

**IN MY PLACE CONDEMNED HE STOOD - The Biblical Pattern of the Atonement - Part thirteen - Sunday, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022**  
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**SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT - DEALING WITH OBJECTIONS**  
(continued)

**IPAD TEXT - 1 Corinthians 1:21-24 - “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. [22] For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, [23] but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, [24] but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”**

This is a shocking text. It is full of revelation on the *nature* of God’s plan for redeeming mankind from sin and preserving us from His terrible, just, holy wrath. And what this text reveals is something we would never have discovered on our own. God tells us something very illuminating about our redemption. He tells us that, left to our own best unaided thinking, we will always misinterpret what Father God was doing through Christ’s death. It won’t seem *wise* to us - “....*the world did not know God through wisdom*”(21). It won’t seem *powerful* to us. It won’t seem *relevant* to us.

And then the text tells us something even **more** shocking. It tells us it was God's **intention** to undercut our natural instincts as we search for the meaning of Christ's death. God's design was to **invert our insights** and **challenge our pride** in His method of redemption. He was forcing us to lean on **His** wisdom rather than **ours**. He uses the cross to help us see that we need rescuing from our **pride** as much as from our **adultery**. So He **confounds** our proud wisdom and logic in order to fully **rescue** us - like you tell the young student learning to swim not to resist and fight as you hold him up in the water.

In the last two weeks we've considered some of the common objections being offered against the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement. I'm just listing them here, not re-opening them:

First, we considered the objection that there are other pictures of the atonement in the Scriptures. Christ suffered and died as our **example** in the laying down our own rights (**1 Peter 2:21-25**). And Christ died as our **Victor over Satan and the powers of darkness** (**Hebrews 2:14-15**).

Second, we considered the objection that penal substitution isn't a concept our culture **easily understands** or will **embrace**.

And third, we considered the objection that the idea that God punishes our sins so violently on the cross makes a mockery of Jesus' teaching that we should love and forgive our enemies without striking back against them.

Today we will consider two more objections:

- 1) **“PENAL SUBSTITUTION SETS UP A DIVISION WITHIN THE MEMBERS OF THE TRINITY. GOD THE FATHER IS A GOD OF WRATH WHILE JESUS CHRIST, GOD THE SON, IS THE ONE WHO DIES AND BEARS GOD’S WRATH SO SINNERS CAN BE SPARED”**

The mystery of the atonement is tied to the fact that whenever we speak of our redemption we are required to think of the Trinity. The fact that we usually *don’t* process all of this only bears witness to the simplistic, shallow ways we usually *speak* and *sing* about the atonement without making the mental effort to ***think it through - to process it - to drill down into the wonder of it.***

The result of this laziness is the common perception that God is the angry judge just itching to get His holy hands on us, and, fortunately for us, Jesus steps in to intervene. Perhaps it’s not totally surprising how this idea naturally forms in our minds. When we see words like ***“justification”*** and ***“justified,”*** our minds are drawn into the legal world of strict courtrooms and cold verdicts. And while there is some truth to be gleaned there, if we’re not careful and thoughtful, having ***only*** these pieces of the whole picture can lead to some very common distortions of the atonement.

So is it true that penal substitution splinters the unity of the Trinity, making God the Father a God of wrath and justice, while Jesus is full of grace and mercy? And whatever misconceptions may abound, the Biblical answer is **no** for several reasons:

a) ***Love and holy justice are not mutually exclusive in either the Father or the Son***

We need to start with the basics. Remember, it was not the sacrifice of the Son that **caused** the Father to love us. It was the love of the Father that **sent** the Son in the first place - **John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."** - IPAD TEXT

The Father's divine love is the **source** of the Son's death, not the **result** of it. But this verse mustn't be misread. The idea behind these words isn't that God's love is a ringing **endorsement** or **acceptance** of the sinful state of this world. Rather, it's a testimony to the incredible **grace** in God's reach. What's beautiful and glorious in this best known of all Bible verses **isn't** the character of the world - like it **deserved** God's rescue - but the amazing loving character of our merciful Heavenly Father.

But there's more than just God's love described in John chapter 3. Just a few verses later John **describes** in detail the predicament of this world even as God sends His Son to redeem it - **John 3:36 - "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."** - IPAD TEXT

Take careful note of John's point. This whole world, so incredibly loved by God, is the **same** world that lies under His wrath. It's not an either, or. It's a both, and.

And what is true of the Father is also true of the Son. The Son who came to lay down His life in love for our sins is the **same** Son who will be the **Judge** of sinners on the last day:

**Matthew 25:31-34, 41 - “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. [32] Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33] And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. [34] Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world....41....Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ - IPAD TEXT**

Or consider John’s words, as he’s gripped by the terror of visions of wrath as the world faces divine end-time judgment - **Revelation 6:15-16 - “Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, [16] calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and *from the wrath of the Lamb....*” - IPAD TEXT**

That’s right. Take special note - “*...the wrath of the Lamb!*”

So the lesson is the Father and the Son can't be played against each other. The Father is just as loving to this lost world as the Son. And the Son is just as sternly opposed to iniquity as the Father. But we need to take a hard look into the nature of the Trinity to see exactly *why* this is so and how it all works together.

b) ***The nature of the Trinity is the glue holding the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement together***

Here's a very important text. It contains some of the most important, albeit difficult, concepts concerning the relationship between the Father and the Son (and indeed, all members of the Trinity) - **John 14:10-11 - "Do you not believe that *I am in the Father and the Father is in me?* The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. [11] Believe me that *I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.*" - IPAD TEXT**

This was not an isolated statement from Jesus. He labored to make the very same point in **John 10:37-38 - “If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; [38] but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that *the Father is in me and I am in the Father.*” - IPAD TEXT**

When Jesus said “*The Father is in me and I am in the Father,*” He didn’t just mean He went around thinking about the Father. He didn’t mean He was in the Father and the Father was in Him the way I might say Reni is with me during the day because I picture her in my mind. No, He was describing the intricate working of the Trinity in words we find hard to relate to.

Here’s why we find them hard to grasp. You and I can only understand **persons** as separate **entities**. We are not just **persons**. We are **individuals**. You and I inhabit our own exclusive, physical space and think our own thoughts. This is true even of the closest and dearest relations we have here on earth.

But when Jesus says He is *in* the Father and the Father is *in* Him he means they are *persons* but not *individuals*. And our minds can't go there because the only existence we know is the one God created us with. And He created us different from Himself in that we exist only in our own *separate* selves.

Understand. There is *more* between the members of the Trinity than just a great deal of *love*. I can *love* someone - even love them *deeply* - and yet not *agree* with him or her. But when Jesus says He is *in* the Father and the Father is *in* Him He means not only that they are incredibly alike and *frequently* agree. He means it is *impossible* for them *not* to agree. He means it is *impossible* for the three *not* to have exactly the same character.

They have different *roles* relationally. The Father is the *Father* and not the *Son*. The Son is the *Son* and not the *Father*. And the *Spirit* is neither the *Father* nor a *Second Son*. Yes, they are mysteriously three *persons*. But they are not three distinct *deities*. In their eternal roles it is impossible for them to *argue - ever*.

I know this is a bit of work for a Sunday morning, but it's incredibly important and deeply worth-while. The members of the Trinity **always** have the same - **exact** same desire and goal. Yet they have different **functions** in the Godhead. For just one quick example, consider that the Father and the Son are said to "**send**" the Spirit. But the Spirit is never said to "**send**" either the Father or the Son. But, for all that, the Spirit is not **less** God than either the Father or the Son.

Another example - the Son becomes **incarnate** and enters the human condition. The Spirit **indwells** believers without ever taking on human flesh. But neither One loves this world more than the Father who sends them both.

So here's the conclusion. It is eternally impossible for the members of the Godhead to ever be any other than of exactly the same mind in either their **love** for this world or their **eternal opposition** to wickedness and unbelief.

I hope you can see that this isn't mental mumbo-jumbo. What we're studying goes to the very heart of Steven Chalk's inflammatory remarks that ***for the Father to punish the Son for my sins is "cosmic child abuse."*** Aside from being close to blasphemous, the charge fails to land on so many accounts. All of them have to do with grasping what Jesus Himself taught about the nature of the Triune Godhead. There are ***two reasons*** Chalk is dead wrong:

***First*** of all, Jesus knowingly and willingly laid down His life for our sins - **John 10:17-18 - "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. [18] No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again..." - IPAD TEXT**

This is exactly where Steven Chalk starts off in the wrong direction. Child ***abuse*** is exactly what it's called. It's ***abusive*** because it is the selfish exerting of a stronger will over and against that of the one who is weaker. This is what makes child abuse so offensive.

**Second**, Chalk is wrong calling the atonement cosmic child abuse because Jesus laid down His own life precisely to bring Himself untold glory - **Hebrews 2:9 - “But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death....” - IPAD TEXT**

Child abuse is carried out for no one’s glory but the selfish gratification of the abuser. Christ died to bring glory to the Father and Himself and to redeem mankind.

2) **“EVEN IF THE SON IS WILLING TO DIE, IT IS UNJUST OF GOD THE FATHER TO PUNISH JESUS FOR MY SIN”**

For many writing on the atonement today, this seems to be the heart of resistance to penal substitution. To us it certainly seems **advantageous** for Jesus to die in our place, the just for the unjust, as the Scriptures say. But is it **right**? Can we ever legitimately punish the **innocent** in place of the **guilty**?

To make things worse, it seems the Bible resounds with the same objection - **Proverbs 17:15 - “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.” - IPAD TEXT**

So God sets it up as a moral absolute that it's wrong to treat the **guilty** as though he were **innocent**, and the **innocent** as though he were **guilty**. Once this happens the moral foundations crumble and justice becomes a joke. "Don't do it," God says.

So what does this do to penal substitutionary atonement? How shall we respond to this objection that for Father God to punish the Son for my sin is a travesty of justice?

And here again, the hard-won blessing of studying these difficult questions is the way it presses us into doctrines of the Christian faith that grow dusty on the back shelf of our assumed beliefs. If the objection that penal atonement sets up a division between the wrath of Father God and the mercy of His only Son has its roots in a misunderstanding of the **Trinity**, the objection that it is wrong to punish the innocent and acquit the guilty has its roots in a failure to grasp the Biblical doctrine of our **oneness with Christ**.

How many times does the New Testament reboot the idea of our being "**in Christ?**" It would be wearying to have to list all the references of being "**united to Christ,**" "**baptized into Christ Jesus,**" "**baptized into His sufferings,**" "**in Christ,**" or even "**Christ in us,**" or "**Christ in you.**"

These references pile up so quickly and frequently that we don't process them as we read. We **see** them as we read, but they don't **register** as they should. Because obviously, when something is referred to so often it is something the Biblical writers **assume** in order to make everything else they say make full sense. This concept is a part of the **operating system** of the rest of the New Testament.

The doctrine is simply remembered under the label of the believer's **union with Christ**. And here's what that means. It means that, just as the members of the Trinity can't be properly identified apart from their place with the other Persons of the Godhead, so the believer can't properly be understood fully apart from his or her place in Christ.

But it goes even farther. To our astonishment, we discover that our understanding of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, in His incarnate state, can't be accurate or complete apart from **His** union with **us**. Since He was born in Bethlehem Jesus can't be understood apart from His complete and entire identification with you and me and our sinful nature.

Now, when we unpack this bewildering doctrine at the foot of the cross, here is what we find. Its significance is rich beyond telling. Jesus doesn't die on the cross merely as God dying for sinners. And sinners to place saving trust in Christ don't receive God's approval **merely** as sinful individuals.

In words that should make our mouths drop open, Paul stretches human language to put the miracle into words - **2 Corinthians 5:21 - “For our sake he [Father God] made him [Jesus, God the Son] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” - IPAD TEXT**

If you’ve ever heard words deeply - deeply enough to have them change and effect you - so deeply they shake your inner being off its hinges - hear these. They answer our objection. How can God punish the *innocent* and *acquit* the guilty? And the answer is, *He doesn’t*. Jesus *becomes* the guilty on the cross. He’s not *pretending* to be sin in our place. He *becomes* sin. And there’s more. His precious righteousness actually *becomes ours*.

How can we get our hearts around a truth this big? All we can do is bow and weep. Jesus doesn’t die as some separate third party on the cross. He *becomes* you and me, in all our filth and unrighteousness. And we don’t stand before the loving, holy heavenly Father as fallen wretches. We stand in the literally imputed perfection of God the Son.

**1 John 3:1 - “See [“BEHOLD!”] what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are!...” - IPAS TEXT**