

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 16, 6 Pictures of Christ, Part 3, Penal Substitution

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on Christ's Saving Work. This is session 16, Six Pictures of Christ, Part 3, Penal Substitution.

We continue our study of Christ's Saving Work.

We're dealing with the picture, the metaphor of penal substitution, specifically objections against it, and answering those objections. Objection number six claims that penal substitution pits the father against the son. Green and Baker oppose unsophisticated forms of penal substitution when they write, quote, any atonement theology that assumes against Paul that in the cross God did something to Jesus is an affront to the Christian doctrine of the triune God, close quote.

Again, Green and Baker recover the scandal of the cross, this time from page 57. They object to views that present God as subject and Christ only as object. But thoughtful proponents of penal substitution do not do this.

Listen to Stott, quote, we must never make Christ the object of God's punishment or God the object of Christ's persuasion. For both God and Christ were subjects, not objects, taking the initiative together to save sinners. Without going into great detail on this point, listen to Williams again.

There is, therefore, biblical testimony to the action of the father toward the son, specifically in laying iniquity on him and condemning it in him. To state what ought to be obvious, he punished the sin that had been transferred to Christ, not regarded Christ in and of himself, with whom in this very act he was well pleased. Objection number seven, penal substitution supposedly neglects the life of Jesus.

While speaking against penal substitution, Gregory Boyd confesses, quote, I frankly struggle to see how it's even relevant to any other aspect of Jesus' life and ministry. Four of the passages studied in these lectures connect Jesus' sinless life with his death on the cross, which is regarded as a penal substitution. We see it in Isaiah 53, where the servant is sinless in action, word, and character, and surely, Isaiah 53 presents penal substitution.

He had done no violence, there was no deceit in his mouth, he is the righteous one my servant, Isaiah 53 verses 9 and 11. The same sinless servant suffers in the place of

others, enduring the suffering that they deserve, as Isaiah says, twice. And he shall bear their iniquities, yet he bore the sin of many, Isaiah 53 verses 11 and 12.

Peter, Paul, and John assert the same truth. Paul, for our sake he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God, 2 Corinthians 5:21. Peter, for Christ also suffered for sins, excuse me, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, 1 Peter 3 18.

Then John speaks of Jesus Christ as the righteous. He is a propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world, 1 John 2 1 and 2. Note how each apostle speaks of Christ's sinless earthly life. Paul calls Jesus him who knew no sin, 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Peter calls him the righteous one, 1 Peter 3:18. And John, Jesus Christ the righteous, 1 John 2:1. Notice also how in each of these texts, the three apostles speak of Christ's life while teaching penal substitution. This objection to penal substitution is, therefore, without merit.

Objection number eight, it has no place for Christ's resurrection. Opponents of penal substitution insist that, quote, because of the singular focus on penal satisfaction, Jesus' resurrection is not really necessary according to this model. Green and Baker, recovering the scandal of the cross.

I admit that proponents of penal substitution have not always given sufficient attention to Jesus' resurrection. But the abuse of a doctrine does not disprove the doctrine. I will make an exegetical and a theological argument.

First is the exegetical argument. It is well known that the legal themes of substitution and justification go together. Paul connects them to Jesus' resurrection when he speaks of Christ our Jesus, our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Romans 4:24-25. Because the curse resulting from Adam's sin was penal, bringing death, its reversal is also penal, bringing life. That reversal entails Jesus' vicarious death and resurrection.

Marshall exegetes Romans 4:25. In the cross, God's condemnation of sin is demonstrated and carried out. Christ bears the sin, and so God declares that sin has been taken away.

And Christ is representatively justified so that those who believe and are united with him share in his justification. Hence, the resurrection is essential to the saving act in that it is not merely God saying that Christ has done what is necessary. Rather, God

himself has to carry out the act of pardon on the basis of what God has done, and he does so.

Thus, Christ was raised for our justification, and without this raising of Christ, we would not be justified. Second is the theological argument. The great majority of Reformed theologians have taught that Christ's lifelong obedience to the Father and the law is part of his saving work.

As Jeffrey, Ovi, and Sack argue, "this integrates perfectly with the doctrine of penal substitution. The righteousness of Jesus' life was imputed to us so that we might be justified or declared righteous by God and stand pure and blameless before him—objection number nine to penal substitution. It cannot account for the cosmic scope of Jesus' death and resurrection. Joel Green writes, quote, an exaggerated focus on an objective atonement and on salvation as transaction obscures the social and cosmological dimensions of salvation."

Critics have complained that substitutionary atonement is so concerned with the salvation of individuals that it detracts attention from the larger biblical story, which involves the redemption of the cosmos that God created. While scripture insists that an individual's relationship with God is a matter near to his heart, the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20, for example, scripture is also concerned with the deliverance of the creation from the curse. The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption, Romans 8:21. What does this deliverance have to do with penal substitution? The answer is much.

The curse resulting from the fall of our first parents was penal. The curses that God pronounces on the serpent Adam and Eve and the ground all were penalties for the primal sin. The result was disorder everywhere among human beings and in the rest of creation itself.

Paul explains, "the creation was subjected to futility, and the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now," Romans 8:20 and 22. The end of the Bible story reveals that the curse has been removed, quote, no longer will there be anything accursed, Revelation 22:3. What occurred to deliver the creation from God's curse? The biblical answer is that Christ died and arose to remove the penalty on creation. God's remedy for the penal curse on the creation is the penal substitution of the Son.

Hear Williams again, who has done such outstanding work in this very area, quote, penal substitution teaches that on the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ exhausted the disordering curse in our place. It is for this reason that there can be resurrection and new creation because the obstacles to it have been removed. Penal substitution is, therefore, the prerequisite for a strong doctrine of the resurrection and as the beginning of the new creation, not a detraction from it.

If the penalty had not been borne by Christ, then the creation would still be under the curse, still disrupted and incapable of being renewed. Objection 10. Penal substitution undermines moral development in believers' lives.

A common criticism of opponents of penal substitution is summed up by Green, "the prevailing model of the atonement focused as it is on the individual on the forensic judgment is an obstacle to a thoroughgoing soteriology oriented toward the holiness of life. Is the work of salvation as transformation unrelated to the atoning work of Christ?" But such objections overlook the link between substitution and union with Christ, the heart of the application of salvation.

Union with Christ is essential to penal substitution, for it establishes the justice of the transfer of our sin to Christ. As John Owen explained, and I quote, "God might punish the elect either in their own persons or in their surety, their representative standing in their room instead. And when he is punished, they also are punished. For in this point of view, the federal head, Christ, and those represented by him are not considered as distinct but as one. Although they are not one with respect to personal unity, they are, however, one. That is one body in mystical union, yea, one mystical Christ. Namely, the surety is the head, and those represented by him are the members. And when the head is punished, the members also are punished."

Owen is correct. Scripture ties together Christ's atonement and the Christian life by virtue of union with Christ. Williams explains the idea of being united to Christ in his death is integral to penal substitution.

Union with Christ explains the justice of the transfer of sin to Christ. If we have died with him as he died, as he bore our penalty for sin, so we must reckon ourselves dead to sin. The foundational doctrine of union with Christ forges an indissoluble link between penal substitution and personal sanctification.

Williams, of course, is alluding to Romans chapter 6. The last argument against penal substitution is that it is cosmic child abuse. This last objection assumes that it's wrong for a parent to inflict pain on a child and that in the traditional Christian understanding, the father inflicted pain on Christ on the cross, thereby giving an unjust example that promotes abuse. There are a number of problems with this view.

First, Jesus was a son, but not a minor when he died. Second, Jesus died to bring glory to himself, for example, in John 17:1, and to save his people, Romans 5:8, as well as glorify the Father. By contrast, child abuse is directed out solely for the gratification of the abuser.

Third, this criticism of penal substitution is misplaced because it fails to recognize that the initiation of the cross was a decision of the Trinity. The son died willingly to rescue the lost. In Christ God, the father was reconciling the world to himself, 2 Corinthians 5:19.

Howard Marshall illustrates the point well. A parent who puts himself into the breach and dies to save her child from a burning house is considered praiseworthy. The God who suffers and dies in the person of Jesus for human sin belongs in the same category.

It is true that the concept of God the Son suffering and dying is a paradox and incomprehensible, and we have to recognize that fact, but that is what scripture says. Close quote, Marshall's theology of the New Testament. Fourth, when opponents of penal substitution use this criticism, they must remember that as large as originally put forward by radical feminists, it attacked not only penal substitution but the Christian doctrine of atonement in general.

Listen to Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker's "The central image of Christ on the cross as the savior of the world communicates the message that suffering is redemptive. This message is complicated further by the theology that says Christ suffered in obedience to his father's will. Divine child abuse is paraded as salvific, and the child who suffers without even raising his voice, an allusion to Isaiah 53, is lauded as the hope of the world." If accepted, this argument proves too much.

William's analysis is correct. As originally made, the radical feminist attack on the cross as cosmic child abuse is not just an attack on penal substitution but on the cross. The general idea, this criticism of penal substitution attacks the general idea that the father willed the suffering of the son, not the specific idea he willed the penal substitutionary suffering of the son.

For many feminists, their criticism results in the rejection of Christianity because the religion undeniably involves the idea that God purposed the sufferings of Christ. In the end, it purposed redemptive suffering, which is regarded as unacceptable. Christianity has to go.

Close quote. And I want to be very careful. Do not misunderstand.

I'm not accusing evangelicals and others who use the divine child abuse argument of necessarily abandoning the Christian faith or advocating radical feminism. I am pointing out, however, that they have strange bedfellows, to say the least. If pressed, this argument leads to the rejection not only of penal substitution but of Christianity itself.

I'm thankful my brothers and sisters who oppose penal substitution with evangelicalism don't take it to that point, but this fact suggests that its evangelical proponents need to rethink this argument—putting things together, summarizing penal substitution. There are many texts that teach it.

Because of its importance and attacks against it, I will just read the references. Genesis 8:21, Exodus 12:13, and 34:6, and 7. Leviticus 1:9, 2:1 and 2:3-5. Leviticus 4:29 and 31. Leviticus 16:21, 22, the great day of atonement. Isaiah 52:13, 53:12. Mark 10:45. Romans 3:25, 26. Romans 8:1-4. 2 Corinthians 5:21. Galatians 3:13. Colossians 2:14. 1 Peter 2:14 and 3:18.

1 John 2:2 and 4:10. As we've already said, the sphere of this picture is the law and involves court, judge, accuser, accused verdict, condemnation, justification, and adoption. Both justification and adoption are legal pictures.

One occurs in the criminal court and one in the family court, but they're both legal in that way. Old Testament background includes a pleasing aroma to the Lord, the Passover lamb, the character of Yahweh in Exodus 34, 6, and 7, the two goats in the day of the atonement, and the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Definition.

Tom Schreiner defines penal substitution well. The father, because of his love for human beings, sent his son, who offered himself willingly and gladly, to satisfy God's justice so that Christ took the place of sinners. The punishment and penalty we deserved was laid on Jesus Christ instead of us so that on the cross, both God's holiness and love are manifested.

The need for penal substitution. Humanity's need for Christ, our penal substitute, is our guilt before a just and holy God. Because of Adam's original sin and our own actual sins, we are condemned before God's judgment seat.

Romans 5:12 to 19, and even before that original sin passage, Romans 1:18 to 3:30, shows actual sins as condemnable. In a word, the need is our deserving condemnation due to our sin, both Adam's and ours. Initiator.

The initiator of penal substitution is always God, sometimes the father. Isaiah 53, 10, Romans 3:25, Romans 8:3, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Colossians 2:14, 1 John 4:10, and sometimes the initiator of penal substitution is the son. Isaiah 53:12, Mark 10:45, Galatians 3:13, 1 Peter 2:24, and 3:18.

Mediator. The mediator, our penal substitute, is Jesus Christ. Text after text present Jesus as the mediator of legal substitution.

I'll just pick five among many. Five by different scriptural authors. Isaiah 53:11, by his knowledge, so the righteous one my servant make many to be accounted righteous and he will bear their iniquities.

Mark 10:45, for even the son of man came to give his life as a ransom for many. Galatians 3:13, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. 1 Peter 3:18, for Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

1 John 2:2, Jesus is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. What is the work that Jesus performs in penal substitution? It is dying in our place, taking the punishment we deserve, that we might be justified and forgiven. Isaiah 53:5, and 6, for he was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes, we are healed.

The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. For even the son of man came to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10:45, I keep coming back to it because it's so important.

Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation in his blood. Romans 3:24, 25, these are places showing Jesus' work in bringing us justification through penal substitution. By sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, God condemns sin in the flesh.

Romans 8:3, for our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21. Colossians 2:13, and 14, and you, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He himself bore our sins and his body on the tree. 1 Peter 2:24.

This is love. Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 4:10.

Voluntariness. Jesus willingly gives himself in place of his people. He is not coerced.

He poured out his soul to death. Isaiah 53:12. The son of man came to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10:45. I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

John 10:17, and 18. Then I said, behold, I have come to do your will, O God. Hebrews 10:7, and 9. Substitution.

This is the very heart of the matter. The son of God dies in the place of sinners, suffering the penalty for their sins. I don't need to quote the passages again and again, they show it clearly.

Particularity. Some of my viewers and hearers will object, but I would like them to think about this. Salvation and substitution involve efficacy, which implies particularity.

Christ's vicarious atonement, his suffering the penalty that sinners cannot pay, is efficacious for the following reasons. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. Isaiah 53: 5. By his knowledge shall the righteous one my servant make many to be accounted righteous, and he will bear their iniquities.

Isaiah 53: 11. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. Galatians 3:13.

And you, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. Colossians 2:13, 14.

He himself bore our sins and his body on the tree. 1 Peter 2:24. Christ also suffered for sins, once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

God loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 4:10. Christ's substitutionary atonement is effective through his death and resurrection.

He actually brings peace, heals, makes many to be accounted righteous, redeems from the law's curse, cancels the record of debt, bears sins in his body, brings people to God, and is the propitiation for sin. And if his saving work is substitutionary and therefore efficacious, there are only two possibilities. Either it is universal, and everyone is saved, or it is particular, and all whom God has chosen are saved.

Universalism is incompatible with the Bible's message. C. J. I. Packer, *Universalism, Will Everyone Be Saved?* In *Hell Under Fire*, a book that I co-edited with Christopher Morgan for Zondervan in 2004. Packer's opposition to universalism there is outstanding.

If Jesus died a substitutionary death, and he did, therefore, his death is effective. If it's effective, only two possibilities are obtained. It's effective for all, universalism, or it's effective for the elect, and only they will be saved in the end.

J. I. Packer argues in the same manner for particular or definite atonement. "if the use historically made of the penal substitution model is examined, there is no doubt, despite occasional confusions of thought, that part of the intention is to celebrate the decisiveness of the cross as in every sense the procuring cause of salvation. Once this is granted, however, we are shut up to a choice between universalism and some form of the view that Christ died to save only a part of the human race."

I might add that one of the dangers of systematic theology is it separates what God has put together. As viewers might suspect, I'm a Calvinist, but I understand God's absolute sovereignty and genuine human freedom to exist in tension in the Bible.

And so, I do not deny the freedom of the will rightly understood. I would oppose a notion of Arminian freedom of the will; I'm lacking vocabulary here; perhaps it'll come, and I would affirm that because of the fall, we are unable to choose God and that he must choose us to save him. We must choose Christ that we might be, God must choose us to save us.

But I do affirm both sovereignty and freedom. What I just read is strong on the sovereignty side, simply because we're talking about the atonement of Christ. I oppose libertarian freedom of the will, which was true in the Garden of Eden but was lost in the fall, it is recovered only in measure in the Christian life but will be true in the, it will be true in the resurrection of the dead.

We will not be free to choose evil in the final reckoning of things. We will be most free. True freedom is, should be distinguished from freedom of choice.

Human beings always have freedom of choice, but true freedom is that which our first parents enjoyed in the garden, the ability to love, serve, and know God. That was lost in the fall, it's recovered in measure in Christ, but it'll be resplendent in the new heavens and new earth as resurrected beings will be totally sanctified, 1 Thessalonians 5 toward the end, and we won't be able to sin. We will be most free then, but we will lack libertarian freedom.

Perhaps that's enough said. Justification and adoption, the legal aspects of the application of salvation that correspond to Christ's saving work as penal substitution are justification and adoption. We see the former justification tethered to penal substitution in Isaiah 53.

By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities, verse 11. It is noteworthy that scripture's

key propitiation passage is situated in Romans, so as to provide the basis for justification, Romans 3:25, 26. Adoption, like justification, is a legal picture of salvation applied.

Paul teaches that the Father sent the Son to redeem slaves of sin so that he might adopt them, Galatians 4:4 through 7. How does Paul, in the same epistle, describe the redemption that brings adoption? As penal substitution in Galatians 3:13, Christ redeems us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse in our, for us. Individual, corporate, and cosmic scope, Christ dies as a penal substitute for individuals, for his church, and to deliver the whole creation from the curse of sin—relation to other doctrines.

One way to demonstrate the importance of penal substitution is to see its function in relation to other pictures of Christ's saving work. Sometimes it is used to describe redemption, Mark 10:45, Galatians 3:13. Reconciliation, 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Victory, Colossians 2:14, 15. And sacrifice, Romans 3:25, 1 Peter 2:24. We have examined now three pictures of Christ's saving work.

Reconciliation, where Jesus is our mediator, our peacemaker. Redemption, where Jesus is our redeemer, our deliverer. And substitution, where Christ is our substitute, our legal substitute, who pays the penalty of the law for us.

I'll just survey the other three at the end of this lecture that we might tackle them in more detail in the next lecture. The picture of victory comes from the domain or the sphere of warfare, of battle, of struggle. Our need is we have foes far stronger than we are.

The devil, his demons, death, hell, the world considered as a system antagonistic to God. All of these are ranged against us as foes more powerful than we. Christ is our divine human champion who defeats our enemies by his death and resurrection.

Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14 and 15 are paramount. We will see Christ is our sacrifice. He is the great high priest who offers himself.

He is both a sacrifice and an offering. Our need is moral defilement or filth that makes us odious in the sight of a holy God. The picture of priestly sacrifice then results in purification or cleansing for God's people.

John 1:29, Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Hebrews 9:12 and 15, Christ's death purifies us, cleanses us. The last picture, and the least known among Christians to whom I have taught, is the picture of restoration, in which Jesus is the second Adam.

The need is the death brought about by Adam's primal disobedience. The result is the life, eternal life brought by Christ, the second and last Adam who obeys in the place of Adam's disobedience. Two primary texts are Romans 5:18 and 19 and 1 Corinthians 15:22.

So, six major pictures of Christ's saving work. There are more, but I chose them on the basis of their importance and prominence in the biblical story. It's just not a mention of one of these themes one or two times, but they're revealed in considerable passages of scripture, and they are presented as what Christ has done to make us his own and save us forever.

So, again, in our next session together, we'll look at Christ, our champion, Christ, our sacrifice and high priest, and Christ, the second Adam who undoes what Adam did. Thank you very much for your good attention.

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