

The Gospel Wars

Lesson #5 Penal Substitutionary Atonement

I. Lesson Introduction

There are within what is termed “Christianity” at least 5 dominant views of the atonement. The significance of their differences is immense and important.

Only 1 is correct. The others will have within them some elements of truth, but in fact are insufficient to be consistent with the totality of Scripture teaching. We will list and define each of these five major theories/views of the Atoning work of Jesus the Christ.

The purpose of a theory of atonement is to answer at least these 3 questions:

- 1st What is the nature of Jesus’ death on the cross?
- 2nd Why did Jesus die?
- 3rd What does His death mean for the world today?

II. Definitions

1. The Penal Substitutionary Blood Atonement Doctrine:

A **penalty** had to be paid. It was paid by a **substitute** on our behalf. Payment was based on the spilling of **blood** in the death of a perfectly righteous sacrificial Being.

“Christ’s death was “penal” in that He bore a penalty when He died. His death was also a “substitution” in that He was a substitution for us when He died. This has been the orthodox understanding of the atonement held by evangelical theologians, in contrast to other views that attempt to explain the atonement apart from the idea of the wrath of God or payment of the penalty for sin.

This view of the atonement is sometimes called the theory of **vicarious atonement**. A ‘vicar’ is someone who stand sin the place of another or who represents another. Christ’s death was therefore ‘vicarious’ because He stood in our place and represented us. As our representative, He took the penalty that we deserve.”

From Wayne Grudem’s - Systematic Theology; p. 579

My own comments: Most of the other views are an attempt to remove the “offense” of the cross as referred to by Paul in Galatians 5:11 – *Now brothers, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. Offense; *σκανδαλον*; skandalon; (Str. 4625) 15x; meaning “offense” or “stumbling block”. I prefer “offense” as used in the KJV, NKJV, ESV, and the HCSB. The word “offense” is simpler. The cross of Christ is an offense to the natural mind, but to those of us who are redeemed in Christ, it is our glory. Ray Weedon comments*

Read the earliest written account of the gospel in the earliest book written in Scripture:

1. Job’s dilemma - Job 9:32-35; 2. Job’s hope – Job 16:18-22; 3. Job’s certain salvation – Job 19:23-27.

Note: I consider this view as the only orthodox view of Christ’s atoning work based on its compliance with the requirements of all relevant passages of Scripture. Error here (atonement theories) can be the beginning of heresy in the church. (See item #7 of my “What is Christian Orthodoxy?”)

2. The Satisfaction Theory: (a.k.a. the Commercial theory)

“Formulated by the medieval theologian Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) in his book, *Cur Deus Homo* (lit. ‘Why the God Man’). In his view, God’s offended honor and dignity could only be satisfied by the sacrifice of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Anselm believed that humans could not render to God more than what was due to Him. The satisfaction due to God was greater than what all created beings are capable of doing, since they can only do what is already required of them. Therefore, God had to make satisfaction for Himself. Yet if this satisfaction was going to avail for humans, it had to be made by a human. Therefore only a being that was both God and man could satisfy God and give him the honor that is due him.

The classic Anselmian formulation of the Satisfaction View needs to be distinguished from [Penal Substitution](#). Penal Substitution states that Christ bore the *penalty* for sin, *in place of* those sinners united to him by faith. Anselm, by contrast, regarded human sin as defrauding God of the honour he is due. Christ’s death, the ultimate act of obedience, gives God great honour. As it was beyond the call of duty for Christ, it is more

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honour than he was obliged to give. Christ's surplus can therefore repay our deficit. Hence Christ's death is substitutionary in this sense: he pays the honour instead of us. But that substitution is not penal; his death pays our honour not our penalty.” <https://www.theopedia.com/satisfaction-theory-of-the-atonement>

Note: This is a weak view that does instruct us of some important considerations of the atonement, but misses the mark of complete Biblical truth.

3. The Moral Influence Theory:

“In this view, the purpose and result of Christ's death was to influence mankind toward moral improvement. This theory denies that Christ died to satisfy any principle of divine justice, but teaches instead that His death was designed to greatly impress mankind with a sense of God's love, resulting in softening their hearts and leading them to repentance. Thus, the Atonement is not directed towards God with the purpose of maintaining His justice, but towards man with the purpose of persuading him to right action.

Formulated by Peter Abelard (1079-1142) partially in reaction against Anselm’s Satisfaction theory, this view was held by the 16th century Socinian’s. Versions of it can be found later in Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Horace Bushnell (1802-1876). It was largely taught in liberal Christian circles.”

www.theopedia.com/moral-influence-theory-of-atonement

Note: This is Scripturally a very weak theory brought about by theological weaknesses regarding understanding the nature of God! This does not technically reflect an atonement for theory for sin at all. This view considers atonement unnecessary. Jesus died as a man because of the miscalculation of he and his followers.

4. The Ransom Theory:

“A Ransom Theory of Christ's atonement became prevalent in the early church. It is difficult to find the origin of this theory, but it dates from at least Irenaeus (ca. 125-202). The view was particularly prominent in the Greek Church around the time of Origen and ultimately became predominant in the Post-Nicene Church.

As Irenaeus took it, Jesus had ransomed the Church by his blood. This much is supported by Scripture according to the words of Jesus [Matt 20:28, Mark 10:45], Paul [1 Tim 2:6] and John [Rev 5:9]. It appears that Irenaeus believed the ransom was paid to God, but it is Origen (ca. 185-254) who raises the question to whom the ransom was paid, and denies that it was paid to God, affirming that it was paid to the Devil.”

www.theopedia.com/ransom

Note: This theory does not contain the specificity required of individual sin being paid for by specific payment by God the Son in His atoning work. It ignores the perfection of God’s justice and wrath.

5. The Governmental Theory:

“First taught by Dutch theologian and jurist, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). This theory holds that God did not actually have to require payment for sin, but, since He was omnipotent God, He could have set aside that requirement and simply forgiven sins without the payment of a penalty. Then what was the purpose of Christ’s death? It was God’s demonstration of the fact that His laws had been broken, that He is the moral lawgiver and governor of the universe, and that some kind of penalty would be required whenever His laws were broken. Thus Christ did not exactly pay the penalty for the actual sins of any people, but simply suffered to show that when God’s laws are broken there must be some penalty paid.”

From Wayne Grudem’s - Systematic Theology; p. 582

Note: God in His perfect and complete justice could not overlook sin and excuse it (no penalty) in any way without Himself becoming in some degree complicit in said sin. There must be propitiation (satisfaction)

Other theories of the Atonement include: The Scapegoat Theory, The Christus Victor Theory, etc.

III. Scriptural Basis of the “Penal Substitutionary Blood Atonement” Doctrine:

| Doctrinal Point Addressed | Some Relevant Scriptural Passage (Unless Otherwise Noted, all Scripture is from the 1995 New American Standard – Updated edition.) |
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| <p><u>Substitution</u></p> <p><u>Penalty forgiven</u></p> | <p>Rom 5:6-11 <i>For while we were still helpless, at the right time <u>Christ died for the ungodly.</u> ⁷For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, <u>Christ died for us.</u> ⁹Much more then, having now been <u>justified by His blood,</u> we shall be <u>saved from the wrath of God through Him.</u> ¹⁰For if while we were enemies we were <u>reconciled to God through the death of His Son,</u> much more, having been reconciled, <u>we shall be saved by His life.</u> ¹¹And not only this, but <u>we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.</u></i></p> |
| <p><u>Penalty forgiven through reconciliation</u></p> <p><u>Substitution</u></p> | <p>2 Cor 5:17-21 <i>Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. ¹⁸Now all these things are from God, <u>who reconciled us to Himself through Christ</u> and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹namely, that <u>God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them,</u> and He has committed to us <u>the word of reconciliation.</u> ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; <u>we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.</u> ²¹<u>He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf,</u> so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.</i></p> |
| <p><u>Substitutionary</u></p> <p><u>Penalty forgiven</u></p> | <p>Gal 2:20-21 <i>I have been crucified with Christ; and <u>it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;</u> and <u>the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.</u> ²¹<u>I do not nullify the grace of God, for <u>if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.</u></u></i></p> |
| <p><u>Substitutionary</u></p> <p><u>Penalty forgiven</u></p> | <p>Col 2:9-15 <i>For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, ¹⁰and in Him you have been <u>made complete,</u> and He is the head over all rule and authority; ¹¹and in Him you were also <u>circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;</u> ¹²<u>having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.</u> ¹³<u>When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, <u>having forgiven us all our transgressions,</u> ¹⁴<u>having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.</u> ¹⁵<u>When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.</u></u></i></p> |
| <p>These twin truths of God substituting His own offering to cover the penalty of our sin is abundantly clear!</p> | <p>Read all of Genesis 22 and see this proto-gospel where Isaac was to be sacrificed on a burning altar, but God interceded and provided a ram as a substitution (vss. 13-14) to be sacrificed to cover the sins of Abraham and Isaac. This was a picture/type of God providing His only and beloved Son to be the sacrifice for Abraham's offspring (those who are of faith).</p> <p>Read all of Romans 4 and see this story of Abraham and Isaac interpreted and explained in the light of the Gospel. Continue reading into Romans 5 and come to Rom 5:6, which we started with at the top of this table and see the certain connection of God's great grace demonstrated in us who are "in Christ".</p> |

IV. Church Position and Importance

This understanding of the atoning work of Christ (Penal substitutionary blood atonement) is an essential doctrine of the Christian faith. Upon this the church stands or falls. The gospel in its totality, cannot be apprehended in a rational way based on the Scripture's attribution of Who the God-head is.

Within the attributes and nature of God, there is only one possible way for a people of a fallen nature to be redeemed and brought back into fellowship and relationship with the Holy God of Scripture.

Satan hates this gospel, this method of atonement. He and His demons are fallen, but no redemptive act has been offered to them. They remain in their sin.

Oh, to see the hatred that Satan and his demons have for God's holy saints who have been redeemed and forgiven. There is only one view of the atonement that enrages Satan and his demons so thoroughly.