

False Allegations about Substitution and Christ's Mission

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | January 2, 2014



Recently, I have noted, from online forums and emails, a resurgence in the number of people who misunderstand what our ministry teaches. It appears these misunderstandings arise out of false assumptions. For instance, if we say we don't believe in "penal substitution," then some individuals allege we don't believe in the substitutionary nature of Christ's death, which of course is not true.

This appears to happen because the people who make such allegations seem to consider "penal substitution" the only possible way for Christ to be our substitute. So, I thought I would provide this blog, which may be of benefit to many of you, our readers, if you find yourself confronted with similar concerns.

- Denying Penal Substitution does NOT mean denying the substitutionary nature of Christ's death.
- Denying God punished Jesus at the cross does NOT mean Jesus avoided God's wrath.
- Denying God placed every sin ever committed upon Jesus does NOT mean Jesus did not become sin for us. He did!
- Denying Christ paid a legal penalty does NOT mean Christ did not pay an infinite price. He did!

The key difference is how one understands God's law. Individuals who make allegations like those cited above tend to see God's law as "imposed," like human law; rules dictated without inherent consequence, which requires the ruling authority to police breeches in the law and punish the guilty.

But, when we come back to the call of the first angel of Revelation 14 and worship "him who made the heavens, earth, and seas..."; when we come back to worship the Designer and reject the dictator view of God, everything changes.

God's law is NOT like a Roman emperor. God is Creator, Builder, Designer, and His law is the law upon which life is constructed to operate, on all levels, physical, relational, and moral. Deviate from this design and one takes oneself out of harmony with how the Designer constructed life to exist, and if God does nothing, then death ensues.

Thus, once Adam sinned, mankind was deviant from God's design, "dead in trespass and sin," and in a terminal condition. (Eph 2:1) If the Designer didn't intervene humankind would have died from sin. "Sin when full grown brings forth death." (James 1:15) It is as simple as that.

Jesus, then, becomes our substitute by taking our condition upon Himself in order to heal and cure the condition. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2Cor 5:21) It is by his wounds, his sacrifice, that "we are healed." (Isa 53:5)

Thus, when we understand God's law, His design for life, the law of love, we recognize our sinfulness, our sinful state, and see that our deviant condition is out of harmony with how He built life to operate. Further, we recognize Christ took up this "terminal" condition and He fixed what Adam's sin did to humanity.

Jesus destroyed the infection of fear and selfishness and established God's perfect law of love within the humanity He assumed. In other words, He became sin, suffered the horrible pain this condition brings, and yet through the ordeal He loved perfectly, thereby purifying and perfecting the humanity He assumed. In other words, He did not have individual acts placed upon Him that were then individually punished by some external cosmic authority.

But, if one accepts the lie of the little horn, the change to God's law, that God's law is like manmade law, imposed without inherent consequence, one falsely believes that deviation from God's design requires the lawgiver to impose punishment. Therefore, one falsely believes that the nature of Jesus' substitutionary death was not for healing, but to pay an imposed legal penalty. Further, one falsely believes God actually used His power to execute Jesus on the cross, punishing Him for each individual act of sin ever committed. Isaiah prophesied we would misunderstand God's actions when he said, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted." (Isa 53:4)

Note, Jesus took up our "infirmities" (our sick state) in order to heal and cure; yet we would misunderstand and think God was striking (punishing) Him. Those who promote penal substitution promulgate this lie, that God, in order to be just had to strike Jesus.

Yes, Jesus did experience God's wrath upon sin! That is, God abandoned Jesus to experience what Jesus had chosen to do, to go through the cross and die as our substitute. Note what Jesus cried out, "My

God, My God, why have you forsaken me.” (MT 27:46) Not, “Why are you torturing me? Why are you executing me?” Jesus didn’t avoid the wrath of God, which is God’s letting go to reap what one has chosen. (See Romans 1:18-31) Yet, in His wrath, God never laid a hand upon His Son. His hands of protection were REMOVED from Christ and Jesus experienced death at the hands of man.

Because God’s law is the design template upon which life is constructed and because humankind, after Adam, was deviant from this design and in a terminal condition, humanity became incapable of remedying this situation (in other words, we could not put ourselves back into harmony with God’s design). Therefore, God sent His Son to do this work for us. This would cost the Godhead more than we will ever know, but it was not a legal price paid to the heavenly treasurer. It was the price necessary by our condition to free us from Satan’s lies and our own carnal nature.

An analogy would be the high price someone pays when they donate a kidney to a loved one dying of renal failure. Yes, the person who donates a kidney pays a price, but it is not a legal price. Likewise, our situation, our condition, required fixing; the only way to do that was by the exercise of perfect character of love within a real human brain. Jesus became human to do this for us, and it cost Him beyond measure. Infinite Christ, God, is now and forever confined to a finite perfect human brain living within a finite human body.

So, the next time someone suggests we don’t believe in the substitutionary nature of Christ’s death, feel confident in your answer. Christ is our substitute in fixing what Adam’s sin did to humanity, restoring God’s law of love back into humanity, and thereby procuring the Remedy which heals all who trust Him, recreating within each of us a new heart and right spirit, so that it is no longer I that live but Christ lives in me. Through Christ, we become partakers of the divine nature and reconciled into unity with God. (Ezek 36:26, Gal 2:20, 2Pet 1:4)