

Penal-Substitution and Full-Preterism

~by~

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~Introduction~

Full-Preterist Edward W. Goodie recently posted a blog on the progressive Death-is-Defeated-dot-ning (DID). In his blog, entitled “Substitutionary Death of Jesus Christ”, he asks a bold question,¹

“...was this substitutionary death [of Jesus Christ] "physical" death or "spiritual" death?”

He explains,

I ask, because if Adam's sin was physical death, then it demands that the atonement for THAT death be physical as well. It also forms the basis for the futurist's physical resurrection...

But if Adam's death was "spiritual" (covenantal separation from God),² it demands that the atonement for THAT death be spiritual as well...

If THE DEATH that Christ died was to redeem us from THE DEATH that we died, then it cannot possibly refer to physical death because we, as redeemed ones, still physically die...

The Reformed view is a bit different than what Mr. Goodie calls the *futurist* view; Christ’s sufferings were in *both* soul and body,³ viz. He physically died and in His soul bore the

¹ Goodie, *Substitutionary Death of Jesus Christ*, (2011)

² The oxymoron “covenantal separation of God” was probably meant to say “separation from God’s covenant.”

³ Canons of Dort, 2nd Head, Article 1 “[God’s] justice requires that our sins, committed against His infinite majesty, should be punished not only in this age but also in the age to come, both in body and soul. We cannot escape these punishments unless satisfaction is made to the justice of God”; Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 11-12, His justice requires that sin committed against the most high majesty of God also be punished with the most severe, that is, with everlasting, punishment of body and soul... according to God's righteous judgment we deserve temporal and eternal punishment”; Q & A 16, 37, “During all the time He lived on earth, but especially at the end, Christ bore in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race. Thus, by His suffering, as the only atoning sacrifice, He has redeemed our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtained for us the grace of God, righteousness, and eternal life.”; Q & A 39, 43-44;

Belgic Confession Article 14-15, “[Man] corrupted his whole nature. By all this he made himself liable to physical and spiritual death.”; Article 18, “He not only assumed human nature as to the body, but also a true human soul, in order that He might be a real man. For since the soul was lost as well as the body, it was necessary that He should assume both to save both.”; Article 21, “He suffered in body and soul, feeling the horrible punishment caused by our sins”;

full weight of our penalty⁴—the wrath of God. Nonetheless, he makes an important point: conservative Christianity’s belief in a future Resurrection of the body of believers has its basis in another foundational doctrine, the Atonement. Mr. Goodie takes care to be consistent in his Full-Preterism by siding on an aberrant view of the Atonement.⁵ Christians should be concerned. If one errs on the Atonement, the heart of the Gospel. For if one errs on this elementary dogma, then one may be liable to err on the Gospel.

I recently posted my own blog on DID.⁶ It was a commentary on some of Rev. Joseph Michael Vincent II’s remarks on a short exchange we had on another popular social network. I mentioned that the common implications of Full-Preterism disagree with the first-principles of the Faith. One of the examples I made was the mention of the penal-substitutionary Atonement.⁷ This doctrine was dismissed by another Full-Preterist as a theological corruption.

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Doug Wilkinson, that Full-Preterist, has his own response.⁸ In his comments, he implies that the penal-substitution theory of the doctrine of the Atonement is a product of the

Westminster Confession of Faith 8.4, “...[He] endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul, and most painful sufferings in His body; was crucified, and died; was buried, and remained under the power of death...He arose from the dead, with the same body in which He suffered”;

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q & A 19, 27.

⁴ Gordon Clark holds to the Reformed opinion, “Scripture uses the term *death* both for physical death and for spiritual death. Both together are the penalty for sin.” (Clark, 1992)

⁵ One former-full-preterist had argued a sort of substitutionary view, “If physical death is a punishment for sin, then we have not yet been set free from Sin...Physical death was natural... the REAL PROBLEM was death and sheol, not physical death... Jesus' death on the cross meant an end to the old covenant...”

Full-Preterists Richard Walter Sire, comments on Goodie’s blog, supposing it is perhaps the Law that we are delivered from—and not the Law’s penalty for sin, “I have not come to a settled understanding of the atonement since coming over to a full preterist understanding of things... I have been thinking about the law or stipulations that were nailed to the cross thus freeing us from the law's bondage. And it is the law that comes in so that sin can be taken into account and when that law is there it reigns and sin springs up and we die, or Adam died and we all died in him. (or something like that).

Full-Preterist Michael Bennett wrote to a friend and I, “... if he was your substitution and that substitution has to do with physical death - then why are you still paying the price by physically dying? You just made yourself a closet Arminian”... “in a sense - much like a universal atonement where He dies for all - but people are still punished in your view - it is about physical death / but we still die physically - therefore his substitution failed”... “Jesus phys. death is a sign of what was done spiritually. He went to hades and conquered hades. He was separated from the Father. In other words he wasn't trying to conquer physical death for us. If he was he failed because we are all still physically dying. As I understand it substitutionary atonement is a Calvinistic view of atonement ie all that Jesus died for are saved. If your view is that substitutionary atonement is in regards to physical death then just like an arminian atonement Jesus failed. In the arminian universal atonement people still go to hell even if Jesus died for them. If you think that Jesus atonement is about physical death then it is double jeopardy. Jesus physically died so that we will not physically die yet people still physically die.” (Bennett, 2009)

Another variation in Full-Preterism, a little less common, is that Christ’s death was *quid pro quo*, viz. His punishment, death upon the cross, was a substitution for the spiritual death of the Church.

⁶ <http://api.ning.com/files/Zce5gBGPGJkNZXHxQZt2gdZsoOX84U3SMALFOS7k0vkQkh7yj-su*n5COyyIWiaMvaNLNAJyF36kU9n1OFsRz5HSivuUy5Uo/RevJoe.pdf>

⁷ In his sermon on the Atonement, “The Heart of the Gospel”, Charles H. Spurgeon speaks introduces it as one of “the elementary truths of the Gospel”, “the first principles of the faith”, and “the old foundation truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

⁸ <<http://deathisdefeated.ning.com/profiles/blogs/comments-on-joes-remarks>>

Reformation, alien to paleo-orthodoxy.⁹ He argues that the doctrine is not present in early Christian thinking—replacing the “classical” *Christus Victor* Atonement.¹⁰ He goes on to assert that Reformed theology is heterodox, implying that Full-Preterism may be a return to the classical view of the Atonement.¹¹

To his comments, I respond on the website,

The depth of the atonement is inexhaustible. We cannot say that the paleo-Christian Church had an idea contradicting penal substitution. There is still room for the idea of a ransom in the Atonement, without contradicting penal-substitution (cf. Institutes 2:17.2-5). There is even room for the "Christus Victor" atonement: Calvin writes about how Christ paid the price of our redemption as a substitute ransom (2:16.7). However, unlike those who hold to the classical theory of Atonement, Full-Preterism contradicts penal substitution because it precludes it.

Secondly, Calvin appeals to the Church of antiquity in his formulation of the doctrine of the Atonement. For example, he quotes Augustine on reconciliation (2:16.4). He refers to Ambrose on the sufferings of our Savior (2:16.12). Calvin also cites the Apostles' Creed with its inclusion of the words "He descended into hell" (2:16.8-9). The Creed has an early Christian history, summing up the core doctrines of the Faith. If Christians believed that Christ was dead and buried and descended into hell, there is no doubt that they understand that Christ suffered the full wrath of God, and was marked as a transgressor...¹²

Because the doctrines such as the Trinity (e.g. the wrath of God against sin, the justice of God, and the remission of sins) are central to penal substitution, the early Church had the elements of penal-atonement. They believed the Gospel, even though Bibles were less accessible than they were

⁹ “Reformed systematic theology is inherently flawed and needs to be thrown out. The Reformers are the newcomers. They have no claim to early Christian doctrine.”

¹⁰ “It should come as no surprise to find that Penal Substitutionary Atonement was conceived by the Roman Catholic Church 1,000 years after Christ (as simple Substitutionary Atonement) and then fully described by Calvin 1,500 years after Christ. For the first 1,000 years the church used "Classical Atonement" AKA "Christus Victor" atonement.”

¹¹ Ibid. “So, yet again, preterism points out some significant doctrine that the church has screwed up over the years.” In another place he writes, “I think Sam [Frost]'s right to notice that Penal Substitutionary Atonement is not compatible with preterism (this is because, though God might know which sins to judge through omniscience, they have to be a finite number of sins because each one had to be punished in a discreet amount of time 2,000 years ago). I think that's why the early church intuitively embraced Classical Atonement. Penal Substitutionary Atonement was invented 1,500 years after the cross. It was not the original paradigm. The original explanation included an expiatory sacrifice instead of a propitiatory one, and was simply the idea that Christ overcame the evil world (so that His work extended from His ministry to the cross and then to through the resurrection). If you ask me, this fits a preteristic worldview quite well.” <<http://deathisdefeated.ning.com/profiles/blogs/fully-and-entirelynot-just>>

¹² Cf. Heidelberg Q & A 44

during the Reformation. But Full-Preterists, commonly preclude the doctrine of penal-substitution, as if the sacrifice of Christ's body¹³ was not a propitiation for the penalty of our sins...

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~Focus~

The question of whether early Christians held to penal-substitution is debatable. If Mr. Goodie is correct that penal-substitution was never held until the Reformation, then it would appear that the visible Church in her infancy never believed the Truth about the Atonement—making either the doctrine a non-essential opinion, or that the Atonement was not penal and that the Reformed doctrine is a corruption. Either way, the conclusion would justify Mr. Goodie's Full-Preterism.

It is true that what some (e.g. Aulen) have categorized as *the ransom theory* was a common theme in early Patristic writing. Yet to suggest that penal-substitution was utterly absent in Christianity until Anselm, or even Calvin, is untrue. Early Christian documents survive, some of which the writers held to some form of *ransom-substitution*, whereby that the sacrificial payment of Christ's death is described also as a payment for the human debt to sin.¹⁴ Christ, in His incarnation, is said to take upon the corruption of mankind and become liable unto death, so that He could defeat death for those who incurred that penalty.

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~Method~

Some well-known early Christian writings are presented to dismiss the assertion that penal-substitution was concocted in the Reformation. Brief exegesis from the Holy Scripture is given with commentary to establish support for the doctrine's legitimacy.

¹³ Cf. *Ep. Barnabas*, 8

¹⁴ For example, Ignatius holds to a sort of *Christus Victor* view of restoration (not necessarily a *devil-ransom* Atonement), but he still sees the restoration of man from the corruption of death as a restoration from the penalty of sin, "*Seeing, then, all things have an end, and there is set before us life upon our observance [of God's precepts], but death as the result of disobedience, and every one, according to the choice he makes, shall go to his own place, let us flee from death, and make choice of life.*" *Ep. to the Magnesians*, v.; Early Church Father Irenaeus, in a passage where the "ransom" theme is notable, he also makes a substitutionary statement, "...the mighty Word, and very man, who, redeeming us by His own blood in a manner consonant to reason, gave Himself as a redemption for those who had been led into captivity. And since the apostasy tyrannized over us unjustly, and, though we were by nature the property of the omnipotent God, alienated us contrary to nature, rendering us its own disciples, the Word of God, powerful in all things, and not defective with regard to His own justice, did righteously turn against that apostasy, and redeem from it His own property, not by violent means, as the [apostasy] had obtained dominion over us at the beginning, when it insatiably snatched away what was not its own, but by means of persuasion, as became a God of counsel, who does not use violent means to obtain what He desires; so that neither should justice be infringed upon, nor the ancient handiwork of God go to destruction. Since the Lord thus has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, and His flesh for our flesh, and has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, attaching man to God by His own incarnation, and bestowing upon us at His coming immortality durably and truly, by means of communion with God, all the doctrines of the heretics fall to ruin." In this passage, Irenaeus stresses the justice of God and gives a literal substitution of *soul for soul, flesh for flesh*, instead of a *quid pro quo* theory. *Adv. Haer.* v.1-2

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~Athanasius, On the Incarnation~

The “ransom theory” of Atonement is not distinctive in the theology of Athanasius. Much earlier than Anselm, Athanasius argued that mankind was subject to corruption of death because of transgression. He further argues that God has decreed that *the soul that sins shall die*—indicting the iniquity of man; God has sworn in His wrath to execute retributive justice against sin.¹⁵ It would be contrary to the just character of God to grant absolution without following through in His decree of death,¹⁶ so argues Athanasius. He goes on to suggest Jesus is the right kind of substitute that could redeem man from the bondage of corruption.¹⁷

The text,

“...turning from eternal things to things corruptible, by counsel of the devil, they [men] had become the cause of their own corruption in death; for, as I said before, though they were by nature subject to corruption, the grace of their union with the Word made them capable of escaping from the natural law, provided that they retained the beauty of innocence with which they were created...men began to die, and corruption ran riot among them and held sway over them to an even more than natural degree, because it was the penalty of which God had forewarned them for transgressing the commandment.”¹⁸

The law of death, which followed from the Transgression, prevailed upon us, and from it there was no escape. The thing that was happening was in truth both monstrous and unfitting. It would, of course, have been unthinkable that God should go back upon His word and that man, having transgressed, should not die; but it was equally monstrous that beings which once had shared the nature of the Word should perish and turn back again into non-existence through corruption.¹⁹

...As we have already noted, it was unthinkable that God, the Father of Truth, should go back upon His word regarding death in order to ensure our continued existence. He could not falsify Himself; what, then, was God to do? Was He to demand repentance from men for their transgression? You might say that that was worthy of God, and argue further that, as through the Transgression they became subject to corruption, so through repentance they might return to incorruption again. But repentance would not guard the Divine consistency, for, if death did not hold dominion over men, God would still remain untrue...What—or rather Who was it that was

¹⁵ Cf. Q & A 10

¹⁶ Cf. Q & A 11

¹⁷ Cf. Q & A 12-19

¹⁸ *De Incarnation*, 1.5

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 2.6

*needed for such grace and such recall as we required? Who, save the Word of God Himself, Who also in the beginning had made all things out of nothing? His part it was, and His alone, both to bring again the corruptible to incorruption and to maintain for the Father His consistency of character with all. For He alone, being Word of the Father and above all, was in consequence both able to recreate all, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be an ambassador for all with the Father.*²⁰

By suggesting that God's character is preserved because He has made a decree²¹ about death (i.e. *the soul that sinneth shall die*), and that because repentance alone would not be restorative without satisfying the demands of that decree,²² Athanasius assumes the elements of penal-substitution: (1) the Justice of God, (2) the Justice of God cannot be compromised, (3) the corruption of death is a penalty of God's wrath, (4) the Son of God Himself is merciful in the midst of His unwavering and just character, (5) He is able to suffer as a substitute for sinners to whom the curse is due, and (6) His work is a propitiation for the terms of divine decree. Thus, Athanasius assumes a rudimentary idea of penal-substitution. He may not expound on all the subtler intricacies of its systematic applications like Calvin and the Reformers arguably did, but the essence of the Atonement is foundational in his thinking. He believes—at least foundationally—what every Christian believes concerning the sacrifice for sins.

He continues on the necessity of the Incarnation,

*The Word perceived that corruption could not be got rid of otherwise than through death; yet He Himself, as the Word, being immortal and the Father's Son, was such as could not die. For this reason, therefore, He assumed a body capable of death, in order that it, through belonging to the Word Who is above all, might become in dying a sufficient exchange for all, and, itself remaining incorruptible through His indwelling, might thereafter put an end to corruption for all others as well, by the grace of the resurrection. It was by surrendering to death the body which He had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from every stain, that He forthwith abolished death for His human brethren by the offering of the equivalent. For naturally, since the Word of God was above all, when He offered His own temple and bodily instrument as a substitute for the life of all, He fulfilled in death all that was required. Naturally also, through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection.*²³

The Full-Preterist does not dogmatically hold to the orthodox doctrine of the necessity of the Atonement. In Christian theology, God had to become liable to the same death as men were subject to so that He could, as God free from sin, restore man from the corruption of sin in their

²⁰ Ibid. 2.7

²¹ Cf. "Athanasius On the Atonement" from *Documents of the Christian Church, Selected and Edited by Henry Bettenson*.

²² Cf. WCF 15.3

²³ Ibid 2.9

corrupted humanity. His bodily temple is “the offering of the equivalent,” a substitutionary-sacrifice for sin. As a federal head of others, His body is a “substitute for the life of all,”²⁴ satisfying the terms of “all that was required.”²⁵ Generally speaking, Full-Preterists neither hold that the death of the body (i.e. the physical body corrupted by sin), is a penalty of sin, nor that the Atonement was a payment of the same death that mankind is subject to because of the original transgression.²⁶

Athanasius also concludes that the consummation of God’s restorative act is inherent in “the promise of the resurrection.”²⁷ He holds that we are already past from the bondage of the corruption of sin and death, that the ultimate realization of our bodily restoration is in God’s sanction of Redemption, viz. the Resurrection. The correlation of the Resurrection with the necessity of the Atonement (viz. our union with Him through His federal representation, mediation, and according to our reconciliation) is virtually absent in Full-Preterist theology.

In summary of these points he writes,

Death there had to be, and death for all, so that the due of all might be paid. Wherefore, the Word, as I said, being Himself incapable of death, assumed a mortal body, that He might offer it as His own in place of all, and suffering for the sake of all through His union with it, " might bring to nought Him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might deliver them who all their lifetime were enslaved by the fear of death."

*...Now that the common Savior of all has died on our behalf, we who believe in Christ no longer die, as men died aforetime, in fulfillment of the threat of the law. That condemnation has come to an end; and now that, by the grace of the resurrection, corruption has been banished and done away, we are loosed from our mortal bodies in God's good time for each, so that we may obtain thereby a better resurrection.*²⁸

²⁴ Since it was Christ’s body that was a substitute, *quid pro quo* substitution is not in mind. In fact, He had to take upon a humanity to receive a human punishment.

²⁵ “Wherefore, the Word, as I said, being Himself incapable of death, assumed a mortal body, that He might offer it as His own in place of all, and suffering for the sake of all through His union with it, *might bring to nought Him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might deliver them who all their lifetime were enslaved by the fear of death.* Now that the common Savior of all *has died on our behalf*, we who believe in Christ no longer die, as men died aforetime, *in fulfillment of the threat of the law.* That *condemnation has come to an end* indeed the Lord offered for our sakes the one death that was supremely good. *He had come to bear the curse that lay on us;* and how could He ‘become a curse’ otherwise than by accepting the accursed death? And that death is the cross, for it is written ‘Cursed is every one that hangeth on tree.’” Ibid, 16.

²⁶ Cf. “But beyond all this, there was a *debt owing which must needs be paid;* for, as I said before, *all men were due to die.* Here, then, is the second reason why the Word dwelt among us, namely that having proved His Godhead by His works, He might offer the sacrifice on behalf of all, surrendering His own temple to death in place of all, to settle man’s account with death and free him from the primal transgression.”

²⁷ “The supreme object of His coming was to bring about the resurrection of the body. This was to be the monument to His victory over death, the assurance to all that He had Himself conquered corruption and that their own bodies also would eventually be incorrupt; and it was in token of that and as a pledge of the future resurrection that He kept His body incorrupt” (Ibid 4.22) cf. Heidelberg Q & A 45.

²⁸ Ibid. 4

Like the “ransom” view, Athanasius holds that “the due of all might be paid” by the Atonement as a surety on the behalf of many. Yet beyond the ransom view, he holds that Christ’s payment fulfilled “the threat of the law” to end condemnation. No doubt, Athanasius assumes penal-substitution and the consummation of restoration in the Resurrection of believers.

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~Other Examples~

Another example of penal-substitution from Mathetes,

“...and having made it manifest that in ourselves we were unable to enter into the kingdom of God [because of our sins], we might through the power of God be made able. But when our wickedness had reached its height, and it had been clearly shown that its reward, punishment and death, was impending over us...[He] showed great long-suffering, and bore with us, He Himself took on Him the burden of our iniquities, He gave His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy One for transgressors, the blameless One for the wicked, the righteous One for the unrighteous, the incorruptible One for the corruptible, the immortal One for them that are mortal. For what other thing was capable of covering our sins than His righteousness? By what other one was it possible that we, the wicked and ungodly, could be justified, than by the only Son of God? O sweet exchange! O unsearchable operation! O benefits surpassing all expectation! that the wickedness of many should be hid in a single righteous One, and that the righteousness of One should justify many transgressors!”²⁹

The themes that death is from sin and that Christ took the sin upon Himself and the liabilities of transgressors is not absent from all early Christian writings. Here, justification is taught to be substitutionary.³⁰

From the Tome of Leo—propitiation is in view, i.e. the paying off of the debt is correlated with the penalty for sin,

Without detriment therefore to the properties of either nature and substance which then came together in one person, majesty took on humility, strength weakness, eternity mortality: and for the paying off of the debt belonging to our condition inviolable nature was united with possible nature, so that, as suited the needs of our case, one and the same Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, could both die with the one and not die with the other.

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~Scriptural Exegesis~

²⁹ From *Orat. Ch. 9*, “Why the Son was Sent So Late”

³⁰ Cf. WCF 11.3

No comment on the blessed doctrine of the Atonement is complete without the breath of the Spirit speaking through the Scriptures. The Belgic Confession heralds,

We may not consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with the divine Scriptures; nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the Truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and lighter than a breath. We therefore reject with all our heart whatever does not agree with this infallible rule, as the apostles have taught us: Test the spirits to see whether they are of God.

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Romans 8:3

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

In verse one of chapter eight, the Apostle concludes from his preceding arguments that there is not one sentence of condemnation to the ones in conjugal membership of Jesus Christ (cf. 7:4-6);³¹ through the Lord of those who walk after the Spirit, the same minding His operation will be delivered from the indwelling sin of their members by Christ (cf. 7:23-25), and will through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body *in this life*. He says that there is “not therefore” (*ouden ara*)—not “now” (*nun*) in this life (before the redemption of the body)—any yet “condemnation” (*katakrima*) to those walking according to the Spirit [through by one could mind the things of the Law of God, to mortify sin that the righteousness of the Law could be fulfilled in them by virtue of Christ’s death and victory over it], contrasted with the walking according to the flesh, in the motions of sin, whereby the Law condemned the sinner.

Some expositors note (e.g. John Gill) that the verse does not say that there is nothing in us, in our flesh, that condemnable; but being freed from the bondage of the sins that instigate the Law against them, they are thereby released from all liabilities of their sin.

In verse two the Apostle explains (*gar*) the Law of the Spirit of Life (*ho nomos tou pneumatou tEs zOEs*), the Law in Christ (*en christO iEsou*), has made me (*me*) free from the law of the sin and of the death (*nomou tEs harmartias kai tou thanatou*). That is, the legal executive influence by the indwelling Holy Spirit³² has freed the sinner who was in the bondage of corruption from the guilt of sin reigning unto death. The means of forensic expiation is through taking the guilt away by punishing either the culpable offender or by the sufficient substitution of

³¹ Cranfield says of this section [of Romans 8] that it “connects not with 7.25a or 7.25b but with 7.6 (7.7—25 being... a necessary clarification of 7.1-6). Verse 1 draws out the significance of 7.1-6: those who are in Christ Jesus are freed from the divine condemnation pronounced by God’s law.”173.

³² Cranfield also holds that the usage of the word “law” in this place is metaphorical. Ibid, 174

a scapegoat; debtors are thereby freed from the legal force of sin and death over them if the terms of the Law condemning them are fulfilled.

The text does not hint that the sinner had to be freed from the Law of God;³³ the Law was not the problem.³⁴ The problem of condemnation is the guilt of sin—freed from the condemnation against their unrighteousness; the sin acted through the Law to bring the penalty of condemnation. So to deal with the sin and corruption of death that bounds the sinner, Christ had to deal with the sin if He chose to spare the sinner.

In verse two, the indirect object of the verb is the prepositional phrase “in Christ Jesus,” preceding the verb with positional emphasis. Verse three expounds on the Christ’s *freeing*.

For what the law could not do,

The conjunction “for” (*gar*) of the subordinating adjective clause at the beginning of verse three explains how being in Christ’s emancipation is deliverance from condemnation. The definite article “[what] the” (*to*) names the substantive subject, i.e. that which *cannot not be done* (*adunaton*). That *impossible thing* is a description of the freedom that Christ gives from condemnation *through condemning sin*. “The Law” (*tou nomou*) has the genitive ending to indicate *of what* the deliverance cannot be discharged by. Here, it could be thought that the Law refers to either the Law of the Spirit, or the law of sin and death. But neither is referenced by a pronoun in verse three. One could rule out the *Law of the Spirit* because of the negative tone against its impotence, but it is unnatural to suppose that “the Law” modifying the subject nominative of the dependent clause in v.3 is same law of a prepositional phrase in the previous verse because a correlation is too loosely established. Rather, when compared with v.4, “the Law” is shown to have “righteousness”. Thereby, we know *the Torah*, the Law of Moses (the statutes of God), is in mind.

...in that it was weak through the flesh,

The prepositional phrase describes the Law. The neuter relative pronoun “which” (*hO*) compounded with the preposition “in” (*en*), describes the condition in which the Law cannot condemn sin to free the blameworthy. The reason that the Law could not condemn sin is because it was too feeble through that which serves the reign of sin unto death, i.e. the flesh. The preposition “through” (*dia*) describes the *causal* source of the Law’s weakness. The flesh that

³³ Galatians 5 indeed speaks of the *heirs* as *free from the entangling yoke of bondage*. The bondage is not circumcision or the Law itself (cf. Romans 7:22-23). The Law is weak from the flesh because the strength of sin is the Law (Romans 7:5). Because the occasion of the Law is operated through the sin in the flesh (Romans 7:8-11), Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh (but without sin) to destroy sin in the flesh—not the Law which has no fault (Romans 7:12-13). The works of the flesh are all manner of deadly sin. The Apostle speaks of being made free from sin so that by virtue of the cross the believer may through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the flesh. There is no doubt that the baptized are free from the condemnation of the Law (Romans 7:6), because they being baptized in Christ, are dead to it (Romans 6:14-15). Yet the Apostle warns that this liberty is no occasion to yield one’s members to sin as a freedom to sin (Romans 6:15). Since a servant can only have one master (Romans 6:16-17, 6:20), the baptized are made free from the rule of sin and death (Romans 6:12-14, 8:2) that they may be made servants to their Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 6:18) in all the fruits of the Spirit that delivered them (Romans 6:19, 6:21-22, 8:4). Although it is true that the baptized are free from the Law (Romans 7:3, 7:6), it was sin that they were under the bondage of that through the power of the Law they were to earn the bondage of the death (Romans 6:23); Cf. Romans 8:12.

³⁴ Romans 7:7, 7:12-13

serves sin is the source of the Law's inability to condemn sin without condemning the sinner in the flesh.

God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,

“God” (*ho theos*), the Father, is the subject of this noun clause. The adjective participle “sending” modifies the subject; it describes God to explain how He condemned sin in the flesh. Chiefly, God sent “His own Son” (*ton heautou huion*). This is a reference to the Incarnation of the Son of God into the world. The preposition “in” (*en*) denotes the relational place that the sending of the Son, the direct object, had come into—i.e. the indirect object. The Son had been sent by the Father into the “likeness” (*homoioima*) of sinful flesh. The “likeness” shows that Christ's humanity has a resemblance to flesh with indwelling sin, yet He, being not a creature under Adam, has not had the corruption of sin conveyed upon His body. Still, He has but the form of it with all its liabilities and infirmities. He suffered the penalty, bearing the marks of it on His flesh, without participating in the crime.

Here, Christ's body is compared to the flesh of sin (*sarkos harmartias*). Christ's human nature is alike ours in all points (except sin), with the body and soul of humanity. This is a teaching of Christ's *federal headship*. He is not compared with the sin, but with the “flesh”. The Christian position is that Christ took upon a human-nature, but He has no sinful-nature.

In the Old administration of the Covenant, the sacrificial atonement was offered to God as a propitiation for sin. This typified the salvic work of Christ, the Lamb of the world. Yet we read how the high priest was able to impute the sins of the congregation onto the scapegoat,

Leviticus 16:21-22,

...and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a man that is in readiness into the wilderness: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a solitary land: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.

This teaches us how the Lord could bear the iniquity of our sin upon Him. Hebrews 9:28 describes Christ as *having been once offered to bear the sins of many*. When death came upon Him, the death would be dead with His body. He who was undefiled became the subject of transgression—the object of the Law's wrath. This implies imputation. For Christ did not sin, nor was there guile found in His mouth, nor was His death a sin; it was the voluntary offering of the perfect sacrifice of obedience through what has been called *the Covenant of Redemption*.

For the Lord Jesus was marked as a transgressor.³⁵ Although there was no guilt found in Him³⁶—He was delivered to the cross among criminals to die an accursed death.³⁷ He both took

³⁵ Isaiah 53:12, Matthew 27:38, Mark 15:27-28, Luke 22:37, 23:32-33, John 19:18, Hebrews 12:2

³⁶ Isaiah 53:9, Matthew 27:4, 27:19, 27:23-24, Luke 23:22, 23:41, 23:47, John 8:46, Acts 13:28, Hebrews 7:26-27, 1 Peter 1:19, 2:22, 1 John 3:5.

³⁷ Galatians 3:13

upon human nature in the likeness of sinful flesh,³⁸ and fulfilled the terms of the Law for others in His own flesh.

The Law was weak in that it could not absolve apart from the shedding of blood.³⁹ Sin thereby took occasion by the Law to operate unto penal death.⁴⁰ The power of the transgression to corrupt the flesh unto death is through the power of the Law. The weakness of the Law is that it is limited to punishing sinners—it can never redeem sinners from their sin without the shedding of blood. It being *the power* of sin unto death is *weak* with regards to putting sin to death.

So Christ came in the flesh to be the High Priest⁴¹ and the offering⁴² that the condemnation would be upon the imputed sin conveyed upon Him in His humanity [not to corrupt His humanity] that the guilt of the Church upon His flesh would be condemned with His spotless sacrifice—that the sin of her guilt would be put to death with Him to reconcile them from condemnation of the Law through propitiation. The expiation through the terms of the Law implies propitiation since through justification by His blood the sins of the culpable were remitted, the guilt of the blameworthy was acquitted, the offence of the trespasser was forgiven, and the sentence of the being punished has been exhausted.

The text notes that it is through the flesh that Christ makes atonement for others. Christians believe that by taking on flesh Christ also assumed a reasonable soul and suffered in His soul.⁴³ Although animal stock was sacrificed to atone for sins of the flesh, they could not sanctify the defiled conscience.⁴⁴ Animals are of the flesh, and the sanctifying of the flesh could ceremonially permit for the substitution of the life of animal stock for the penalty of particular sins of the flesh from blameworthy covenant members. Animals, not being sinners under the Covenant, could carry the punishment of others under the legal terms of God's mercy to be a type of Christ. Yet those sacrifices could not perfect the congregation in their conscience because (1) animals do not have a reasonable soul⁴⁵ to substitute for souls-enslaved-to-sin in the human genus, (2) animal stock had to be routinely sacrificed because their lives were not an equal substitute to carry all the sins of the world,⁴⁶ (4) they cannot sustain the burden of God's wrath against mankind,⁴⁷ and (3) the High Priests were reminded of the guiltiness of sin by the sacrifice.⁴⁸

...and for sin,

³⁸ Philippians 2:7-8, Hebrews 2:14-17, Hebrews 4:15

³⁹ Hebrews 9:22

⁴⁰ Romans 4:14, 5:20, 7:8, 7:11, 7:13, etc.

⁴¹ Hebrews 5:1; 9:7, 9:22-28

⁴² Hebrews 9:14, 9:26

⁴³ Belgic Confession, Article 14, 15, 21; Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 16

⁴⁴ Hebrews 9:13-14, 10:2

⁴⁵ Clark writes, "...many animals have sharper sensations than man has. But animals cannot think. At least they cannot do geometry, and geometry is just about the best example of thinking that one can think of. Man then is a rational being, like God, while animals, bless their little gizzards, are not."

⁴⁶ Cf. Canons of Dort, 2nd Head, Article 3-4

⁴⁷ Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 14

⁴⁸ Hebrews 10:1-10

The coordinating conjunction “and” connects the genitive phrases “of sin” and “for sin.” That is, the Son was sent in the likeness of flesh *of* sin and in the likeness of flesh *for* sin. The preposition “for” (*peri*) conveys the occasion the likeness of flesh was assumed. It was assumed concerning the subject of sin. In context, the sin He came to deal with was the indwelling sin that the Law condemned. This shows *reason* for Christ to assume flesh. The Incarnation was for the Atonement.

...condemned sin in the flesh

The main verb of the independent clause “condemned” (*karekinen*), tells what the clause’s subject, God the Father, does by sending the Son.

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Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

Verse 10 begins a parenthetical note with the explanatory conjunction “for” (*gar*), explaining how the blessing of Abraham is conferred upon those of Faith. The problem was that the curse of the Law was upon all because not all continued in all the things of the Law to do. The substantive pronoun “as many as” is the subject of the first independent clause. The noun phrase gives an expression of who is in mind. The preposition “of” (*ex*) indicates the origin of the subject comes out of. They are “out of the works of the Law.” They were from the Law, in its entire wrath against sin, and they are out-of-the-Law.

The idea of “works of the Law” is previously mentioned in 2:16. The Apostle has already impressed his thesis, i.e. no one is justified by the works of the Law. Here, beginning in verse 10, he gives further arguments to support that assertion. The works could mean *all the things written in the Law to do them*, or perhaps what the Law does, work wrath (Romans 4:15a). If so, the verse would have to mean the subject originates in condemnation. For the Law was added because of transgressions (v. 19) in order to work wrath against sinners. But the parallelism of v. 10a and 10b is too striking. The Apostle impresses that whosoever is from under the Law’s terms and coming out from them, is under their work against the coming out from them.

All those of the Law’s work are under the Law’s sentence. The Apostle explains next what the terms of the sentence are, i.e. (1) who is under the sentence, (2) what must a person do to be justified from the sentence of the Law. The sentence is *the curse*. The singular substantive adjective “everyone” (*pas*), often translated as “all” to show the singular totality of a set—in this place the word is used for emphasis—parallels with the “whosoever” of v. 10a. Those same that “continue”, or remain (*emmenei*)—the verb of this phrase being modified by the adverbial negative particle “not” (*ouk*)—is correlated with those that *come out* of their original position. The preposition “in” (*en*) is sharply contrasted from the preposition of the first clause “of” (*ex*). The indirect object indicates their original estate before the Law’s condemnation works upon them, the commandment. Paul says in the Epistle of Romans, *I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died*. Here in the Epistle to the Galatians, he explains that none are justified by the works of the Law because all those who do not continue in

it—which happens to be *all* mankind universally—those who do not live in it, are cursed by it. No doubt, the reference to Deuteronomy 27 is a reference to the penalty of sin.

In verse 11, Paul concludes that no man is justified in the Law before God. He gives a causative conjunction “for” (*hoti*) to underscore his original premise. He appeals to Habakkuk 2:4. “The just shall live by faith.” In the Greek, the substantive adjective of “the just” is singular in this place, implying that those just are just under the following condition alone. The preposition modifying the subject is “*ek*.” It is from the same word as “*ex*” from the previous verse. But the usage is subtly different here with the more common ending. The just one has his origin through the Faith. This is contrasted from justification by the works of the Law, so the interpretation is sure. The intransitive verb is *shall live*; there is no direct object.

The Apostle teaches that (1) none are justified by the Law, (2) all those who are not justified are cursed by the Law; (3) the justified shall live. By contrasting *life* from *the curse*, Paul is contrasting the *living in the Law* from *the penalty of the Law*, viz. *life* from *death*. But he still has to explain the blessing of Abraham, the object of the Faith, and how the condemned are redeemed from the sentence of curse from the Law.

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law,

The Lord Jesus is the subject of the first independent clause of verse 13. The word “redeemed” (*exEgorasen*) denotes that He bought us back—He paid for us. The word “us” is the direct object of the verb. The prepositional phrase “from the curse of the Law” denotes from where out of we were redeemed. The preposition “*ek*” shows that we properly had our condemnation from the curse. We, the faithful, were reclaimed from out of the curse.

...being made a curse for us

The participle “being made” modifies the nominative singular masculine—Christ—not us. He was not under any condemnation, but was made one to pay for us from the Law’s wrath against our sins. The preposition “for” (*huper*) is with the genitive case of the word “us” (*hEmOn*), meaning *for the sake of*, or *over for/instead of*. “A curse” takes the nominative case for emphasis in this phrase, to show how the Lord does become the price of our redemption proper. There is no definite article, but this does not mean He takes a substitute penalty *quid pro quo*. He does not turn into condemnation; He becomes the *object of condemnation*. He becomes *cursed* for us. This implies imputation through vicarious redemption.

...for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree

This is explained by the appeal to Deuteronomy 21:22-23. He assumed condemnation worth of death, of such severity that His body was lifted above the earth so that the ground would not be defiled. The Lord Jesus had to die for us so that the condemnation would be upon Him, instead of us—that the blessing of Abraham might come on us. The *blessing* of Abraham, imputed through Faith, is contrasted from *the curse*.

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For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

The text also speaks of Christ Jesus and His work through Atonement. The central theme is the reconciliation of those in Christ's stead to God. Like the verse from Galatians (v. 3:13), Christ, the subject is made by God "sin" for us.

For he hath made him to be sin

The explanatory conjunction "for" (*gar*), explains why God did not impute the trespasses to our blame upon us, and how we are made ambassadors through Christ in the ministry of reconciliation. The first pronoun "He" is implied by the verb in this context. There is no nominative "*theos*" to refer to the subject in this phrase, but the parataxis between verses keeps God the Father in mind. He is God, who makes (*epoiEsen*). The direct object of the verb is the accusative article "the One" (*ton*). This refers to the Christ by whom God has reconciled us to Himself through. The explicative copula "to be" is supplied, being required by the translation of the verb into its irregular English equivalent. In this phrase, the word "sin" (*harmartian*) is also in the accusative, but the syntactic order assigns *Christ* as the direct object, and *sin* as an extension to complement the object.

The verse from Galatians speaks of curse being assumed by Christ in His humanity. This passage speaks of the sin being imputed to Him.⁴⁹ The verse from Galatians deals with the propitiation, this verse deals with expiation of the sin. In reality, He was accounted as sin by God.

...for us

The prepositional phrase (*huper hEmOn*) uses the same preposition "*huper*" as verse 20, translated in that place as "in-stead", and in verses 14-15 where Christ is said to die *for us*. The precise interpretation of this is imperative, for this phrase is the dispensation of the Gospel.⁵⁰ It could either imply substitution, as the word does in the immediate context, or it could mean He arbitrarily died for the sake of—in *some abstract sense*—our benefit. One explains why He died; the other assigns no necessary reason for His death. The former interpretation has contextual support; the latter is a generalization of the ends of Christ's death without precluding substitution.

⁴⁹ Spurgeon comments on the phrase "He was made sin", (Spurgeon) "It is a wonderful expression: the more you weigh it, the more you will marvel at its singular strength. Only the Holy Ghost might originate such language. It was wise for the divine Teacher to use very strong expressions, for else the thought might not have entered human minds. Even now, despite the emphasis, clearness, and distinctness of the language used here and elsewhere in Scripture, there are found men daring enough to deny that substitution is taught in Scripture. With such subtle wits, it is useless to argue. It is clear that language has no meaning for them. To read the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, to accept it as relating to the Messiah, and then to deny His substitutionary sacrifice is simply wickedness. It would be vain to reason with such beings: they are so blind that if they were transported to the sun they could not see. In the church and out of the church there is a deadly animosity to this truth. Modern thought labors to get away from what is obviously the meaning of the Holy Spirit that sin was lifted from the guilty and laid upon the innocent. It is written, 'The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Isa 53:6). This is as plain language as can be used; but if any plainer was required, here it is, 'He hath made him to be sin for us.'"

⁵⁰ Cf. Romans 5:8, 8:34, 1 Thessalonians 5:10.

The substitutionary interpretation of the phrase assigns a theological purpose for why the means of becoming a sin was necessary. This is important to distinguish this from the result of the means, explained in the dependent clause “that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” The purpose was for substitution as a surety for us. The resulting end of the means was justification through the substitutionary work.

...who knew no sin

The participle “knew” describes the article in the accusative singular masculine referring to Christ. He, not knowing (*mE gnonta*) sin, having no experience of it, the corruption thereof never took root in His conscience. He truly was uncorrupted and lived a holy life in full obedience to the Father. But in His full innocence, He became the object of our condemnation.

...that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him

The conjunction “that” (*hina*) introduces the subordinate clause explaining the end result of Christ being made to be sin for us. The result of His having been made to be sin was so that we may be the righteousness of God. This is not an expansion on the phrase “for us”, but rather it describes the end results of that sacrificial means for our justification and reconciliation to God.

He is made sin; we are made righteousness. He was not blameworthy; we were not innocent. He was innocent; we were blameworthy. But the enmity between us and God, He had abolished in His flesh. He never assumed their guilt, but He was accounted among the guilty and bore the mark of transgression. The enmity was the ungodliness and unrighteousness of our sins, that Christ put away with the sufferings of His death in His body. The punishment of those sins He bore on His body and in His soul, yet He in His divine person was left uncorrupted by sin. The imputation of sin was never something He had experienced subjectively. He encountered all manner of sin in His earthly life, but He was never enticed by sin. Yet the punishment of that sin He suffered by throughout His life, especially in His passion on the cross. Thus, the means of His sufferings are directly correlated with the redemption of the guilty in Him from their punishment.

The only satisfactory explanation for why Christ would be made sin with respect to our sin is if the sin put to death in His flesh was our sin. Because the terms of the Law of which sin transgressed, it is logical to infer that Christ assumed our sin. The text says not that He became corrupted by sin proper in His humanity and divinity, or that He was made a sinner. Only the penal-substitutionary view holds that our sin was imputed to His stead to discharge us from our liabilities to the sin. His death put the sin to death; if we are buried in Him we are free from the condemnation of the sin because we are counted as dead to it in Christ. This is also taught in 1st Peter.

1 Peter 2:24

...who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed.

Clark contends for the vicarious Atonement in 1 Peter 2, “...the evangelical doctrines of grace are so plain in the Bible that the reprobate lose face in trying to twist the Greek language as

no Greek could ever have imagined. Can anyone make anything else of this verse other than, Christ himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree?” (Clark, 1993)

The relative pronoun “who” (*hos*) refers to the Christ, the simple subject of the clause: He who did no sin. “His own self” (*autos*) is the compliment, adding emphasis. For He who was innocent (cf. v. 21-23) bares up the sin of us. “The sins” (*tas harmartias*) are the direct object carried. The sins are “our” sins (*hEmOn*). The indirect object is His body. Our sins were actually in the body of Him, that when His body was slain our own sins were slain with Him.

*

~Conclusion~

Penal-substitution has occupied a foundational role in the theology of the Christian age. Although the formulation of systematic doctrine concerning the Atonement is in some places overshadowed by the novel eccentricities of the opinion of some regarding the restorative function of Christ’s Incarnation, Atonement, and Resurrection, the elements of penal-substitution is commonly assumed in their system. For example, the fanciful explanation of Christ’s ransoming redemptive work as a “hook” or “mousetrap” is not necessarily a grave error. In some cases such lore could be regarded as a simple-minded allegory to describe the work of Christ [including both His death and resurrection⁵¹].⁵² In such cases, the necessity of the Incarnation and the effect of the Atonement are not central; the purposed end of the Incarnation [culminated in His passion and consummated in His victory over death: viz. the resurrection] is centrally in view. In such cases, excluding the fictitious lore of Origin, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory the Great, the “ransom theory” does not contradict penal-substitution, but supplements it with an overarching thematic theory of redemptory-restoration.

The doctrine of the Atonement is an inexhaustibly deep. The Scriptures indeed teach of the vicarious nature of our Lord’s Atonement of our sin. It is a fundamental doctrine—a Biblical doctrine. It is a doctrine that affects how we live and how we worship God. It is a doctrine that motivates us to mortify sin in our fleshly members. It is a doctrine that turns our attention to heaven for the blessed hope of the resurrection of our body. It is a doctrine that affects all other doctrines. It is the Gospel. For a person to deny the central meaning of the Gospel because it

⁵¹ Christus Victor, according to The Faith of the Christian Church: an introduction to theology, is defined as “The atonement theory in which Christ is victor over the powers of sin, death, and the Devil, the powers that enslave us, by defeating them through his victory on the cross **and resurrection**, thereby freeing us from the power of sin and death.” [Emphasis added], Inbody, Tyron. 2005. *The Faith of the Christian Church: An Introduction to Theology*. s.l. : Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005. p. 338. 0802841511, 9780802841513. cf. McKim, Donald K. 1996. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Louisville : Westminster John Knox Press, 1996. p. 48. 0664255116, 9780664255114.; Webber, Robert E. 1999. *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*: Baker Academic, 1999. pp. 58-60. 080106029X, 9780801060298.

⁵² ...Irenaeus follows the Pauline motif of dramatic parallels between the fall and redemption... This rhetorical device... the kind of rationale Irenaeus and others use to explain the death and resurrection of Jesus. Here one should simply note with care the details of the fall, which will be recapitulated in the passion narrative... Irenaeus introduces two themes that indicate a high level of theological reflection on his part beyond the mere transmission of the narrative...” Schmiechen, Peter. 2005. *Saving power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church*. s.l. : Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005. pp. 125-128. 0802829856, 9780802829856.

does not fit into their eschatological paradigm is lamentable. It is even more disastrous to rely on the opinions of men from antiquity for dogmatic systemization. It is my prayer that Full-Preterists will remember that Old-Time-Gospel and contend for it with the Scriptures as they begin to systematize their theology.

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