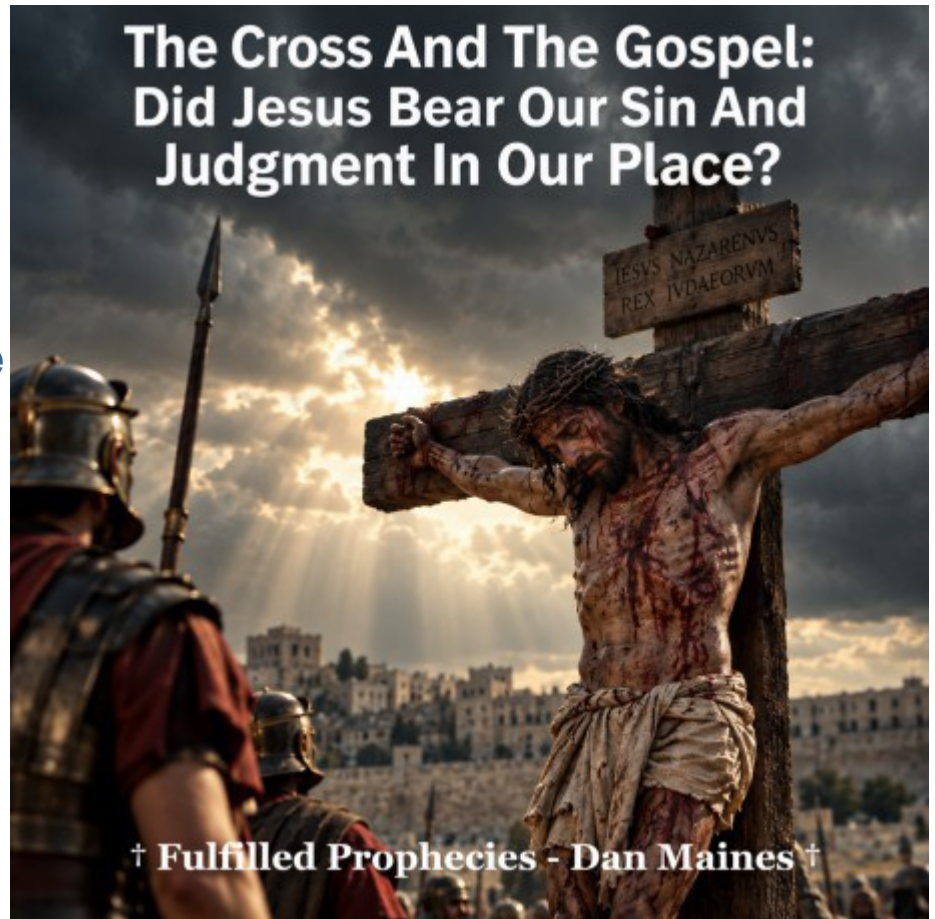


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The Cross And The Gospel: Did Jesus Bear Our Sin And Judgment In Our Place?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Penal substitution is the teaching that Jesus Christ stood in the place of sinners, bore our sins, and suffered the judgment that sin deserved so that those who are in Him could receive forgiveness, reconciliation, and life.

† The word penal refers to judgment or penalty, while substitution means that Christ acted on behalf of others. The important issue isn't the theological label, but whether Scripture

teaches the truth represented by those words.

† Scripture repeatedly uses the language of substitution. Christ died for our sins, bore our sins, was wounded for our transgressions, became a curse for us, and died for the ungodly (1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:5; Galatians 3:13; Romans 5:6).

† Penal substitution shouldn't be presented as an angry Father punishing an unwilling Son. The Father sent the Son in love, and the Son willingly gave Himself for us (John 3:16; John 10:17-18; Galatians 2:20).

† The cross stands at the center of the Gospel because God's justice against sin and God's love toward sinners meet in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 53:4-6

However, it was our sicknesses that He Himself bore, And our pains that He carried; Yet we ourselves assumed that He had been afflicted, Struck down by God, and humiliated. But He was pierced for our offenses, He was crushed for our wrongdoings; The punishment for our well-being was laid upon Him, And by His wounds we are healed. All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the wrongdoing of us all

† Isaiah couldn't make the substitutionary nature of Christ's suffering much clearer. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and the iniquity of others was placed upon Him.

† The Servant suffers because of the sins of others. The judgment connected with their wrongdoing falls upon Him, and peace comes to them through His suffering (Isaiah 53:8, 11-12).

† The New Testament directly applies Isaiah 53 to Jesus and His saving work, showing that this wasn't simply an unfortunate death at the hands of Rome (Acts 8:32-35; 1 Peter 2:22-25).

Romans 3:23-26

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is

in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in God's merciful restraint He let the sins previously committed go unpunished; for the demonstration, that is, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

† Paul connects the Gospel with sin, grace, redemption, blood, righteousness, and justification. God doesn't simply ignore sin. The cross demonstrates His righteousness while providing justification for the believer.

† This is essential to understanding penal substitution. God remains just while justifying sinners because redemption has been accomplished through Christ.

† The cross reveals both God's justice and God's grace. Forgiveness isn't based on pretending sin doesn't matter, it's grounded in what Christ accomplished on behalf of sinners (Romans 5:8-9).

Romans 5:6-9

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous person; though perhaps for the good person someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

† Christ died for the ungodly and for sinners. The words for us express the substitutionary character of His death.

† Paul directly connects Christ's blood with justification and deliverance from wrath. His death wasn't separated from God's judgment against sin.

† Penal substitution isn't opposed to God's love. Paul presents Christ's substitutionary death as the demonstration of God's love toward sinners (Ephesians 5:2).

2 Corinthians 5:19-21

namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their wrongdoings against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

† Jesus knew no sin, yet He was made to be sin on our behalf. Paul places the sinless Christ in direct relationship to the guilt and reconciliation of sinners.

† This doesn't mean Jesus became morally sinful. He remained the spotless Son of God, but He bore sin in His sacrificial work (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

† Reconciliation is possible because God acted in Christ. The cross isn't the Son trying to convince an unwilling Father to love humanity. God Himself initiated reconciliation through Christ (Romans 5:10-11).

Galatians 3:10, 13-14

For all who are of works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the Law, to do them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" - in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

† Paul doesn't say the curse simply disappeared. Christ redeemed those under the curse by becoming a curse for them.

† This is substitutionary judgment in unmistakable covenant language. The curse belonged to the lawbreaker, yet Christ took the position of the cursed one to accomplish redemption.

† The result reaches beyond judgment to blessing. Through Christ, the promised blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles, demonstrating that the cross opens the way to the covenant blessings found in Christ (Genesis 12:3; Galatians

3:26-29).

1 Peter 2:21-24

For you have been called for this purpose, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you would follow in His steps, He who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being abusively insulted, He did not insult in return; while suffering, He did not threaten, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself brought our sins in His body up on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by His wounds you were healed.

† Peter directly identifies Jesus as the sinless One who bore our sins in His body on the cross.

† The language comes directly from Isaiah 53 and confirms that the suffering Servant prophecy finds its fulfillment in Christ.

† Jesus didn't simply provide an example of sacrificial love.

Peter says He bore our sins, and that saving work produces a people who die to sin and live to righteousness (1 Peter 3:18).

1 Peter 3:18

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all time, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

† The righteous One suffered for the unrighteous. That is substitution stated in remarkably simple language.

† Notice the purpose, that He might bring us to God. Penal substitution isn't only about what we're saved from, it's about reconciliation and restored fellowship with God.

† Christ's sacrifice was once for all. The Gospel doesn't require another sacrifice, another mediator, or another payment for sin (Hebrews 9:26-28).

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Now I make known to you, brothers and sisters, the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received, in which you also stand, by which you also are saved, if you hold firmly to the

word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I handed down to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

† Paul gives us the heart of the Gospel, Christ died for our sins, He was buried, and He was raised.

† The phrase for our sins is essential. Jesus didn't simply die. His death dealt directly with the problem of human sin.

† The resurrection demonstrates that death didn't have the final word. The crucified Christ was raised, and the Gospel announces His completed victory (Romans 6:9-10).

Hebrews 9:26-28

Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And just as it is destined for people to die once, and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

† Hebrews says Christ appeared at the end of the ages to put away sin through the sacrifice of Himself. The biblical timing places His sacrificial work within the closing period of the old covenant age (Hebrews 1:1-2; Hebrews 8:13).

† Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. Again, Scripture uses substitutionary language, He bears what belonged to others.

† From the fulfilled perspective, Christ's sacrificial death can't be separated from the covenant transition that reached its completion when the obsolete old covenant order disappeared (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:9-18).

The Cross, Covenant Judgment, And The Gospel

† Penal substitution is strongest when it's kept within the whole biblical story. Sin brought death and separation, the law

exposed transgression, covenant judgment stood against the guilty, and Christ entered history as the faithful and sinless Son who bore sin and accomplished redemption (Romans 5:12-19).

† Jesus bore the curse associated with the law, fulfilled the sacrificial shadows, and established the new covenant through His blood (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:15).

† The cross and AD 70 shouldn't be confused as though they were the same event. The sacrifice occurred at the cross. The old covenant world reached its judicial and historical conclusion in the judgment upon Jerusalem and the removal of the temple system (Matthew 23:34-38; Hebrews 8:13).

† The Gospel therefore isn't a message that Jesus still needs to accomplish redemption. His sacrifice was completed, His victory was accomplished, and believers now live in the blessings of the new covenant that His blood established (Hebrews 10:10-18).

Historical References

† Justin Martyr, writing in the second century, repeatedly connected Isaiah 53 with Christ's suffering and taught that Christ endured suffering for humanity.

† Irenaeus emphasized Christ's representative work, presenting Christ as the obedient Second Adam who reversed the disobedience introduced through Adam.

† Athanasius explained Christ's death in terms of humanity's liability to death and presented Christ as giving His body over to death on behalf of all.

† The language used by early Christian writers wasn't always identical to later theological formulations called penal substitution, but substitution, sacrifice, judgment, redemption, and Christ's death on behalf of sinners were present throughout early Christian reflection on the cross.

† The final authority isn't a later theological system or historical writer. Scripture must determine what we believe about the meaning of Christ's death.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't need to wonder whether enough has been done for our redemption. Christ offered Himself once, and His sacrifice doesn't need to be repeated (Hebrews 10:10-14).

† We don't approach God through the old covenant priesthood, temple, animal sacrifices, or repeated offerings. Jesus accomplished what those shadows anticipated (Hebrews 9:11-12).

† The Gospel announces accomplished redemption. Christ died for sins, was raised from the dead, and brought reconciliation to those who are in Him (Romans 5:10-11).

† God's justice and God's love aren't enemies at the cross. The same God who judges sin provided the sacrifice through which sinners are reconciled to Him (Romans 3:25-26).

† Our response isn't to attempt to pay God back. We trust Christ, live in gratitude, walk in righteousness, forgive others, love one another, and proclaim the reconciliation God accomplished through His Son (Ephesians 4:32; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

† Penal substitution doesn't contain everything Scripture says about the cross. Scripture also speaks of redemption, reconciliation, sacrifice, victory, covenant, forgiveness, and the defeat of death. These truths work together rather than against one another (Colossians 2:13-15).

† At the center of them all stands Jesus Christ, the righteous One who suffered for the unrighteous to bring us to God.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Does penal substitution mean the Father hated Jesus and punished an unwilling Son?

A: No. The Father loved the Son, the Father sent the Son because of His love for the world, and Jesus willingly laid down His life (John 3:16; John 10:17-18).

Q: Did Jesus become a sinner when He bore our sins?

A: No. Jesus remained without sin. He bore our sins sacrificially while remaining the righteous and spotless One (2 Corinthians

5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

Q: Does the Bible actually teach substitution even though the phrase penal substitution isn't found in Scripture?

A: Yes. Scripture says Christ died for our sins, bore our sins, became a curse for us, and the righteous One suffered for the unrighteous (1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 2:24; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 3:18).

Q: Is penal substitution the entire Gospel?

A: No. It's an important explanation of what Christ accomplished through His death, but the Gospel includes His death for sins, burial, resurrection, reign, reconciliation, redemption, and the new covenant blessings accomplished through Him (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 5:10-11).

Q: How does penal substitution relate to fulfilled prophecy?

A: Christ's sacrifice was accomplished at the cross within the last days of the old covenant age. His sacrifice established the new covenant, and the obsolete old covenant order reached its historical end when Jerusalem and the temple were judged in AD 70 (Hebrews 1:1-2; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 9:26).

Q: Are believers still waiting for Christ to deal with the sin problem?

A: No. Christ appeared once to put away sin through the sacrifice of Himself, and by one offering He perfected those who are sanctified (Hebrews 9:26; Hebrews 10:14).

Q: What is the simplest biblical statement of substitution?

A: Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Isaiah 53:4-6; Romans 3:23-26; Romans 5:6-9; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; Galatians 3:10, 13-14; 1 Peter 2:21-24; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Hebrews 9:26-28
† Justin Martyr; Irenaeus; Athanasius

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