

WHEATON COLLEGE GRADUATE SCHOOL

PENAL SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT: THE TRINITARIAN CHARACTER OF A
BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

SUBMITTED TO DR. BARBEAU
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
BITH 565: CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

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FEBRUARY 27, 2012

Introduction

Steve Chalke, Joel Green, and feminist theologian Rita Nakashima Brock error by rejecting the Reformed conception of penal substitutionary atonement—understanding it be unbiblical, believing it be harmful for society and evangelism, and arguing that it promotes an exclusively individualistic notion of salvation. These theologians are mistaken. A robust presentation and biblical defense of penal substitutionary atonement, along with an overlooked emphasis on God’s trinitarian involvement in the atonement, refutes these arguments and results in therapeutic and transformative effects for individuals, the church and society.

This paper is an apologetic for the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement, a doctrine under attack as of lately. First, there will be a definition and explanation of penal substitution within the context of historic atonement theories. Second, there will be a presentation of the strongest critiques from those wish to eliminate or replace penal substitutionary atonement in Christian theology. Then the paper will present an apologetic for the embrace of penal substitution, arguing that—understood in the context of God’s trinitarian nature—it is biblical, theologically congruent, evangelistically necessary, and impacting on a personal and societal level.

Penal Substitutionary Atonement: Definition and Introduction

The annals of church history have witnessed a myriad of approaches to the doctrine of atonement. To understand penal substitution’s place among the many, it will be helpful to briefly rehearse some of the other ways Christians have understand the atonement throughout the ages. One of the earliest of views was Irenaeus and his theology of recapitulation. According to this view, “Christ’s life as well as death” undoes “humanity’s collective transgressions, replacing

Adam's headship over the human race with his own."¹ The recapitulation view was followed by another early theory, spearheaded by the theologian Origen, known as the ransom theory because it understood Jesus' death as a ransom paid to the devil to deliver sinners.² The ransom theory is contrasted with another approach known as *Christus Victor*—a view which emphasized the cosmic battle between good and evil and held that Christ overcame “the powers of death and hell at the cross.”³ Differing from these views is the satisfaction theory. Best articulated by Anselm, this view understood Jesus' death to be the result of a need to satisfy God's honor, an honor violated by sinful humanity.⁴ Rejecting the ransom theory, Peter Abelard's moral influence atonement theory understood the cross to be a “demonstration of God's love rather than as a satisfaction either of God's dignity or his justice” and that “the effect of the atonement is to provide a moving example of God love that will induce sinners to repentance.”⁵ A middle road between satisfaction theory and moral influence theory was Hugo Grotius's moral government theory,⁶ which sought to preserve the objectivity of the cross, while emphasizing its subjective influence on others, and understood the atonement to be an establishment of “God's just government of the world” and the “basis on which human beings approach God.”⁷ Truly, church history has witnessed a vast array of ways to understand the atonement!

Among these many views is penal substitutionary atonement, a view popular with many traditional and contemporary Reformed theologians. One such theologian, Wayne Grudem, defines the concept in this way: “The view that Christ in his death bore the just penalty of God

¹ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2011), 509.

² John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Intervarsity Press, 1986), 133.

³ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 509.

⁴ Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 139-142.

⁵ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 509.

⁶ Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 143-4.

⁷ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 509.

for our sins as a substitute for us.”⁸ What makes this view distinctive is its emphasis on penal and substitutionary elements. I. Howard Marshall explains the term “penal” as “relating to the nature of the sufferings and death of Jesus” and “substitution” as “referring to the fact that he was bearing this penalty on behalf of others and not on his own behalf.”⁹ These two elements—bearing a penalty and substituting oneself for another—form the heart of penal substitutionary atonement. Authors who espouse this view understand the concept to be rooted within the life of Trinity,¹⁰ biblical,¹¹ beneficial for individuals and society,¹² and historically articulated—from Justin Martyr up to J. I. Packer.¹³

Yet there are many theologians who are unhappy the concept of penal substitutionary atonement. These individuals reject the theory, seek to do away with it, or hope to replace the concept with other ways of understanding the atonement. It is to these voices which we now turn.

Penal Substitutionary Atonement: A Doctrine Under Attack

The doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement is under attack by pastors and theologians ranging from a variety of theological and cultural stripes. Steve Chalke, a contemporary British Christian thinker, has recently caused no little controversy by labeling the doctrine as “a form of cosmic child abuse,”¹⁴ a term drawn from feminist theologian Rita

⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1994), 1250.

⁹ Howard I. Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Paternoster, 2007), 3.

¹⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (comb. ed.; 1938; repr., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 379; Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced For Our Transgressions* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007), 279-306.

¹¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 595-6.

¹² Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced*, 307-323.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 161-204.

¹⁴ Steve Chalke, “The Redemption of the Cross,” in *The Atonement Debate* (ed. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker; Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2008), 34; Garry Williams J., “Penal Substitutionary Atonement in the Church Fathers,” *EvQ* 83.3 (2011):195-216.

Nakashima Brock.¹⁵ Along with Chalke and Brock, theologians Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green have voiced their critique of the doctrine, even writing a book to refute and replace the theory with an alternative way of understanding the atonement.¹⁶ These opponents, and others, reject penal substitutionary atonement on the grounds that it is biblically suspect, theologically incoherent, detrimental to evangelism, and harmful for individuals and societies. What is their rationale behind such judgments?

First, penal substitutionary atonement is rejected on biblical grounds. Steve Chalke—while maintaining a belief in the substitutionary aspect of atonement—cites several places in Scripture to reject any notion of Christ bearing a penalty. Beginning with the belief that the OT prophets started “moving beyond” any notion of the penal elements in atonement,¹⁷ Chalke uses the prodigal son passage of Luke 15, Jesus’ “teaching on anger” in Matt 5, and the “God is love” passage of 1 John 4:8 to build a case against any notion of a penalty being paid by Christ on the cross.¹⁸ Chalke argues that God’s love and his teaching about forgiving others makes it unthinkable that God the Father would punish the Son for the sins of humanity.¹⁹ Likewise, Joel Green rejects penal elements by basing his arguments on Jesus’ statements in the Gospels, and claims that penal substitution is a truncating of the atonement because it places so much focus on the cross rather than “the whole” of Jesus’ life.²⁰ Green and theologian Mark Baker also use 1 Peter 2:22-25 to offer an alternative way of understanding the atonement which focuses on

¹⁵Rita Nakashima Brock, “And a Little Child Will Lead Us: Christology and Child Abuse,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse* (ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn; New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 51.

¹⁶ Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (2d ed.; 2000; repr., Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Chalke, “Redemption,” in Tidball, Hilborn, and Thacker, *Atonement Debate*, 39.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Joel Green, “Must We Imagine the Atonement in Penal Substitutionary Terms? Questions, Caveats and a Plea,” in *The Atonement Debate* (ed. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008), 158.

healing and Jesus' identification with sinners.²¹ Thus, these theologians understand Scripture to preclude any penal elements in the atonement, which leads them to embrace alternative ways of understanding the atonement.

The second rationale for rejecting penal substitution is based on theological arguments. Opponents of penal substitution allege that such an atonement theory results in an angry Father (with a passive loving Son), and a break of the unity in the Trinity. Green argues this much when he claims that the context of penal substitution results in both “a misshapen image of God as angry with us and a denial that the work of God the Father and Christ the Son are one (that is, a severance within the Godhead).”²² Chalke concurs, and also adds that penal substitution results in a version of atonement which has no need for the resurrection.²³ Thus, theological motives are the second reason for rejecting penal substitution.

Third, it is argued that penal substitution is harmful for evangelism. Chalke indicates this by his claim that those who hold to penal substitution fail to “engage with or challenge our society and its macro values” by missing the opportunity to speak “with prophetic power to a global society caught in the grip of the lie that violence can be redemptive.”²⁴ In other words, promoting a version of atonement which holds a “violent” sacrifice of Christ to be necessary and essential to salvation is detrimental to the cause of speaking out against violence. Chalke also argues that a presentation of penal substitution “offers instant forgiveness without challenging basic day-to-day moral behavior” and “fails to address the corporate and systemic contexts of

²¹ Baker and Green, *Recovering*, 109-110.

²² Green, “Must We Imagine?” in Tidball, Hilborn, and Thacker, *Atonement Debate*, 159.

²³ Chalke, “Redemption,” in Tidball, Hilborn, and Thacker, *Atonement Debate*, 39.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

evil in our world.”²⁵ In an effort to faithfully proclaim the Gospel message to those outside the Church, Chalke and others reject penal substitution as being deleterious.

A fourth reason penal substitution is rejected is on the grounds that it is harmful for individuals and society. Feminist theologian Rita Nakashima Brock argues such when she claims that atonement theories like penal substitution “reflect and support images of benign paternalism” or child abuse.²⁶ Joel Green also sees harmful personal and societal effects due to penal substitution. He claims that “an exaggerated focus on an objective atonement and on salvation as transaction undermines any emphasis on salvation as transformation, and it obscures the social and cosmological dimensions of salvation.”²⁷ In summary of this fourth point, it can be said that these theologians believe penal substitution can subtly promote violence, neglect lifelong transformative elements and overlook the cosmic scope of Jesus’ work.

After rejecting penal substitutionary atonement on the four planks of biblical, theological, evangelistic, and transformative reasons, what alternative do these theologians offer in the resulting lacuna? In the place of penal substitution, Chalke offers a theory of atonement which precludes any penal elements, and focuses on the key elements of identification, example and representation: Jesus identifies with our suffering, provides us an example of how to live and represents us before God.²⁸ He defines his version of atonement to be a form of *Christus Victor*, wherein, Jesus’ “life, death *and* resurrection together are seen as his victory over all the forces of evil and sin, including the earthly and spiritual powers that oppress people.”²⁹ In this framework

²⁵ Ibid., 41-42.

²⁶ Brock, “And a Little Child,” in Brown and Bohn, *Christianity*, 52.

²⁷ Green, “Must We,” in Tidball, Hilborn, and Thacker, *Atonement Debate*, 166.

²⁸ Chalk, “Redemption,” in Tidball, Hilborn, and Thacker, *Atonement Debate*, 37.

²⁹ Emphasis his, Ibid., 44.

Chalke argues that Jesus “does not placate God’s anger in taking the punishment for sin but rather absorbs its consequences.”³⁰

Green and Baker also offer an alternative way of understanding the atonement. They describe their view as a “sanctifying atonement,” wherein, Christ’s death takes the place of others in such a way that it affects their very being” and results in healing.³¹ Jesus then takes the effects of sin and death but does not necessarily bear a penalty of sin. By taking on the effects of sin, Jesus then brings healing to a broken humanity. Such a view reminds us of the Wesleyan and Eastern understanding of a therapeutic salvation that explains one of the roles Christ fulfilling to be as a healer/physician.³²

This then is the critique and alternative offered by those who reject penal substitution. Are these theologians justified in rejected penal substitution on biblical, theological, evangelistic, personally and societally therapeutic grounds? Can penal substitution stand under the attacks of those who reject it? It is these questions which the next section will attempt to answer.

A Trinitarian Apologetic for Penal Substitutionary Atonement

A proper defense and understanding of penal substitution must include an awareness of God’s trinitarian nature. Jason S. Sexton has rightly observed the recent “trinitarian resurgence” within Christian theological studies, and particularly within Evangelical circles.³³ In line with this beneficial resurgence, the following section will attempt to appropriate a trinitarian lens and provide an apologetic for penal substitution while addressing the categories of Bible, theology, evangelism, personal and societal impact. From this standpoint, it will be argued that penal

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Baker and Green, *Recovering*, 110.

³² Randy L. Maddox aptly describes this as “Christ as physician” in his work: *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 112.

³³ “The State of the Evangelical Trinitarian Resurgence,” *JETS* 54 (4 2011):787-809.

substitutionary atonement naturally flows out of these categories and is best guided by trinitarian thought.

1. A Biblical Apologetic

The doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement is rooted in the Old Testament, explicated in the New Testament, and best understood with reference to God's ontological trinitarian being. OT theologian Chris Wright argues in favor of penal substitution in his article "Atonement in the Old Testament,"³⁴ he notes that penal elements are the consequence of a breach in the relationship between God and humanity, whose sins have impacted a variety of levels including: social, covenantal, legal, ritual, emotional, historical, final or ultimate separation from God.³⁵ These problems point to a need for atonement in which God restores humanity and deals with the penal consequences of violating God's laws, a violation which brings about God's just wrath. Wright argues that God has historically and graciously provided a means of such an atonement, an atonement which both addresses the need to avert God wrath by propitiation (an aversion of God's wrath) and also restored humanity by expiation (a cleansing of guilt and sin).³⁶ Wright claims that God graciously provided such a means in the sacrificial system and on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16).³⁷ Yet he understands these animal sacrifices to ultimately point to a future sacrifice, that of Jesus Christ, which was predicted by the OT prophets—most notably in Isaiah 53.³⁸ Such OT texts evidence God's trinitarian character: God (the Father) provided a means of atonement, which foreshadowed a future atonement performed

³⁴ Found in *The Atonement Debate* (ed. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker; Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2008), 69-82.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁷ Wright, "Atonement in the Old Testament," in Tidball, Hilborn, and Thacker, *Atonement*, 78.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

by the ‘Suffering Servant’ (God the Son) and was proclaimed through his prophets by means of God the Holy Spirit.

This OT evidence is concatenate with the evidence found in the NT. Contemporary NT scholar I. Howard Marshall makes a case for this, arguing that the penal substitution is “well-founded in Scripture,”³⁹ and that the OT presentation of God as gracious, merciful, judging, wrathful, and punisher of sin, is the same presentation which is found in the NT.⁴⁰ God’s gracious provision of atoning sacrifices found in the OT was fulfilled in the anti-type Jesus. Instead of an animal being the substitute for humanity—taking the penalty for sins—the perfect God-man received the penalty for humanity’s sins. One of the clearest texts which describe this event is found in Rom 3:21-26.⁴¹ Here we read that the “righteousness of God”—God’s saving activity⁴²—is publicly displayed, as God provided a means of atonement through Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation for sin. As Christ was a propitiation for sin (taking God’s just wrath), he stood in as a substitute for all who have faith in him.⁴³ Paul declares that this act allows God to be “just” (punishing sin) and the “justifier” (making one just or righteous in the sight of God) of the one who has faith in Jesus. Here we see a remarkable trinitarian act of grace toward humanity: God the Father, as a gift toward rebellious humanity, puts forward God the Son (who willingly lays down his life, not as a passive abused child) to be a propitiation for the sins of humanity, which God the Holy Spirit enables humanity to receive by faith.

These ‘penal’ elements—God punishing sin and graciously providing a substitute to bear the penalty for humanity’s sins—lead to a natural embrace of penal substitution from a biblical

³⁹ Marshall, “Theology of Atonement,” in Tidball, Hilborn, and Thacker, *Atonement*, 49.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 40-59.

⁴¹ Another key passage is 2 Cor 5, which speaks of Christ as receiving taking on our sin, and the penalty of our sin, and giving us his righteous standing with God. Martin Luther rightly labeled such an as “the great exchange.”

⁴² Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 221

⁴³ Moo notes the remarkable connection this passage has with the Leviticus 16 by the way the two texts use the word ἱλαστήριον (propitiation) in the context of atonement: *Ibid.*, 232.

perspective. This view does not necessarily need to preclude every element of Chalke's *Christus Victor* view or overlook the Scriptures which present God as loving. As Christ bore the penalty for our sins, he conquered sins' consequences and death itself—bringing healing to humanity—and in the greatest act of love, he laid down his life for others.

One major benefit of penal substitution is that it seriously deals with verses which speak of God's wrath and propitiation. By offering a version of atonement which precludes these elements, Chalke and others fail to address the 'whole counsel' of God's Word (Eph 4:14), which speaks not only of God's love, but also of his holy hatred and punishment of sin.

2. A Theological Apologetic

The second level of defense is theological. If penal substitution is in conflict with a trinitarian understanding of God, or if it places theologically incompatible constraints on God, it should be questioned and replaced. But this is not the case; penal Substitution is thoroughly trinitarian and theologically congruent with other areas of Christian theology.

Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof was ahead of his time when in 1938 he described penal substitution in trinitarian terms. Unlike the current opponents of penal substitution (Chalke,⁴⁴ Green and Baker⁴⁵), Berkhof believed there was no need to assume a break in the unity of the Trinity if a person held to penal substitution: "It was not the Father but the triune God that conceived the plan of redemption. There was a solemn agreement between the three persons in the Godhead."⁴⁶ All three members of the Trinity took part in the plan and in the operation of penal substitution. This same point is argued by the authors *Pierced for our*

⁴⁴ Chalke, "Redemption," in Tidball, Hilborn, and Thacker, *Atonement Debate*, 39.

⁴⁵ Baker and Green, *Recovering*, 57

⁴⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 379. Modern biblical theologian I. Howard Marshall claims the same point in his recent work *Aspects*, 66.

Transgressions.⁴⁷ Building on the language of Augustine, these authors explain that the unity of God is maintained in penal substitution through the concept of “inseparable action.” This concept understands every act of God the Father also to involve the act of God the Son,⁴⁸ which allows for a true unity and distinction between the Father and the Son: the Father “exacts the punishment borne by the Son” but the action itself is “inseparable” from the Son who offered up himself.⁴⁹ Such a point is excellent, but should also include the vital role of the Holy Spirit, who—being sent by the Father—empowered Jesus to go the cross to bear the penalty of our sins. In this light, there is no break in the unity of the triune God; all three members are at work together.

Penal substitution is also defensible on the grounds of God’s loving motivation to redeem sinners. It might be asked of those who hold to penal substitution whether God was constrained to appease his wrath before he could love creation. It seems that the answer is negative; God was not constrained to first pour out his wrath on sin before he could love his creation, rather, as Michael Horton wisely notes, God “was moved by his love to send his Son to make satisfaction.”⁵⁰ That is, God loved us, and it was out of this love that he sent Jesus to bear the penalty of sin. Marshall describes this well: “the death of Jesus is not a means of appeasing a Father who is unable or unwilling to forgive.”⁵¹ Instead, God freely loved us and God freely gave himself as a substitute in a gracious act of love toward his humanity. As Stott argues, “For in order to save us in such a way as to satisfy himself, God through Christ substituted himself for us. Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice.”⁵² God in this way died in

⁴⁷ Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced*, 279-285.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 284-5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁵⁰ Horton, *Christian Faith*, 511.

⁵¹ Marshall, “The Theology of Atonement,” in Tidball, Hilborn, and Thacker, *Atonement Debate*, 62.

⁵² Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 187.

our place as a man—the ultimate act of love for his rebellious humanity. As God the Son died as a man on the cross, God the Spirit (sent by God the Father) raised him up on the third day, providing assurance of all who believe in Christ that they too will one day rise from the dead and experience complete and final justification (Rom 8:11). This last element shows the importance of the resurrection within the scheme of penal substitution.⁵³

3. An Evangelistic Apologetic

Thus far we have argued that penal substitution is biblical and theological, but now we must ask, is it helpful for evangelism? Earlier we noted how Chalke argued that penal substitution was harmful for evangelism because it takes away the church’s prophetic voice of speaking out against violence by promoting a violence-based theory of atonement. Is this really a legitimate argument? Is penal substitution truly harmful for evangelism?

It seems that Chalke would be right if one understood penal substitution in way that pictured God as violently slaughtering his son like a common criminal kills an innocent victim. This presentation of penal substitution would truly be harmful for evangelism and any attempt to speak out against violence. But this presentation is not accurate because it does not take into account God’s trinitarian character of unity. If one holds to God’s trinitarian character, one must remember that it was God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit who agreed together that the Son would lay down his life for humanity. This was no act of vindictive violence; it was an act of redemptive sacrifice. God, loving and *willingly* (unlike the victim of a violent crime), died as a man in the place of sinners. The Apostle Paul describes how this presentation reveals how great a love God has for humanity. He argues that Jesus’ death reveals that God loves us, because, for a person to lay down his or her life for another, is the ultimate act of love (Rom 5:7-

⁵³ Contra Chalke, who claims that penal substitution overlooks the resurrection: “Redemption,” in Tidball, Hilborn, and Thacker, *Atonement Debate*, 39.

8). By presenting penal substitution in these terms, the evangelistic message is enriched, and God's love for humanity beams ever more brightly, while the utterly reprehensive blackness of sin is ever more clearly perceived. This presentation of penal substitution depicts God as loving and holy, which would lead to a further rejection of violence, not a promotion of it. The church's prophetic voice is empowered, and not hindered, to speak out against the violence of humanity.

Along with empowering the evangelistic message, penal substitution provides a prophetic and challenging call of repentance to a society continually drifting toward post-Christian values. In an increasingly self-centered and morally relativistic society, the message of God's sacrificial and holy love reveals how objectively abhorrent and evil materialism and the idolatry of self-interest is. Penal substitution confronts the sinner with the truth that they live in a universe ruled by a holy, loving, wrathful, just God who does punish sin, and has provided a meaning of reconciliation. Perhaps a carefully presented presentation of penal substitutionary atonement (like the one recently given by Kevin Vanhoozer),⁵⁴ which deals with the objections of postmodernity's distaste for absolutes and rightly explains the doctrine in trinitarian terms, is just what our society needs. We ought not to shrink away from the realities of God's wrath and punishment of sin, despite our society's hatred of the concepts, and we should prophetically show that all of our worldly attempts to define love are trumped by God's loving act of dying for sinners as a man. God has given himself to humanity, and as Vanhoozer so trinitarianly writes, *"through the death of Jesus, God gives himself—Father, Son and Spirit—to sinners."*⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Atonement in Postmodernity," in *The Glory of the Atonement* (ed. Charles E Hill and Frank A. III James; Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 367-404.

⁵⁵ Emphasis his: *Ibid.*, 402.

4. A Personal and Societal Therapeutic Apologetic

The fourth and final plank of defense addresses the manner penal substitution impacts individuals and society. As discussed earlier, feminist theologian Rita Nakashima Brock argues that penal substitution leads to a promotion of adverse effects, even furthering child abuse, and NT theologian Joel Green believes that it can result in a neglect of life-long transformation and societal engagement. These critiques are unhelpful and inaccurate.

First, Brock's claim that penal substitution leads to a promotion of child abuse seems utterly ridiculous in light of our discussion about God's trinitarian nature and the Son's willing self-offering. God's trinitarian nature assumes that all members of the Trinity—Father, Son and Spirit—take part in the plan and participation of the atonement. This scenario assumes a unity of purpose, even if distinction is made in the event (Father punishes sin, Son takes punishment). Such a scenario is far cry away from a child getting abused by a wicked parent. God's trinitarian action is rooted in love for rebellious humanity while child abused is rooted in evil and vindictive violence of a malignant parent. In fact, when a parent rightly considers God's loving, redemptive, sacrificial act of penal substitution, they will be moved to sacrificially love their child, not beat them.

Second, Green's claim that an embrace of penal substitution will result in a neglect of lifelong transformation or societal impact seems baseless. Rather than stripping the transformative elements of salvation, penal substitution serves as the fuel and confidence for a life of transformation. A person who rests in the objective, historic, penal salvific act of Christ on the cross will be freer to rest in God's grace than one who has no confidence of such assurance, and it is this confidence which will empower a life of transformation. As a person continually remembers how Jesus has taken the penalty for their sins and how they have Christ's

righteousness, they will be filled with joy and gladness and a renewed desire to worship will result, bringing further transformation. Here we see that penal substitutionary atonement is not antithetical to a life of transformation, but advantageous to it.

Finally, penal substitution results in societal transformation. The power and motivation to change a society—bringing justice and healing to a broken world—flows out of the fountain of lives changed by the gospel. As individuals embrace their certain forgiveness in the perfect penal substitute, they are empowered to bring justice to a world filled with God’s image-bearers. The trinitarian God has reached out to a broken world, and his Holy Spirit-filled ambassadors proclaim his message and seek to do works which bring glory to his Name. By remembering how God brought about justice and reconciliation through Jesus, Christians are given a paradigm to impact their society—a paradigm that embraces sacrificial love. Thus, penal substitution is beneficial to both individuals and society at large.

Conclusion: A Doctrine to Embrace

In conclusion, the evidence above points toward the legitimate and beneficial embrace of penal substitutionary atonement. Penal substitution stands up under its critics’ attacks and demonstrates itself to be biblical, theological, evangelistic and transformative for individuals and society. The triune God has made atonement with rebellious humanity, and out of his glorious atoning act of unity (united in purpose, love and resolve) and diversity (Father sends, Son dies, Holy Spirit empowers), God has shown himself to be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Christ.

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