

# Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 16, 6 Pictures of Christ's Saving Works, Part 2, Penal Substitution

## Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

### 1. Abstract of Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 16, 6 Pictures of Christ's Saving Works, Part 2, Penal Substitution, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert Peterson's session focuses on the doctrine of **penal substitution** as a key aspect of **Christ's saving work**. He addresses common **objections** to this theological concept, such as the idea that it creates conflict within the Trinity, neglects Jesus's life and resurrection, or lacks cosmic scope. Peterson argues against these criticisms by highlighting **biblical support** and explaining penal substitution's connection to concepts like justification, adoption, and the defeat of sin's curse. Ultimately, the lecture defines **penal substitution**, outlines its necessity and initiators, and emphasizes its **efficacy** in securing salvation for believers.

2. 21 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of  
Dr. Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 16 – Double click  
icon to play in Windows media player or go to the  
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link  
there (Theology → Theology, Peterson → Christology).



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### 3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 16, 6 Pictures of Christ's Saving Works, Part 2, Penal Substitution

#### Briefing Document: Dr. Robert A. Peterson on Penal Substitution

**Overview:** This briefing document summarizes the main themes and arguments presented by Dr. Robert A. Peterson in Session 16 of his teaching on "Christ's Saving Work," focusing specifically on the doctrine of Penal Substitution. Peterson addresses common objections to this doctrine, provides biblical support, outlines its key elements, and discusses its relation to other aspects of salvation and broader theological themes.

#### Main Themes and Important Ideas:

##### 1. Addressing Objections to Penal Substitution:

Peterson dedicates a significant portion of this session to refuting ten common objections raised against the doctrine of penal substitution. These objections and Peterson's responses are as follows:

- **Objection 6: Penal substitution pits the Father against the Son.**
- **Peterson's Response:** Thoughtful proponents understand that both God the Father and God the Son were active subjects in the work of salvation, taking the initiative together. He quotes Stott: *"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."* Peterson also emphasizes that the Father punished the sin that was transferred to Christ, not Christ himself, with whom He was well pleased. He quotes Williams: *"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 7: Penal substitution neglects the life of Jesus.**
- **Peterson's Response:** Scripture connects Jesus' sinless life directly with his death as a penal substitute. He cites Isaiah 53 (the sinless servant), 2 Corinthians 5:21 ("he made him to be sin who knew no sin"), 1 Peter 3:18 ("the righteous for the unrighteous"), and 1 John 2:1 ("Jesus Christ as the righteous...is the propitiation

for our sins"). He highlights that the apostles speak of Christ's sinless life while teaching penal substitution, demonstrating the connection.

- **Objection 8: Penal substitution has no place for Christ's resurrection.**
- **Peterson's Response:** While acknowledging that some proponents may have underemphasized the resurrection, Peterson argues exegetically (Romans 4:24-25 links Christ's being "delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification") and theologically (Reformed theologians see Christ's lifelong obedience as part of saving work). The resurrection is essential for our justification as it signifies God's acceptance of Christ's atoning work and the carrying out of pardon.
- **Objection 9: Penal substitution cannot account for the cosmic scope of Jesus' death and resurrection.**
- **Peterson's Response:** The curse resulting from the fall was penal and brought disorder to all creation. Christ's penal substitution is the remedy for this curse, removing the penalty on creation. He quotes Williams: *"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."*
- **Objection 10: Penal substitution undermines moral development in believers' lives.**
- **Peterson's Response:** This objection overlooks the crucial link between penal substitution and union with Christ. Peterson quotes John Owen emphasizing the mystical union between Christ (the surety) and believers (the members), where punishment of the head is also the punishment of the members in this representative view. Union with Christ explains the justice of sin transfer and necessitates that those who died with Christ to sin should reckon themselves dead to sin (Romans 6).
- **Objection 11: Penal substitution is cosmic child abuse.**
- **Peterson's Response:** Peterson raises several counterpoints: Jesus was an adult, his death had multiple purposes (glorifying God, saving people), and the cross was a decision of the Trinity with the Son dying willingly. He uses Marshall's analogy of a parent sacrificing themselves to save a child as praiseworthy. He also highlights that this criticism, as originally formulated by radical feminists, attacks the entire Christian doctrine of atonement, not just penal substitution. He quotes

Brown and Parker's criticism: *"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...is lauded as the hope of the world."* Peterson cautions against embracing this argument, noting its radical implications.

## 2. Biblical Support for Penal Substitution:

Peterson provides an extensive list of biblical references supporting penal substitution, including: Genesis 8:21, Exodus 12:13, 34:6-7, Leviticus (various sacrificial passages), Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Mark 10:45, Romans 3:25-26, 8:1-4, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13, Colossians 2:14, 1 Peter 2:24, 3:18, and 1 John 2:2, 4:10.

## 3. Key Elements of Penal Substitution:

Peterson outlines the following aspects of penal substitution:

- **Sphere:** The law and legal contexts (court, judge, etc.).
- **Old Testament Background:** Pleasing aroma offerings, Passover lamb, Yahweh's character (Exodus 34), the two goats on the Day of Atonement, and the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53).
- **Definition:** Peterson quotes Tom Schreiner's definition: *"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."*
- **Need:** Humanity's guilt before a just and holy God due to original sin and actual sins, deserving condemnation.
- **Initiator:** Primarily God (the Father) but also the Son.
- **Mediator:** Jesus Christ.
- **Work:** Dying in our place, taking our punishment for our justification and forgiveness (citing Isaiah 53:5-6, Mark 10:45, Romans 3:24-25, 8:3, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Colossians 2:13-14, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 John 4:10).
- **Voluntariness:** Jesus willingly offered himself (Isaiah 53:12, Mark 10:45, John 10:17-18, Hebrews 10:7, 9).

- **Substitution:** Christ died in the place of sinners, suffering their penalty.
- **Particularity:** Peterson argues for a particular or definite atonement, stating that if Christ's substitutionary death is effective (as Scripture indicates), then it is either effective for all (universalism, which Peterson rejects) or effective for the elect. He quotes J.I. Packer supporting this view.

#### 4. Relation to Justification and Adoption:

Peterson emphasizes that justification (being declared righteous in God's sight, citing Isaiah 53:11 and Romans 3:25-26) and adoption (being brought into God's family, citing Galatians 4:4-7 and 3:13) are the legal aspects of the application of salvation that correspond to Christ's penal substitutionary work.

#### 5. Individual, Corporate, and Cosmic Scope:

Christ's death as a penal substitute has individual, corporate (for the church), and cosmic (delivering creation from the curse) implications.

#### 6. Relation to Other Doctrines/Pictures of Christ's Saving Work:

Penal substitution functions in relation to other pictures of Christ's saving work, including:

- **Redemption:** Penal substitution describes the means of deliverance (Mark 10:45, Galatians 3:13).
- **Reconciliation:** Penal substitution explains how the broken relationship is restored (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- **Victory:** Christ's penal suffering and death are integral to his triumph over sin and death (Colossians 2:14-15).
- **Sacrifice:** Penal substitution highlights the nature of Christ's offering as a satisfaction of God's justice (Romans 3:25, 1 Peter 2:24).

#### Preview of Future Sessions:

Peterson concludes by briefly introducing three other "pictures" of Christ's saving work that will be discussed in the next session:

- **Victory:** Christ as the divine-human champion defeating our enemies (devil, demons, death, etc.) (Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14-15).

- **Sacrifice:** Christ as the great high priest offering himself to purify and cleanse God's people (John 1:29, Hebrews 9:12, 15).
- **Restoration:** Christ as the Second Adam undoing the effects of Adam's disobedience and bringing life (Romans 5:18-19, 1 Corinthians 15:22).

**Conclusion:**

Dr. Peterson provides a robust defense of the doctrine of penal substitution, addressing numerous objections with biblical and theological arguments. He meticulously outlines the key components of this doctrine and demonstrates its integral role in understanding various aspects of salvation and its connection to other essential theological themes. The session emphasizes the justice and love of God displayed in the cross, where Christ willingly took the penalty for humanity's sin.

## 4. Study Guide: Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 16, 6 Pictures of Christ's Saving Works, Part 2, Penal Substitution

### Study Guide: Penal Substitution

#### Key Concepts:

- **Penal Substitution:** The doctrine that Christ died in the place of sinners, bearing the punishment (penalty) they deserved for their sins, thus satisfying God's justice.
- **Atonement:** The work Christ did in his life and death to reconcile humanity to God. Penal substitution is one model of the atonement.
- **Justification:** God's act of declaring sinners righteous in his sight, not based on their own merit but on the righteousness of Christ imputed to them.
- **Adoption:** God's act of bringing believers into his family as sons and daughters, granting them all the rights and privileges thereof.
- **Union with Christ:** The mystical and spiritual connection between believers and Christ, through which they share in his death, resurrection, and life.
- **Propitiation:** The act of appeasing or satisfying God's wrath against sin. Christ's death is understood as a propitiation for our sins.
- **Reconciliation:** The restoration of friendly relations between two parties who were previously hostile. Christ's death reconciles sinners to God.
- **Redemption:** The act of buying back or ransoming someone from captivity or slavery. Christ's death is a redemption from the slavery of sin and the law.
- **Cosmic Scope of Salvation:** The understanding that Christ's saving work extends beyond individual salvation to include the renewal and restoration of the entire created order.
- **Voluntariness of Christ's Sacrifice:** The understanding that Jesus willingly and freely offered himself as a sacrifice for sin.
- **Particularity of Atonement:** The view that Christ's substitutionary death was effective specifically for those whom God has chosen to save (the elect).
- **Universalism:** The belief that all people will ultimately be saved. The text argues against this view.

- **Libertarian Freedom of the Will:** The belief that humans have the absolute ability to choose between good and evil, a freedom the text argues was lost after the Fall.
- **Pleasing Aroma:** An Old Testament concept referring to sacrifices that were acceptable and pleasing to God.
- **Passover Lamb:** The lamb sacrificed during the Passover to commemorate the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt, seen as a foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice.
- **Day of Atonement:** The annual Old Testament ritual where the high priest offered sacrifices for the sins of the nation.
- **Suffering Servant:** The figure in Isaiah 53 who suffers and dies for the sins of others, understood to be a prophecy of Christ.
- **Second Adam:** A title for Christ, highlighting his role in reversing the effects of Adam's sin and bringing life to humanity through his obedience.

#### Short Answer Quiz:

1. According to Peterson, what is the sixth objection against penal substitution discussed in the lecture, and how does he refute it using the writings of Stott and Williams?
2. What is the seventh objection raised against penal substitution, and what evidence from Isaiah, Paul, Peter, and John does Peterson provide to counter this objection?
3. Explain the eighth objection to penal substitution concerning the resurrection, and summarize Peterson's exegetical argument using Romans 4:24-25 to address it.
4. What is the ninth objection to penal substitution regarding its scope, and how does Peterson argue that the penal nature of the curse and Christ's work address this concern?
5. Summarize the tenth objection against penal substitution, which claims it undermines moral development, and explain how the doctrine of union with Christ provides a counter-argument.
6. What is the final objection discussed, which Peterson labels "cosmic child abuse," and what are at least two reasons he gives to refute this criticism?



7. According to Tom Schreiner's definition quoted in the lecture, what are the key elements and the manifested results of penal substitution?
8. What does Peterson identify as the fundamental need of humanity that necessitates penal substitution, and where in Scripture does he point to support this?
9. Identify at least three different roles or actions of Jesus Christ in penal substitution as described in the lecture and supported by specific scriptural references.
10. What are the two possible conclusions regarding the efficacy of Christ's substitutionary death, and which does Peterson argue is consistent with biblical teaching?

**Answer Key:**

1. The sixth objection claims that penal substitution pits the Father against the Son, presenting God as subject and Christ as object. Peterson refutes this by citing Stott, who emphasizes that both God and Christ were subjects taking the initiative together to save sinners, and Williams, who clarifies that God punished the sin transferred to Christ, not Christ himself, with whom He was well pleased.
2. The seventh objection states that penal substitution neglects the life of Jesus and its relevance to his saving work. Peterson counters this by highlighting passages (Isaiah 53, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 3:18, 1 John 2:1-2) where the sinless life of Christ is explicitly connected with his penal substitutionary death, as asserted by Isaiah and the apostles.
3. The eighth objection argues that penal substitution's singular focus on penal satisfaction renders Jesus' resurrection unnecessary. Peterson's exegetical argument from Romans 4:24-25 shows that Paul connects Jesus' being "delivered up for our trespasses" (penal substitution) and "raised for our justification," indicating the resurrection is the penal reversal bringing life and is essential for our justification.
4. The ninth objection claims that penal substitution's focus on individual salvation obscures the cosmic scope of Jesus' death and resurrection. Peterson argues that the curse resulting from the Fall was penal and caused cosmic disorder, and Christ's penal substitutionary death and resurrection remove this penalty, thus delivering the creation from the curse.

5. The tenth objection argues that penal substitution, with its focus on forensic judgment, hinders a soteriology oriented toward holiness of life. Peterson refutes this by emphasizing the essential link between penal substitution and union with Christ, explaining that our union with Christ, who bore our penalty, necessitates that we reckon ourselves dead to sin, forging a link with sanctification.
6. The final objection, "cosmic child abuse," assumes it's wrong for a parent to inflict pain on a child and misrepresents the Trinity's actions on the cross. Peterson counters by noting that Jesus was not a minor, his death served to glorify himself and save his people (not for the abuser's gratification), and the cross was a decision of the entire Trinity, with the Son dying willingly.
7. According to Schreiner, penal substitution involves the Father sending his willing Son to satisfy God's justice by taking the place of sinners. As a result, the punishment and penalty we deserved were laid on Jesus, manifesting both God's holiness and love on the cross.
8. Peterson identifies humanity's fundamental need as our guilt before a just and holy God due to both Adam's original sin and our own actual sins, leading to deserving condemnation. He refers to Romans 5:12-19 and Romans 1:18-3:30 to support this understanding of our condemnable state.
9. Jesus Christ is presented as the **mediator** who suffers in our place (1 Peter 3:18), as the one on whom the Lord **laid the iniquity of us all** (Isaiah 53:6), and as the **propitiation** for our sins (1 John 2:2, 4:10), demonstrating his work of taking our punishment to bring us justification and forgiveness.
10. The two possibilities are universalism (everyone is saved) or particularity (only the elect are saved). Peterson argues against universalism as incompatible with the Bible's message and leans towards the particularity of the atonement, where Christ's effective substitutionary death secures the salvation of God's chosen people.

**Essay Format Questions:**

1. Critically analyze the objections raised against the doctrine of penal substitution presented in the lecture. Evaluate the strength of both the objections and Peterson's responses, providing specific examples from the text.
2. Explore the relationship between penal substitution and other key doctrines of salvation, such as justification, adoption, and union with Christ. How does the understanding of penal substitution inform and shape these other doctrines, according to the lecture?
3. Discuss the scope of Christ's saving work as presented in the lecture, paying particular attention to the argument that penal substitution can account for both individual salvation and the redemption of the cosmos.
4. Examine the role of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the doctrine of penal substitution as implied in the lecture. How does the concept of the Trinity address potential criticisms, such as the "cosmic child abuse" objection?
5. Compare and contrast the concept of libertarian freedom of the will with the understanding of human freedom presented in the lecture in relation to the efficacy and particularity of Christ's atonement.

## 5. FAQs on Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 16, 6 Pictures of Christ's Saving Works, Part 2, Penal Substitution, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions about Penal Substitution

**1. What is penal substitution?** Penal substitution is a picture or metaphor used to describe a crucial aspect of Christ's saving work. It explains that God the Father, out of love for humanity, sent his Son, Jesus Christ, who willingly offered himself to satisfy divine justice. In this act, Christ took the place of sinners, bearing the punishment and penalty that they deserved for their sins. This substitution manifested on the cross, demonstrating both God's holiness in condemning sin and his love in providing a way for sinners to be reconciled to him.

**2. Doesn't penal substitution pit the Father against the Son?** No, thoughtful proponents of penal substitution emphasize that the Trinity acted in unison in the work of salvation. While Scripture speaks of the Father laying iniquity on the Son and condemning sin in him, it does not portray God the Father as merely an angry subject and Christ as only the passive object of punishment. Both God the Father and Jesus Christ were subjects who took the initiative together to save sinners. The punishment was directed at the sin transferred to Christ, not at Christ himself, with whom the Father remained well-pleased.

**3. How does penal substitution relate to the life of Jesus? Doesn't it just focus on his death?** Penal substitution does not neglect the significance of Jesus' life. Several biblical passages connect Jesus' sinless life with his death as a penal substitute. For example, Isaiah 53 describes the sinless servant who bears the iniquities of others. The apostles Peter, Paul, and John also highlight Christ's sinlessness when teaching about his substitutionary death. Paul calls Jesus "him who knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21), Peter refers to him as "the righteous for the unrighteous" (1 Peter 3:18), and John calls him "Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). These connections demonstrate that Christ's perfect life provided the necessary righteousness for his substitutionary death to be effective.

**4. What role does the resurrection of Jesus play in penal substitution? Is it even necessary?** The resurrection is essential to penal substitution and is not rendered unnecessary by it. Biblically, legal themes of substitution and justification are linked to Jesus' resurrection. Romans 4:24-25 states that Jesus "was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." Because sin brought a penal curse of death, its reversal through Christ's sacrifice is also penal, culminating in the gift of life through his resurrection. The resurrection signifies that God's pardon has been carried out based on Christ's atoning work, and it is through Christ's resurrection that believers are representatively justified.

**5. Does penal substitution only focus on individual salvation and ignore the broader scope of redemption?** While penal substitution addresses the individual's need for reconciliation with God due to sin, it does not ignore the cosmic scope of Jesus' death and resurrection. The curse resulting from the fall had penal consequences for all of creation, subjecting it to futility and decay. Christ's death and resurrection, as a penal substitution, removed the penalty on creation, paving the way for its future deliverance and renewal. Penal substitution is thus seen as the prerequisite for the new creation, as it dealt with the disordering curse that affected the entire cosmos.

**6. How does penal substitution relate to moral development and holiness in believers' lives?** Penal substitution is intrinsically linked to the moral development of believers through the concept of union with Christ. This union establishes the justice of the transfer of our sin to Christ and, consequently, our participation in his death and resurrection. Because we are united with Christ who bore our penalty for sin, we are also called to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. This foundational doctrine forges an inseparable connection between Christ's atoning work as our substitute and our personal sanctification and pursuit of holiness.

**7. Is the concept of penal substitution akin to "cosmic child abuse"?** The objection that penal substitution constitutes "cosmic child abuse" misunderstands several key aspects. First, Jesus was not a minor but willingly laid down his life. Second, his death served to bring glory to himself and to save his people, unlike the selfish motivations behind child abuse. Third, the decision for Christ's sacrifice was a Trinitarian one, with the Son willingly participating in the plan of redemption. This act of self-sacrifice for the sake of others is more akin to a parent heroically sacrificing themselves to save their child. Furthermore, this criticism often extends beyond penal substitution to attack the fundamental Christian belief that God purposed the suffering of Christ for redemptive purposes.

**8. What are some of the key biblical foundations for the doctrine of penal substitution?**

The Bible contains numerous passages that teach or imply penal substitution. These include Old Testament concepts like the pleasing aroma sacrifices (Leviticus), the Passover lamb (Exodus), the Day of Atonement with the two goats (Leviticus 16), and the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. New Testament texts explicitly teach penal substitution, such as Mark 10:45 ("a ransom for many"), Romans 3:24-25 ("propitiation by his blood"), 2 Corinthians 5:21 ("made him to be sin who knew no sin"), Galatians 3:13 ("Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us"), and 1 Peter 3:18 ("the righteous for the unrighteous"). These texts highlight Christ's role as our substitute who bore the penalty for our sins, leading to our justification and reconciliation with God.