

The Victim is the Victor: Penal Substitution in Victory in 1 Peter

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Introduction: Victim Mentality in the Post-Christian West

- **Question:** What do racism, sexual identity, same-sex marriage, and abortion all have in common?
- **See:** Maurianne Adams, et. al. (eds.), *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Antisemitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism* (New York, Routledge, 2000).
- **Question:** How are these all issues of social justice?

Prior to celebrating diversity, we must first eliminate intolerance. No matter what form it takes or who does it, we must all take action to stop intolerance when it happens. Working toward a celebration of diversity implies working for social justice—the elimination of all forms of social oppression.¹

- **Critical Theory:**
 - ❑ Critical theory views the many different disciplines in the humanities—e.g., gender studies, critical race theory, feminism, anthropology, literary criticism, through the lens of power.
 - ❑ Critical theory understands all relationships in terms of power dynamics: Each individual is seen either as oppressed or as an oppressor, victim or victimizer, depending on their race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and a number of other categories.
 - ❑ Oppressed groups are subjugated not by physical force or even overt discrimination, but through the ability of dominant groups to impose their norms, values, and expectations on society as a whole, relegating other groups to subordinate or marginal positions.
 - ❑ **It's not all wrong!** There have been victims and it is very important that the church recognise that it has a special calling to the marginalised, disenfranchised, and victimised.
 - ❑ **However:** It is equally as important to recognise that there is an impersonal identity-politics agenda that views humans in a binary manner.

¹ Mary McClintock, "How to Interpret Oppressive Behaviour," p. 483 in Maurianne Adams, et. al. (eds.) *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice* (New York, Routledge, 2000)

- **Stephen McAlpine:**

Those who play at the card table of identity politics constantly search for the trump card that will grant them an elevated victim status and therefore place them beyond criticism by others, ushering in privileges hitherto held from them.²

- **Cultural Shift:**

- ❑ **The Church at the Margins:** There is a real sense that the church's role in our cultural is shifting (or has already shifted) from the centre to the margins.
- ❑ **Embrace the Margins!** As Christians we must avoid the temptation to play the victim game. As we saw in our two talks yesterday, the message that the church is called to proclaim centres on the crucified Christ, the ultimate story of weakness and the relinquishing of secular notions of power.

- **2 Corinthians 13:5:**

For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

- **Question:** But why should God's life-giving work take place in the context of such weakness? **Answer:** Read on!

1. Victory in 1 Peter

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

- **1 Peter 3:18-20a, 22:**

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and *proclaimed* [his victory] to the spirits in prison who disobeyed... Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers *having been subjected to him*.

Salvation in the New Testament is frequently depicted as freedom from the devil's oppression (Col 1:12-13; 2:14-15; 2 Tim 2:26; Heb 2:14-15; 1 Peter 3:18-4:6; 5:8-12; 1 John 3:8; Rev 12:7-11)

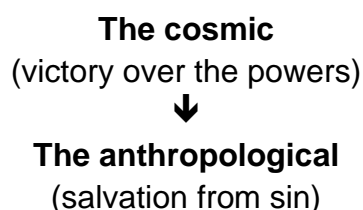
² Stephen McAlpine, *Being the Bad Guys: How to Live for Jesus in a World That Says You Shouldn't* (Epsom: Good Book Company, 2021), 65.

- **Gregory Boyd:**

Everything that New Testament says about the soteriological significance of Christ's saving work is predicated on the cosmic significance of his work. Yet only the *Christus Victor* view captures the centrality of this cosmic, warfare significance and thus properly expresses the soteriological significance of Christ's work.³ (p. 34)

The New Testament concept of salvation is centered on our participation in Christ's cosmic victory over the powers. It does not first and foremost mean "salvation from God's wrath" or "salvation from hell," as many Western Christians mistakenly assume. ... This is what the New Testament means by "salvation." It is a cosmic reality before it is an anthropological reality, and it is the latter [the anthropological] because it is the former [the cosmic].⁴

That Christ came to defeat the devil and his works is as clear as could be in the New Testament. But how exactly Christ's life, death, and resurrection accomplished this feat *is not so clear*.⁵

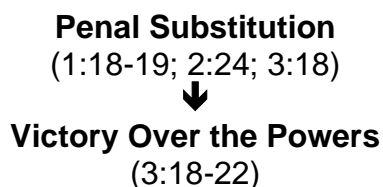


- **However:**

- (1) The *Christus victor view* ends to limit the outcome of Christ's death and resurrection to a victory gained over the forces of evil (and important outcome, nonetheless).
- (2) *Christus victor view* does not tell us: (1) how the battle was fought; (2) in what way was this victory gained, and (3) why was the cross necessary to achieve it?

- **1 Peter:**

Christ's victory over the cosmic powers
is grounded in his atonement for sin



³ Gregory Boyd, "Christus Victor View in James K. Beilby, and R. Paul Eddy, *The Nature of Atonement: Four Views* ed. Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 34.

⁴ Boyd, "Christus Victor View," 34.

⁵ Boyd, "Christus Victor View," 36.

2. Penal Substitution in 1 Peter

(2.1) Penal Substitution and Redemption (1:18-19)

Knowing that you were ransomed [or redeemed] from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

- This verse emphasizes **FOUR** things:

- (1) The Nature of Redemption (v 18a)

- The Greek word rendered “ransomed” here (*lytroō*) means “to free by paying a ransom [price].”⁶ Christ’s atonement is characterised as “redemption,” that by which a person is redeemed or set free from the bondage of sin through the payment of Christ’s shed blood as a ransom price.

- (2) The Price of Redemption (v 19)

- Peter explicitly states that the believer’s redemption came at a much higher cost than money (the normal means of a ransom payment in the papyri and early Greek writers):

not with perishable things such as silver or gold,
but with the precious blood of Christ.

- (3) The Substitute of Redemption (v 19)

- **Note:** The act of redeeming by the payment of a ransom price carried the idea of exchange or substitution.

- **Jeffrey, Ovey, and Sach:**

In his death Jesus paid the ransom price of his life as a substitutionary payment in the place of others.⁷

- (4) The Effect of Redemption (v 18b)

- The language of redemption is the language of setting free by the payment of a ransom price: “You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers.” Redemption, Peter asserts, entails divine liberation from bondage to the futile, empty, aimless, idolatrous, and sinful ways of their pagan past.

⁶ BDAG, 606.

⁷ Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 67.

(2.2) Penal Substitution and Forgiveness (2:24)

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

- This verse emphasizes **THREE** things:
 - (1) The Nature of Christ's Death (v 24a)
 - (a) The opening statement of v 24 expands on v 21 explaining in what sense "Christ suffered for you." The words "for you" could also be rendered as "in your place"—for that is what the Greek words *hyper hēmōn* indicate.
 - (b) The words "He himself bore our sins" actually allude to three verses in the Greek version of Isaiah 53, a chapter full of substitutionary language:
 - Isa 53:4: "This one carries our sins."
 - Isa 53:11: "He himself will bear their sins."
 - Isa 53:12: "He himself bore the sins of many."
 - ➔ The notion of "bearing sins" is a familiar one in the Old Testament where it generally carries the sense of "**to bear the consequences or punishment of those sins**" (e.g., Exod 28:28,42; Lev 5:1,17; 7:18; 19:8; 20:19,20; 22:9; 24:15; Num 5:31; 9:13; 14:33-35; 18:1,22; Ezek 18:20).
 - (2) The Purpose of Christ's Death (v 24b)
 - The purpose of Christ's substitutionary death is signalled by the word "that" or "so that" (*hina*): "**that** we might die to sin and live to righteousness."
 - Peter's "Gospel Grammar":
 - **The gospel grammar**, employed in the New Testament, and coming to expression in our lives, **always** operates according to **a basic rule**:
 - **Divine indicatives** (statements about what God has done, is doing, or will do for us)
 - ↓
 - always logically precede and ground**
 - **Divine imperatives** (statements about what we are to do in response).

- **Here in 1 Peter 2:24:**

- What God has done for us in Christ (**the divine indicative**): “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree”



provides the foundation for

- Our response of obedience (**the divine imperative**): “that we might die to sin and live to righteousness”

- (3) **The Result of Christ’s Death** (v 24c)

- The last part of verse 24 turns the focus onto the result of Christ’s vicarious suffering in the experience of those who have become believers (v 24cd): “By his wounds you have been healed.”
- Since bodily sickness was closely connected with sin in Old Testament thinking, healing becomes a vivid picture of God’s forgiveness and mercy.
- Thus, in a number of Old Testament passages, healing is closely associated with the forgiveness of sins (e.g., Deut. 30:3; 2 Chron. 7:14; Pss 6:2; 30:2; 41:4; 103:3; Isa. 6:10; 53:5).

- **Isaiah 53:**

But he was *pierced* for our transgressions; he was *crushed* for our *iniquities*; upon him was the *chastisement* that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

(2.3) Penal Substitution & Reconciliation (3:18)

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

(1 Peter 3:18)

- This verse emphasizes **TWO** things:

- (1) The Nature of Christ's Substitutionary Death (v 18a)

Observe **FOUR** things here:

- (a) The expression “suffered once for sins” is shorthand for “suffered once as a sacrifice for sins” or “suffered once as a sin offering” (cf. Heb 5:1,2; 7:27; 10:18,26; 1 John 2:2; 4:10)
- (b) The addition of the word “once” (hapax) emphasises the once-and-for-all, unique, perfect, and all-sufficient atoning sacrifice of Christ for sin (cf. Heb 9:26).
- (c) The words “the righteous for the unrighteous” parallels and expands on the words “suffered once as a sacrifice for sins.” The word “for” in the expression “the righteous for the unrighteous” indicates substitution: The righteous one in the place of unrighteousness ones.
- (d) The words “put to death in the flesh” are parallel to “suffer as a sacrifice for sins” and indicates the penal nature of Christ's suffering: The death of Christ is substitutionary because he died the death of the unrighteous (that is, the death the unrighteous should die because of their unrighteousness).

- (2) The Purpose of Christ's Substitutionary Death (v 18b)

- Grammatically, the purpose (*hina* in Greek) of Christ's atoning death is “that [*hina*] he might bring us to God.”
- Theologically, the purpose of Christ's sacrificial, substitutionary, and penal death was to reconcile us to God. Peter links our reconciliation directly with the death of Jesus.
- **Note:** Reconciliation does not ultimately consist in the removal of our subjective enmity, but rather the removal of the ground of our alienation, our sin, by the death of Christ “as a sacrifice for sin.”
- In his death Jesus pays the penalty for our sin, so that we can have “**a right-standing before God**” (status) and therefore “**a right-relationship with God**” (reconciliation).

3. The Victim is the Victor: Victory through Penal Substitution

At this juncture we want to note two things:

- (1) At the heart of Peter's theology of the atonement are two important themes:
 - (a) **Penal Substitution:** Jesus' death as a substitutionary sacrifice that pays the penalty, bears the consequences for our sin, which is death.
 - (b) **Cosmic Victory:** Jesus' death constitutes a victory over the cosmic powers mentioned in 1 Peter 3:22.
- (2) In Peter's theology of the atonement we can discern a *movement* from penal substitution to cosmic victory:

(1) **Penal Substitution** and Redemption (1:18-19)

(2) **Penal Substitution** and Forgiveness (2:24)

(3) **Penal Substitution** and Reconciliation: (3:18)



(4) **Victory over the Cosmic Powers** (3:19-22)

- **Question:** What is the relationship between the atonement as penal substitution and the atonement as cosmic victory?
 - **Answer:** The order in which Peter deals with these themes in his letter (1:18-19; 2:24; 3:18 → 3:19-22) suggests that Christ's victory over the cosmos powers *is grounded in or based on* his substitutionary atonement for sin.
- **A Canonical Inclusion: Genesis 3:15 → Revelation 12:1-17**

The head-crushing victory of the woman's seed over the Satan (Genesis 3:15) is attained by the blood of Jesus Christ (Rev 12:7-12), which was shed for the ransom of humanity from their sin and its consequences (see Revelation 1:5; 5:9).

- **Revelation 12:10-11:**

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

- **Three brief observations:**
 - **(1) Satan is “the accuser,” standing against sinners to accuse them day and night before God** (Rev 12:10; Zech 3:1).
 - As a courtroom prosecutor, he zealously declares “Guilty” and calls for the proper penalty for sin, which is death.
 - Satan’s accusatory power is derived from the fact that he appeals to God’s holy standard: *the law*.
 - **(2) Satan is “thrown down to earth”** (Rev 12:9,10).
 - **As a direct result of Christ’s death and resurrection**, Satan has both lost his place in the heavenly court and his power to accuse God’s people.
 - **G. K. Beale:**

Christ death and resurrection have resulted in Satan’s excommunication from heaven. ... Satan’s job had always been to accuse the saints (Job 1:6-11; 2:1-6; Zech 3:1-2), and from these texts it can be concluded that the devil was permitted by God to accuse his people of sin. ... The devil’s accusation is based on the correct presupposition that the penalty of sin necessitates a judgement of spiritual death. ...

Yet when Christ came, his death satisfied the anger of God against the sins of the faithful ... He was the spotless, substitutionary Lamb who was slain and who purchased for our God by means of his blood a redeemed people from throughout the earth (so 5:6-9).

The fact that the just judgment of God on human sin was visited on the sinless Christ has had the result that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1), and that no one can “bring a charge against God’s elect,” not even “angels, nor principalities ... nor powers” (Rom 8:33-34,38).
- **By satisfying God’s justice and forgiving sinners:**
 - Christ has rendered Satan’s accusation ineffective
 - Christ has *broken* the accusatory and condemnatory power that Satan held sway over Christians.

- **Colossians 2:13-15:**

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

→ Through the cross sins are forgiven (2:13)

→ By his death Christ disarmed Satan and triumphed over him (2:15)

- The crucifixion can be seen as a victory over Satan *because* in his vicarious penal suffering he bore the consequences of the believers' sin, thus cancelling their debt and *rendering as empty and baseless Satan's damning accusations against them*.

- **(3) Believers also overcome “the accuser” by the same means: The blood of Christ (Rev 12:11).**

Believers can be assured of their own victory over Satan because

- **(1)** of their belief in the triumph of the cross,
- **(2)** their union with the suffering yet victorious Messiah,
- **(3)** and their ongoing witness to that victory through their own suffering, perseverance, and gospel witness.

Conclusion: The Victim is the Victor

Christ has achieved a decisive victory over sin, death, and Satan *precisely by* embracing the role of the victim:

The substitutionary sacrifice that overcomes sin (the ground of our condemnation), death (the penalty for sin) and Satan (the accuser of sinners).

Believers can be assured of their own victory over sin, death, and Satan, because of:

- their union with the suffering yet victorious Christ, and
- their ongoing witness to that suffering and victory through their own suffering, perseverance, and gospel witness.

The Christian hope *is not* based on winning the culture war.

Rather, our hope is in the one who has defeated our true enemies—sin, death, and Satan—a victory that was brought about through Christ’s death on the cross as our substitute and representative.

According to Peter, a central-part of the church’s mission is to proclaim that it is the way of self-sacrificial love, not the way of violent force, that defeated the powers and that will ultimately win the day.

So how do we do this?

I want us to briefly consider three issues of social justice mentioned at the start of this talk: **Racial barriers, social barriers, and gender barriers.**

- **(1) Racial Barriers**

- **(2) Social Barriers**

- **(3) Gender Barriers**