



(1Co 15:1-3)

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians fifteen make it clear that how we understand Christ's death directly affects whether the "gospel" we believe is "in accordance with the Scriptures" (and saving) - or false (and damning). It is therefore (as Paul states) of "first importance"; a doctrine the Church cannot afford to get wrong. This unfortunately has been the plight of many within Evangelical or Reformed Christianity who espouse the false doctrine of Penal Substitutionary Atonement, a theory which states that Jesus in His death was punished for our sins (penal), in our place (substitute), so that God could extend forgiveness (or justification) to us¹.

What those embracing the false doctrine of Penal Substitutionary Atonement fail to understand:

1. The Bible communicates not one (penal only) – but two types of atonement - or means of satisfying justice, removing guilt or spiritual uncleanness and turning back God's wrath²:

Penal = atonement accomplished through the punishment of those guilty of sin establishing justice (e.g. Num 25:1-13; Isa 27:8-9; re: justice - Psalms 106:30 – KJV, "he executed judgment or justice"; 2Th 1:6-9 = God is just – or a God of justice b/c he punishes sin) Penal atonement or justice is always the prerequisite to God receiving the blood sacrifice - or the second type of atonement (propitiatory). Hence the reason repentance must precede faith/belief for it to be effectual since repentance is doing justice (Mat 5:23-24; Lev 5:1-6:7; Amo 5:21-24; Exo 34:7; Luk 3:7-14; Mar 1:14-15; Joh 3:36; Pro 16:6 = steadfast love [loyalty] and faithfulness [to God's LAW/just system or system of justice] is how "iniquity is atoned for" by us so that we can receive God's propitiatory sacrifice and justification; Pro 20:30 – "blows...strokes" = punishment; "cleanse away evil...make clean the innermost parts" = accomplish [penal] atonement)³.

- 1.1. Penal atonement is our responsibility/what we must do/we must bear the punishment and establish justice.
- 1.2. Propitiatory = atonement accomplished through a blood sacrifice/sacred application establishing justification. Hence the reason justification is only used in relation to propitiation (e.g. Lev 17:11; Isa 6:1-7; Rom 3:23-25; Lev 19:22)⁴.
- 1.3. Propitiatory atonement is God's responsibility/what only He can do/He bears our sin/spiritual uncleanness and establishes justification.
- 1.4. Old and New Testament witness to the order and necessity of both forms of atonement to satisfying justice/securing salvation (Isa 1:11-20; Luk 3:3-6 = Thru repentance people prepare themselves to receive the Lord's propitiatory sacrifice [and salvation]; Notice in each text, who is responsible for the penal aspect - us!).
- 1.5. Helpful (?) analogy:

¹ Why the theory of Penal Substitution must be rejected as false: **1. It is the invention of the Protestant Reformers to support their false gospel of Sola Fide.** Though several of the Early Church Fathers did preach Christ's cross-work as substitutionary (e.g. Justin Martyr, Athanasius, Ambrose, Gregory the Great), they did not view it as penal (i.e. Christ taking our place in punishment). It isn't until the Reformation - 1,500 years after the inception of Christianity, that such teaching emerges. And this to support their other invention: the Sola Fide gospel – or the notion that all a person needs to do in order to be saved is put faith in the person and work of Jesus. For such a gospel to be taken seriously, required that Jesus not only be the substitution for the sacrificial lamb, but also our substitution in relation to justice - to satisfy our obligation to serve the justice established by God's Law ("... Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Melancthon and their reforming contemporaries were the pioneers in stating it [i.e. the penal substitutionary theory]..." – J.I. Packer [What Did The Cross Achieve? The Logic Of Penal Substitution]). **2. Neither Christ's sacrifice nor His predecessors – the OT sacrifices (for atonement), are ever identified as penal, the penalty for sins, the punishment for sins or as paying for sins.** It is not uncommon to hear people refer to Christ's death as paying for our sins - or that He was punished for our sins, yet the Scripture never speaks this way when referring to the sacrifice of Christ or His predecessors – the animal sacrifices of the OT. **3. God doesn't punish His food or abandon His sacrifice for atonement.** Based on their penal understanding of Jesus' cross-work, Evangelical/Reformed Protestants therefore must also conclude that what the OT priests were doing in slaying the animal sacrifices was actually to punish them. As such, penal substitution creates a picture of God that is sadistic and twisted. He must abuse His food before He can eat it. According to Scripture however, God comes near and receives such sacrifices as good or precious food possessing a pleasing aroma. Hence the reason so much care is to be taken when considering the animals to be sacrificed and preparing them (Num 28:1-4). **4. Identifying the atoning sacrifices of the Bible as penal in nature (i.e. punishment for sin) violates the Bible's definition of sin.** If the sacrifices were meant to function as punishment for sin, then this implies that even good things (Mary giving birth to Jesus) need to be viewed as sinful since atoning sacrifices were required after such an event (Lev 12:1-8 w/Luk 2:22-24). This thinking stands in direct opposition to what the Scripture defines as sin or sinful (1Jo 3:4). **5. Jesus' substitution is in relation to the sacrificial lamb not us with respect to justice.** The Bible identifies Christ as "the lamb who takes away the sin of the world" (Joh 1:29) not "the patsy who paid our penalty." **6. If God allowed another person to receive our punishment – or pay the penalty due to us in order to serve justice, it would not only violate His Law, but make Him a corrupt judge.** The Evangelical/Reformed view of Christ's death as penal confirms the world's criticisms of God as the "Cosmic Child-Abuser" and their religion as the West's most unethical or immoral (e.g. Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins on scapegoating and Christ). According to Scripture, allowing somebody to take our place in punishment or pay the penalty for our sins is strictly and explicitly prohibited (Num 35:31-34; Deu 24:16). For God to allow Jesus to function in that way would therefore make Him a corrupt judge (Deu 27:25; Pro 17:15). **7. If Christ is our penal substitute, then the Christian's obligation to seek and serve justice is destroyed.** The reason there is so much confusion within Evangelical/Reformed Christianity regarding the issues of discipline, punishment for crime (or sin), forgiveness and repentance is b/c each of these are grounded in a robust obligation to seek and serve justice which is removed the moment one views Christ's cross-work as penal. **If Christ is our penal substitute, then the Christian's suffering and eventual death are not only unnecessary but also unjust.** If Jesus' death was penal, then why do we still suffer and die? This makes God guilty of double jeopardy (1Pe 4:16-19; Deu 17:11; Mat 20:23). Given the aforementioned problems, it is safe to assume that ignorance and religious zeal for Evangelical/Reformed Protestantism are the chief causes behind the continuing popularity of Penal Substitution. A contributing factor may also be related to modern Christendom's lack of appreciation for testing (or experiment) as a means for establishing truth. In the words of late, great quantum physicist, Richard Feynman, "If it disagrees with experiment, it is wrong."

² All three components (satisfying justice, removing guilt or spiritual uncleanness and turning back God's wrath) are a part of the biblical definition of atonement based on its usage within the context of salvation (e.g. Rom 3:21-26; Lev 12:1-8; Num 25:11-13)

³ The only time penal atonement or punishment/serving justice/repentance is not the necessary pre-requisite is when spiritual uncleanness is not the result of sin (e.g. Lev 12:1-8).

⁴ Those in the penal substitution camp tend to conflate propitiation w/atonement viewing them as synonymous. This however is highly unlikely given the fact that the OT word for "propitiation" is used only to refer to the place sacrifices were to be made on the Day of Atonement (translated "mercy seat"; Literally, "propitiation seat"). Why would the NT writers choose such an exclusive term (versus the more general term of "atonement") if not to indicate an existing distinction important to our understanding of Christ's cross-work?

- 1) A person refuses to pay their electric bill. As a result, the electric company places a debt on their record (including penalties) which in turn “stains” their credit and hurts their good standing or status w/the company. The only way this changes, is if that person (first) “repents” by making arrangements to pay their bill, or pays their bill – including the penalties (**justice/penal atonement**; Luk 13:1-5 “If you do not repent you will likewise perish”).
- 2) Once the arrangement has been made – or the debt has been paid, that person can (now) appeal to the electric company to “forgive” them and restore their good standing (1Pe 3:21 – “an appeal to God for a good conscience [standing]”). The electric company then “bears – or carries the burden” of removing the “stain” and changing their status w/the company (**justification; propitiatory atonement**; Col 2:14 – “canceling the record of debt that stood against us”).

2. Jesus’ death is only identified as propitiatory (never as penal) (Rom 3:25 w/4:25; Heb 2:17; 1Jo 2:2, 4:10; **Isa 53:1-6** = Consider how Peter understands verses 5 and 6 [1Pe 2:20-25] = Jesus’ “chastisement” and “stripes” were not punishment, but persecution [v4 – “smitten by God” = Literally, “allowed to be persecuted by God” – See Psa 69:26]. It was God’s will that Jesus be persecuted [not punished] in His role as our propitiatory sacrifice - **Isa 53:7-10** “offering for guilt” = OT propitiatory blood sacrifice, Lev 1, 4-7).

3. Jesus is only revealed to be our sin-bearer (never our punishment/penalty-taker) (1Pe 2:24; 2Co 5:21; Gal 3:13; **Isa 53:6, 12**).

4. The scapegoat was also a sin-bearer not a punishment/penalty-taker (Lev 16:5, 8-10, 21-22) = Part of the “atonement” process on the Day of Atonement was choosing a (scape)goat to bear or carry the sins (not the punishment) of the people back to their author “Azazel” - or Satan, who dwelt in the “wilderness”. Jesus fulfilled the role of the scapegoat – or sin-bearer, by being baptized in the water where the people of Israel had – through a baptism of repentance, committed to leaving their sins behind (i.e. to do penal justice). Hence the reason, the place He immediately goes after this event is to the wilderness of Satan (Mat 3:13-4:11). To finish making propitiation however, required more than just bearing them. The people’s spiritual uncleanness still needed to be cleansed by blood sacrifice. Hence the reason for the second goat and Jesus’ death on the cross (Lev 16:15-16). Jesus’ role as substitutionary scapegoat and sin offering from the Day of Atonement is why the writer of Hebrews identifies Him as not only our “high priest” – but the one who made “propitiation for the sins of the people” – a direct allusion to the events and Day of Atonement since this was the only time such a sacrifice was made on behalf of the entire covenant community [or again “people”].

5. Jesus’ substitution is only in relation to the OT blood (or animal) sacrifices (never us) (Mat 20:28; Mar 10:45 – “ransom” = substitute; “for many” = on behalf of the many – see Mat 26:28 for same idea. Jesus’ blood - as the substitute for blood of the OT sacrifices, would accomplish forgiveness “for [on behalf of] the many”. IOW: His substitution w/b in re: to them not us. Jesus’ words [“ransom for many”] is an allusion to **Isa 53:7-11** = As God’s substitute lamb He would “make many to be accounted righteous” as he “bear(s) their iniquities”).

6. It is b/c Christ’s death was only propitiatory that justice (incl. penal atonement/punishment for sin) remains our responsibility (Mat 5:18-20; Rom 8:12-13 – “So then brothers, we are debtors... to put to death the deeds of the body”; e.g. Luk 19:1-10 = “salvation has come to this house!”).

What therefore the Bible teaches in relation to Christ’s death in not Penal Substitution but Propitiatory Substitution

Propitiatory Substitutionary Atonement = Jesus in His death became our propitiatory sacrifice (i.e. He accomplished His role as our propitiatory atonement/He provided what only God could provide) in place of the blood sacrifices of the OT so that God could extend forgiveness (or justification) to us. However, Jesus’ role as our propitiatory atonement is only available us if we accept our responsibility to faithfully seek/serve justice or God’s Law (to repent) - which includes acknowledging and humbly receiving the punishment and suffering due our sins (i.e. if we accept our role in penal atonement).

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION: It is Christ’s “already finished forever” propitiation that proves God’s love to us (Rom 5:6-11) = God proved His “love” for mankind by sending Christ to make propitiation/justification on our behalf before we had accomplished its pre-requisite: justice or becoming “good” and “righteous” people. We were instead “ungodly” and “sinners”.

CLOSING CHALLENGE: Realizing God’s great love for us in (already) doing **what only He can do** (securing justification thru the propitiation of Christ), will we do (and continue to do) **what only we can do** (penal justice and just living) to receive it?