TMSJ 20/2 (Fall 2009) 171-197

PENAL SUBSTITUTION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: A FOCUSED LOOK AT FIRST PETER

Paul W. Felix
Assistant Professor of New Testament

A focused look at 1 Peter regarding the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement, taking into account 1 Pet 1:2, 18-19; 2:24; 3:18; and 4:1, typifies many NT references to that important teaching. Though 1 Pet 1:2 does not speak of penal atonement, the passage does speak of the death of Christ in language that recalls the language of sacrifice and substitution in the OT. The language of redemption in 1 Pet 1:18-19 includes substitution since the redeeming of one life requires the giving of another life. That passage also includes in its background a penal aspect since the blood of the victim clearly entailed His dying a painful death as a penalty for the sins of others. First Peter 2:24 does provide readers with an example to follow in Christ's suffering, but it does far more. In line with the influence of Isaiah 53 on the passage, it views Christ as a sin-bearer and substitute for those whose place He took. It also presents Him as the curse-bearer in bearing punishment for the sins of the people He came to save. In mentioning the sufferings of Christ and the death of the just one for the unjust ones, 1 Pet 3:18 confirms what 1 Peter teaches elsewhere, i.e., the penal substitution of the cross of Christ. Without adding further details but summarizing what Peter has already written, 1 Pet 4:1 adds an explicit reference to the death of Christ. The epistle clearly supports the penal substitutionary nature of the atonement.

* * * * *

Introduction

The doctrine of penal substitution[1] as an explanation of the death of Christ

[1]"Penal substitution indicates that the Messiah died in the sinner's place and took upon himself the sinner's just punishment" (Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology [Wheaton Ill.: 1997] 171. An expanded definition of penal

is not new. It is rooted in Scripture, has traces in the Apostolic Fathers, fully blossoms in the Protestant Reformers,[2] and has been vigorously defended in recent years.[3] For those who affirm this doctrine, the issue is not where penal substitution is taught in the Bible, but rather determining which passages to focus on. More specifically, in light of the objective of this article, what are the key passages in the NT that teach the substitutionary and penal aspects of the glorious cross of Christ? Where does the reader of the NT turn to discover if the heart and soul of the atonement is penal substitution?

Two basic approaches have defended penal substitution in the NT. The first is the broad approach that focuses on the NT as a whole. Typically, the employers of this method center their attention on more than one book of the NT and sometimes the whole NT.[4] An alternate approach is to look at a particular passage or book (i.e., Mark, John, 1 John, etc.). There is a tendency to focus on the Pauline passages[5] and in particular Rom 3:21-26.[6]

The latter methodology will be utilized in this article. This writer has chosen to look at the doctrine of penal substitution through the lens of the first letter of the apostle Peter to his readers in various parts of Asia Minor. For a relatively

---

substitution is: "The Father, because of his love for human beings, sent his Son (who offered himself willingly and gladly) to satisfy his justice, so that Christ took the place of sinners. The punishment and penalty we deserved was laid on Jesus Christ instead of us, so that in the cross both God's holiness and love are manifested" (Thomas R. Schreiner, "Penal Substitution View," in *The Nature of the Atonement*, eds. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy [Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, an Imprint of InterVarsity, 2006] 67).

[2]See Demarest, *Cross and Salvation* 159-62 for the history of this doctrine.

[3]Contemporary defenses of penal substitutionary atonement are: David Peterson, ed., *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today* (Carlisle, United Kingdom: Paternoster, 2001); Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Practical Perspectives* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, an Imprint of InterVarsity, 2004); Schreiner, "Penal Substitution View" 67-98; Jerry Bridges and Bob Bevington, *The Great Exchange* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2007); Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Recovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2007); I. Howard Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement*, Paternoster Thinking Faith (Colorado Springs: Authentic, 2008). In addition to these books, the entire issue of *The Southern Baptist Theological Journal* 11/2 (Summer 2007) was devoted to the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

[4]An example of this approach is David Peterson, "Atonement in the New Testament," in *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today*, ed. David Peterson (Carlisle, United Kingdom: Paternoster, 2001) 26-67.

[5]"Yet, quite often in such discussions, Paul's epistles receive star treatment and the spotlight while other writings such as Hebrews are relegated to a 'junior varsity' or 'special teams' status" (Barry C. Joslin, "Christ Bore the Sins of Many: Substitution and the Atonement in Hebrews," *The Southern Baptist Theological Journal* 11/2 (Summer 2007):74.

[6]D. A. Carson, "Atonement in Romans 3:21-26," in *The Glory of the Atonement* 119-39; Jarvis J. Williams, "Penal Substitution in Romans 3:25-26?" *Princeton Theological Review* 13 (December 2007):73-81; etc.

short book, Peter has a significant amount of direct and indirect references to the cross of Christ. The death of Christ is clearly referred to in 1:2, 18-19; 2:24; 3:18; and 4:1. The sufferings of Christ as a concept and the reality that Christ suffered are mentioned in 1:11; 2:21, 23, 24; 3:18; 4:1, 13; and 5:1.[7] The apostle stated he was a witness of Christ's suffering (5:1). Furthermore, at the time of the writing of 1 Peter, he unashamedly proclaims that the OT prophets spoke of the sufferings of Christ (1:11). This is quite a contrast for the man who once rebuked the Lord and said the Christ would never suffer and die (cf. Matt 16:22).

Leon Morris correctly observes, "For a short writing, 1 Peter has an astonishing amount to say about the atonement."[8] In light of this, the wondrous cross as presented by the key apostle of Jesus will be surveyed, not only to behold the cross in all of its grandeur and majesty, but to determine what this epistle contributes to the doctrine of penal substitution.

FIRST PETER 1:2

It does not take long for the apostle Peter to focus on the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first explicit reference to the cross is located in 1:2 where Peter writes, "sprinkled with His blood."[9] There is no doubt the apostle is referring to the blood Jesus shed when he died on Calvary's mountain.

The Context of 1 Peter 1:2

The context of Peter's first reference to the cross is his salutation in 1:1-2. The three parts of the salutation are the author (1:1a), the readers (1b-2a), and the greeting (1:2b). The context in outline form is as follows:

1A. Salutation (1:1-2)
- 1B. The author (1:1a)
  - 1C. His name
  - 2C. His office
- 2B. The readers (1:1b-2a)
  - 1C. They are select
  - 2C. They are sojourners
  - 3C. They are scattered
- 3B. The greeting (1:2b)
  - 1C. The wish of an abounding of grace

---

[7]The verses listed are not an exhaustive treatment of the suffering of Christ in 1 Peter, but rather are the ones that use either the verb πάσχω (12 times; 2:19, 20, 21, 23; 3:14, 17, 18; 4:1, 1, 15, 19; 5:10) or the related noun πάθημα (4 times; 1:11; 4:13; 5:1, 3). Sometimes these terms do not refer to Christ.

[8]Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 316.

[9]Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*. © The Lockman Foundation, 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977.

2C. The wish of an abounding of peace

The Interpretation of 1 Peter 1:2

After Peter identifies himself by name (Πέτρος) and by position (ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), he turns his attention to the recipients of the letter. The readers are identified as "elect sojourners of the dispersion." The Greek text underlying the identification of the readers indicates that they are selected ones (ἐκλεκτοῖς), sojourners (παρεπιδήμοις), and scattered (διασπορᾶς). As Jobes points out, "The original recipients of this letter may have been foreigners with respect to their society and scattered throughout the vast area of Asia Minor, but with respect to God, Peter says they are chosen."[10] Surely, such a designation would have been of great comfort to the readers in their current circumstances.

The apostle expands upon the readers' identity as "elect" by means of three prepositional phrases.[11] The election of the readers is "according to [κατά] the foreknowledge of God the Father, by [ἐν] the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that [εἰς] you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood. The prepositional phrases indicate the standard (κατά), sphere (ἐν), and goal (εἰς)[12] of the believers' choice by God." Each prepositional phrase contains a reference to a different member of the Trinity. The readers are elect according to the foreknowledge of "God the Father." They were chosen before the foundation of the world for salvation. Also, they are elect in the sphere of the sanctification of the "Holy Spirit." It is the Spirit of God who has produced this initial sanctification at salvation. Finally, the goal of the election is stated in relation to "Jesus Christ."

The third prepositional phrase explicitly refers to the atonement. Before the phrase "the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" is examined, the precise relationship of the noun "obedience" (ὑπακοήν) and the phrase "sprinkling of the blood" (ῥαντισμὸν αἵματος) to "Jesus Christ" (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) must be determined. One alternative is the phrase "Jesus Christ" modifies both "obedience" and "sprinkling of the blood." A translation based upon this understanding is "to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood" (NASU) or "for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood" (ESV). A second alternative is the phrase "Jesus Christ" relates only to "sprinkling of the blood" and the noun "obedience" stands alone. The translations "for obedience and for sprinkling with Jesus Christ's blood" (NET) and "for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus

---

[10]Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 67.

[11]Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 86; John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 317; Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 71.

[12]Some say causal (Elliott, *1 Peter* 317, 319; Earl J. Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude & 2 Peter: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the New Testament [Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2000] 65).

Christ" (NKJV) seek to reflect this viewpoint. A final alternative is the phrase "Jesus Christ" modifies "obedience" and "sprinkling of the blood," but these two components are to be understood as a hendiadys (expressing a single idea by two words) and not coordinates, to refer to God's covenant relationship with His people. This position is reflected in the translation: "and consecrated with the sprinkled blood of Jesus Christ" (NEB).[13]

The phrase "Jesus Christ" should be connected only to "sprinkling of the blood."[14] "It is too confusing to imagine that "Jesus Christ" would be both an objective genitive ("obedience to Jesus Christ") and subjective genitive ("by his blood") in the same phrase.[15] The goal of the believer's election is first unto obedience,[16] and second unto the sprinkling of the blood that belongs to Jesus Christ.

"The blood of Jesus Christ" (cf. Heb 10:19; 1 John 1:7; 5:6) clearly refers to the crucifixion of Christ. It speaks of His death on the cross. The mentioning of Christ's blood is a metonymy of His death. "Sprinkling" (ῥαντισμόν) captures Peter's immediate emphasis regarding the blood of the Messiah. The same term is used in Heb 12:24, where the "blood of Jesus is called αἷμα ῥαντισμοῦ *blood of sprinkling,* i.e. *blood that is sprinkled* for atonement."[17]

The exact phrase of the apostle, "sprinkling of blood" (ῥαντισμὸν αἵματος) is not found in the NT. Despite the absence of the phrase in the OT,[18] it is best to turn there to attempt to capture the meaning of Peter's words. Grudem writes,

---

[13]Frank W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947) 50-51; Jobes, *1 Peter* 58.

[14]Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter*, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003) 55; Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 88; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988) 11; D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (1992; repr., Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 2002) 51; Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter*, trans. Peter H. Davids (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University, 2008) 59.

[15]Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* 55. The conclusion of Michaels is basically identical, when he argues against those who take the first genitive as objective and the second as possessive. He states, "To attempt to link 'Jesus Christ' both to 'obedience' and 'blood' would create difficulty by making it an objective genitive in relation to the first and a possessive in relation to the second" (*1 Peter* 11). Achtemeier (*1 Peter* 87) is far more forceful in his evaluation: "Yet that demands that the same genitive Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ function two different ways in the same sentence, something of a grammatical monstrosity and surely confusing to the reader/listener."

[16]This is the initial obedience of receiving the gospel (Schreiner, *1 Peter* 54; Hiebert, *1 Peter* 52; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990] 48) and not the ongoing obedience in the Christian life as held by Grudem (Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988] 52).

[17]Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., trans. and ed. Frederick William Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 903 (hearafter BDAG; emphasis in the original).

[18]"The phrase is unique in the NT, and it occurs nowhere in the OT" (Elliott, *1 Peter* 320).

> Sprinkled blood in the Old Testament was a visual reminder to God and to his people that a life had been given, a sacrifice had been paid. But in most Old Testament sacrifices the blood was sprinkled on the altar or on the mercy seat (Lv. 4:17; 5:9; 16:14, 15, 19; Nu. 19:4). In only three cases was blood ceremonially sprinkled on the people themselves: (1) in the covenant initiation ceremony at Mt. Sinai when Moses sprinkled half the blood from the sacrificial oxen on all the people (Ex. 24:5-8; Heb. 9:19; and perhaps Is. 52:15 [Aquila, cf. Theodotian]); (2) in the ceremony of ordination for Aaron and his sons as priests (Ex. 29:21; probably also Heb. 10:22); and (3) in the purification ceremony for a leper who had been healed from leprosy (Lv. 14:6-7).[19]

In light of this data, the best background in the OT is the sprinkling of the blood when the covenant with Moses was inaugurated (Exod 24:3-8). Peter's reference signifies the forgiveness and cleansing; the people need to stand in right relation with God.[20] The goal of the reader's election was not only unto obedience, but also unto forgiveness and cleansing, which is pictured by their being sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.

The Contribution of 1 Peter 1:2 to Penal Substitution

The substitutionary aspect of the atonement is implied by the phrase "sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ." Jerry Bridges and Bob Bevington rightly state,

> The expression "sprinkling with his blood" is reminiscent of the sacrificial language foreshadowed in the old covenant. It is the language of atonement, the language of transferred guilt, the language of substitution. The blood of Christ, indicative of his atoning sacrificial death, is sprinkled on behalf of those he represents.[21]

Yet it would be too much to read into Peter's words in 1:2 the penal idea of the atonement.

FIRST PETER 1:18-19

The first substantial portion of Peter's letter to focus on the cross is 1:18-19. The richness of these two verses regarding the atonement has not been overlooked by interpreters, expositors, and theologians. Pastor and biblical expositor John MacArthur introduces the theme of these two verses by citing the words of the Puritan Thomas Watson:

> Great was the work of creation, but greater the work of redemption; it cost more to redeem us than to make us; in the one there was but the speaking of a Word, in the other

---

[19]Grudem, *1 Peter* 52.

[20]So Schreiner, *1 Peter* 56; Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 89; Elliott, *1 Peter* 320; Hiebert, *1 Peter* 52; Goppelt, *I Peter* 74; Feldmeier, *First Letter of Peter* 58.

[21]Bridges and Bevington, *The Great Exchange* 251.

the shedding of blood. Luke 1:51. The creation was but the work of God's fingers. Psalm 8:3. Redemption is the work of His arm.[22]

The Context of 1 Peter 1:18-19

The broad and narrow contexts of 1:18-19 are important. General agreement is that the broad context of Peter's significant words about redemption is 1:13–2:10.[23] After eulogizing God for the believer's great salvation in 1:3-12, Peter places upon the shoulders of his readers the glorious burden of a series of imperatives that reflect the products of salvation. A great salvation is to lead to godly living. Thus, the readers are commanded by means of five aorist imperatives to hope (1:13, ἐλπίσατε), be holy (1:15, γενήθητε), live in fear (1:17, ἀναστράφητε), love one another (1:22, ἀγαπήσατε), and desire the word (2:2, ἐπεποθήσατε). The wider context concludes with indicative statements whereby the apostle reminds the readers of their identity in 2:4-10.

The narrow context of these two verses is 1:17-21. The specific focus here is to live a life of fear or to "conduct yourselves in fear" (ἐν φόβῳ . . . ἀναστράφητε). The command is preceded by a condition that is assumed to be true of the readers[24]: "if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work." The motivation for conducting their lives in fear is contingent upon invoking God as Father. Another motivation for a life of fear is given in the verses that highlight the redemption of the believer.

The Interpretation of 1 Peter 1:18-19: The Redemption of the Believer

The introductory formula that begins 1:18-19 is "knowing that" (εἰδότες ὅτι). "Knowing" is a causal participle and is translated in some modern versions as "for you know" (NIV, HCSB). Why should the readers conduct themselves in fear during the time of their stay upon earth? Why should their time of sojourning be focused on living a life of reverence? It is because of what they know. What they know is to spur them on to obey the command in 1:17.

This formula, "knowing that," indicates that what follows is well known to the readers. They were well established in the truth of the redemption of the believer. The apostolic teaching on which they were grounded regarding their redemption can be outlined as follows:

The Redemption of the Believer
A. The nature of redemption (1:18b)

---

[22]John MacArthur, *1 Peter*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 2004) 71.

[23]Elliott, *1 Peter* 82; Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 73. Feldmeier (*First Letter of Peter* 22), among others, sees the broader context as 1:3–2:10.

[24]The conjunction εἰ introduces a first-class conditional statement that assumes the protasis portion is true for the sake argument. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 690.

B. The means of redemption (1:18a, 19)
   1. The denied means of redemption (1:18a)
   2. The affirmed means of redemption (1:19)

The nature of the believer's redemption is captured by the words "you were . . . redeemed" (ἐλυτρώθητε). The verb "I redeem" (λυτρόω) also occurs in Luke 24:21 ("we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel") and Titus 2:14 ("Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed . . . "). These are the only uses in the NT. The noun form (λύτρον) can be translated "ransom." Jesus used this term when He stated that He did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45). The verb and the noun are a part of a family of terms that combine to teach the marvelous doctrine of redemption in the NT.[25]

The word "redeem" basically denotes the act of deliverance by the payment of a ransom.[26] It means to purchase someone's freedom by paying a ransom.[27]

There is disagreement regarding the background Peter had in mind when he used this term. The idea of redemption or ransom has its roots in both the Jewish and the Greco-Roman worlds.[28] Suggested backgrounds are the manumission of slaves, the use of the word in the OT, or both the image of manumission and the use of the term in the OT.[29] There are two good reasons for favoring the background being the OT Scriptures. First, it is the practice of the apostle Peter to use the OT in this letter.[30] Second, the verb is often employed in the OT in reference to God ransoming/redeeming Israel.[31] Although this is the preferred setting, the words of Achtemeier are illuminating,

> Such an origin is at best secondhand, however, since the author's language (εἰδότες) makes clear he intends to appeal to an already existing Christian tradition. The more direct

---

[25]For NT terms related to redemption, see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd revised edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 17-62.

[26]Hiebert, *1 Peter* 101.

[27]Grudem, *1 Peter* 83.

[28]Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 127. Elliott (*1* Peter 370) adds, "However, the fact that the 'blood of Christ' is cited here as the means of redemption points to the influence of a specifically Christian tradition in which the thought of Jesus as vicarious ransom for all (Mark 10:45) was developed through the use of Isa 53, which spoke of the vicarious suffering of the servant of God."

[29]For a detailed discussion of the issue, consult Jacob Prasad, *Foundations of the Christian Way of Life according to 1 Peter 1, 13-25: An Exegetico-Theological Study*, Analecta Biblica 146 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2000) 281-91.

[30]Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* 84.

[31]Elliott, *1 Peter* 369.

origin is probably to be found in similar concepts of the redemptive significance of the death of Christ in the NT, where it is recalled as originating with Jesus himself.[32]

The aorist tense testifies to the redemption of the believer being an accomplished fact.[33] The passive voice is a "divine passive," a "reverential passive," or a "theological passive." Although the terminology might differ, common agreement sees that the passive indicates God is the actor in the redemption.[34] Peter uses "the passive that implies God as the subject."[35]

The apostle expands upon the nature of the believer's redemption by indicating what his readers were redeemed "from" (ἐκ) or "out of." It is "from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers" that these elect exiles of the dispersion have been redeemed from. This black and dark backdrop allows the diamond of redemption to sparkle in all of its brilliance.

The recipients of Peter's letter were redeemed from a "way of life" (τῆς . . . ἀναστροφῆς). Typically, redemption is pictured in terms of being redeemed from sin. Yet the apostle uses one of his key words[36] to indicate more specifically that the redemption was from a lifestyle. "The term implies not merely behavior but also the values, norms, and commitments that constitute an entire 'way of life'."[37]

This lifestyle is described in a threefold way. First, it is a way of life that was personally owned by the ones who were redeemed. The personal pronoun (ὑμῶν) in the genitive indicates this lifestyle was possessed by the readers. Secondly, the way of life is described as "futile" (ματαίας). The term conveys the ideas of "vain," "useless," "empty," and "worthless." To put it bluntly, prior to their Christian experience the readers' conduct "was unprofitable and void of positive results."[38] Thirdly, the way of life is described as "inherited from your forefathers" (πατροπαραδότου). This adjective does not occur elsewhere in the NT or in the LXX.[39] Normally, "it signifies a vibrant tradition that is conveyed from generation to generation."[40] Because of its collocation with the adjective ματαίας these traditions must be painted with a negative color.[41]

---

[32]Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 127.

[33]Hiebert, *1 Peter* 101.

[34]Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 126; Prasad, *Foundations of the Christian Way of Life* 286; Elliott, *1 Peter* 370.

[35]Jobes, *1 Peter* 117.

[36]The noun ἀναστροφή also occurs in 1:15; 2:12; 3:1, 2, 16. The cognate verb ἀναστρέφω appears in 1:17.

[37]Elliott, *1 Peter* 370.

[38]Hiebert, *1 Peter* 102.

[39]Elliott, *1 Peter* 370.

[40]Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* 84-85.

[41]Prasad, *Foundations of the Christian Way of Life* 291.

The nature of redemption (1:18b) is sandwiched by the denied means of redemption (1:18a) and the affirmed means of redemption (1:19). These two possible instruments of redemption are contrasted by the strong adversative conjunction "but" (ἀλλά) at the beginning of v. 19. The contrasting pair emphasizes the negative and positive means of the believers' redemption. Before an affirmation of the true means of redemption, comes a categorical denial of its false means.

The denied means of redemption is "perishable things like silver or gold."[42] Literally, Peter writes, "knowing that not by perishable things, by silver or by gold, you were redeemed." The negative "not" (οὐ) "categorically excludes all corruptible things from procuring redemption."[43] These "perishable things" (φθαρτοῖς) are further defined by "silver" (ἀργυρίῳ) and "gold" (χρυσίῳ).[44] "They name two of the best and most highly treasured means that belong to the category of 'perishable things'."[45] Yet, they are utterly inadequate as instruments to redeem sinful man.

The affirmed means of redemption is "with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ." The means of redemption, when boiled down to one word, is "blood" (αἵματι). The redemption of Peter's readers was not accomplished by the best of perishable things, even silver or gold, but in complete contrast, it was accomplished by blood that is described as precious.

Throughout the apostle's epistle, he has a penchant of mentioning something and then expanding upon it. He does that here with reference to the blood. By means of three modifiers, Peter elaborates upon the concept of blood. The first modifier, and the one that is emphatic due to its position, informs the reader of whose blood this is. No one questions that it is the blood of Christ. Although several words separate "blood" from the genitive noun "Christ" (Χριστοῦ) which is at the end of the verse, the two belong together. This phrase "is the clear outward evidence that his lifeblood was poured out when he died a sacrificial death as the price of the believer's redemption."[46] It was not the blood of a cut finger, but rather the blood of a slaughtered sacrifice for sins! With this first description of blood, Peter reminds believers that redemption was accomplished by means of the bloody death of Christ.

The second modifier, the adjective "precious" (τιμίῳ) precedes the noun "blood" and stresses the value of the blood. This adjective is used in the NT in the twofold sense of "costly" (precious in the sense of its high value) and "highly esteemed" (precious in the sense of held in honor).[47] Who can argue with Hiebert when he quotes John Phillips' words: "The cost of Calvary is beyond all human

---

[42]More than likely this is an illusion to Isa 52:3 (Feldmeier, *First Letter of Peter* 116-17).

[43]Hiebert, *1 Peter* 102.

[44]All three nouns are best categorized as instrumental of means (Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 128).

[45]Hiebert, *1 Peter* 102.

[46]Grudem, *1 Peter* 84.

[47]Hiebert, *1 Peter* 103.

computation; the value of the shed blood of Jesus is beyond all our comprehension."[48] Yet, could it be that Earl Richard is closer to the truth when he pens,

> [H]owever, its present context and the author's use of the related term *entimos* in 2:4, 6 point to divine approval: "precious [in God's sight]." Christ's blood as the means or the price of redemption from slavery (see Acts 20:28 and especially Heb 9:11-14) has become precious to God in its character as perfect sacrifice.[49]

The third modifier separates "blood" from "Christ" and is introduced by the adverb "as" (ὡς). The precious blood of Christ is furthered described "as of a lamb unblemished and spotless." Peter does not compare Christ to a lamb (ESV—"like that of a lamb"), but rather declares Christ is a lamb (NIV—"a lamb").[50] His words echo the exclamation of John the Baptist, who when he saw Jesus cried out, "Behold, the lamb of God" (cf. John 1:29, 36). Besides the references of Peter and John the Baptist, the only other time "lamb" (ἀμνός) is used of Jesus is in Acts 8:32, which is a quotation of Isaiah 53:7.

The suggested background of Peter's "lamb" is the Passover lamb of Exodus 12,[51] the prophetic lamb of Isa 53:7,[52] the sacrificial cult practiced by Israel,[53] or a combination of the previous views.[54] If Peter is referring to the Passover lamb in Exodus 12, it is not through a lexical association. The LXX renders "lamb" by the Greek term πρόβατον rather than ἀμνός. Also, although "unblemished" describes the lamb in Exod 12:5 and 1 Pet 1:19, the Greek is τέλειον in the Exodus 12 verse and not ἀμώμου as in 1 Peter. Theologically, it has been questioned whether it was the blood of the paschal lamb that provided redemption or the power of God.[55]

A reference to the prophetic lamb of Isa 53:7 is indeed tempting. As previously mentioned, one of the places where the term "lamb" occurs is Acts 8:32, which quotes Isa 53:7. Peter's exact phrase "as of a lamb" (ὡς ἀμνοῦ) is used in reference to the Suffering Servant in the LXX of Isaiah. Yet, the apostle focuses upon the blood of this lamb being the means of redemption, whereas the Suffering

---

[48]Ibid.

[49]Richard, *1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter* 65.

[50]See Achtemeier (*1 Peter* 129) for a brief discussion of the problem and a defense of the figurative nature of the comparison. See also R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966) 65, and Hiebert (*1 Peter* 103) who disagree with this position.

[51]Davids, *First Epistle of Peter* 72; Goppelt, *I Peter* 116; David Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Epworth Commentaries, ed. Ivor H. Jones (Peterborough, England: Epworth, 1988) 33.

[52]Elliott, *1 Peter* 374; Hiebert, *1 Peter* 104.

[53]Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 129.

[54]Michaels, *1 Peter* 66; Prasad, *Foundations of the Christian Way of Life* 303-4; Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* 87.

[55]Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 128.

Servant is spoken of in terms of the silence of a lamb. Furthermore, besides the aforementioned phrase, there are no linguistic similarities between Isa 53:7 and 1 Pet 1:19.[56]

The blending of three backgrounds as the backdrop to Peter's lamb is possible,[57] but not plausible. It is best to view the background as the general sacrificial cult practiced by Israel. The advantage of this perspective is it views Christ as an actual lamb, and also it brings to the forefront the character and perfection of Christ.

The two adjectives, "unblemished" (ἀμώμου) and "spotless" (ἀσπίλου), bear testimony to the character of Christ the lamb. English translations have not agreed upon how to render these terms: "unblemished and spotless" (NASU, NET); "without blemish or spot" (ESV); "without blemish or defect" (NIV); "without blemish and without spot" (NKJV); "without defect or blemish" (NRSV, HCSB). The first adjective can be located several times in the OT with reference to sacrifices being without blemish.[58] The second adjective is absent from the OT. It stresses the spotlessness and flawlessness of Christ. The two adjectives combine to declare the sinlessness of the one whose blood was the means of redemption.[59]

The Contribution of 1 Peter 1:18-19 to Penal Substitution

First Peter 1:18-19 is not silent on the matter of penal substitutionary atonement. The two verses have something to say regarding both the substitutionary and penal aspects of Christ's death on the cross.

Without question the apostle Peter teaches here the great cost of redemption. Yet, it needs to be remembered that the concept of redemption also involves a substitution. The family of words related to the word "redeemed" in 1:18 is used in Mark 10:45 ("a ransom [λύτρον] for many") and Titus 2:14 ("who gave Himself for us so that he might redeem [λυτρώσεται] us . . .") and imply substitution. This is borne out by the respective phrases, "for many" and "for us."

Furthermore, the denied and affirmed means of redemption in 1:18a and 1:19 weigh in on the matter of substitution. McCartney states,

> "Precious blood" is in the instrumental (dative) case rather than in the genitive that ordinarily is used to indicate price (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20). The focus is not so much on a particular quantitative value or kind of coin used for the redemption but on the fact that

[56]Ibid., 129.

[57]See Prasad (*Foundations of the Christian Way of Life* 303-4) for an attempt to do so.

[58]"The requirement that sacrifices are to be 'without blemish' is often stated in the OT (e.g., LXX Exod 29:1, 38; Lev 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6, 9; 4:3, 14, 23, 28, 32; 5:15, 18; 12:6; Num 15:24; Ezek 43:22)" (Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* 86).

[59]Stated positively, "In our context the two terms simply reinforce each other and indicate the total perfection of Christ as a sacrifice (Heb. 9:14)" (Davids, *First Epistle of Peter* 73).

the redeeming of one life requires another."[60]

The substitutionary aspect of the atonement is not the total picture of what is presented in these verses. In the background of this redemption painting is the penal aspect of the bloody death of Christ. The one who paid the price is an unblemished sacrifice who was punished for the sins of others. I. H. Marshall astutely observes,

> The price is a substitute for the person redeemed, and in that the price is costly, it is, we might say, painful. Hence the concept of substitution is present and the cost may be regarded as a penalty in the broad sense. This is manifestly the case where it is the precious blood of Christ that brings about people's redemption. Consequently, the principle of penal substitution can be seen to be effective here. A ransom need not imply substitution of one person for another. It may simply be a monetary payment. Peter, however, makes the point that we were ransomed with blood (cf. 1 Pet. 1:18-19). There is the clear implication that the price is of infinite worth so that it avails for all people; the principle that the death of this particular One is able to ransom many sinners is manifest. Since, as we have seen death is the ultimate consequence of sin, and Christ suffered death, it would seem to me to require special pleading to argue that his death was anything other than a bearing of the death that sin inflicts upon sinners so that they might not have to bear it.[61]

It should be added that the view of God regarding the blood of His Son dismantles the arguments that penal substitution is "cosmic child abuse" or is "grotesque" or "primitive." The blood of Christ is "precious blood."

First Peter 2:24

Peter's focus on the cross sharpens through what he writes in 2:24. The apostolic preaching of the cross in this verse has been popularly summarized by Robert Mounce:

> Few statements in the New Testament exceed this in theological import. The entire redemptive purpose of God comes into focus in this one great act of eternal significance. On the lonely altar of a Roman cross the Son of God becomes the ultimate sacrifice. He carries in his own body the just penalty for our sins. He is at the same time both the priest who lays the sacrifice on the altar (in the Septuagint the Greek verb is commonly used of bearing a sacrifice and placing it on the altar) and the victim who is sacrificed. The One who knew no sin becomes a sin-offering for mankind (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 9:28). The validity of the Christian faith rests entirely on this central claim—that Christ suffered the full penalty for all the sins of man. As the lamb of God he took upon himself the entire

---

[60]Dan G. McCartney, "Atonement in James, Peter and Jude," in *The Glory of the Atonement* 187.

[61]*Aspects of the Atonement* (Colorado Springs: Authentic Publishing, 2008) 53-54.

punishment for sin and paid the just penalty by the gift of his sinless life.[62]

The Context of 1 Peter 2:24

A significant new literary unit marks the epistle of 1 Peter at 2:11. The suggested terminus for this unit has been 3:12, 3:22, or even as far as 4:11. Whatever the ending point of this section, clearly the broad context of 2:24 begins at 2:11 and extends at least to 3:12. The key theme of the surrounding context is subjection. The basis of subjection and its evangelistic benefit are provided in 2:11-12, followed by attention drawn to subjection of citizens (2:13-17), subjection of servants (2:18-25), subjection in the family (3:1-7), and subjection in the church (3:8-12).

The immediate context of 2:24 is the subjection of "servants" (οἱ οἰκέται) in 2:18-25. These individuals are commanded to submit not only to masters "who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable" (2:18). The reason for this action, which is described as "a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly," is that it is favorable (2:19). Peter explains that it is not commendable to endure suffering for doing wrong, but to endure when one suffers for doing right, "this *finds* favor with God" (2:20). In fact, believers "have been called for this purpose," i.e., of suffering unjustly (2:21a).

At this point Peter ushers to the forefront the example of Christ's suffering unjustly: "Christ also suffered." The "for you" suffering of Christ has placed footprints in the sand that the readers might "follow in His steps" (2:21b). The details of the exemplary suffering of Christ (2:22-23) reach their apex with the sacrificial suffering of Christ (2:24). The apostle concludes the passage by highlighting the significance of this sacrificial suffering for the believer (2:25).

An important feature of the narrow context and v. 24 is Peter's reliance on Isaiah 53. Addressing the use of Isaiah in 2:24, Norman Hillyer writes,

> The teaching that Jesus **himself bore our sins**, that the righteous and innocent one suffered the penalty for the misdeeds of the ungodly and guilty, is elaborated in this verse by means of language soaked with terms from the Suffering Servant passage of Isaiah 53 (LXX). Yet Peter sends his readers no signal that he is about to quote from the OT. That Peter weaves Isaiah's words so naturally into what he writes suggests that the passage must have been the subject of much meditation on Peter's part as he pondered the meaning of the death of Christ. He has so absorbed the prophet's message that it has molded his own thinking.[63]

The Interpretation of 1 Peter 2:24: The Sacrificial Suffering of Christ

An analysis of 2:24 under the heading of the sacrificial suffering of Christ

---

[62]Robert H. Mounce, *A Living Hope: A Commentary on 1 and 2 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 37-38

[63]*1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992) 86. For additional information on Peter's use of Isaiah 53 in the narrow context, see Jobes (*1 Peter* 191-200) and D. A. Carson, "I Peter" in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 1033-35 (emphasis in the original).

reveals the nature of the sacrificial suffering of Christ (2:24a), the purpose of the sacrificial suffering of Christ (2:24b), and the result of the sacrificial suffering of Christ (2:24c).

Peter specifies the nature of Christ's sacrificial suffering by first indicating the identity of the sufferer ("He Himself"). The sufferer is identified not by means of a personal name, but rather by a relative pronoun (ὅς). This is the third of four relative pronouns in 2:21b-24. The antecedent of each one is stated in v. 21, where Peter declares that "Christ also suffered for you." The antecedent is Christ. Once the antecedent has been identified, the four relative pronouns, three in the nominative case and one in the genitive, elaborate on Christ. The four relative clauses introduced by the four relative pronouns are: (1) Christ, who did not commit sin . . . ; (2) Christ, who did not retaliate . . . ; (3) Christ, who bore our sins . . . ; (4) Christ, by whose wounds you are healed.[64]

The intensive pronoun, αὐτός, further identifies the sufferer. With this word, Peter emphasizes the identity of the one who suffered on the cross.[65] It is this One, Christ and Christ alone, who is responsible for the action of the verb, only He and no one else.

Peter elaborates upon the nature of the sacrificial suffering of Christ by indicating the essence of the suffering. The verb "bore" (ἀνήνεγκεν) gets right to the heart of the suffering. The basic meaning of the verb can be "offer" or "bear." This has led to the understanding that Jesus offered up the sins of His people to God as a sacrifice upon the altar or that Jesus bore the sins of His people as a sacrifice when crucified on the cross. Several reasons lead to rejecting the former interpretation. First, "tree" (ξύλον) is not a normal way to designate an altar.[66] Second, in the OT the altar was holy and was never contaminated with anything unholy.[67] Finally, it is an intolerable concept in any known Jewish or early Christian context to have Jesus offering up sins as a sacrifice that God accepts.[68]

Taking the meaning of the verb as "bear" is preferable in this context.[69] The object of what Christ bore is "our sins" (τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν). The position of the direct object gives it emphasis. Literally, what Peter writes can be roughly translated, "who, our sins, He Himself bore." Hiebert is right to point out, "Unlike the imperfects in v. 23,'bore' is an aorist—a definite event, not a repeated practice."[70]

---

[64]Jobes, *1 Peter* 196.

[65]H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955) 126.

[66]Elliott, *1 Peter* 532.

[67]Edward G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1947) 180.

[68]Michaels, *1 Peter* 148; Hiebert, *1 Peter* 187.

[69]Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* 145; Achtemeier, *1* Peter 202.

[70]Hiebert, *1 Peter* 187.

The picture of Christ that is painted by His act is as sin-bearer.[71]

The opening words of this verse bleed Isaiah 53. Clearly the author depends directly or indirectly on Isa 53:4 ("He bears ours sins"), 53:11 ("He will bear their sins"), and 53:12 ("He bore the sins of many").[72] Peter identifies Isaiah's Suffering Servant as the one who Himself bore the sins of His people.

The nature of the sacrificial suffering of Christ concludes with the apostle providing the amplification of the suffering. The suffering is expanded upon with two prepositional phrases: "in His body" (ἐν τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ) and "on the cross" (ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον). Both prepositional phrases modify the verb "bore." "With these words, Peter appends his distinctive Christian interpretation of 'He himself bore our sins'."[73] They represent his unique perspective since the phrases are not found in Isaiah 53. The combination of these phrases forms an explicit reference to the death of Jesus by crucifixion.[74]

Christ's body was the vehicle through which He bore the sins of His people. "In His body" reinforces Peter's previous statement that it was Christ Himself and no one else who bore the believer's sins. The Pauline counterpart to the words of Peter is found in 2 Cor 5:21: "He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf."

The preposition phrase "on the cross," first depicts a motion toward a destination. The preposition (ἐπί) followed by the accusative case suggests Christ carried the believer's sins up to or upon the destination, depicting the idea of sacrifice.[75] The prepositional phrase also identifies a destination, which is the "cross." Peter uses his favorite term ξύλον (cf. Acts 5:30; 10:39) and not the more common NT term σταυρός. It can mean "tree," "wood," and "objects of wood." Paul uses this term with reference to the cross in Gal 3:13. This is significant since he quotes Deut. 21:23 ("cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"). Peter more than likely uses ξύλον to imply "that Jesus was cursed for the salvation of his people."[76]

Peter is explicit in stating the purpose of the sacrificial suffering of Christ. He writes, "that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." The conjunction ἵνα introduces a purpose clause that consists of the main verb "live" (ζήσωμεν)[77] which is modified by the participial phrase "we might die to sin" (ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἀπογενόμενοι) and a dative articular noun (τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ). A translation that is more reflective of the Greek text is: "that we, having died unto sins, might live unto

---

[71]Schreiner (*1 Peter* 145) states, "Often the word 'bore' (*anapherō*) is used of 'offering' sacrifices (Heb 7:27; 9:28-29; 13:15; Jas 2:21; 1 Pet 2:5; cf. Gen 8:20; 22:2; Exod 24:5; 29:18; Lev. 17:5; Isa 57:6."

[72]Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 201. See Jobes (*1 Peter* 194) for a translation that shows the quotations and allusions to Isaiah 53 in 1 Pet 2:21-25.

[73]Michaels, *1 Peter* 147.

[74]Jobes, *1 Peter* 197; Elliott, *1 Peter* 533.

[75]Beare, *First Epistle of Peter* 123; Alan M. Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 121.

[76]Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* 145.

[77]The verb ζάω is a favorite of Peter (cf. 1:3, 23; 2:2, 4, 5; 3:7).

righteousness" (ASV). In a nutshell, the purpose of Christ's sacrificial death is that the believer might live. The Christian is to live with reference to the righteousness that summarized Christ's submissive obedience to God.[78]

The child of God by the grace of God can fulfill this purpose for his life. It is possible due to the fact the believer has died to sin. The aorist participle "having died" is a word that occurs only here in the NT and does not appear at all in the Septuagint.[79] Interpreters are divided on whether this participle with the dative has the ideal of having been removed from life with reference to sins ("die")[80] or having been removed from sins ("depart").[81] The first understanding is preferred in light of the contrast with the verb "live" and the avoidance of the awkward rendering of the dative "sins" with the meaning of the participle "having died."[82] Peter's purpose statement demonstrates the ethical implications of the cross of Christ.[83]

The analysis of v. 24 began with the nature of the sacrificial suffering of Christ, continued with the purpose of that suffering, and concludes with the result of the sacrificial suffering of Christ. The result is not expressed by the syntactical means of a conjunction. The only connection the result has with the preceding sentence is through the presence of the last of four relative pronouns in 2:22-24. The relative pronoun οὗ (translated "His") stands first in the clause that announces an accomplishment of Christ's death on the cross for the believer: "for by His wounds you were healed" (οὗ τῷ μώλωπι ἰάθητε). It is obvious that the words of the prophet Isaiah in 53:5 ("And by His scourging we are healed;" LXX—τῷ μώλωπι αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς ἰάθημεν) are in the mind of Peter.[84] The servants of 2:18 in particular and the readers of the epistle in general are healed. "The wounds that sin had inflicted on the souls of Peter's readers 'have been healed', not merely 'will be healed'."[85]

---

[78]The dative should be seen as a dative of reference or dative of respect (Elliott, *1 Peter* 535).

[79]Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St Jude*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark Limited, 1901) 148.

[80]Grudem, *1 Peter* 132; Feldmeier, *First Letter of Peter* 176; Robert Johnstone, *The First Epistle of Peter* (1888; repr., Minneapolis: The James Family Christian Publishers, 1978) 187.

[81]Michaels, *1 Peter* 148-49; Elliott, *1 Peter* 535; Bigg, *Epistles of St. Peter* 148; Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* 113; Selwyn, *First Epistle of St. Peter* 181.

[82]Michaels (*1 Peter* 149) acknowledges that one would expect a genitive of separation with the participle for it to mean "depart from," but unconvincingly believes that Peter used the dative for "rhetorical symmetry" with the dative "righteousness."

[83]See Robert L. Thomas, *Who Am I? The Christian Hunger for Self-Identity* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2002) 184-86, on how this purpose statement relates to the Christian life.

[84]With regards to the Greek of Peter and of the Septuagint, Schreiner (*1, 2 Peter* 146) observes, "The wording is quite close to the Septuagint. The first person plural verb has been changed to a second person plural, and the relative pronoun "whose" (*hou*) has been substituted for "his" (*autou*)."

[85]Hiebert, *1 Peter* 189. The issue of physical healing in the atonement is addressed by Richard L. Mayhue, "For What Did Christ Atone in Isaiah 53:4-5?" *The Master's Seminary Journal* 6/2 (Fall 1995):121-41.

The means or instrument of the healing is "his wounds."[86] Although the noun is singular, most translations have chosen to render the word as a plural. Possibly the *hapax legomena* is a collective singular referring to the scourgings of Jesus (cf. Mark 15:15; Matt. 27:26). Yet ultimately, Peter has reference to "that ultimate mark made by the stroke of death."[87]

The Contribution of 1 Peter 2:24 to Penal Substitution

The words of this verse provide a significant contribution to a proper understanding of the cross of Christ. A person could argue that this verse provides the readers with an example for handling suffering (cf. 2:21a). But to limit the words merely to Christ's being an example is to rob them of their full force and weight. First Peter 2:24 teaches penal substitution.

The substitutionary aspect and the penal aspect of the atonement are woven together in Peter's description of the work of Christ on Calvary's cross. Christ is first viewed as the sin-bearer. The sin-bearing was substitutionary: "In his sacrificial death we see God, in the Son, bearing the consequences of our sin so that we do not have to bear them."[88]

The bearing of sin is a well-known concept in the OT. "It means bearing the penalty of sin" and when the apostle applies it to Christ, he "means that Jesus in His death endured the penalty for our sins."[89] Reflecting upon Christ's bearing sins, Cranfield wrote, "On the cross he bore not merely physical pain and sorrow that men could be so blind and wicked, but, what was much more dreadful, that separation from his Father ('My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?') which was the due reward of our sins."[90]

Peter also presents Christ as the curse-bearer. It has previously been explained that the death of Christ upon "the tree" has its roots in Deut 21:23 and parallels what Paul teaches about the death of Christ in Gal 3:13. Thus the insight of Marshall on Gal 3:13 is applicable to Peter's words:

> Believers are delivered from the curse of the law by Christ dying on the cross as the one accursed. The curse of the law is its condemnation of sinners and statement of judgment

---

[86]The dative τῷ μώλωπι should be classified as an instrumental of means (A. T. Robertson, *General Epistles,* vol. 6 of *Word Pictures in the New Testament* [Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1933] 106).

[87]Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* 203.

[88]Marshall, *Atonement* 51.

[89]Morris, *Cross in the New Testament* 324-25. See also Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions* 97. The words of John R. W. Stott (*The Cross of Christ* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1986] 143) reiterate the same truth: "It is clear from OT usage that to 'bear sin' means neither to sympathize with sinners, not to identify with their pain, not to express their penitence, nor to be persecuted on account of human sinfulness (as others have argued), nor even to suffer the consequences of sin in personal or social terms, but specifically to endure its penal consequences, to undergo its penalty."

[90]C. E. B. Cranfield, *I & II Peter and Jude* (London: SCM, 1960) 86.

> over them. The curse cannot simply be laid aside. It is carried out on Christ, and thereby sinners are delivered from it. Again, the one dies for the many, in their place. The principle of one bearing the consequences of sin for the many is present. Here the procedure of the Old Testament criminal law is used to explain Jesus' death, and the element of penalty is conspicuous. This is one of the clearest examples of Christ taking the place of sinners by occupying the accursed position and dying. The law, we remember, is God's law and therefore, ultimately it is God who imposes the curse."[91]

The influence of Isaiah 53 on Peter in this verse and the larger context (2:22-25) is significant. The phrase "by His wounds you have been healed . . . highlights the substitutionary nature of his death—he suffered in order that we might not."[92] But there is more: "Returning *via* Isaiah 52-3 to 1 Peter 2:24, we may affirm that, as the Suffering Servant the Lord Jesus Christ bore the punishment for the sins of his people in their place, and that in so doing he wrought atonement for them as the punishment was poured out upon him by the hand of God himself."[93]

First Peter 3:18

First Peter 3:18 is another magnificent verse that continues the apostle's survey of the wondrous cross. The 21 words in the Greek text have to be the most compact, prolific treatment of the death of Christ in the whole NT. The words are simple and succinct. Yet, at the same time they are profound and deep. This verse is "one of the richest summaries given in the New Testament for the meaning of the Cross of Jesus."[94]

The Context of 1 Peter 3:18

The verse begins a paragraph which concludes with v. 22. It is unanimous among interpreters that these five verses have more than their share of interpretive challenges. The difficulties of the text did not go unnoticed by Martin Luther: "A wonderful text is this, and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for a certainty just what Peter means."[95] Yet without doubt at least three significant events in the life of Christ are highlighted in

---

[91]Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement* 51-52.

[92]Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions* 97. McCartney ("Atonement in James, Peter and Jude" 181) adds: "The Servant of the Lord of Isaiah 40–55 is undoubtedly the source, not just of Peter's but also of the early church's idea of Jesus' death as a representational substitution. The Servant Song has its culmination in Isaiah 53, which is both quoted and applied by 1 Peter 2:21-25 as that which explains the suffering and death of Christ on behalf of his people."

[93]Gary Williams, "The Cross and the Punishment of Sin," in *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today*, ed. David Peterson (Carlisle, United Kingdom: Paternoster, 2001) 81. See also Peterson, "Atonement in the New Testament" 57.

[94]The quotation is found in Hiebert, *1 Peter* 235.

[95]The quotation is found in Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* 184.

this section. First, the death of Christ is at the center of v. 18. Second, the resurrection of Christ is referred to in v. 21. Third and final, the exaltation of Christ with a reference to His ascension concludes the paragraph, which forms the narrow context of 3:18.

The broader context of the verse under examination is 3:13–4:6. The paragraph 3:18-22 is not an intrusion. Nor should anyone relate 3:18 to 3:17 only, and consider 3:19-22 as peripheral.[96] The entire paragraph furnishes support for 3:13-17.[97] As Hiebert writes, "The treatment of Christian suffering for righteousness in vv. 13-17 prompted Peter to refer to Christ's undeserved suffering (v. 18a), that elicited an involved treatment of the consequences of His suffering (vv. 18b-21), concluding with a declaration of its triumphant culmination (v. 22)."[98] The inferential conjunction "therefore" (οὖν) in 4:1 indicates that this paragraph is the foundation of Peter's words in 4:1-6.

The Interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18: The Death of Christ

The heart of v. 18 is the subject, "Christ" (Χριστός) and the predicate, "died" ("suffered" in some manuscripts, ἔπαθεν[99]). Everything else in the verse serves as a modifier of the subject or the verb. Peter states as a fact that "Christ . . . died." The NASB translation hides the idea that before Peter proclaims Christ's death, he first mentions it was "once" and it was "concerning sins" (cf. Χριστός ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν). Contrary to expectation, the author was able to write these words. On a previous occasion, he had rebuked the Lord because Christ had declared He was going to suffer, be killed, and be raised on the third day (Matt 16:22). Peter had difficulty with the idea of a suffering and crucified Messiah. But now, he can write freely that "Christ . . . died." Yet he is not content with simply saying "Christ . . . died." He expands upon that by pointing out seven facts about the death of Christ.

The death of Christ was exemplary. It served as a model and an example to the readers. The causal conjunction (ὅτι) that begins v. 18 gives the reason why Peter could say in v. 17 that it is better, if God should will it so, that the readers suffer for doing good. It also gives the reason why Peter could say, in v. 14, that the readers

---

[96]See the discussion of Achtemeier (*1* Peter 243) on these rejected views.

[97]Elliott, *1 Peter* 639; Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* 180.

[98]Hiebert, *1 Peter* 235.

[99]"While acknowledging the difficulty of ascertaining the original text, a majority of the Committee preferred περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν because (a) this verb, which is a favorite of the author (it occurs elsewhere in 1 Peter eleven times), carries on the thought of ver. 17, whereas ἀποθνήσκειν (which occurs nowhere else in the epistle) abruptly introduces a new idea; (b) in view of the presence of the expression περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν scribes would be more likely to substitute ἀπέθανεν for ἔπαθεν than vice versa; . . ." (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: Second Edition* (Stuttgart, Germany: German Bible Societies, 1994) 623. So Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* 181; Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 247; Elliott, *1 Peter* 640; Jobes, *1 Peter* 258; Davids, *First Epistle of Peter* 135. Although the preferred reading is "suffered," Peter is clearly referring to the death of Christ (cf. 3:18b; 4:1).

are blessed if they suffer for doing right. Why is it better? Why are they blessed? It is because Christ suffered (died) for doing good and for doing right. The end result of His death is that He triumphed and is at the right hand of God.

Although Peter does not present Christ as the model for suffering per se, as he did in 2:21-25, it is clear that what happened to Christ is to be an encouragement and a motivation to his readers to do what is good and to do what is right. The adjunctive conjunction (καί) declares that Christ also suffered just as did some of the readers. Yet the rest of the verse makes it clear that His suffering was unique!

When Christ died on the cross, it was sufficient. The death of Jesus was definitive, conclusive, and complete. It was "once for all" (ἅπαξ). The Greek word can mean either "once" or "once for all." Peter could mean that Christ died once in contrast to "now," or he could be writing that Christ died "once for all" in contrast to something that can be repeated again and again.

In light of the "jewishness" of the apostle Peter and the fact that he could declare in Acts 10:12-14 that he had never eaten anything unholy and unclean, the term most likely means "once for all."[100] In contrast to continual OT sacrifices, Christ died for sins once and only once. Peter is in complete agreement with other NT Scriptures that proclaim the sufficiency of Christ's death (cf. John 19:30; Heb 1:3; 9:28—"so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many," 10:12).

Christ's death was sacrificial. It was a death "for sins" (περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν). The plural form of "sin" implies that Christ died for a mass of sins. The preposition (περί) with the singular form of "sin" occurs frequently in the LXX and is often translated "sin-offering." The combination occurs 19 times in Leviticus and three of these uses are in the chapter that focuses on the Day of Atonement (16:3, 5, 9). Clearly Peter has a sacrificial meaning in mind.[101] That understanding is confirmed by the use of this same prepositional phrase in Heb 5:3 and 10:26. The writer of Hebrews also uses περί with the singular form of "sin" in 10:6, 8, 18; 13:11.

Peter has come to understand Christ's suffering to death as a unique sin offering[102] and as a propitiatory sin-offering at that.[103] Furthermore, since this formula was well known from the sin offerings of the OT and NT explanations of the death of Christ (Rom 8:3; 1 Cor 15:3; 1 Thess 5:10; 1 John 2:2; 4:10), it is also the formula for substitutionary atonement, the death of the victim on behalf of the sins of another.[104]

The death of Christ was substitutionary. By means of three Greek words (δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων), the great doctrine of substitutionary atonement is proclaimed. The phrase could be translated "a just one for unjust ones." Two

---

[100]Michaels, *1 Peter* 202; Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 246.

[101]Michaels, *1 Peter* 202.

[102]Jobes, *1 Peter* 238.

[103]Elliott, *1 Peter* 641.

[104]Davids, *First Epistle of Peter* 135.

anarthrous adjectives that function as substantives are utilized to put emphasis upon the nature or essence of the individuals indicated by the terms.[105] The idea is "a person, just in character, died in behalf of persons, unjust in character."

It is clear whom Peter identifies as "just" since the term is in apposition to Christ. The Christ who died is further defined as having the character of being a "just one" or a "righteous one." That Christ was "righteous" is stressed elsewhere in the epistle (especially 2:22-23) and also in other parts of the NT (Matt 27:19; Luke 23:47; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 1 John 2:1, 29; 3:7; cf. Isa 53:11).[106]

This righteous One died in the place of individuals who were of a quality that they could be labeled "unrighteous ones." These are individuals who break the law and fail to act in harmony with the will of God. It is very likely that Peter uses "unjust" to remind the readers of their pre-salvation state.[107]

Christ's death was conciliatory. To put it another way, it provided reconciliation. John Murray distinguishes propitiation from reconciliation in the following manner: "Propitiation places in the focus of attention the wrath of God and the divine provision for the removal of that wrath. Reconciliation places in the focus of attention our alienation from God and the divine method of restoring us to his favour."[108]

The conjunction ἵνα, which is translated "in order that," introduces the reader to a purpose clause. The readers are informed that the purpose of the death of Christ is that "He might bring us [or 'you' in some versions] to God." One of the grand purposes of the atonement can be literally rendered, "that you He might bring to God". The "you" is emphatic due to position and stresses the "for-you-ness" of the gospel (cf. 1:12, 20-21).[109] The purpose clause reminds the reader once again of the ethical implications of the death of Christ (cf. 2:24).

The verb "bring" (προσαγάγῃ) is used six times in the NT (Matt 18:24; Luke 9:41; Acts 12:6; 16:20; 27:27; 1 Pet 3:18) and the nominal form three times (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12).[110] The usages of the term suggest a variety of meanings, but the bottom-line is that it communicates "to bring to God" or "to have access to God." Davids captures the significance of the expression when he writes, "Jesus died in order that, so to speak, he might reach across the gulf between God and humanity and taking our hand lead us across the territory of the enemy into the presence of the Father who called us."[111]

The death of Christ was exemplary, sufficient, sacrificial, substitutionary,

---

[105]Elliott, *1 Peter* 641.

[106]Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 247.

[107]Michaels, *1 Peter* 202-3.

[108]John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955) 33.

[109]Elliott, *1 Peter* 642.

[110]Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 248.

[111]Davids, *First Epistle of Peter* 136.

and conciliatory. Many interpreters of God's Word would be convinced of this based upon what Peter has written thus far. Major disagreement among exegetes has arisen in light of the remaining words of v. 18: "having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." Structurally, the apostle Peter uses the particles μέν and δέ to contrast[112] two aorist passive participles (θανατωθείς; ζῳοποιηθείς)[113] that are each modified by an anarthrous noun having the dative form (σαρκί; πνεύματι).

The particle μέν introduces the first half of the contrast. With regards to the Christ who died, it states that He was put to death (θανατωθείς). Peter uses a term that means "to cause cessation of life, put to death; literally τινά *kill someone, hand someone over to be killed*, especially of the death sentence and its execution."[114] It was a violent death that terminated the life of Christ on earth.[115] The term "flesh" should be understood as a locative of sphere and means that Christ was put to death in the sphere of His flesh.[116] The agent is unexpressed, but this is more than likely a "divine passive" and indicates that God is ultimately the one responsible for His Son's death.

It should be observed that the action of God upon His Son indicates that His death was penal. Stibbs is correct when he briefly and succinctly states, "[W]e are told that His earthly life was abruptly terminated by penal execution, as though He were a sinner."[117]

The particle δέ presents the contrast to "having been put to death in the flesh." The antithesis, "but made alive in the spirit," presents the final fact in this verse about the death of Christ. With this phrase, the apostle proclaims that Christ's death was conquered. The crucifixion of Christ is not the end of the story, nor is "made alive in the spirit." The story concludes with v. 22, where Christ is pictured at the right of God.

How does the phrase "made alive in the spirit" indicate that the death of Christ was conquered? A popular answer is the phrase refers the words to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The term "spirit" is taken as the Holy Spirit and the dative form of the noun is viewed as a dative of agency or instrumental of means. Another answer is that the phrase refers to Jesus Christ being made alive in the spiritual realm, in the realm of the Spirit's activity. The term "spirit" refers to Christ's risen state and the dative form of the noun functions as a dative or locative of sphere. Peter's words have in the mind the resurrection of Christ.

David MacLeod provides a third answer. He states,

---

[112]"Such combinations occur elsewhere in 1 Peter (1:20; 2:4; 4:6) and are typical of the author's predilection for explicit antithesis" (Elliott, *1 Peter* 645).

[113]The participles modify the verb "died" (ἔπαθεν) rather than "bring" (προσαγάγῃ).

[114]BDAG 443.

[115]Hiebert, *1 Peter* 238.

[116]Contra Elliott (*1* Peter 645), who suggests Peter uses the term to mean "men" put him to death.

[117]*First Epistle General of Peter* 141.

> It is unlikely, however, that Peter was speaking here of the resurrection; nor did he mean spiritual sphere of existence or spiritual mode of existence when he said "in the spirit." Rather he was describing certain events in the life of Christ, and doing so in chronological order. In v. 18 he describes Christ's death. He did not get to the resurrection until vv. 21 and 22.
>
> Furthermore, he was here speaking of two constituent parts of Christ's human nature, vis., his body and his spirit or soul. On the cross Jesus died in his manhood—body, soul and spirit. The Savior was objectively abandoned by God. The Father withdrew his comfort and sustaining power from him and sent the torments of hell against him. He was separated from God in those awful hours of darkness. As he expired on the cross, there was that separation of body and soul that the Bible calls death. Christ commended his spirit to the Father: "Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). At that moment Jesus came alive again in spirit through renewed fellowship with the Father. He immediately began to enjoy liberation; the distress of his baptism by death was over (cf. Luke 12:50). By his physical death he became not a victim, but a victor.[118]

The implication of the words of the apostle Peter in 3:18 is the death of Christ is exemplary, sufficient, sacrificial, substitutionary, conciliatory, penal, and conquered.

The Contribution of 1 Peter 3:18 to Penal Substitution

The substitutionary nature of the death of Christ is obvious in this verse. It has already been demonstrated that the phrase, "*the* just for the unjust," refers to one who has the character of being righteous, Christ, taking the place of ones who have the character of being unrighteous. This took place when Christ died on the cross.

The phrase "Christ . . . suffered . . . for sins" suggests the penal nature of the atonement. The Christ "who committed no sin" (2:22a) suffered to the point of death "for sins." He was punished for the sins of others; He paid the penalty for sins that He did not do. Also, as already pointed out, the words "having been put to death in the flesh" indicate the penal aspect of Christ's death. Additionally, it is very possible that the goal of Christ's death, which is reconciliation ("in order that He might bring us to God"), implies Christ was punished and paid the penalty for sins when He died on the cross. The words of Morris on this matter are helpful. He writes,

> This connection of His suffering on the one hand with sins, and on the other with bringing us to God, makes it clear that we are moving in the same thought world as when we read of the bearing of sin. The sins that kept us away from God no longer do so, thanks to that death. Christ's suffering cancelled out our sins.[119]

---

[118]David J. MacLeod, "The Sufferings of Christ: Exemplary, Substitutionary, and Triumphant," *Emmaus Journal* 14 (2005):12-14. This writer is in essential agreement with MacLeod and would encourage a reading of the selected pages with the supporting footnotes for support of this view.

[119]*Cross in the New Testament* 326. Marshall (*Atonement* 55) goes a step further with regard to the parallel idea of reconciliation in 2 Cor 5:14-21: "The consequences of sin, specifically death, are borne by Christ when he is made one with sinners, and, in that sense, the substitution is penal."

Finally, if the interpretation of "having been made alive in the spirit" refers to Christ first being forsaken and abandoned by His Father ("My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"), then Peter provides further proof of the penal aspect of the atonement. At the cross, Christ experienced punitive separation in the place of the believer.[120]

First Peter 4:1

Peter's survey of the wondrous cross of Jesus Christ concludes at 4:1. A comparison of this verse with 1:18-19, 2:24, and 3:18 shows a lack of specificity about Christ's death in 4:1. In the previous verses, the author of 1 Peter enhances what he says about the crucifixion of Christ by means of modifiers. This verse has only a one-word modifier referring to the death of Christ in 4:1a. In fact, the cross of Christ is not even the heart of the verse.

The Context of 1 Peter 4:1

First Peter 4:1 initiates a paragraph that ends at 4:6. As mentioned in the discussion of the context of 3:18, Peter links these verses to 3:18-22 by means of the inferential conjunction "therefore" (οὖν). The foundation of the author's words beginning in 4:1 is the triumphant suffering of Christ. The goal of the paragraph is to impress upon readers that "they can obtain a victory over their persecutors parallel to that which, as already described, Christ has won over the malefic powers which control them."[121] A basic summary of the passage notes that because of the suffering of Christ, believers are exhorted to upright living in a sinful and hostile world, for judgment will come.[122]

The Interpretation of 1 Peter 4:1

The core of 4:1 is the exhortation "arm yourselves also with the same purpose." The aorist imperative "arm yourselves" (ὁπλίσασθε) utilizes a military metaphor to command the readers to put on their armor and take up their weapons. The direct object of the verb indicates what that armor or weapon is—"the same purpose" (τὴν αὐτὴν ἔννοιαν). "Purpose" can also be translated "mind" (ASV, KJV, NKJV), "way of thinking" (ESV), "attitude" (NIV, NET), "intention" (NRSV), "resolve" (HCSB), or "thought" (RSV). It refers to the mindset and resolve the believer must possess in order to live for the will of God.

The personal pronoun translated "same" indicates this resolve is to be patterned after the resolve of someone else. This "thought" belongs to Christ, who

---

[120]Demarest, *Cross and Salvation* 171.

[121]John N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1969) 165.

[122]Horrell, *Epistles of Peter* 74.

is mentioned at the beginning of the verse. Before Peter addressed the will of the readers with a command, he drew their attention to Christ. The phrase, "since Christ has suffered in the flesh," gives the reason[123] the readers are to heed the command. It is reminiscent of "Christ died" and "having been put to death in the flesh" in 3:18. The sense is "because Christ has suffered in the flesh, you too[124] must arm yourselves with the same mindset."

The verse concludes with the problematic phrase "because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin."[125] It is likely that the introductory conjunction "because" is causal.[126] Also, "the one who has suffered in the flesh" should be viewed as the believer who has died by virtue of his death and resurrection with Christ (cf. Rom. 6:1-11).[127]

The Contribution of 1 Peter 4:1 to Penal Substitution

Peter's final explicit reference to the death of Christ does not offer any additional insight into the nature of the atonement. The lack of details connected with the statement "since Christ has suffered in the flesh" indicates that what has been previously said concerning Christ's death would apply to these words also.

Conclusion

The focused look at the cross of Christ in First Peter has concluded. The wondrous cross was surveyed by examining the following passages: 1:2; 1:18-19; 2:24; 3:18; 4:1. In addition, the contribution of each passage to the doctrine of penal substitution was considered. Several lines of evidence from the various verses were offered to support both the penal aspect and the substitutionary aspect of the atonement. The proper understanding of Peter's presentation of the cross of Christ is that he proclaims a penal substitutionary atonement.

Is this doctrine the heart of the atonement itself? Should it be at the forefront of the explanation of the cross? The substitutionary and penal aspects of the death of Christ are so interwoven in Peter's message of the cross that such questions cannot be legitimately answered in the negative. A distorted image of the

---

[123]The genitive absolute construction (Χριστοῦ . . . παθόντος) is normally viewed as causal (Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 277).

[124]This is the adjunctive use of καί.

[125]The phrase, ὅτι ὁ παθὼν σαρκὶ πέπαυται ἁμαρτίας, has two interpretive issues. The minor issue concerns whether the conjunction ὅτι is causal ("because") or epexegetical ("that"). The major issue is the identity of "he who has suffered in the flesh" (ὁ παθὼν σαρκὶ) and its implications for the meaning of "has ceased from sins" (πέπαυται ἁμαρτίας). It is beyond the scope of this article to resolve these issues in an exegetical manner.

[126]So Elliott, *1 Peter* 714; Goppelt, *I Peter* 280; Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter* 200. Contra Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 278; Davids, *First Epistle of Peter* 148; Jobes, *1 Peter* 263.

[127]For a discussion of the problem, see the normal commentaries and especially Achtemeier, *1 Peter* 278-80; Elliott, *1 Peter* 715-18; Michaels, *1 Peter* 225-29.

atonement, if not an unrecognizable one, would result if penal substitution is not at the center.

Peter's message of the cross is saturated with the idea that the Messiah died in the sinner's place. The words of the apostle about the death of Christ are rightly understood when they are interpreted to mean that the punishment and penalty which believers deserved was placed on Christ instead of the believer. The glorious and magnificent truth of the work of Christ on the cross according to 1 Peter has been captured in the second stanza of the well-known hymn, "Hallelujah, What a Savior!"

> Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
> In my place condemned He stood—
> Sealed my pardon with His blood:
> Hallelujah, what a Savior![128]

[128]Philip P. Bliss, "Hallelujah, What a Savior!"