

Pierced ‘That I Might’ Praise: The Worship Only Penal Substitution Creates

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by David Schrock

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,
so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
— 2 Corinthians 5:21 —

*For Christ also suffered once for sins,
the righteous for the unrighteous,
that he might bring us to God,
being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.*
— 1 Peter 3:18 —

In and around the church, there has always been a group of theologians and pastors willing to question or deny penal substitution—the evangelical doctrine that affirms Christ’s death as a payment of penalty for sinners who trust in Jesus. Like Peter objecting to Christ’s prediction of suffering and death (Matthew 16:21–23), liberal theologians like Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albert Schweitzer, and Adolph Von Harnack, along with modern authors like Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, and William Paul Young (author of *The Shack*) have maligned the blood of the cross.

Unfortunately, such denial of penal substitution depends upon a denial of Scripture, a defamation of biblical authors, and twisting of biblical words. At the same time, making Christ a mere model, teacher, or prophet, follows the lie of Satan (Matthew 16:23); it effectively denies the deity of Christ and God’s plan of salvation, foretold in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New. But aside from the theological considerations—which are considerable—denying penal substitution steals glory from God’s work and praise from the believer’s heart.

The Praise That Penal Substitution Brings

In Ephesians 1:7 Paul writes of the blood of Christ which brings redemption: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, . . .” Paul continues to marvel at God’s plan of salvation in verses 8–11 and closes by saying in v. 12, “so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.” Indeed, Christ will forever receive praise for dying in the place of sinners, paying with his life the death penalty sinners deserve.

Three times in Ephesians 1, we find Paul praising God the Father (v. 6), God the Son (v. 12), and God the Spirit (v. 14) for their respective-yet-inseparable work in redemption. And what stands at the center of this praise? The saving work of Christ on Calvary. Through his bloody cross the Father turns death-deserving sinners into adopted heirs, who are then sealed by the

Holy Spirit. Indeed, Christ's bloody cross and empty tomb are the bi-focal centerpiece of redemptive history.

And what Ephesians 1–2 explains, Revelation 5 extols. For seated around the throne the court of the Lord sing this song (vv. 9–10):

*Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth."*

Apparently, the mention of blood is not forbidden in the realms of glory. Truly, Christ's glory hangs on rightly understanding the meaning of his blood. Denial of penal substitution, therefore steals his glory and thus reminds us: Doctrine matters.

And most importantly, doctrine matters for the sake doxology—the praise, honor, and glory that God deserves. As Ephesians 1 and Revelation 5 show us, Christian worship praises the blood of Christ. And so, while clergy and all Christians may be tempted by Satan and the world to clean up the cross, the truth is bloody. Only a God who takes on flesh to suffer and die on Calvary can bring salvation to mankind and fill eternity praise. Only Christ's obedient sacrifice on Calvary satisfies the righteous wrath of God (see Romans 3:21–26).

Love Lustres at Calvary

For some time, I have believed this debated truth. But recently in reading [*The Valley of Vision*](#), I was reminded of this precious truth again: only the doctrine of penal substitution can produce the praise God deserves. Only when sinners approach the throne of God through the blood of Calvary are their lips cleansed and their hearts purified to offer acceptable praise. And more than that, such bloody praise is not only more pure, it is also more powerful.

Maybe it is subjective to say this, but consider the following prayer ("Love Lustres at Calvary" from [*The Valley of Vision*](#)) and notice how the great exchange on Calvary (in bold) leads to the greatest, richest, strongest praise. Penal substitution, when rightly understood, doesn't stifle worship; it makes it soar to the heavens.

MY FATHER,

Enlarge my heart, warm my affections,
open my lips, supply words that proclaim 'Love lustres at Calvary.'

There grace removes my burdens and heaps them on thy Son,
made a transgressor, a curse, and sin for me;
There the sword of thy justice smote the man, thy fellow;
There thy infinite attributes were magnified, and infinite atonement was made;
There infinite punishment was due, and infinite punishment was endured.

**Christ was all anguish that I might be all joy,
cast off that I might be brought in,
trodden down as an enemy that I might be welcomed as a friend,
surrendered to hell's worst that I might attain heaven's best,
stripped that I might be clothed,**

**wounded *that I might* be healed,
athirst *that I might* drink,
tormented *that I might* be comforted,
made a shame *that I might* inherit glory,
entered darkness *that I might* have eternal light.**

My Saviour wept that all tears might be wiped from my eyes,
groaned that I might have endless song,
endured all pain that I might have unfading health,
bore a thorny crown that I might have a glory-diadem,
bowed his head that I might uplift mine,
experienced reproach that I might receive welcome,
dosed his eyes in death that I might gaze on unclouded brightness,
expired that I might for ever live.

O Father, who spared not thine only Son that thou mightest spare me,
All this transfer thy love designed and accomplished;
Help me to adore thee by lips and life.
O that my every breath might be ecstatic praise,
my every step buoyant with delight,
as I see my enemies crushed,
Satan baffled, defeated, destroyed, sin buried in the ocean of reconciling blood, hell's gates
closed, heaven's portal open.

Go forth, O conquering God, and show me the cross, mighty to subdue, comfort and save.

As we come to the Lord's Table this Sunday, may our praise be filled with this fact: Christ died *in the place* of sinners. It wasn't a mistake, a tragedy, an accident, or some moral example for us to follow. It was the intentional self-surrender of God the Son, so that he might with his blood purchase a people for his own possession. Though Satan hates this gospel truth and leads men and women to twist it. It is wonder to behold and it leads to the highest praise.

May God stir our hearts to praise him this Lord's Day and all days, as we consider how the sinless lamb of God became our propitiation, our ransom, our sacrifice, our curse-bearer, and our substitute.

Soli Deo Gloria, ds