upon the word of God.

God's foreknowledge is limited in the area of man's free decisions.

Simply a rewording of the criticism above, it seems clear from both scripture and reason, that for choices to be truly free, they must, in some sense, not be possible areas of **certain** foreknowledge. As Genesis 21:12 shows us in God's own words, when He tested Abraham, "And he said, 'Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: **for now I know** (present tense, first person singular) that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only [son] from me.'" Apparently, God's knowledge of Abraham's heart faithfulness was not complete until He saw how he would respond to the test.

Many of the things God predicted never came true.

While this seems merely a rewording of earlier criticisms, I know of no MGT writings which state that "many" of the things "predicted" by God never came true. What MGT teaches is that God has the freedom to change His mind based on the responses He perceives in the hearts and minds of human beings. God never locks Himself into a box. *"At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy it; if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them."* Jeremiah 18:7 & 8 ASV

The atonement shows a willingness on God's part to forgive, rather than a desire to punish sin.

I find it difficult to believe that this is a criticism. Who can doubt that the death of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate second person of the Trinity, embodies the heart of God to forgive sin rather than punish the

sinner? The Psalmist declares, "**The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.**" (Ps. 145:8, 9 RSV) And David prays "**Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they [have been] ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD.**" (Ps. 25:6, 7 KJV) Romans 5:8 clearly states, "**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**" (NKJV) and John 3:17 state "**For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.**" (NKJV) "**God proposes to forgive sin freely by his grace,**" in view of atoning measures and other conditions that will make this exercise right and proper. God abounds in *compassion* and only needs protective measures to safeguard its release." ([Gordon C. Olson](#), *Essentials of Salvation*) *Essentials of Salvation* incorporates Olson's works, *The Moral Government of God*, *The Entrance of Sin into the World*, *Holiness and Sin*, and *The Kindness of God our Savior*, which includes *God's Willingness to Forgive and Reconciliation and the Atonement of Christ*. All of these works are available from [Revival Theology Promotions](#) and should be considered primary source material for the foundations of Moral Government Theology.

God forgives completely out of His grace rather than a need for personal vindictive satisfaction.

Rather than deny such a charge, we **emphatically** embrace it! Despite those who would hold up the Reformed theory of the Atonement as the only "orthodox" view, the majority of Christians, both evangelical and otherwise, have never held to the penal satisfaction theory. The Governmental theory of the Atonement was, for 150 years, considered **the** Methodist view of the atonement. The bible no where teaches that God is a vindictive ruler whose wrath is appeased by the death of Christ, but rather a loving Father Who finds a way to forgive the repentant sinner out of His love and yet uphold His moral law. MGT teaches that the Atonement, in its relation to God, solves Governmental concerns in the heart of God, rather than appeasing any personal wrath

toward the sinner.

As Gordon Olson writes: "We conclude this extended Biblical consideration of the revealed inner disposition of the Godhead with profound gratitude and adoration. The fact that the Godhead are mercifully disposed and willing to forgive without the slightest vindictive satisfaction is the greatest revelation that could be made to us in our present situation as part of a rebellious race of moral beings. Apart from these attributes of virtuous love in the Divine Being, man would have been exterminated immediately upon his bold venture across the threshold of propriety into the unknown realm of rebellion. The evidence for the complete absence of all personal unwillingness to forgive repentant sinners is truly astonishing. No appeasement of Divine wrath is necessary as a prelude to mercy; no vindictive reactions need to be satisfied; no inner antagonism needs to be subdued; no unwillingness must be overcome; no payment in the absolute sense need be made for every sin that is to be passed over. The problems of forgiveness do not relate to God considered as an isolated Being, but to God in relationship to His moral creatures as a Moral Governor. The problems are not personal, but governmental. Nothing is needed to change the disposition of any Member of the Godhead, for an overwhelming surplus of compassion and mercy prevails in one blessed accumulation of Divine love, which is distinctly heavenly and seeks to make its intrusion into earth's atmosphere of moral darkness." (*Essentials of Salvation*, p. 121)

Those interested in a more in depth analysis of the Governmental view of the Atonement are invited to research the [Articles on Moral Government and the Atonement](#).

God never needed His wrath abated because of sin.

Personal vindictiveness on the part of God toward the sinner has never been an issue in the forgiveness and pardoning of sin. To quote P. P. Waldenstrom from his work, [Be Ye Reconciled to God](#), "Contrary to all such perverse imaginations, the Scriptures teach that *no change took place in God's disposition towards man* in consequence of his sin. That, therefore, it was

not God who needed to be reconciled to man, but that it was man who needed to be reconciled to God. And that, consequently, reconciliation is a work which proceeds from God and is directed towards man, and aims not to appease God, but to cleanse man from sin, and to restore him to a right relation with God." As 1 John 4:9, 10 "In this **the love of God** was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins." (RSV)

The atonement does not pay our debt for sin.

The bible does not teach that Christ *paid* the literal penalty sin. If sins are *paid* for, in what sense can it be said that they are *forgiven*? The bible term for "forgive" is "apolo", meaning "to let free; to let go; to dismiss" and "aphiemi", "to send away; to bid going away or depart; to omit, neglect; to let go, give up a debt, forgive, to remit." In what sense can someone be said to forgive a debt if the debt has been paid in full? In what sense, therefore, can God be said to forgive sin if the sin has been paid for? And, in what sense can Jesus be said to have paid for sin when the penalty for sin is eternal death? As Gordon Olson writes (*Essentials of Salvation*, p. 166-167) "Christ, the Saviour of the world, died for all men and for every man, and His grace is extended to all. His atoning sacrifice is in and of itself sufficient for the redemption of the whole world, and is intended for all by God the Father. The sacrifice of Christ is not the payment of a debt, nor is it a complete satisfaction of justice for sin. It is a Divinely appointed condition which precedes the forgiveness of sin, just as the death of a lamb or a goat in the Mosaic economy. Christ's sufferings took the place of a penalty, so that His sufferings have the same effect in reconciling God to man, and procuring the forgiveness of sin, that the sinner's endurance of the punishment due to his sins would have had. The sufferings of Christ were not a substituted penalty, but a substitute for a penalty: Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609); Episcopius (1583-1643); Curcellaeus (1586-1659); Limborch (1633-1712); known as Arminianism. Outside Holland, Arminianism exerted considerable influence in France, Switzerland,

Germany, England, and America, and hence throughout the world through various denominations, especially Methodism."

The devil has deceived us into believing that Christ was a ransom for us, and that he redeemed us by paying for our sins.

In so far as the devil is the "father of lies" (John 8:44), one might make the statement that any deviation from absolute truth is a product of his "deception". However, I am unaware of any MGT proponent making this statement. It has, however, been stated by Reformed theologians concerning MGT. I would prefer to simply state that those who hold to a penal satisfaction theory of the atonement are in error and urge more civility on both sides!

Jesus did not pay for our sins.

Another restatement of the above concerning the Atonement. Again, the bible no where states Jesus "paid" for our sins. 1 Cor. 6:20 and 7:23 ("You were bought at a price;...") are two of a very few passages that can be construed to mean such. That this is metaphorical language should be clear. It should also be clear, from the context, that it is not sins which have been "paid" for, but rather humanity itself. Christ's death serves, metaphorically, not as a literal payment of the penalty every sinners' sin deserves, but rather payment for the sinner Himself. Christ has *bought* us through His substitution-ary display, He deserves that which He has purchased! As Jonathan Maxcy (President of Rhode Island College in the late 18th Century) writes in *A Discourse Designed to Explain the Doctrine of Atonement*, "But do not the Scriptures represent Christ as giving himself a ransom, and as buying his people with a price? They do. They also represent men, while under the influence of sin, as prisoners, slaves, captives. These expressions are all figurative, borrowed from sensible to express moral or spiritual things, and therefore are not to be explained as if literally true. If we say that Christ hath redeemed us, that he hath bought us, that he has paid the debt and discharged us, if we have any consistent meaning it must be this: That in consequence of what Christ has done, we are delivered from sin, in as great a consistency with justice, as a debtor is delivered from his obligation, or the demands of law, when his debt is paid. That is, God extends pardon in such a way, through Christ, that he does not injure the authority of his law, but

supports it as effectually as if he inflicted punishment."

Jesus was the substitutionary sacrifice for the penalty our sins deserve. It is His death which enables God to exercise His loving mercy in pardoning repentant sinners. To quote Charles G. Finney, "The atonement is a governmental expedient to sustain law without the execution of its penalty on the sinner. Of course, it must always be a difficult thing in any government to sustain the authority of law, and the respect due to it, without the execution of penalty. Yet God has accomplished it most perfectly." Thus we declare **no financial transaction** took place at the cross. For an in depth look into the issues surrounding this subject, read Finney's chapter on [*the Atonement*](#) from his Systematic Theology.

To believe that our salvation was literally purchased with Christ's blood makes God to be vindictive and bloodthirsty.

This is an attempt to argue using emotion rather than reason and is, again, simply a restatement of the critics' disagreement with the Governmental view of the Atonement. It is also more an interpolation of the MGT view, then any teaching of MGT itself. It is the same charge the heathen make against God, mistakenly believing that the satisfaction theory of the Atonement represents true scriptural teaching or the doctrine of all Christians everywhere.

One is ultimately responsible for his/her own salvation because of free will.

A charge thrown at everyone who has believed in free will since Arminius, and probably before. The ground of salvation is, and always must be, the Grace of God exhibited in freely offering salvation to all who will "repent and believe" (Mark 1:15, Acts 2:38). Since the offer is, and always has been, God's, there is nothing which man can do to be saved other than conform to the conditions which God Himself sets forth, i.e. freely repent and exercise faith in Jesus Christ.

Imputed righteousness is a lie. God does not look on Christians through the garb of Christ's blood.

Imputation, in the sense that the present condition of Christians is seen only through Christ's holiness, is a theological fiction. That God pardons the believer's past sin on the basis of Christ's atoning work, and treats the believer as though he had never sinned based on that atonement, is the true biblical teaching. To quote Finney (*Lectures on Systematic Theology*,

1851 edition):

"The doctrine of an imputed righteousness, or that Christ's obedience to the law was accounted as our obedience, is founded on a most false and nonsensical assumption; to wit, that Christ owed no obedience to the law in his own person, and that therefore his obedience was altogether a work of supererogation, and might be made a substitute for our own obedience that it might be set down to our credit, because he did not need to obey for himself.

"I must here remark, that justification respects the moral law; and that it must be intended that Christ owed no obedience to the moral law, and therefore his obedience to this law, being wholly a work of supererogation, is set down to our account as the ground of our justification upon condition of faith in him. But surely this is an obvious mistake. We have seen, that the spirit of the moral law requires goodwill to God and the universe. Was Christ under no obligation to do this? Nay, was he not rather under infinite obligation to be perfectly benevolent? Was it possible for him to be more benevolent than the law requires God and all beings to be? Did he not owe entire consecration of heart and life to the highest good of universal being? If not, then benevolence in him were no virtue, for it would not be a compliance with moral obligation. It was naturally impossible for him, and is naturally impossible for any being, to perform a work of supererogation; that is, to be more benevolent than the moral law requires him to be. This is and must be as true of God as it is of any other being. Would not Christ have sinned had he not been perfectly benevolent? If he would, it follows that he owed obedience to the law, as really as any other being. Indeed, a being that owed no obedience to the moral law must be wholly incapable of virtue, for what is virtue but obedience to the moral law?

"But if Christ owed personal obedience to the moral law, then his obedience could no more than justify himself. It can never be imputed to us. He was bound for himself to love God with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and his neighbor as himself. He did no more than this. He could do no more. It

was naturally impossible, then, for him to obey in our behalf. This doctrine of the imputation of Christ's obedience to the moral law to us, is based upon the absurd assumptions, (1.) That the moral law is founded in the arbitrary will of God, and (2.) That of course, Christ, as God, owed no obedience to it; both of which assumptions are absurd. But if these assumptions are given up, what becomes of the doctrine of an imputed righteousness, as a ground of a forensic justification? It vanishes into thin air."

True repentance means ceasing from all sin before we die.

True repentance means forsaking all known sin, as God declares in Ezekiel 18:30ff, "Repent, and turn from **all** your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you **all** the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit." (NKJV) Every time a person sins, he must repent, for one cannot continue in a state of sin and be repentant at the same time. 1 John 3:5ff "And you know that He was manifested to **take away** our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices ("poieo" - to be the authors of, the cause; to make ready, to prepare; to produce, bear, shoot forth; to acquire, to provide a thing for one's self) righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins (i.e. habitually prefers his own interest above God and others - the sinning is the conjugate of practices righteousness) is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."

Salvation is not so dependent on whether we accept Christ - it's whether He will accept us. We need to do more so that He will want to accept us.

This seems to be a very strange argument to be presented by Calvinists, who hold that salvation is "none of us" and "all of Him"! In any case, it is a distortion of the teachings of Moral Government Theology. "Accepting Christ" is nowhere found in the scriptures. By being "acceptable" to Christ and God is simply meant meeting the conditions which God has set for salvation, i.e. repenting and believing in Christ Jesus and enduring to the end (Mt. 10:22). Gordon Olson clearly represents the MGT position when he writes, "We notice in connection with the

law that all are to 'love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might' (De. 6:5). The words 'all thy' express our obligation. It is the exertion of 'thy' personality and ability that is required -'all' ability. Since we cannot love God with more than 'all,' we cannot do more than is required. Thus as time passes we may choose to fulfill our obligation or choose not to do so. When we are so choosing, we are not condemned and are not accruing guilt that needs to be forgiven. When we are not so choosing, we are adding guilt moment by moment, as the clock ticks away, accruing this guilt against us to call forth justice if mercy is not allowed to intervene. Sincere repentance may stop these additions, but can do nothing to blot out what has been done. Forgiveness must always, therefore, be entirely of unmerited grace. Its exercise can never be brought under any kind of obligation. It always proceeds from the heart of God out of pure mercy." (*Essentials of Salvation*, p. 104) See also [Can Forgiveness of Sins Ever Be Merited?](#)

Salvation is dependent upon our adherence to moral law.

Salvation is, as has always been taught by MGT, dependent upon the loving Grace of God demonstrated in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. However, it seems clear that God's intention in salvation is to deliver His people from their sins (Mt. 1:21) and write His Law upon their hearts. He declares in Jeremiah (31:33 NKJV), "But this [is] the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." One must, of course, differentiate between moral law, which is universally applicable, and the Law (i.e. the "law unto righteousness") which Paul declares we are delivered from. Legalism declares that one must *earn* God's grace and make up for past sin by conforming to the Law now. However, MGT affirms there is **nothing** one can do to *earn* God's forgiveness. The pardon of past sins is founded solely upon the love of God demonstrated in the death of His Son Jesus Christ. It is offered freely to those who will but repent of their sins, exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and determine, by God's grace, to walk in the Spirit from henceforth. If one is to remain in a "state"

of grace, one must continue "following after" Jesus. One who follows after Jesus will walk with the moral law "written upon" his heart.

God is holy only because He chooses to use His attributes in a loving way.

This is like charging a dean's list student with excelling in school only because he chooses to apply his abilities diligently. What is *holiness* if not the consistent, voluntary choice of Universal Benevolence? Finney writes, "Moral law proposes but one ultimate end of pursuit to God, and to all moral agents. All its requisitions, in their spirit, are summed up and expressed in one word, love or benevolence. This I only announce here. It will more fully appear hereafter. Moral law is a pure and simple idea of the reason. It is the idea of perfect, universal, and constant consecration of the whole being, to the highest good of being." It is strange that anyone would argue for another point of view. If God is not holy because He chooses to be, in what sense may God's holiness be praiseworthy? The scriptures portray the angels in heaven magnifying God because of His holiness. However, if God can do nothing but be holy, how does that make Him worthy of praise anymore than a rock is worthy of praise for its immutability? A excellent look at this issue may be found in Kel Good's article, [*The Goodness of God - or Can Voluntary Goodness be Guaranteed?*](#) .

God has the ability to make wrong choices or to sin.

This seems to be somewhat of an inane criticism. If, as asserted above, God is holy by choice, then certainly God **could** choose not to be holy. Much of God's dealings with the people of Israel in the OT involved demonstrating His faithfulness in light of the fickle nature of the gods worshiped by the surrounding heathen nations. (E.g. Deut. 7:9. "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he [is] God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;" KJV) If it is *impossible* for God to be other than He is, why does He not simply declare to Israel, "I **cannot** be unfaithful", etc.?

Yet, what of the Bible's claims that God **cannot** lie, **cannot** be tempted (Titus 1:2 and James 1:13)? Let us point out that both passages may be translated in such a way that the emphasis is not an *inability*, but

an **unwillingness!** Titus 1:2, which in the KJV is translated "In hope of eternal life, which God, that *cannot lie*, promised before the world began;" is translated in Weymouth's, "in hope of the Life of the Ages which God, who is *never false to His word*," the RSV has it "in hope of eternal life which God, *who never lies*, promised ages ago..." and Young's Literal Translation has it "upon hope of life age-during, which God, *who doth not lie*, did promise before times of ages..." Consequently, it seems that this verse, which *may* lend some support to the inability of God to lie, at best can show either position and at worst (for those holding to the "impossible" view) shows that it is His *choice*, rather than His *nature*.

In the same way, James 1:13, translated by the Calvinist King James writers as "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:" is translated by Young's as "Let no one say, being tempted -- 'From God I am tempted', for God is not tempted of evil,..." Again, just as capable of showing that God is not tempted by choice rather than by inability.

But what about Hebrews 6:18, for even in Young's it declares "that through two immutable things, in which [it is] *impossible* for God to lie,"? We answer this with a passage from Kel Good's article, [*The Goodness of God - or Can Voluntary Goodness be Guaranteed?*](#), "God's character is established in holiness. This impossibility is a moral one, not a metaphysical one. Again we have an example of this, even on a human scale. We know of people whose character is so constant that we can say of them, that they simply could not do certain things. It would be impossible to tempt them to do so. We do not mean by this language that they could not feel any temptation to do so, or that they have no ability to perform the actions, but recognize that their voluntary character is established to such an extent that they would not do these things, even though they could."

Our moral character is shaped merely by our

Another mis-characterization of the MGT position, especially in the use of the term "merely". "Moral

individual acts of sin.

character" may be sinful or holy. Our "moral character", therefore, is shaped, not by our actions, but by our choices and, primarily, by our "ultimate" choice. Of course, there is nothing "mere" about moral choices, for they determine, ultimately, our destiny. Moral character ultimately stems out of one overriding supreme choice for one's life. This choice affects all other subordinate choices, defining their moral character. In the final analysis there are only two possible ultimate choices. One is to live to please self, however that works out in subordinate choices, whether in profligate living or in an ostensibly moral life, the ultimate concern is the self. The other is to live to please God, in obedience to His moral law. As Ted Elliot writes in [Born Sinful?](#), "God has told us certain things that we are to let our minds dwell upon (Titus 4:8). This is because, 'As a man thinketh, so is he.' (Proverbs 23:7 KJV) In other words, a man's thoughts become his actions, his actions become his habits, *and his habits become his nature, his nature becomes his character*, and his character determines his destiny."

If an individual unknowingly commits a sin, it is not a sin to that person and they will not be held to account for it by God.

The bible clearly tells us that sin is a willful rejection of *light*, i.e. knowledge of the truth. "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin... If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father." (John 15:22, 24) Finney (ST p. 453, 1851 ed.) "[Unbelief] is not ignorance of truth. Ignorance is a blank; it is the negation or absence of knowledge. This certainly cannot be the unbelief everywhere represented in the Bible as a heinous sin. Ignorance may be a consequence of unbelief, but cannot be identical with it. We may be ignorant of certain truths as a consequence of rejecting others, but this ignorance is not, and, we shall see, cannot be unbelief." For a more complete examination of the nature of sin, check out the [Articles on the Nature of Sin](#).

The sin of Adam is not transmitted to us, and it would be unjust for God to pronounce us guilty because of his sin.

We would ask in what sense the sin of Adam could be "transmitted" to us? How is that transmission made? It would seem that if this doctrine were true, there should be abundant evidence of it in scripture.

However, the only allusion to this doctrine is found in Romans 5. Let's take a brief look at this doctrine:

1. Human beings have a sinful nature *by birth*.
2. We have *inherited* this sinful nature from Adam.
3. Because of this sinful nature, we can do nothing but sin, i.e. it is a causative *something* in back of the will.
4. Because of this sinful nature, we are *unable* to keep the requirements of God's Law.
5. Because we are unable to keep the requirements of His law, God is going to condemn human beings to Hell.

Who can demonstrate that this, if true, is *justice*? It cannot be supported either by reason or by scripture, and so is justifiably rejected. For more information on the doctrine of Original Sin, see the articles under [Original Sin and Eternal Security](#).

If God condemns us all because of Adam's sin, God must also save everyone because of what Christ did (Rom. 5:19). This is universalism, and therefore both parts of the argument must be wrong.

It can scarcely be refuted that the rise of Universalism in the early 19th Century was directly related to the Satisfaction theory of the Atonement. The argument, simplified, was that since the bible clearly supports the theory of a general atonement, i.e. that Christ died for the sins of the whole world and not for the elect only, and since He paid the literal debt owed by sinners, God must, bound by His justice, of necessity forgive all sinners and, ultimately, receive them into heaven. Methodist theologian John Miley, wrote in the late 19th century (*The Atonement In Christ* p. 177) "The ground-principle of the doctrine [the literal satisfaction theory] is that sin must be punished according to its demerit, and on that ground must be, because of an immutable obligation of justice so to punish it. Then by the penal substitution of Christ sin is so punished in him, and the obligation of justice fulfilled. Such are the facts of the doctrine. On the ground of such facts, a discharge must immediately follow upon such penal substitution, just as on the payment of a debt." The famed Reformed theologian Dr. Hodge, states no less when he writes in his *Systematic Theology* (Vol. 2, p. 470) "If the claims of justice are satisfied they cannot be again enforced. This is the analogy

between the work of Christ and the payment of a debt. The point of agreement between the two cases is not the nature of the satisfaction rendered, but one aspect of the effect produced. In both cases the persons for whom the satisfaction is made are certainly freed. Their exemption or deliverance is in both cases, and equally in both, a matter of justice."

Consequently, it cannot be denied that if the satisfaction theory is true, and if, as millions of Christians hold and the bible affirms, the Atonement was made for all of mankind, then all humanity must eventually be saved for every person's sin has been paid for. However, since Universalism is also demonstrably untrue by biblical standards, we are left with two alternatives. Either the Atonement was not made for all mankind or it was not a literal payment of the debt of sinners. Since the former is evidently taught by scripture and the latter hangs on the barest thread of biblical evidence, it would seem that the weight of both scripture and reason are against the validity of the satisfaction theory.

While critics of MGT may attempt to paint this view as outside the pale of evangelical Christianity, it is in fact a view held historically by Arminians and others for centuries.

Our moral depravity is shaped solely by wrong and sinful choices we make.

This is something of a restatement of a criticism above and much of the answer above stands. However, it should be noted that MGT does teach that human beings are born "physically depraved". Finney (ST p. 320, 343 1851 ed.) defines this as "the depravity of constitution, or substance, as distinguished from depravity of free moral action. It may be predicated of body or of mind. Physical depravity, when predicated of the body, is commonly and rightly termed disease. It consists in a physical departure from the laws of health; a lapsed, or fallen state, in which healthy organic action is not sustained....[It] should be remembered, that the physical depravity of our race has much to do with our moral depravity. A diseased physical system renders the appetites, passions, tempers, and propensities more clamorous and despotic in their demands, and of course constantly urging to

selfishness, confirms and strengthens it. It should be distinctly remembered that physical depravity has no moral character in itself. But yet it is a source of fierce temptation to selfishness."

We as humans are able to fulfill the law.

If it is wrong to stand with scripture, then MGT is guilty! All throughout the scriptures, God commands His people to obey His law without ever intimating to them that it is impossible for them to do so. In Deuteronomy 30:11-14 we read, "For this commandment which I command you today [is] not [too] mysterious for you, nor [is] it far off. It [is] not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Nor [is] it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word [is] very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, **that you may do it**"

Humans are not bound to a sinful flesh that continually wants to sin. Through good choices and an iron will, mankind can turn away from sin in and of him/herself.

This is another distortion of the true MGT teaching. As stated above, MGT recognizes the physical depravity plays a profound role in temptation to sin. That depravity is not sin, in and of itself. While MGT teaches the human beings are not *born* sinful, it does teach moral depravity as a consequence of continued sin. As Gordon Olson writes, "Moral depravity...is...a state or condition of our moral nature that is the result of what we have done. Moral depravity is a developed habit of life, a tendency to keep on doing what we have been doing. Every wrong action deepens the ruts of our depravity until we develop mighty monsters of bondage that require an ever-increasing energy of will to counteract." (*Essentials of Salvation*, p. 60) It is only by the grace of God that such bondage is broken and that we are delivered from the power of sin and death. As Paul writes in Romans 5:5-12 (NKJV), "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be [in] [the] [likeness] of [His] resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with [Him], that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from

the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For [the] [death] that He died, He died to sin once for all; but [the] [life] that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, *reckon* yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts." While this *reckoning* is an act of will (faith), it is the power of God which delivers from the bondage of sin.(Romans 8:1-15)

One can achieve perfection if that individual sets his/her goals high enough.

It certainly seems true that if one never raises his sights above the ground one is subject to always walk in the dirt. However, this is yet another misinterpretation of MGT teaching. MGT does emphasize holiness as characteristic of the Christian life. "Perfection", however, is a term almost universally used by the detractors of those who preach holiness. This is the same criticism Wesley received, and the same that those of the post Civil War holiness movements received, as well as the Keswicks at the turn of the century. Jesus, of course, declared "Therefore you shall be **perfect** , just as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Mt. 5:48, NKJV) And Paul wrote to the Colossians "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man **perfect** in Christ Jesus." (1:28 NKJV) Finally, we might note that James declared "But let patience have [its] perfect work, that you may be **perfect** and complete, lacking nothing." (1:4 NKJV) Thus, it seems that scripture itself teaches that "one can achieve perfection".

Hard to believe how anyone can believe that kind of stuff, but it happens...

What is hard to believe is that so many careless misstatements can be taken seriously by thinking Christians. It is unfortunate in this day that there are those who still are more concerned with establishing their interpretation of "orthodoxy" than with the truth of Jesus Christ. It is not claimed that the responses here are complete or exhaustive, but rather that they are sufficient to show that far from being biblically aberrant, MGT is scripturally sound as well as eminently reasonable. It is also our hope that this response may encourage those who have been influenced by such criticisms to explore more

thoroughly the truth contained in scripture, and so
"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a
worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly
dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim. 2:15 NKJV)