

THE REFORMED THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

www.rtr.org.au

Vol. 71

APRIL, 2012

No. 1

The Image of God and the Cosmos: A Response to the Individualist Critique of Penal Substitutionary Atonement

1. Introduction

One of the dominant critiques of the penal substitution theory of atonement is that it errs in its individualistic focus.¹ Another way to state the problem is that the penal substitutionary theory of atonement has a principle at work in which salvation is an *anthropological* reality before it is a *cosmic* reality.² Is the penal substitution theory of atonement simply a way of expressing a Western individualistic worldview? Or, does it accurately reflect the emphasis of the Bible? Such a sweeping question

¹ The term 'penal' refers to the retributive nature of the suffering and death of Jesus and the term 'substitution' refers to this penalty being 'on behalf of others and not on his own behalf'. I. H. Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement: Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity* (London: Paternoster, 2007), 3, also 27, 33.

² Greg Boyd argues that only the Christus Victor view adequately expresses the truth that 'salvation' is a 'cosmic reality before it is an anthropological reality' in 'Christus Victor View' in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, eds. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 35. We see the validity of some aspects of the Christus Victor theory of atonement but we view them as subsidiary to the dominant model of penal substitution.

cannot be answered in a short study. However, a key fact has been ignored by those who wish to defend the penal substitution view of atonement against those who charge it with the fault of being individualistic. In this study, I wish to argue that a canonically robust doctrine of the image of God (*imago Dei*) will support the penal substitution view of atonement by correctly emphasizing ‘salvation’ as an individual *and* cosmic event. We may summarize the thesis this way: *because God made humankind in his image, penal substitutionary atonement has cosmic significance.*

The literature on the atonement is practically endless and requires some parameters. First, this article interacts with the controversy about the nature of the atonement that has developed within broadly evangelical circles that generally fall within the past decade (2000-2010). Second, while trying to interact with the ‘cutting edge’ of scholarship, we have also sought to engage classic works that have had an enduring impact. Our study begins by examining how critiques of penal substitutionary atonement have focused on the intersection between the atonement and the cosmos.

2. The Individualistic Critique

Several scholars have raised the individualistic critique of penal substitutionary atonement. It will be helpful to present their views, questions, and critiques with accuracy and fairness before presenting a thesis that reinforces penal substitutionary atonement.

This critique has also been addressed in a multi-author volume entitled *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (2007). This volume summarizes the critique as: ‘Penal substitution fails to address the issues of political and social sin and cosmic evil.’³ They restate the critique that they detect in several theologians as: ‘penal substitution does not provide for the redemption of the whole cosmos from its fallen state.’⁴

The volume *Pierced for Our Transgressions* by Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach

³ Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Nottingham: InterVarsity, 2007), 307.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 308.

responds to this critique by briefly expositing Romans 8:21 and Galatians 3:13 in order to further the argument that ‘the solution to sin and guilt in individual lives’ is the ‘means by which the whole cosmos will one day be transformed.’⁵ In addition, this volume correctly maintains that social and structural sin is dealt with through the root of sin in individuals. Because *Pierced for Our Transgressions* is so comprehensive, it lacks depth in some areas. This study seeks to do two things. First, it will expand the literature review and carefully document the individualistic critique. Second, it will develop the theological and biblical rationale behind the thesis that the doctrine of *imago Dei* provides penal substitutionary atonement with cosmic significance – an idea only hinted at by Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach.

2.1 Joel B. Green

Joel Green’s critique of penal substitutionary atonement is expansive. One important area that he regularly focuses on is his perception that penal substitutionary atonement is a Western construct that is individualistic and indeed is the product of Cartesian occupation with the self.⁶ What Green does is simply raise a question in the midst of response to Tom Schreiner’s model of penal substitutionary atonement in the book *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* (2006). Green first poses an extended (rhetorical?) question to Tom Schreiner: ‘Focused as it is on the individual, on forensic judgment and on the moment of justification, how can this model keep from undermining any emphasis on salvation as transformation and from obscuring the social and cosmological dimensions of salvation?’⁷ Hidden in this long quotation is the individualistic critique that states that penal substitutionary atonement *obscures the cosmological dimensions of salvation*.

Green also states, ‘A faith, evangelical or otherwise, that does not inherently address the cosmos or that does not promote human

⁵ Ibid., 312.

⁶ Joel Green, ‘Must We Imagine the Atonement in Penal Substitutionary Terms?’ in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement* eds. Derek Tidball, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 164-5.

⁷ Joel Green, ‘Kaleidoscopic Response to the Penal Substitution View’ in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, 114.

transformation in all of its fullness has little by what of heart or soul'.⁸ Here, Green is restating his question in the form of a concern: penal substitutionary atonement *does not address the cosmos*.

Whether these are simply questions is not the concern of our study. What we have in Green's response to Schreiner are two distinct problems for penal substitutionary atonement. The first problem is that cosmic issues may indeed be present but they are obscured. Perhaps this is the problem of clarity or priority. Secondly, Green raises the concern that cosmic dimensions of salvation are not addressed at all. Ultimately, Green finds that there is a significant problem with viewing the death of Jesus as 'best understood in penal categories and soteriology in forensic terms focused on the status of the individual before God'.⁹ Lastly, Green proposes that there is no Scriptural evidence that penal is the foundational theme for the atonement. According to Green, to focus on the forensic over the multi-hued images of the work of Christ is in its finality too thin a description.¹⁰

2.2 Mark D. Baker

Mark Baker is treated separately in this review section although he co-wrote his major contribution to atonement theology with Joel Green as *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (2000). In the aforementioned book, Baker and Green clearly articulate a criticism of penal substitutionary atonement that we have deemed the 'individualistic critique'. Baker and Green write that penal substitutionary atonement places its 'emphasis on autonomous individualism characteristic of so much of the modern middle class in the West'.¹¹ They also claim that penal substitution becomes a source of unjust thinking that seeks to 'locate responsibility

⁸ Ibid., 114-5.

⁹ Green, 'Must We Imagine the Atonement in Penal Substitutionary Terms?' 165.

¹⁰ Green, 'Kaleidoscopic View' in *The Nature of the Atonement*, 170-171.

¹¹ Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity: 2000), 213. This line of argumentation is addressed briefly by Garry Williams in 'Penal Substitution: A Response to Recent Criticisms,' in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement*, 181-3.

(or fault or blame) primarily at the level of the individual'.¹²

Baker has maintained this line of thinking apart from his co-written work with Green. In his chapter entitled 'Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross' Baker writes, 'What happened on the cross was of universal significance—in the language of the day, for Jew and Gentiles, for slave and free, for male and female (Gal. 3:28)'.¹³ What is surprising about this statement is his immediate movement from the cosmos to humankind. In spite of this momentary lapse in consistency, Baker uses a quote from an interview to drive home the point that 'Western theology, with its preference for personal forgiveness' is problematic.¹⁴

In sum, the individualistic critique in Baker's thought is that penal substitutionary atonement is wrong in the focus that application of the cross is made to individuals for individual sin. He wants his readers to look 'beyond penal satisfaction theory as the only explanation of the atonement'.¹⁵

2.3 Greg Boyd

Greg Boyd suggests that the best model of the atonement is one of cosmic warfare wherein Christ is victorious over his opponent and god of this world, Satan (*Christus victor*). Stated positively, Boyd wants to centralise the cosmic dimensions of the atonement. He does not deny that there are personal and anthropological benefits that flow from the atonement. The cosmic dimension is foundational and central so that other benefits are subsumed underneath it. Boyd argues that the term 'salvation' in the New Testament is 'a cosmic reality before it is an anthropological reality, and it is the latter because it is the former'.¹⁶

Boyd provides a consistent and rigorous critique of penal

¹² Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 25.

¹³ Mark D. Baker, 'Contextualizing the Scandal of the Cross' in *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of the Atonement*, ed. Mark D. Baker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 17-8.

¹⁴ Mark D. Baker, 'Embracing a Wider Cross: Contextualizing the Atonement' in *Out of the Strange Silence: The Challenge of Being Christian in the 21st Century*, ed. Brad Thiessen (Fresno, CA: Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 2005), 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁶ Boyd, 'Christus Victor View' in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, 33.

substitutionary atonement by insisting that it is individualistic to a fault. Whether the benefits of the atonement are personal healing or personal satisfaction of God's wrath, his critique is consistent. Boyd explains: 'We significantly weaken and distort the biblical depiction of Christ's accomplishment if we centralize the anthropological benefit instead of the cosmic foundation of these benefits'.¹⁷ He contends that the *Christus victor* model, then, judiciously expels the notion of individual transference of guilt. The cosmic model fittingly puts forth the proposal that Jesus as our representative bore our sin and guilt as God the Father abdicated his Son to rebellious cosmic powers. The wrath of God is not for individual sins legally transferred to Christ, but expressed via abandonment to inimical agents which positively demonstrates the power and righteousness of God evinced in both the demonstration of his wrath and the vanquishing of evil.

2.4 Martin Davie

Martin Davie has connections to both the Quakers and the Church of England.¹⁸ Davie's critique of penal substitutionary atonement came about from his Tyndale Fellowship Doctrine Lecture entitled: 'Dead to Sin and Alive to God' that was subsequently published in the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*.¹⁹ For our purposes, it is significant that Davie argues that now is 'the beginning of a cosmic regeneration that will be fully completed at the end of time'.²⁰ This cosmic regeneration is based on 're-creative rather than a retributionist view of punishment'.²¹ In other words, Davie rejects penal substitution because he views restoration and

¹⁷ Greg Boyd, 'Christus Victor Response to the Healing View' in *The Nature of the Atonement*, 145.

¹⁸ Davie presents a brief defense of 'Christian orthodoxy' in which he states: 'as the eternal Son of God He is able to overcome the power of sin and death through His cross and the resurrection.' However, this statement is left unexplained and undeveloped. Martin Davie, 'Some Reflections on an Ecumenical Pilgrimage' in *The Creation of Quaker Theory: Insider Perspectives* ed. Ben Pink-Dandelion, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 198.

¹⁹ Martin Davie, 'Dead to Sin and Alive to God,' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 19 (2001), 158-194.

²⁰ Davie, *ibid.*, 187.

²¹ Davie, *ibid.*, 173.

re-creation (*shalom*?) as mutually exclusive of Jesus satisfying the Father's wrath. Davie's article was critiqued by supporters of penal substitution in *Pierced for Our Transgressions*.²² The answer to Davie's objection focuses on the failure of conservative evangelicals to engage with social issues. With respect to structural sin, the response focuses on individuals as the 'root problem'. There is also a brief response to Davie in the form of an exposition of the frustration of creation in Rom 8:20.²³ For all of the breadth in their response, Jeffrey, Ovey, and Sach only briefly connect their discussion with Genesis 3.

2.5 Summary

Let us synthesise the individualist critique of penal substitutionary atonement by taking into consideration the authors we have just analysed.²⁴ The individualist critique claims that the cross of Christ *accomplished* a redemption that is cosmic in scope and this redemption must be *applied* to the whole cosmos. Negatively, penal substitutionary atonement makes the cross of Christ accomplish a redemption that is anthropocentric, thus limiting the accomplishment and application of the cross.

3. The Image of God as Partial Solution to the Individualist Critique

Having reviewed the individualist critique of penal substitutionary atonement, we can see that several scholars have raised an important question. Does a model of the atonement that emphasises the individual obscure or deny the cosmic scope of the cross? We do not intend to address this question in its entirety but we simply present a partial

²² Jeffery, Ovey, and Sachs, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 309.

²³ *Ibid.*, 311.

²⁴ This is similar to, but different in emphasis from the 'exclusive re-creation argument'. Ovey notes the exclusive re-creation argument focuses on God's overall goal of a new heaven and a new earth and the supposed incompatibility of this with legal and penal views of the atonement. Michael Ovey, 'The Cross, Creation and the Human Predicament' in *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today*, ed. David Peterson (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2001), 104.

solution that supports the centrality and foundational role of penal substitutionary atonement.

We cannot abstract the atonement from the historical reality of Adam any more than we can abstract the cross from the narrative of Israel and Jesus' life.²⁵ This is simply an extrapolation of Simon Gathercole's comment that the 'basis of substitution should, in my view, begin with Genesis 1—3'.²⁶ A canonical and synthetic approach to the atonement that seeks to reconcile all of the diverse voices in Scripture must take into account the over-arching meta-narrative of Scripture. The simplest form of this storyline includes the following: (1) creation, (2) the Fall, (3) redemption, and (4) consummation.

Creation and Atonement

Because God made Adam in his image, Adam and the 'kind' that he represents has a higher value and higher rank of importance than anything else in the cosmos. A canonical theology of the atonement must start with Genesis 1. However, we must begin with a clear definition of our terms as the phraseology 'image of God' or 'made in his image' has a lengthy history of debate. The term 'image of God' refers to the special quality of humankind – both male and female.²⁷ Some suggest that the Hebrew of Genesis 1 can justify certain parallels between Yhwh's creative power

²⁵ On the historical reality and theological significance of Adam see Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 23; C. John Collins, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), passim.

²⁶ Simon Gathercole, 'The Cross and Substitutionary Atonement' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 21:2 (2003), 160. This stands in contrast with H. D. McDonald who interacts sparingly with Gen 2:17, but does not seriously engage Genesis 1—3 in *New Testament Concept of Atonement: The Gospel of the Calvary Event* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1994), passim.

²⁷ For a short discussion on the importance of gender see Stephen R. Holmes, 'Image of God' in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, eds. Kevin Vanhoozer, et al (London: SPCK; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 319. The image of God involves both material qualities and relational qualities. For a survey of these two dimensions see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 69-71.

and human creative efforts.²⁸ Humans alone are moral agents who have exclusive privileges, rights, and characteristics.²⁹ In the narrative of Gen 1:26-28, God gives special qualities to humankind that relate to their special task of dominion.

The task of being fruitful, having dominion, subduing the earth is based directly on the special qualities of being made in the image of God. The task itself is ‘cosmic’ in scope: ‘And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth”’ (ESV). The taming of ‘every kind of beast’ on the whole earth by humanity is the basis of the irony of not being able to tame the tongue in James 3:7. The task of exercising dominion over creation is integral to the *imago Dei* but does not mean that this task is based on self-sufficiency.³⁰

The image of God in the Old Testament is largely based on Genesis 1:26-28, 5:1, and 9:6. Others have used Psalm 8:4-6 to acknowledge humanity’s special status of having been relegated dominion over creation. The early Fathers (e.g., Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen) distinguished between דְּמוּת (*d’mût*) ‘likeness’ and צֶלֶם (*tsélem*) ‘image’. Modern exegetes, however, have advocated parity arguing from Hebraic parallelism. For our purpose, it is important to note that one of the key facets to properly executing dominion is the need of individual atonement. To explain further, in the New Testament the image of God is portrayed in passages such as 1 Corinthians 11:7, where Paul employs the noun εἰκών, *eikôn*, ‘image’, and James 3:9 where he speaks of ὁμοίωσις, *homoiôsis*, ‘likeness’.

Inseparably related is the New Testament witness of Christ as the

²⁸ Note the word study of צֶלֶם in Karl Möller, ‘Images of God and Creation in Genesis 1-2’, in *A God of Faithfulness: Essays in Honour of J. Gordon McConville on His 60th Birthday*, eds. Jamie A. Grant, et al (LHB/OTS 538; New York/London: T. & T. Clark, 2011), 3-39, esp. 8-13.

²⁹ For a dissenting opinion see Oliver Putz, ‘Social Apes in God’s Image: Moral Apes, Human Uniqueness, and the Image of God’, *Zygon* 44:3 (2009), 613-24.

³⁰ The image of God can be ‘obscured by depravity in the form of foolish self-determination’ according to James S. Reitman, ‘God’s “Eye” for the *Imago Dei*: Wise Advocacy Amid Disillusionment in Job and Ecclesiastes’, *TrinJ* 31NS (2010), 125.

ultimate image bearer depicted in 2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15, Hebrews 1:3, and 2:6-9. By reason, then, of the canonical witness that humanity cannot fittingly bear God's image without conformity to the image of Christ (cf. Rom 8:29, 1 Cor 15:49, Eph 4:22-24, Phil 3:21, and Col 3:10) the cosmic aspect of humanity ruling over the created order cannot bypass the Pauline emphasis on being renewed in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness which is intimately connected to individual atonement (penal substitution).

This unique status given to humankind is critical for our argument because it makes the cross of Christ a necessity. Views that dismiss the penal nature of the cross do not give enough weight to the image of God stamped on each and every person. In other words, because humankind is made in the image of God, there is no other way to save guilty sinners than to have a substitute pay the penalty of death. Perhaps we might say that the atonement has cosmic implications *through* its application to individual sinners who are made in the image of God. In sum, we might restate that: because God made Adam in his image, Adam and his kind are individually of cosmic and infinite value.

The Fall and Atonement

Because God made Adam in his image, only penal substitutionary atonement adequately deals with the unique ability of Adam and his kind to anger God. The narrative of Genesis directs constructs a parent-child relationship between YHWH and Adam.³¹ Only Adam and his kind (angels excepted) are able to sin and bring God's wrath upon them. Animals are not able to sin nor are they subject to damnation. Many theories of the atonement have yet to take the over-arching narrative of Scripture with any seriousness. When narrative is addressed, the storyline simply does not go back far enough. We may only hypothesize but the narrative flow of Genesis 1-2 suggests that if Adam was faithful to YHWH, then Satan would not have the power he does today. I do not mean to suggest that the cross was never a part of God's sovereign plan, only that Adam's ability

³¹ C. L. Crouch, 'Genesis 1:26-7 as a Statement of Humanity's Divine Parentage,' *Journal of Theological Studies* 61:1 (2010), 1-15; 'Adam' in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, eds. Leland Ryken, et al (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 9-14, esp. 9.

was real and unique. The application of the cross to Adam and his kind has priority because Adam is the means by which sin and Satan came to have dominion over the earth.

God is the context for understanding the soteriological significance of the cross. That is to say, God himself is the hermeneutical key that unlocks the significance of what it means for us to be saved from his wrath for our sins. That fact that God is love and holy sets the context for understanding the cross. Boyd argues that the subjective significance of the cross (what is most important to us) is only understood in the 'context of the cosmic significance of Christ's victory'.³² We do not wish to deny that the cosmic significance includes victory over Satan and the bondage found under his rule. Yet, the cosmic significance of the atonement is primarily about God and his wrath against sin.

Anselm's famous remark about the atonement was, 'Have you considered how great is the weight of sin?' (*Cur Deus Homo* 1.21). In this section, we raised an equally important issue: Have you considered how great is the *kind* of the one who sinned? Or, have you considered how great is the one in whose image humans are made? Adam and his kind (all those made in the image of God) hold a great and unique place in the schema of all the cosmos. Humankind has a certain cosmic significance because of the one whose image they reflect. Likewise, to reduce the significance of the individual is to minimise the significance of the one whose image they reflect. No other kind could incur God's wrath and no other race of beings could bring sin and death into the world.

Redemption and Atonement

Because God made Adam in his image, both Adam and the Last Adam serve as a federal head or representative of the entire human race. In a short span, it is difficult to capture the complexity of the atonement and narratives of Adam, Israel, and Jesus. The concern here is to present a targeted and precise statement about the cosmic significance of the atonement. The federal nature of Adam and of Jesus is the foundation for a position that eschews a false dichotomy between individual sin and cosmological significance. Let us recall that the individualist critique of penal substitution, which states that sin 'can never be understood

³² Boyd, 'Christus Victor View' in *The Nature of the Atonement*, 33.

as something private or individualistic, for it always manifests itself in relation to others and to the cosmos.³³ By viewing Adam as representative of his kind (humanity), his own individual sin has repercussions for the whole. Howard Marshall clearly articulates this as: 'The death is the death of one who is, at one and the same time, the Son of God and the sinless human being, the second Adam.'³⁴ The doctrine of original sin allows us to see how Jesus' own death as an individual could have repercussions for the whole human race and indeed, the cosmos.

As we have observed, one of the leading criticisms of penal substitution is the charge that forensic and individual dimensions are modern western impositions. A key Pauline text that answers this charge is Romans 5:12-19. John Murray, in his *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, accentuates the syntactical construction καὶ οὕτως highlighting the representative analogy between Adam and Christ.³⁵ The pericope opens with a comparison signalled by the construction best translated 'and so' or 'in like manner,' and consequently signals its closure in verses 18 and 19 with the inverse construction καὶ οὕτως, 'consequently then'.³⁶

In short, the Pauline syntax brings to the foreground in verse 12 the death that came upon all on account of Adam's sin, and its inverse in verses 18 and 19 highlights the parallel that on account of the righteous act of Christ, his obedience will 'make' many righteous (κατασταθήσονται). Therefore, the οὕτως καὶ and its inverse, along with the parallel use of καθίστημι in verse 19, have strong legal and individual inferences for our renewal in the image of God. Jesus as our representative has done away with the plaguing issue of original sin imputed to us that in turn has significance for the cosmos.

Arguments against penal substitutionary atonement are plagued with false dichotomies. Graham Cole in his *God The Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom* judiciously notes that the classic defenders of the penal view (e.g., Calvin) did not exclude the Christus Victor motif. Penal substitution, in other words, is not incompatible with the other

³³ Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 56.

³⁴ Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement*, 9.

³⁵ John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1959).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

atonement models. Rather, penal substitution highlights God's holy hatred of sin (Rom 6:23). There is a moral ground to Jesus' atoning sacrifice.³⁷ The critical matter is the dominance and priority given to the aspects of the atonement. The problem of false dichotomies is particularly true of the individualist critique. The individualist critique asserts that Paul's 'apocalyptic horizon' merges the horizon of the cross with the horizon of the cosmos *rather* than the individual.³⁸ Green and Baker point to three Pauline textual units in defense of this strict dichotomy: 2 Corinthians 5:17, Colossians 1:15-20, and Galatians 6:15.³⁹ We do not have the space for an extended exegesis of each textual unit. However, a quick parsing of Paul's logic of the cross will demonstrate that there is no dichotomy between the individual and the cosmos.

2 Corinthians

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Green and Baker argue that the identity of the 'new creation' (καινὴ κτίσις) is not an individual oriented reality. They highlight the differences between Bible translations.⁴⁰ The NIV and NASB stress that the 'new creation' is identified with the person whereas the NRSV and NCV allow for a broader understanding of what the 'new creation' entails. What Green and Baker seem to overlook is that all these versions begin with an identical protasis or antecedent: 'if anyone is in Christ...'. In the ESV, Paul first speaks to persons (if *anyone* is in Christ...); then cosmic dimensions are mentioned: 'The old has passed away; behold, the new has come'.

It is undeniable that Paul's apocalyptic horizon first touches the individual as they are united to Christ. Moreover, the larger textual unit

³⁷ Graham A Cole, *God the Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom* (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2009), 140.

³⁸ Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 62. The term 'apocalyptic horizon' is nebulous and is used in a variety of contexts that are related to eschatology. Green and Baker appear to use the term 'apocalyptic horizon' to refer to the merging of past salvation-historical events with future events that will fully reveal God's plan for eternity.

³⁹ Green, 'Must We Imagine the Atonement in Penal Substitutionary Terms?', 166; Joel B. Green, 'Death of Christ,' *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, et al., (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 205.

⁴⁰ Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 62.

cites God's rationale for crushing his Son in 2 Corinthians 5:21 'For our sake he made him to be sin...' ⁴¹ By stating that the atonement is for individuals does not negate cosmic implications. Rather, Paul is viewing individuals as agents of cosmic change so that they are ambassadors whom God is speaking through (2 Cor 5:20). In sum, Paul's eschatological horizon connects the cross of Christ with the cosmos for individuals who are in union with Christ by faith.

Galatians

The concept of the 'new creation' (καινὴ κτίσις) in Galatians has also been challenged by the individualist critique. Green and Baker argue that the 'new creation' in Galatians 6:15 is emphatically not about Western individualistic soteriology that is consumed with the salvation of unrighteous sinners from the wrath of God. Rather, the 'new creation' is Galatians 6:15, is about the restoration of the cosmos. This reading misses the flow of Paul's rhetoric which is intended to discredit 'circumcision' or 'uncircumcision'. The whole context is about individuals who rely on the flesh rather than on Christ-faith for justification.

Paul's stigmata (stigma in the singular) appear most clearly in Galatians 6:17 with the puzzling concluding statement: 'From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus'. This rhetorical statement is aimed at the Judaisers who were causing trouble in the church by requiring Christian converts to keep the Law of Moses through circumcision for salvation. The Judaisers are interested in a physical identity marker in circumcision so Paul makes this ironic and sarcastic comment: 'for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus'. This may be a veiled reference to Paul's awareness that Jesus proved his identity to Thomas by showing him the marks in his hands and side (cf. Jn 20:27).

This reference to bearing 'the marks of Jesus' most likely refers to the fact that Paul had suffered physically as he preached the gospel on his missionary trips. This comment was likely tongue-in-cheek because Paul's opponents were overly interested in the physical marker of circumcision.

⁴¹ John R. DeWitt argues that in 2 Cor 5:21 'a legal exchange is in view. Christ, who knew no sin, is legally constituted to be sin by God the Father', in 'The Nature of the Atonement: Reconciliation' in *Atonement*, ed. Gabriel N. E. Fluhner, (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 20.

There may also be Hellenistic implications of Paul's markings. In the Greco-Roman world of the first century, a stigma or brand was used to mark out a slave's relationship to a master. The stigma proved ownership and loyalty. Paul is not arguing that all Christians should have physical marks but that he himself has irrefutable evidence for these Judaisers that he belongs to God. Returning to the point — Paul's interest in the new creation is one of internal change through faith rather than external change in the flesh.⁴² Even if the passage is translated, 'if anyone is in Christ, there is a whole new act of creation,' as Ben Witherington III notes, there is still a strong element of individualism.⁴³ Paul is simply denying that the Judaisers can provide internal change through the law.

Colossians

Last, we turn to examine the nature of the connections in Paul's apocalyptic horizon in Colossians. The text that supposedly undermines the satisfaction of God's wrath and its application to the individual is Colossians 1:15-20. Boyd succinctly argues: 'the *cosmic* significance of Christ's word is ontologically more fundamental than its *soteriological* significance.'⁴⁴ Boyd argues that Paul first uses the textual unit of Colossians 1:15-20 to establish the cosmic significance. Only then does he move on to the personal application (soteriology) in Colossians 1:21-22. The key question is: does the flow of Paul's argumentation in Colossians truly privilege the cosmos over the personal application of the atonement?

The answer to this key question about the flow of Paul's argument simply lies in the text. First, we turn to the statement prior to the text

⁴² Those who find that the 'new creation' in Gal 6:15 refers primarily to individuals include J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (reprint; London: Macmillan and Co., 1874), 224; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 273; Bruce Longenecker, *Galatians* (Word Biblical Commentary 41; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 296.

⁴³ For a discussion of the possibility that the 'cosmos' motif from Isa 65:17-25 is the background, see Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 451.

⁴⁴ Boyd, 'Christus Victor View,' in *The Nature of the Atonement*, 33 (the emphasis is his).

of Colossians 1:15-20. In Colossians 1:13-14 Paul makes the statement: 'He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins' (ESV). Here is a clear connection between the legitimate battle between Jesus and Satan. Jesus' victory entails a transfer of domains. But the reference to the 'Son' cannot be separated from the death of Jesus. Scot McKnight argues thus: 'Jesus' cosmic death provides forgiveness of sins as a redemption' in this text.⁴⁵ The personal forgiveness of sins or the application of the atonement stands in the foreground of the flow of Paul's argument.

If we expand the textual unit that Green mentions to Colossians 1:15-23, we may easily observe again how the flow of the argument moves from personal soteriology to the cosmos. In Colossians 1:23 it is first the 'gospel that you heard' that Paul sets in relation the cosmos: 'which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven'. The gospel of the personal forgiveness of sins is pictured as a message for the whole universe because of the cosmic scope of what has been accomplished by the Son satisfying the wrath of the Father and transferring sinners out of the realm of Satan (death and sin).

Here in Colossians 1, one must question whether Paul is truly trumping cosmic redemption over the anthropological, or if he is speaking about the *various* aspects of Christ's atoning work. Cole aptly notes the breathtaking scope of reconciliation indicated by τὰ (*ta*) in verse 20, for 'all things,' both in heaven and earth, will know the beauty of redemption enacted by Christ's sacrifice.⁴⁶ Reconciliation of 'all things,' however, cannot be divorced from the participial phrase εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ, 'making peace through the blood of his cross.' This participial phrase flows right into verses 21-23 which speak of humanity's redemption. Paul, therefore, does not separate individual atonement and Jesus' victory over cosmic powers. His victory is triumphal in a complete manner. Boyd seems to think that the ordering of Paul's argument gives credence to elevating cosmic triumph over individual atonement, but the thrust of Paul's argument does not support such

⁴⁵ Scot McKnight, *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, The Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005), 346.

⁴⁶ Cole, *The Peacemaker*, 182.

a view. Therefore, Cole is correct when he states that ‘Christus Victor needs the explanatory power of substitutionary atonement.’⁴⁷

Whereas Boyd argues, ‘We are reconciled because the cosmos has been reconciled’,⁴⁸ one might be tempted to state the opposite: the cosmos is reconciled because we have been reconciled. The latter statement would only suffice it if was clear that this personal redemption was first established through Jesus, the Last Adam, the God-man, and the Creator of the cosmos. Jesus is the first context in which the cross should be understood. Any cosmic significance of the cross flows from Jesus’ ontology — he is the substitute that provides redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

Summary

Many debates about the atonement seem to hinge on where one places emphasis with respect to the presence of large Scriptural patterns versus significant individual textual units. In the course of arguing that penal substitutionary atonement is too individualistic, some have appealed to ‘Paul’s apocalyptic horizon’ of redemption. An examination of these three biblical texts demonstrates that critiques of penal substitution rest on a false dichotomy. In each of these texts, the benefits of the atonement are applied to humankind (the individual) before the rest of the cosmos.⁴⁹ Because Jesus is the Creator and the Last Adam who represented humanity, we might also state that the cosmic victory was achieved *through* an individual. Because Jesus cannot be the ‘Christ’ without simultaneously being the Last Adam, the scope of Paul’s ‘new creation’ is inclusive of the individual Adam, the individual Jesus, and those individuals in union with Christ through Adam. We do not have to choose between individuals and the cosmos. Paul is concerned with

⁴⁷ Ibid., 184.

⁴⁸ Boyd, ‘Christus Victor View,’ in *The Nature of the Atonement*, 33.

⁴⁹ The source of Paul’s conception of the atonement lies in the Old Testament (Jewish scriptures) and the works of Jesus. Martin Hengel contends that the disciples’ comprehension transcended Greek and Jewish conceptions finding its source in Isaiah 53 and in Jesus’ own proclamation of his death at the last supper (Mk 14:25; 1 Cor 11:26) in *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 33-75.

both.⁵⁰ With respect to Paul, a quick and broad theological examination of his apocalyptic horizon reveals that there is little basis for the charge that interest in individual salvation is a product of Western obsession with the self.

Consummation and Atonement

Because God made Adam in his image, the Last Adam is able to serve as the God-man to whom the whole cosmos will be subjected. Even though angels have more glory and honour than humanity, they are not made in the image of God in the same way that humankind is. Angels are of a different *kind*. Jesus, in spite of his divinity, stoops down to take on a human nature to redeem his people. In taking on humanity, Jesus becomes the Last Adam or Second Adam. The very Creator of the cosmos is now forever united with a human nature. The whole biblical narrative points to the cosmic significance of one person — Jesus. His death and resurrection insures that he is the ‘firstfruits’ (1 Cor 15:23) of the family who will fulfill the task of dominion over all the cosmos.⁵¹ Those who are united with Jesus by faith becomes co-heirs with Jesus and share in his rule.

The critique as posed by Green, Baker, Boyd, et al, does not seem to take into account the cosmic significance of the God-man Jesus. Now we do not see Jesus’ reign in its fulness (Heb 2:8). We do not currently see how everything is in subjection to Christ. However, all of the cosmos will one day be subject to him in a clear and obvious manner. Individual salvation for humankind flows from the atonement and unites sinners with Christ. The objective satisfaction of the Father’s wrath allows sinners to have their sins completely paid for. This allows sinners to stand in union with the Last Adam. To be in union with Christ is to be in union

⁵⁰ Peter K. Stevenson and Stephen I. Wright deny that the tension between the cosmic and individualistic purpose of the cross can be resolved by focusing on humanity alone. Instead of resolving the tension, they prefer to maintain it. The reason for this is that Paul has the ‘end’ in sight; see *Preaching the Atonement* (Louisville: WJKP, 2009), 194 n.8. This article seeks to develop that argument by connecting the consummation with the atonement.

⁵¹ Ovey points out that ‘Genesis 1:28 envisages a human community exercising dominion’ in ‘The Cross, Creation and the Human Predicament,’ 124.

with the cosmic ruler himself.

The judgment of humankind before the great white throne (Rev 20:11-15) demonstrates the cosmic significance of individuals who are made in the image of God, the creator and king. In the imagery of the great white throne judgment, both 'earth and sky' fly away from the presence of the one seated on the throne. Nothing else in creation has God's attention. Nothing else but those who are made in God's image appear before the throne. Humankind is on center stage and the 'dead are judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done' (Rev 20:13). Whatever structural and institutional sin existed before, it is individuals who face the judgment seat. It is only *after* the great white throne judgment of Adam's kind that the one on the throne says of the cosmos: 'Behold I am making all things new' (Rev 21:5). This is significant because it supports the argument that the judgment of humankind takes precedence and priority in all of the cosmos. The consummation and the judgment of all mankind will end the present era of in which this participation has been inaugurated. After the final judgment, it will be forever clear who is participating as a co-heir with Christ in his cosmic reign.

The cosmic reign of Jesus, the Last Adam, is one of eternal life. The nature of Jesus' cosmic reign consists of a reversal of the wages of sin, which is death (Rom 6:23). Whereas sin brings about God's wrath and perfect justice, a sinner can participate in Jesus' eternal life-giving reign through the perfect mercies of the cross and resurrection. The consummation is determinedly individualistic and yet decisively cosmic in scope.

Summary

Because God made Adam in his image, the accomplishment and application of the cross has God at the centre. By fully integrating the theology of Genesis 1-3 into our model of atonement, we will be able to clearly link the subjective (application) side of the atonement with the objective (accomplishment) side of the atonement. Because humanity is made in the image of God, God remains the locus of the atonement regardless of whether one begins with application or accomplishment. If

one begins with accomplishment, God remains at the center because the Father's wrath is satisfied and God is able to remain just even as he is the justifier of the unrighteous (Rom 3:26). If one begins with application, God remains at the center because the object of his wrath and mercy is made in his image. Even the sacrifice used to appease the Father's wrath was nothing less than a perfect substitute who is the Last Adam.

4. Conclusion

The individualist critique raises important hermeneutical questions regarding the Christian reading of Scripture. Is penal substitution, then, a product of imposing a strand of Christian tradition (e.g., Reformed orthodoxy) onto the Biblical text, or, an inheritance of a feudal reading of Scripture allegedly done by Anselm?⁵² Have we imposed a Western, Cartesian model of the self into the accomplishment and application of the cross? This study suggests that revisiting the *imago Dei* will help evangelical theology move forward beyond this theological impasse.

Even the most orthodox and conservative arguments for penal substitutionary atonement create a deep divide between anthropology and theology-proper.⁵³ We must firmly hold to the *imago Dei* (Gen 1:27) and the otherness of God (Num 23:19). In this study, we have suggested that the tension has been lost in the debate over the nature of the atonement. The doctrine of the *imago Dei* and the text of Genesis 1-3 must be heard in our debates. We must do this while also holding fast to the theologically significant narratives of Adam, Israel, and Jesus. And of Jesus we must acknowledge that Jesus is the Last Adam. Humans are not God but we are indeed made in his image. No one is more significant or cosmic in scope than God. Here we have turned the problem on its head. Whether one begins with anthropology or theology-proper, the accomplishment and application of the atonement has the glory of God as its end.

DAVID H. WENKEL AND JOHN B. SONG

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

⁵² Green, 'Kaleidoscope Response' in *The Nature of the Atonement*, 111; Green, 'Kaleidoscopic View' in *The Nature of the Atonement*, 170.

⁵³ Schreiner, 'Penal Substitution View,' 88.