

PENAL SUBSTITUTION: The testimony of Scripture

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1] Christ is said to “bear” our sins (Isaiah 53:1 Peter 2:24).

To bear sins is not only to assume responsibility for them, but also to undergo *the punishment due to them* (Leviticus 20:17 cf. vv.18-20). Francis Turretin observes: “to bear sin is the same thing as to bear the punishment of sins” (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, volume 3, page 429).

2] The penal nature of Christ’s death is implied some key references to it.

He was delivered “for our offences” (Romans 4:25), the preposition “for” in the Greek is *dia* - “because of, on account of.” This can only mean that these offences were the *cause* of His death. The same meaning is in the propositions of 1 Corinthians 15:3 – “for our sins” (*huper* – “in behalf of, for the sake of”), and 1 Peter 3:18 “suffered for sins” (*peri* – concerning, because of), and Matthew 20:28 “a ransom for many” (*anti* – “because of, instead of.”

3] His death is described as a “sacrifice” (Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 9:26, etc.)

With respect to sacrifices, guilt was transmitted and, in consequence, life was taken *as the penalty due* (see: Leviticus 1:5). As Robert Dabney says concerning the Old Testament sacrifices which prefigured Christ’s sacrifice, “these bloody sacrifices were intended by God to symbolise the substitution of an innocent victim in place of the guilty offerer; the transfer of his guilt to the substitute; satisfaction for it by the vicarious death, and the consequent forgiveness of the sinner (Leviticus 1:4; 14:21; 17:11, *et passim*.)” (*Christ our Penal Substitute*, page 88).

4] In Isaiah 53:7, it says “he was oppressed” - literally, “it was exacted” - that is, Christ bore the penalty which the Law demanded. B.W. Newton comments, “it must be very strongly stated that the commencing Hebrew word (‘it was exacted’) indicates that the suffering was the result of judicial infliction from the hand of God; because He who so suffered stood as one who had voluntarily undertaken to bear penalties which the Law of God ‘exacted.’ The word (*nagas*) indicated not merely oppression, but oppression that was the result of a demand. It means to have payment of a debt sternly executed, and is thus used in Deuteronomy 15:2,3, ‘Every creditor that lendeth ought to his neighbour shall (on the seventh year) release it; he shall not EXACT it of his neighbour or his brother, because the Lord’s release hath been proclaimed. Of a foreigner thou mayest EXACT it again, etc.’” (*Thoughts on the Whole Prophecy of Isaiah*, pages 265,266).

5] It is said that Christ became “a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13).

Since the curse of the Law was the penalty of sin (Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10), this can only mean that He was charged with sin and was judged *as if He was a sinner* - although, of course, He Himself knew no sin (see: 2 Corinthians 5:21).

6] The fact that His death was a “ransom” (Matthew 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:6; cf. Romans 3:24; Ephesians 1:7) shows that the sinner’s freedom has been bought by the payment of a required price. Christ paid the price, an equivalent for the sins of men (1 Peter 1:18,19; Revelation 5:9). In his classic work, *The Atonement and Intercession of Christ*, William Symington concludes, “The passages, thus, without controversy, prove the fact that salvation is effected by the blood or death of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is offered to and accepted of by God, as a perfect satisfaction, a proper equivalent for the sins of such as are made partakers of redemption. They are not their own, but BOUGHT WITH A PRICE. Can anything more distinctly express the idea of satisfaction, which is just the idea of atonement?” (pages 185,186).

7] The very concept of a "surety" (Hebrews 7:22) requires one who performs a service or pays a debt on behalf of another (Gen 43:9; cf. Philemon 18).

8] There is no doubt that God inflicted "chastisement" or "punishment" upon Christ (Isaiah 53:5,10; Zechariah 13:7).

God "condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:4). "The Punishment which God meted out to Christ was the very punishment which was due to his people. (Arthur Pink, *The Atonement*, page 93). Pink proceeds to quote Dr. John Brown: "To the enlightened eye, there is found on the cross another inscription, besides that which Pilate ordered to be written there: The Victim of Guilt. The Wages of sin" (ibid.)

9] Our salvation came about by "reconciliation."

That is, satisfaction being rendered to the offended party whose justice must be fully met and, as a result, God's most righteous displeasure with us on account of sin has been removed (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:20; Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). After a most learned treatment of "propitiation" in both Testaments, Dr. Leon Morris makes this telling point: "The Scripture is clear that the wrath of God is visited on sinners or else that the Son of God dies for them. Either sinners are punished for their misdoings or else there takes place what Hodgson calls 'that self-punishment which combines the activities of punishing and forgiving.' Either we die or He dies. 'But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8)" (*The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, page 213).

10] The nature of Christ's death can only be understood in terms of penal substitution.

His was no ordinary anguish and pain. His was no ordinary death (Matthew 26:37; Mark 14:33-35; Luke 22:44; Hebrews 5:7). As Turretin says, "Such things can have no other adequate cause except in vindicatory justice demanding from Christ a most full satisfaction for us" (op. cited, pages 434,435). A scripture comes to mind: "Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger" (Lamentations 1:12).

As Wesley expresses it,

For what you have done
His blood must atone:
The Father hath punished for you His dear Son:
The Lord, in the day
Of His anger did lay
Your sins on the Lamb, and He bore them away.

Contrary to what Steve Chalke alleges, Penal substitution is not a theory of the Atonement: it *is* the Atonement. And if a sinner rejects it, he places himself beyond hope of the salvation of God.