

Penal Substitution versus Design Law - What's the Difference?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | July 18, 2018



An online listener wrote:

What is the difference between penal substitution and design law? How do we explain the difference and reason with someone who believes in penal substitution?

Design laws are the laws upon which our Creator God constructed reality to operate. These are laws such as the law of gravity, laws of physics, laws of health, and also God's moral laws. Deviations from design laws always damage those who break them and will result in death, unless the Designer intervenes to heal and restore. Thus the Bible teaches:

- The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23)
- sin grows and brings death. (James 1:15 NCV)
- The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction (Gal 6:8)

Examples of violations of design law are:

- Jump off a building—die

- Smoke regularly—ruin one’s health and die younger
- Commit adultery—sear conscience, harden heart, form character of a cheat, and, if no repentance and healing from God, die eternally

Thus, the plan of salvation is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together to heal and restore their creation back into harmony with their design—ridding the universe of sin. In this view, sin (which is being out of harmony with God’s design law, the design protocols for life) is the source of pain, suffering, and death. God is the source of healing and life.

Humans cannot create space, time, energy, matter, or life, thus we cannot create or change God’s design laws. What we can do is make up rules that we call laws and then threaten to punish people who don’t keep our rules. This is the way of sinful beings. This is Satan’s view and Satan’s way. One Bible commentator put it this way:

*In the opening of the great controversy, Satan had declared that the law of God could not be obeyed, that justice was inconsistent with mercy, and that, should the law be broken, it would be impossible for the sinner to be pardoned. **Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan;** (Desire of Ages 761)*

*God could have destroyed Satan and his sympathizers as easily as one can cast a pebble to the earth; but He did not do this. **Rebellion was not to be overcome by force. Compelling power is found only under Satan’s government. The Lord’s principles are not of this order.** His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God’s government is moral, and **truth and love are to be the prevailing power.** (Desire of Ages 759)*

This is the way of the beastly systems—human governments which will always coerce, force, and even kill those who disagree or rebel against them. And this type of law is always arbitrarily imposed. The book *The Acts of the Apostles* puts it like this:

*“Whereunto,” asked Christ, “shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?” Mark 4:30. He could not employ the kingdoms of the world as a similitude. In society He found nothing with which to compare it. **Earthly kingdoms rule by the ascendancy of physical power; but from Christ’s kingdom every carnal weapon, every instrument of coercion, is banished.** (p. 12)*

Penal adherents deny sin itself causes death and instead teach that sin causes a legal problem with the heavenly administration, requiring God to inflict death as an imposed punishment. They teach this, because they have accepted the lie that God’s law functions no differently than human law; imposed rules requiring imposed punishment.

Under imposed law models, there is nothing inherently wrong with breaking the law. Going 50-mph in a 45-mph zone doesn’t naturally result in any injury or harm to the violator of the law. The violator must be caught by the authorities, have their deeds recorded, their case presented before a judge, and then receive an arbitrarily determined penalty inflicted as punishment. This is human law, not Creator law. This is the way of sinful beings, not a sinless God. This idea of law is the basis of penal substitution theology. It is founded on a lie about God’s law and presents a view of God’s government that is functionally no different than sinful human governments.

In the penal view, God becomes the source of inflicted pain, suffering, and death. It is taught, in the penal view, that God's use of power to torture and kill is "justice," because sin must be punished. Such bad theology is the fruit of accepting Satan's lie about God's law and that God, in order to be just, must punish sin. In this view, rather than God working to heal and save the spiritually terminal, God becomes the one from whom we need to be protected, resulting in theologies that have, as their function, the sole purpose of hiding and protecting us from God, rather than heal us to be fit to live in His presence.

Consider the many ideas taught in Christianity that have, as their function, the purpose of hiding us from God. Why? Because people wrongly believe that if God saw their sin and their sinfulness, that He would be required to lash out with wrath and anger to inflict pain and suffering to punish them for their sin. This is **exactly** what Satan wants people to think, because this idea keeps people hiding themselves from God.

But David of old prayed, "search me and see the wicked way in me." He didn't want to hide his sinfulness from God, because he knew God wouldn't punish him, but was the only One who could heal him, so he prayed, "create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me."

God's end-time people are to present a message to the world that calls them back to worship the Designer, and to worship "him who made the heavens, earth, sea and foundations of water." (Rev 14:7) This is a call to reject the dictator-views of God and embrace the Creator, Designer, and Builder of reality! This means we must reject imposed law and all the false penal legal theology upon which it is founded.

But be prepared for the legal adherents to throw another lie at you. Be prepared for them to allege things like:

- Jennings doesn't believe in the substitutionary nature of Christ's death
- Come and Reason Ministries denies Christ had to die for our salvation
- Jennings doesn't believe in the blood atonement
- Come and Reason teaches Moral Influence Theory

All of these allegations are false and are, in fact, diagnostic (evidence revealing) of the mindset of those who make the allegations. Just like Jesus said, "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him." (Mat 12:34,35), those who say such things reveal they are stuck in the false, imposed-law model of thinking. Their words are evidence against themselves, not against what we teach.

We do teach Christ is our substitute, but as the Bible teaches it, not as the false legal system does. And how does the Bible teach it? "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)

Christ became sin, i.e. substitute, for us, *so that* (note the Bible reason) *we might become righteous!* Christ substitution was NOT to pay a legal penalty, but was to provide remedy to heal and fix what sin has done to His creation!

It was not possible for human beings to be healed/saved without the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No human being could accomplish what was necessary. Thus, we do believe in blood atonement, in which the "life is in the blood" (Lev 17:11) and atonement is at-one-ment—restoring sinful

humans to oneness with God. Thus, the perfect sinless human life of Jesus, that He developed singly and alone, becomes the healing remedy that we partake of, so that “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” (Gal 2:20) We become “partakers of the divine nature” (1Pet 1:4).

We do not teach Moral Influence Theory, which basically says the purpose of Christ’s death was to reveal the truth about God to win us back to trust and no more. We acknowledge that *part* of Christ’s mission was to reveal the truth to win us to trust, but we needed more. We needed a new nature, a new, perfect, human character that no sinful human could develop. Thus, Christ became human to, as a human, be “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.” (Heb 4:15), so that “once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” (Heb 5:9)

Wasn’t Jesus always perfect? Jesus was always sinless! However, Bible perfection refers to a mature, sinless character. Character cannot be created by God. It can only be developed by the freewill choices of the intelligent being. Thus, after Adam sinned, no human could develop a sinless character. This is what Christ did for us! Praise God!

Thus, Come and Reason Ministries teaches Healing Substitution—Jesus became our substitute in order to save and to heal!

Reject the false, legal view of God’s law, with its false view of God as the imposer of pain, suffering, and death. Return to worship the Creator, whose law is design law and who is the source of life, love, and all that is good and who will heal you if you trust Him!