

Blood and Forgiveness: Testing the Coherence and Scriptural Necessity of Blood-Dependent Pardon — 33

Phil Stilwell
Independent Scholar
ORCID: [0009-0009-3725-8682](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3725-8682)
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Central claim

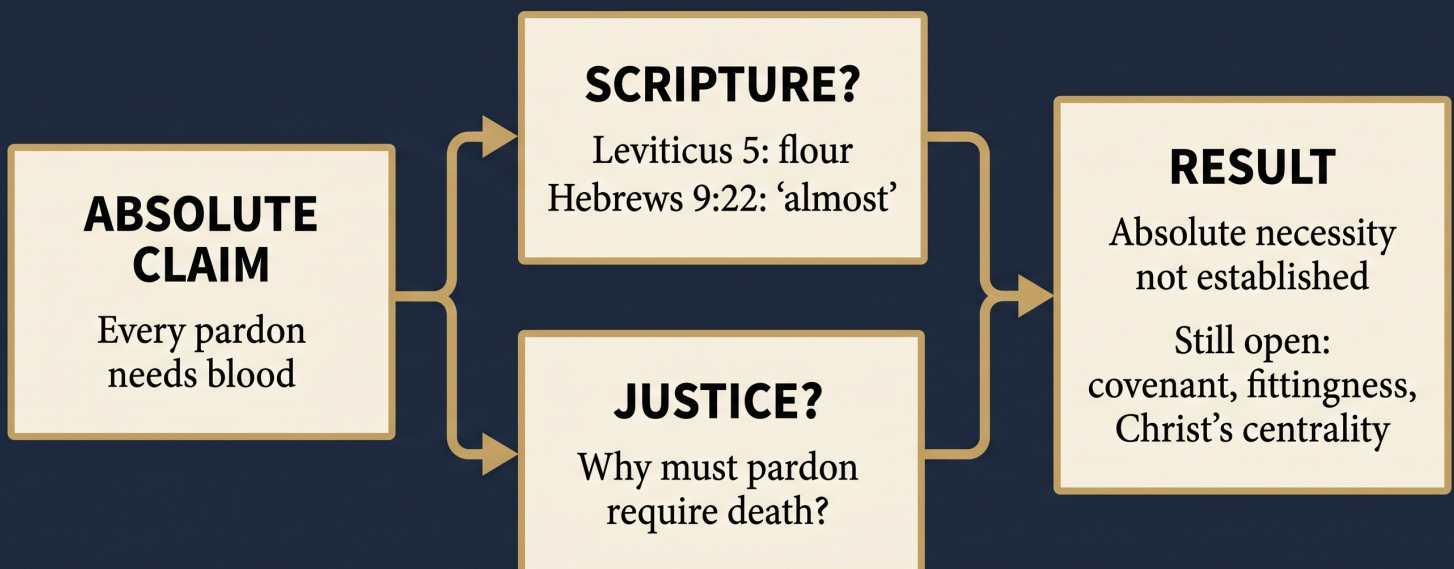
Leviticus 17:11 and Hebrews 9:22 do not establish that blood or death is an exceptionless precondition of every possible divine pardon. Leviticus 5:11–13 expressly provides a flour offering that ends in atonement and forgiveness, while Hebrews says that *almost* everything under the law is purified with blood and develops a first-covenant contrast centered on Christ. Appeals to perfect justice, alone or combined with those texts, require a further premise showing that no nonlethal response could ever express judgment, repair wrong, or restore relationship; omnipotence alone neither supplies nor defeats that premise. Christ's death may therefore remain central, uniquely fitting, or necessary within a freely chosen Christian redemptive economy without being shown absolutely necessary across all possible circumstances.

Preview:

Target claim	What would establish it	Observed record	Bounded result
Every possible divine pardon requires blood or death.	A universal bridge from scripture, justice, or their conjunction.	The texts are qualified; the justice bridge is disputed; combining them adds no universal premise.	Absolute necessity is not established; covenantal centrality and Christological fittingness remain open.

The issue is the scope of the necessity claim, not whether Christian scripture presents Christ's death as central to reconciliation.

Visual preview:



The visual separates an exceptionless claim from covenantal and Christological claims, then identifies the two proposed sources of support and why neither alone nor together supplies the universal scope that absolute necessity requires.

Abstract

Neither the principal scriptural proof texts nor common appeals to perfect justice establish that blood or death is an exceptionless precondition of every possible divine pardon. Four claims often travel under the word *necessary*: absolute necessity across all possible circumstances, a covenant-specific ritual requirement, a moral requirement of justice, and necessity or fittingness within a freely chosen Christian redemptive economy. Their evidential burdens differ. Leviticus 17:11 assigns blood an atoning function in Israel's sacrificial system, but Leviticus 5:11–13 provides a flour offering that culminates in atonement and forgiveness. Hebrews 9:22 says that *almost* everything under the law is purified with blood and develops a contrast between the first covenant and Christ's decisive self-offering; it does not state a cross-world metaphysical law. A justice argument could still establish a broader necessity, but only with an additional premise showing that pardon in every possible case requires lethal satisfaction. Combining covenant-limited texts with that disputed moral bridge does not create the missing universal scope. Leading satisfaction and penal-substitution accounts articulate serious reasons for the cross without making that bridge uncontested. Philosophical accounts of forgiveness further show that pardoning need not condone wrongdoing, erase accountability, or preclude restitution. The result is bounded: absolute blood necessity is not established. Christ's death may remain central, divinely chosen, uniquely fitting, or necessary within the Christian economy of salvation.

Keywords: forgiveness; atonement; blood; sacrifice; Leviticus; Hebrews; penal substitution; necessity

Scriptural wording follows the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition unless the text is paraphrased.

1. The Claim Under Pressure

Christian proclamation gives the death of Christ a central place. The New Testament describes it through sacrifice, ransom, victory, representation, reconciliation, covenant, cleansing, judgment, and self-giving love. The question here is not whether those descriptions matter. It is whether a stronger apologetic conclusion follows: that the deity described by Christian theism is unable, in every possible circumstance, to forgive any wrong without blood or death.

That conclusion is frequently attached to two sentences. Leviticus 17:11 associates blood with atonement because life is in the blood. Hebrews 9:22 says that under the law almost everything is purified with blood and that without blood-shedding there is no forgiveness. Read as slogans, the texts can appear to announce a universal rule. Read in their literary settings and alongside the rest of the relevant material, they support a more limited claim about sacrificial and covenantal order. The difference matters. A rule governing one economy does not automatically become a limit on every possible act of pardon by a perfect deity.

A *God-concept* is a specified conception of a deity, including the attributes, intentions, and actions assigned to it. This paper examines a Christian God-concept that is perfectly good, just, compassionate, knowledgeable, and powerful, and that acts through the scriptural history culminating in Christ. *Theism* names the broader position that at least one deity exists. The argument below is internal and local: it asks what follows about forgiveness within the Christian conception. It does not test theism as a whole, and it does not assume that every Christian atonement theory makes the same claim.

The governing thesis is deliberately asymmetric. To deny that absolute necessity has been established is not to prove that it is impossible. It is to show that the familiar routes do not reach that conclusion without further premises. The scriptural route requires an exceptionless rule; the moral route requires a necessary principle linking every permissible pardon to blood or death. The texts contain counterpressure to the first route, and the second remains philosophically disputed. Nor do the routes acquire universal force merely by being combined: covenant-limited textual premises cannot supply the scope missing from a contested moral bridge.

The central inference

1. If the case for absolute blood necessity succeeds, the assessed scriptural and justice materials must, separately or jointly, supply a universal bridge to every possible divine pardon.
2. The cited scriptural case does not establish an exceptionless rule.
3. The standard justice case does not establish the necessary bridge without a further contested premise.
4. Their conjunction supplies no new universal premise: adding covenant-limited texts to an unsupported universal moral claim does not extend either premise's scope.
5. Therefore, the familiar case does not establish absolute blood necessity.

The conclusion concerns warrant. It leaves room for an independently defended argument not considered here, and it leaves substantial Christian claims intact. It also blocks an invalid retreat: one cannot advertise absolute necessity and, when challenged, defend only the centrality of Christ's death within the actual Christian story. Centrality in that story may be profound without entailing necessity across every possible story.

2. Four Different Claims of Necessity

Disagreement becomes needlessly confused when four propositions are expressed with the same word. Table 1 separates them before the scriptural and philosophical evidence is assessed.

Sense	Claim	Needed support	What it would not yet show
Absolute	No possible divine pardon can occur without blood or death	An exceptionless revelation or a necessary truth about pardon and justice	Merely that blood is prominent in one covenant or historical plan
Covenant-relative	A specified covenant makes blood the appointed ordinary means of purification or atonement	The rules and rhetoric of that covenant, including stated limits and exceptions	That the deity could not appoint or enact another order
Moral	Perfect justice forbids pardon unless a lethal cost satisfies what wrongdoing objectively requires	A defensible account of justice plus a necessary link from wrongdoing to lethal satisfaction	That one historically chosen death is the only possible just response
Economy-relative	Given the freely chosen Christian plan, Christ's death is necessary, decisive, or uniquely fitting	The plan's aims, promises, identities, and narrative logic	That the same means is required in every possible redemptive plan

Absolute necessity is the strongest claim. In modal language, it says that there is no possible circumstance in which a perfect deity pardons without blood or death. Covenant-relative necessity is weaker: once a particular order and its rules are fixed, a rite can be required within it. Economy-relative necessity is also conditional. Given incarnation, covenant promises, representative offices, and the aims assigned to Christ's mission, the death may be required for that plan to be completed as intended. A freely chosen plan can generate real subsequent necessities without having been the only possible plan.

Moral necessity is different again. It does not rest merely on a chosen rule. It says that the nature of justice itself makes blood or death indispensable. That proposition could in principle support absolute necessity, but

omnipotence does not decide it. Perfect power is power to do what is genuinely possible; it is not power to make injustice just. If lethal satisfaction is a necessary condition of just pardon, perfect power would not remove it. Conversely, merely labeling lethal satisfaction a demand of justice does not make it necessary. The moral bridge must be argued.

These distinctions correct two opposite mistakes. The critic should not infer from omnipotence that any desired forgiveness procedure must be possible. The defender should not infer from a divinely appointed procedure that no alternative could be morally possible. Both sides need an account of the relevant modality: what kind of necessity is claimed, what fixes it, and how the evidence reaches that scope.

3. What Leviticus Establishes

3.1 Blood has an assigned covenantal function

Leviticus 17 regulates slaughter and the use of blood. Verse 11 explains that the life of flesh is in the blood and that blood has been given on the altar to make atonement. The point is not that blood possesses an independent magical property. Its life-bearing character and its assigned altar use explain its ritual function. Major commentators accordingly read the verse within Leviticus's sacrificial, purity, and sanctuary system rather than as an isolated treatise on all possible forgiveness (Levine, 1989; Milgrom, 1991).

This context supports a substantial claim. Within the Levitical order, blood is a divinely appointed and normally central means by which animal sacrifice addresses impurity and wrongdoing at the altar. The worshiper does not improvise another symbol whenever convenient. Covenant-relative requirements are genuine requirements.

Yet three inferences do not follow without more argument. First, an assigned means is not necessarily the only conceivable means. Second, atonement, purification, and forgiveness overlap in these texts but are not interchangeable in every occurrence. Third, a general ritual statement can admit an express exception elsewhere in the same legal corpus. Leviticus 5 provides one.

3.2 Leviticus 5:11–13 is a bloodless atonement-and-forgiveness case

Leviticus 5 addresses several offenses and gives a graded set of offerings. A person who cannot afford a sheep or goat may bring birds. A person who cannot afford even two birds may bring a tenth of an ephah of choice flour as a purification offering. The worshiper is told not to add oil or frankincense because it is a purification offering. The priest burns the memorial portion on the altar, and the text concludes that the priest makes atonement for the person and that the person is forgiven (Lev. 5:11–13).

The material is grain, not blood. The rite remains sacrificial and priestly; it occurs at the altar and participates in the same covenantal system. It therefore does not prove that Christian salvation requires no costly divine action, no mediation, or no relation to the larger sacrificial order. It does establish something narrower and decisive against an exceptionless textual slogan: Leviticus itself recognizes a case in which a bloodless offering culminates in atonement and forgiveness. Milgrom and Levine treat the flour provision as the lowest economic tier of the purification offering rather than silently converting it into an animal sacrifice (Levine, 1989; Milgrom, 1991).

A defender may reply that the grain is placed on an altar already consecrated by blood, that the broader system presupposes blood, or that the flour derives efficacy from the altar's sacrificial context. Those proposals may explain the case within a blood-centered system. They do not restore the simple proposition that every act of forgiveness requires the immediate shedding or presentation of blood. At most they support a systemic-dependence claim: a bloodless rite can mediate forgiveness within an order whose sanctuary and priesthood are otherwise blood-marked.

Systemic dependence is not absolute dependence. The former asks what institutions and prior acts make a rite effective within this covenant. The latter says that no perfect deity could pardon under any possible arrangement

without blood or death. Leviticus 5:11–13 makes the movement from one to the other especially difficult, because the alleged exceptionless rule is qualified from within its own legal setting.

4. What Hebrews Establishes

4.1 The word “almost” belongs to the claim

Hebrews 9 contrasts the first covenant’s sanctuary and repeated rites with the more effective ministry of Christ. Verse 22 is often abbreviated to its final clause. Its full assertion begins by saying that, according to the law, *almost* everything is purified with blood. The qualification is not decorative. It warns the reader that the author is stating a broad covenantal pattern, not denying every exception. The literary frame likewise concerns what the law orders and how Christ’s offering fulfills and surpasses that order (Attridge, 1989; Koester, 2001).

The final expression about no forgiveness without blood-shedding has real rhetorical force. It summarizes the sacrificial pattern the author is expounding. But a summary within a first-covenant comparison does not by itself quantify over every possible act of divine pardon. If it did, the author would be making Leviticus’s bloodless provision unintelligible rather than drawing on the law as a patterned whole. Reading the phrase as covenantal generalization preserves both its force and its stated qualification.

The immediate sequence strengthens that reading. Hebrews speaks of copies of heavenly things being purified with the prescribed sacrifices and then of Christ entering the heavenly sanctuary with his own sacrifice. The passage’s subject is cultic access, purification, covenant inauguration, and the decisive self-offering of Christ. It is not an abstract analysis of which acts an omnipotent and perfectly just deity can perform in every possible world.

4.2 Christ’s death is decisive without becoming a universal metaphysical law

Hebrews does not minimize Christ’s death. It intensifies its significance. Animal blood cannot take away sins (Heb. 10:4), repeated offerings cannot perfect worshipers, and Christ’s self-offering accomplishes what the earlier rites could not. The contrast is not simply “more blood succeeds where less blood failed.” It involves the identity, agency, obedience, heavenly ministry, and finality of the one who offers. Moffitt further argues that resurrection and ascension are integral to Hebrews’ atonement logic: the living high priest presents his life in the heavenly sanctuary rather than the theology ending at the moment of death (Moffitt, 2011). Even readers who dispute details of that account should resist reducing Hebrews to a rule about a fluid.

The strongest warranted conclusion is Christological and economy-relative. Given the covenantal drama Hebrews narrates, Christ’s suffering, death, resurrection, priesthood, and heavenly entry form the decisive means of access and purification. That claim can be doctrinally rich. It still differs from saying that the deity under examination lacked every morally possible route to pardon before choosing this economy.

The distinction also helps with apparent pre-cross forgiveness. Hebrew scripture depicts pardon before Christ’s death, and the Gospels portray Jesus forgiving sins during his ministry. A defender can coherently reply that the later atoning work applies proleptically—that is, its efficacy reaches persons earlier in time. Those episodes therefore do not by themselves disprove dependence on Christ’s work. But prolepsis is a theological coordination of events within the chosen economy; it is not independent proof that no other economy was possible.

Text	What it establishes	Internal limit	Result for absolute necessity
Leviticus 17:11	Blood is given an atoning altar function because life is in it	It speaks within Israel's sacrificial order	Supports covenantal centrality, not by itself a cross-world rule
Leviticus 5:11–13	Flour may be offered by the poorest worshiper, followed by atonement and forgiveness	The rite remains priestly and altar-based	Blocks the simplest immediate-blood formulation
Hebrews 9:22	Blood broadly characterizes purification and forgiveness under the law	The sentence says “almost” and belongs to a first-covenant contrast	Does not state that every possible pardon requires blood
Hebrews 10:4	Animal blood cannot remove sins	The insufficiency heightens Christ's unique agency and offering	Warns against treating blood as an independently sufficient mechanism

The ledger displays a convergence. Blood is important, but its importance is structured by covenant, altar, priesthood, and the identity of the offerer. The same record contains an explicit bloodless rite and an explicit “almost.” The proof texts therefore do not bear the scope assigned to them by absolute-necessity arguments.

5. Can Perfect Justice Supply the Missing Bridge?

Once the textual route is narrowed, the argument often moves to divine attributes. A perfectly just deity cannot simply overlook wrongdoing; pardon must be grounded in a satisfaction proportionate to guilt; the consequence of sin is death; therefore blood or death is necessary. This is more serious than a proof-text slogan because it identifies a moral reason that might apply across possible arrangements. Its weakness is not formal shape but support for the bridge between justice and lethal satisfaction.

5.1 Omnipotence does not settle a moral necessity

One tempting reply says that an omnipotent deity could forgive by any means whatsoever. That is too quick. Perfect power does not include the capacity to perform a contradiction or to act unjustly while remaining perfectly just. If forgiving without lethal satisfaction were intrinsically unjust, omnipotence would not make it permissible. The relevant question is thus not “Can an all-powerful being do anything?” It is “Why would perfect justice make lethal satisfaction necessary in every case?”

The opposite shortcut is equally defective. One cannot infer from perfect justice that every wrong generates a debt payable only by death. Human practices recognize several responses to wrongdoing: truthful condemnation, punishment, restitution, repair, protection, repentance, mercy, reconciliation, and transformed relationship. Their adequacy varies with the wrong and the parties. To establish absolute blood necessity, the defender must show not merely that justice matters but that all nonlethal configurations of these responses are necessarily inadequate for divine pardon.

That is a demanding universal claim. Consider a wrongdoer who fully recognizes the wrong, makes complete restitution where possible, accepts proportionate nonlethal consequences, undergoes moral transformation, and seeks reconciliation. The example does not prove that such measures are always sufficient. It asks why perfect justice would necessarily require blood in addition, particularly if the pardoning party can condemn the act, protect victims, and secure repair without lethal harm. A theory may answer, but “perfect justice” alone is the name of the problem, not the answer.

5.2 Compassion cannot be defined to win the argument

A different shortcut defines perfect compassion as always avoiding harm when a nonharmful route exists, then concludes that a blood requirement contradicts compassion. This too is question-begging. Some harms may be permitted or required to protect victims, communicate equal concern, or uphold just order. Compassion is not identical to consequence-free treatment of an offender.

The better internal critique is comparative. If two morally coherent routes accomplish condemnation of wrongdoing, protection, repair, transformation, and restored relationship, while one additionally requires an innocent person's suffering or death, the defender owes an account of why that added harm is necessary rather than merely selected. The burden is strongest when substitution is construed as punitive transfer. It is weaker where the suffering is understood as voluntary solidarity, costly rescue, representative obedience, or the consequence of confronting evil. Different atonement models therefore should not be collapsed into one target.

6. The Strongest Satisfaction and Penal-Substitution Cases

6.1 Anselm: satisfaction, fittingness, and restored order

Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* is often summarized as though it said that an offended ruler needs blood before calming down. That caricature misses the argument. Anselm treats sin as a failure to render what is owed, a disturbance of right order that cannot simply be left unrepaired. Humanity owes satisfaction but cannot supply what is required; the agent who supplies it must be both divine and human. The voluntary self-giving of the divine-human agent restores what humanity could not (Anselm of Canterbury, 1998).

This account supplies more than ritual precedent. It connects atonement to moral order, human responsibility, representative agency, and the identity of Christ. It also makes the work fitting rather than arbitrary. Yet its move from serious disorder to a unique necessary mode of satisfaction remains contestable. Why must the restored order take this precise form? Why could perfect contrition, transformation, restitution, divinely enabled repair, or another form of costly solidarity never satisfy the relevant good? If the answer depends on the freely chosen dignity, offices, and ends of the incarnational plan, the resulting necessity may be economy-relative rather than absolute.

Anselm himself distinguishes what is necessary from what is fitting in complex ways. Modern discussions of atonement likewise display multiple families of explanation rather than a single agreed derivation (Beilby & Eddy, 2006; Crisp, 2020). The charitable conclusion is not that satisfaction language is empty. It is that satisfaction supplies a serious account of why the cross makes moral and theological sense without automatically proving that every possible pardon requires blood.

6.2 Penal substitution: judgment borne by a representative

Penal substitution presents a sharper justice claim. Wrongdoing deserves judgment; a perfectly just deity does not nullify that judgment; Christ voluntarily stands as covenant representative and bears the penal consequence on behalf of sinners; pardon is therefore grounded rather than costless. Contemporary defenders emphasize scriptural patterns of substitution, imputation, curse, sacrifice, and representative union (Craig, 2020; Jeffery et al., 2007).

The strongest version answers several familiar objections. The substitute is not an unwilling third party seized from outside the deity's moral life. On classical trinitarianism, the Son is not a creature external to the deity but shares the one divine nature while remaining personally distinct. The action is voluntary rather than coercive. Representation or union is invoked to explain why the substitute is not legally unrelated to those represented. Resurrection and vindication prevent the story from ending in the triumph of punishment. These features make the theory more coherent than a bare image of punishing an innocent stranger.

Even so, three questions remain.

First, punishment is ordinarily responsive to the culpability of the person punished. Voluntary assumption of another's monetary debt is intelligible because money is transferable; culpability is not obviously transferable in the same way. Representation may create a legally relevant unity, but the moral basis and limits of that unity require argument.

Second, if the full penalty is literally exhausted, the role of forgiveness becomes conceptually uncertain. A creditor whose claim has been paid may release the debtor, but the release is not mercy in precisely the same sense as forgiving an unpaid personal wrong. Defenders can say that the provision of the substitute is itself merciful. That answer is coherent, but it changes where forgiveness occurs: mercy lies in furnishing and uniting persons to the satisfaction, not in simply foregoing the penal claim.

Third, even a coherent penal-substitution account of the actual Christian economy does not prove uniqueness across all possible economies. It explains how justice and mercy meet in this plan. To establish absolute necessity it must also exclude every alternative way a perfect deity could truthfully condemn wrong, honor victims, repair damage, transform offenders, and restore communion.

Defense	What the defense successfully preserves	Evidential cost for absolute necessity
The flour rite depends on a blood-marked altar system	The wider Levitical economy remains blood-centered	Establishes systemic or covenantal dependence, not immediate blood in every forgiveness case
Hebrews speaks proleptically across time	Pre-cross pardon can depend on Christ's later work	Coordinates events inside the chosen economy but does not show that no other economy is possible
Perfect justice requires satisfaction	Pardon need not trivialize wrongdoing	Requires a further account showing that every nonlethal satisfaction is necessarily inadequate
The substitute is voluntary and trinitarian	Avoids the picture of an unrelated victim being forcibly punished	Improves coherence but does not by itself establish transferability or unique necessity
The cross is uniquely fitting	Gives doctrinal, narrative, and moral reasons for this means	Fittingness can be profound without entailing cross-world necessity

The "cost" column does not imply that the defenses fail. It identifies the kind of claim each preserves. Several preserve rich Christian doctrine precisely by retreating from an exceptionless metaphysical law to covenant, representation, or fittingness. That is clarification, not defeat.

7. Forgiveness Is Not the Erasure of Moral Reality

The absolute-necessity argument gains intuitive force when its alternatives are described as casual indulgence. If pardon means pretending that evil did not occur, abandoning victims, and refusing every demand of justice, then a perfect being should not pardon in that sense. But philosophical work on forgiveness does not require that picture.

Forgiveness is commonly analyzed as a change in the offended party's stance toward the wrongdoer: the forswearing or overcoming of certain hostile responses for moral reasons, while retaining a truthful judgment that the act was wrong. Hieronymi argues that resentment can be uncompromising about the wrong's meaning even when forgiveness changes the relationship (Hieronymi, 2001). Griswold emphasizes moral acknowledgment, responsibility, and the interpersonal work surrounding forgiveness rather than reducing it to amnesia or acquittal (Griswold, 2007). Murphy stresses legitimate limits, including the importance of self-respect and the danger of cheap forgiveness (Murphy, 2005).

These accounts disagree on whether repentance is required, which emotions are overcome, and what reconciliation demands. Their shared contribution is conceptual: forgiveness need not erase condemnation, consequences,

or concern for victims. A person may forgive while seeking restitution, maintaining protective distance, testifying truthfully, or supporting proportionate punishment. Forgiveness and reconciliation also differ. One party can relinquish vindictive hostility while mutual trust remains unrestored.

Atonement adds further elements. It concerns how a wrong is addressed, repaired, expiated, or reconciled, not merely the offended party's changed attitude. Radzik's secular treatment of atonement highlights acknowledgment, responsibility, and repair across interpersonal and political settings (Radzik, 2009). Within Christian theology, Stump centers the healing of divided wills and personal union, while retaining the gravity of sin and the work of Christ (Stump, 2018). These accounts show that moral seriousness can be expressed through transformation and restored relation rather than through a single theory of penal payment.

None of this proves that divine forgiveness is identical to human forgiveness. A creator, judge, covenant partner, and victim may have roles no human party combines. Nor does it prove that punishment is never justified. It defeats a false binary: either blood is shed or wrongdoing is treated as unreal. Once condemnation, protection, restitution, transformation, and reconciliation are kept distinct, the defender of absolute necessity must explain why every morally adequate configuration of them still requires death.

8. What the Cross Can Mean Without Absolute Blood Necessity

Rejecting an overextended necessity argument need not thin Christian atonement into a merely decorative symbol. Several substantial claims remain available.

8.1 The cross can be the decisive act of the actual economy

Within the canonical story, Christ's death may be the appointed climax of covenant, sacrifice, priesthood, representation, and reconciliation. Once that plan is freely willed and promised, its completion can be necessary in a conditional but robust sense. The point is comparable to a promise: one might have been free not to make it, but after making it, faithfulness constrains what one may do. Economy-relative necessity is not make-believe necessity.

8.2 The cross can reveal the gravity of wrongdoing and the cost of restoration

Forgiveness is often costly to the injured party even when no payment is demanded from the offender. The one who forgives bears unrepaired loss, undertakes the work of restored relationship, or absorbs risks that retaliation would avoid. The cross can dramatize and enact that costly movement without implying that a quantity of pain mechanically purchases permission to forgive.

This interpretation must not romanticize suffering. The value lies not in pain considered by itself but in what the suffering agent voluntarily does through steadfast love, truthful confrontation, identification, rescue, or covenant fidelity. Atonement theories that emphasize participation, healing, victory over destructive powers, or restored union can make those relations central (Beilby & Eddy, 2006; Crisp, 2020; Stump, 2018).

8.3 The cross can unite justice and mercy without exhausting either concept

The Christian story can say that wrongdoing is publicly condemned, victims are not ignored, the divine agent bears the cost of reconciliation, and offenders are called into transformed life. Those claims answer the fear that mercy trivializes evil. They do not require the further claim that perfect justice is a cosmic accounting rule under which a death must occur before any pardon becomes possible.

The bounded position therefore preserves more than emotional preference. It allows the cross to be revelatory, representative, sacrificial, victorious, reparative, covenantal, and uniquely fitting. What it withholds is the

inference from those actual functions to a universal incapacity: the claim that the deity under examination could not justly pardon under any possible non-blood arrangement.

9. Objections and Replies

9.1 “Without blood-shedding there is no forgiveness” is unqualified

The clause is forceful, but its sentence and argument are qualified. Hebrews says “almost,” invokes what occurs according to the law, and develops a contrast between first-covenant copies and Christ’s decisive ministry. Leviticus itself includes the flour offering. The responsible reading preserves the broad rule while declining to turn it into a metaphysical quantifier absent from the text.

One might say that the clause states an absolute principle even though the purification clause says “almost.” Grammar alone does not decide the scope. Literary context does. The author is explaining covenant inauguration and sacrificial purification, not surveying every possible divine act. An absolute reading must also explain why the legal corpus being summarized names forgiveness after a bloodless offering.

9.2 The flour offering is possible only because other blood has already been shed

That is a plausible account of systemic dependence. The altar, sanctuary, and priestly institution belong to a blood-marked order. Yet the reply concedes the immediate exception: this person’s forgiveness follows a bloodless offering. To move from dependence on a historically constituted system to absolute necessity, the argument must show that no system without prior blood could ever be justly constituted. The text does not make that modal argument.

9.3 Perfect holiness cannot simply waive guilt

The paper does not assume that guilt is simply waived. It asks which responses justice necessarily requires. Pardon can coexist with condemnation, restitution, protection, repentance, transformation, and some consequences. If holiness adds a distinctive requirement, that requirement should be stated and defended. Repeating that guilt is serious does not establish that lethal satisfaction is the only morally adequate response.

9.4 Atonement must be objective, not merely subjective transformation

The alternatives are not limited to an inward change in human feeling. A non-penal account may include objective rescue from destructive powers, covenant enactment, restoration of a damaged relation, truthful public judgment, reparative action, incarnation, resurrection, and divine initiative. Stump’s account, for example, is relational and transformative without treating atonement as a mere inspirational effect (Stump, 2018). The question is not objective versus subjective but which objective relations require death as a matter of absolute necessity.

9.5 The argument reduces revelation to what seems morally intuitive

The textual case begins with the relevant passages, including their qualifications and exceptions. The philosophical case does not veto revelation by intuition; it asks whether an added universal claim has been established. A defender may accept the claim on broader doctrinal grounds. If so, those grounds should be supplied. The burden increases with scope: a proposition about all possible pardon requires more than a broad description of one covenantal pattern.

9.6 Scripture and justice jointly establish what neither establishes alone

Evidence can become stronger in combination. A defender may argue that scripture identifies the actual blood-centered means while perfect justice explains why that means is necessary. Together, on this account, the routes support more than either could support alone.

The proposal succeeds only if their interaction supplies a warranted universal premise. The texts can identify and interpret the chosen covenantal pattern, while a moral theory can explain why that pattern is coherent or fitting. Yet neither contribution establishes what perfect justice requires in every possible case. Their conjunction therefore supports absolute necessity only if an additional bridge explains why a perfect deity would have to choose a lethal means whenever pardon occurs. Stating and defending that bridge would be a new argument, not a result generated by conjunction alone.

9.7 If an alternative were possible, the cross would be gratuitous

Not every freely chosen means among possible means is gratuitous. A chosen action can be uniquely expressive, maximally fitting, promise-fulfilling, identity-revealing, and constitutive of a relationship even if another plan was abstractly possible. The inference from “not absolutely necessary” to “pointless” confuses value with inevitability. Love may be displayed precisely through free self-giving rather than through submission to an external mechanism.

10. A Practical Audit for Blood-Necessity Claims

Before using a blood text or atonement theory to assert absolute necessity, an advocate should answer six questions.

Six questions before saying “necessary”

1. Which sense of necessity is intended: absolute, covenant-relative, moral, or economy-relative?
2. Does the cited text state an exceptionless rule, and how does the reading account for Leviticus 5:11–13 and the word “almost” in Hebrews 9:22?
3. What principle of justice links every permissible pardon to blood or death rather than to a wider set of condemning, reparative, protective, and transformative responses?
4. If the textual and justice routes are combined, which premise supplies the universal scope that neither route establishes on its own?
5. If substitution carries the argument, what makes culpability or punishment transferable, and what role remains for forgiveness after satisfaction?
6. Would the stated evidence establish only the centrality or fittingness of Christ’s death within the actual Christian economy? If so, why advertise the stronger conclusion?

This audit benefits defenders as well as critics. It prevents an easily refuted slogan from carrying more theological weight than the texts require. It also allows a strong, conditional claim to be stated without embarrassment: within the Christian story, the cross can be indispensable because of who Christ is, what has been promised, and what the redemptive economy aims to accomplish. Precision protects that claim from being confused with a brittle rule about blood as a substance.

The audit also identifies what could change the conclusion. A successful argument for absolute necessity would need either a compelling interpretation that reconciles the apparent scriptural exceptions with a genuinely

exceptionless rule, or an independently defended moral principle that rules out every just nonlethal form of pardon. The present analysis does not show such an argument impossible. It shows that the familiar one has not yet supplied it.

11. Conclusion

The case for blood-dependent pardon is strongest when it stays close to covenant and Christology. Leviticus assigns blood a central altar function; Hebrews presents Christ's self-offering as decisive and unsurpassable within its redemptive drama; satisfaction and penal-substitution theories offer serious accounts of how the cross addresses moral disorder. None of that is erased by careful distinctions.

The stronger claim does not fare as well. Leviticus 5:11–13 supplies a bloodless offering followed by atonement and forgiveness. Hebrews 9:22 says “almost,” speaks according to the law, and belongs to a first-covenant comparison. Appeals to perfect justice do not close the gap unless they establish that every morally possible pardon requires lethal satisfaction. Combining the two routes does not change their scope: covenant-limited texts add no universal premise to a disputed moral bridge. Omnipotence cannot make injustice just, but neither can the label “justice” turn one disputed mechanism into a necessary truth.

Forgiveness also need not mean condoning wrong, abandoning victims, or erasing consequences. It can coexist with truthful condemnation, protection, restitution, repentance, transformation, and limits on reconciliation. Once those relations are distinguished, the choice is no longer between blood and moral indifference.

The warranted conclusion is therefore firm and bounded: scripture and the standard attribute argument do not establish that blood or death is an exceptionless precondition of every possible divine pardon. Christ's death may remain central, divinely chosen, uniquely fitting, and necessary within the freely chosen Christian economy. That is a substantial theological claim. It should not be inflated into an absolute necessity that its proof texts and moral bridge do not establish.

A. Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

Plain-language reconstruction

The paper defends a valid conditional argument whose central negative premises are interpretive and philosophical rather than self-evident:

1. The familiar case establishes absolute blood necessity only if the assessed scriptural and justice materials, separately or jointly, establish a universal bridge linking every possible divine pardon to blood or death.
2. The scriptural route does not establish an exceptionless rule: the relevant corpus includes a bloodless atonement-and-forgiveness rite, and Hebrews states a qualified covenantal generalization.
3. The justice route does not establish the required necessary principle merely from perfect justice, omnipotence, or the coherence of one satisfaction model; it requires a further argument excluding every just nonlethal configuration of condemnation, repair, protection, transformation, and restored relationship.
4. The conjunction of those routes supplies no missing universal premise. Covenant-relative textual evidence does not gain cross-world scope by being joined to a moral premise that has not itself been established as necessary.
5. Therefore, the familiar case does not establish absolute blood necessity.

The conclusion is about what the assessed case warrants. It is not the stronger proposition that absolute blood necessity is false in every possible system. That stronger proposition would require an independent modal argument.

Symbols

- A : The assessed case establishes that every possible divine pardon requires blood or death.
- U : The assessed scriptural material establishes an exceptionless rule requiring blood or death for every possible divine pardon.
- J : The assessed moral argument establishes a necessary justice principle requiring blood or death for every possible divine pardon.
- K : The conjunction of the assessed scriptural and moral materials establishes the universal bridge even though neither route establishes it alone.

Symbolic form

1.	$A \rightarrow (U \vee J \vee K)$	the separate and joint routes offered by the assessed case,
2.	$\neg U \wedge \neg J \wedge \neg K$	the textual, philosophical, and joint-route assessment,
3.	$\therefore \neg A$	modus tollens, with conjunction elimination.

Premise 2 entails $\neg U$, $\neg J$, and $\neg K$, hence $\neg(U \vee J \vee K)$. Together with premise 1, $\neg A$ follows by modus tollens. The inference is deductively valid.

Validity, support, and scope

Validity does not make the premises indubitable. Premise 1 represents the two familiar routes assessed here and includes their possible conjunction through K ; a defender could still offer a genuinely independent third source of support, which would require separate assessment. Premise 2 contains the paper's substantive work. The support for $\neg U$ comes from literary scope, Leviticus's bloodless provision, Hebrews' qualification, and the distinction between a covenantal pattern and an absolute law. The support for $\neg J$ comes from the underdetermination of lethal satisfaction by perfect justice, the availability of morally serious nonlethal responses, and unresolved questions about substitution, transfer, and uniqueness. The support for $\neg K$ is structural: combining a covenant-limited premise with a moral premise whose universal scope remains unsupported does not create a new universal quantifier. A successful joint argument would need to state and defend an additional bridge rather than derive it from the conjunction alone.

Most importantly, $\neg A$ means "the assessed case does not establish absolute necessity." It does not show that every possible route to such a necessity claim has failed, and it does not entail that Christ's death is dispensable within the Christian economy. Covenant-relative requirements, economy-relative necessity, and unique fittingness remain compatible with every line of the formal argument.

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