

Revisiting Penal Substitution

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*Jesus paid it all,
all to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.¹*

Evangelicals, in their preaching as well as their worship, have recognized that the cross of Christ is central to the life of the believer, as evidenced by the refrain from the popular hymn above. We, together with all Christians, find great significance in the cross of Christ. However, evangelicals almost unanimously interpret the cross in terms of what has come to be known as the *penal substitution* theory of the atonement. The basic understanding of this view of the atonement is that we are all under obligation to obey God. However, our disobedience to God has placed us under his condemnation. Since “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), we have all earned death as a consequence of our sins. Therefore, we owe God the debt of our very own lives. When Jesus died on the cross for sinners, he was paying the debt that we owed God so that we would not have to pay with our own lives. In other words, Jesus *substituted* his life for ours so that we need not die eternal death in hell for our own sins.

There is yet another important aspect of the penal substitution view in addition to the idea of substitution. This view of the atonement stresses the fact that our sin has kindled God’s wrath

¹“Jesus Paid it All,” refrain. Words by Elvina M. Hall, 1865.

against us. As a righteous God, God rightly declares that sin is inherently deserving of punishment. Were God not to punish our sins, this would be a tacit admission that his previous judgment that our sin deserves punishment is itself an unjust judgment. However, since there is no injustice in God (Rom. 9:14), it follows that our sins must be punished. Therefore, Jesus suffered the wrath of God in our stead when God punished him in our place on the cross. The idea that Jesus suffered the wrath of God in our place can readily be seen in the words of the hymn “Alas, and did my Savior Bleed”

*Thy body slain, sweet Jesus, Thine—
And bathed in its own blood—
While the firm mark of wrath divine,
His Soul in anguish stood.²*

In summary, the penal substitution view of the atonement holds that Jesus not only died in our place so that we need not die, but in his death he took upon himself the wrath of God that would have otherwise been poured out on us. He became our *substitute* and suffered the *penalty* that was due our sins.

While the wrath of God is of great importance in the penal substitution view of the atonement, we should remember that it is ultimately the love of God that is the cause of his sending his Son to die for sinners. As the apostle John reminds us “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10, NASB, updated version). This verse clearly locates the cause of the death of Christ in God’s love for us. However, at the same time God’s love is not separated from the fact that in the death of Christ God’s wrath was also appeased, which is the basic understanding of the word propitiation.³

²“Alas, and did My Savior Bleed?” Words by Isaac Watts, 1707.

³Not all are agreed that the word *hilasmon* that occurs here should be translated “propitiation.” Some argue

This view of the atonement, which is so entrenched in the theology and worship of evangelical churches, is not without its critics. Some complain that the penal substitution view of the atonement portrays God as an angry judge who must punish sin. Such a view, it is argued, diminishes the biblical picture of God as a loving Father. Others have expressed concern that the idea that God punished his Son is abusive and therefore condones the abuse of the weak.⁴ In recent years there has been a call for Christians to rethink our understanding of the atonement, taking into consideration these and other criticisms. One recent challenge to the penal substitution theory of the atonement has come from within evangelicalism itself. In their recent book, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker call on Christians to examine their assumptions about the meaning of the death of Christ.⁵ Green and Baker argue that the penal substitution theory of the atonement is a misinterpretation of the constellation of biblical images which describe the death of Christ. The present writer however believes that the criticisms of the penal substitution view of the atonement offered by Green and Baker demonstrate that they have misinterpreted this view.

In what follows I wish to compare some of the basic arguments presented by Green and Baker in *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* with the substitutionary view of the atonement

that it should be translated as “expiation,” which has reference to cleansing from sin rather than the appeasement of God’s wrath. One argument that we should understand the *hilaskomai*, *hilasmos* word group to connote the removal of the wrath of God is given by Leon Morris in *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 179-213.

⁴See, for example, Beverly Harrison and Carter Heyward, “Pain and Pleasure: Avoiding the Confusion of Christian Tradition in Feminist Theology,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, eds. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carol R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim, 1989), and Joanne Brown and Rebecca Parker, “For God so Loved the World?” in the same volume.

⁵Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

presented the writings of John Calvin. This comparison with Calvin's theology will, I hope, demonstrate that the criticisms of the penal substitution view offered by Green and Baker rest on a fundamental misunderstanding of the penal substitution view of the atonement. Furthermore, we will see that Calvin recognized as being central certain biblical teachings about the atonement that Green and Baker explicitly reject. Calvin's acceptance of these biblical teachings allowed him to provide an answer to the question which we must all answer—"Why the Cross?" a question to which Green and Baker never provide a sufficient answer. Finally, I will present some general critiques that I believe are warranted by certain presuppositions held by Green and Baker.

Analyzing Green's and Baker's Critique of the Penal Substitution Model of the Atonement

Recovering the Scandal of the Cross is a provocative, rather post-modern, call to rethink traditional (read "western") models of the atonement, especially (or even specifically) the penal substitution model of the atonement. Green and Baker examine the biblical teachings on the atonement and find that the Biblical authors seldom spoke with one voice in their attempts to come to grips with the meaning of Christ's death on a Roman cross. Since the biblical teaching on the meaning of the cross is so varied, we are told that we must resist the temptation to subsume all the biblical teaching on the atonement under any one theory. The particular theory that the authors single out for special criticism is the penal substitution theory.

The authors find much lacking in the penal substitution model and their criticisms are varied and numerous. On the one hand they claim that this theory is inextricably linked to western culture and thus does not readily translate to people in other cultures.⁶ Therefore, they

⁶See, for example, *ibid.*, ch. 6, in which the authors argue that the idea of objective guilt does not translate in Japanese culture that is shame based rather than guilt based.

issue a call to rethink the atonement taking into consideration Christians in other parts of the world. On the other hand they argue that the penal substitution view is offensive to many in our own culture because it presents God as a divine child abuser, and should, on this basis, be rejected even by western culture in favor of new models that take into account postmodern sensibilities.⁷ While *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* is, in part, an extended critique of the penal substitution model of the atonement, the authors also present interpretations of the cross from other cultures and from supposedly under-represented voices in our own culture, eager that in doing so their readers may discover new ways of thinking about the cross.

Green and Baker are to be commended for reminding us that the richness of what Christ did for us on the cross cannot be expressed “without remainder” by any one theory of the atonement.⁸ We must take into consideration the whole constellation of biblical images used to describe what took place at Calvary. They are also correct in their recognition that the biblical authors employed many metaphors which describe the work of Christ on the cross, metaphors taken from diverse areas of life such as the courtroom, the market place, and even the temple worship of Israel to name just a few.⁹ However, Green and Baker overlook the possibility that those who hold to a penal substitution model of the atonement may be speaking metaphorically when they speak of the “anger” of God towards our sin. This is certainly the case with Calvin. According to Calvin, language of the wrath of God must be understood metaphorically, as indicating God’s displeasure over our sins. The central motivating factor, indeed the *cause* of the atonement, in Calvin’s mind, is the love of God and not his wrath. As Calvin states:

⁷Comments along these lines are interspersed throughout *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*. However, see specifically pp. 31, 89, 91-92, 133, 172-175.

⁸*Ibid.*, 13, 23.

⁹*Ibid.*, 97.

But, before we go any farther, we must see in passing how fitting it was that God, who *anticipates* us by his mercy, should have been our enemy until he was reconciled to us through Christ. For how could he have given in his only-begotten son a singular pledge of his love to us if he had not already embraced us with his free favor? Since, therefore, some sort of contradiction arises here, I shall dispose of this difficulty. The Spirit usually speaks this way in the Scriptures: “God was men’s enemy until they were reconciled to grace by the death of Christ.” [Rom. 5:10 p.] “They were under a curse until their iniquity was atoned for by his sacrifice.” [Gal. 3:10, 13 p.] “They were estranged from God until through his body they were reconciled.” [Col. 1:21–22 p.] Expressions of this sort have been *accommodated* to our capacity that we may better understand how miserable and ruinous our condition is apart from Christ. For if it had not been clearly stated that the wrath and vengeance of God and eternal death rested upon us, we would scarcely have recognized how miserable we would have been without God’s mercy, and we would have underestimated the benefit of liberation.¹⁰

Green and Baker present the appeasement of the wrath of God as being the central concept in the penal substitution model, a characterization that is certainly untrue of Calvin’s position. While God’s anger towards our sin is important for Calvin, it is God’s love that goes before, or anticipates, our need as sinners. While the actual cause of the atonement is God’s love for us, anger is God’s chosen metaphor to describe His displeasure over our sins.

Calvin frequently speaks of revelation as an accommodation on God’s part to our human frailties. As he asks elsewhere in the *Institutes*, “who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to ‘lisp’ in speaking with us?”¹¹ Language of wrath is understood by Calvin as a divine accommodation to our slight capacities. However, without such a picture of our needy position before a holy God, we would not be able to appreciate how valuable is our liberation from sin. This is true not only because of our finitude but also because our sinful hearts keep us from recognizing our predicament, as Calvin explains:

¹⁰John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans., Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vols. XX-XXI, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville: Westminster-John Knox, 1960), 2.16.2, emphasis added.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 1.13.1.

To sum up: since our hearts cannot, in God's mercy, either seize upon life ardently enough or accept it with the gratefulness we owe, unless our minds are first struck and overwhelmed by fear of God's wrath and by dread of eternal death, we are taught by scripture to perceive that apart from Christ, God is, so to speak, hostile to us, and his hand is armed for our destruction; [we are taught] to embrace his benevolence and fatherly love in Christ alone.¹²

God has employed metaphors suited to our finite minds as well as metaphors that are designed to stir up our sinful hearts to recognize our loathsome predicament apart from Christ. Yet, even though God has used such metaphors, Calvin also says that the Scriptures speak truthfully when they describe God as being angry towards us. Writing of God's wrath against our unrighteousness Calvin says:

Although this [language about wrath] is tempered to our feeble comprehension, it is not said falsely. For God, who is the highest righteousness, cannot love the unrighteousness that he sees in us all. All of us, therefore, have in ourselves something deserving of God's hatred. . . . But because the Lord wills not to lose what is his in us, out of his own kindness he still finds something to love. . . . Therefore, by his love God the Father goes before and anticipates our reconciliation in Christ. Indeed, "because he first loved us" [I John 4:19], he afterward reconciles us to himself.¹³

In order to summarize Calvin's understanding of the atonement, several things should be noted from these passages. First, Calvin emphasizes that it is the love of God that is the actual *cause* of the death of Christ on the cross and not God's righteous anger. God's love anticipates our need by making provision for our sins "while we were yet sinners" (Rom. 5:8).¹⁴ Secondly, God's anger towards us is an expression of the seriousness with which God views our sin. God's anger over our sin is not arbitrary but is based upon the fact that we have failed to live up to his standard of righteousness, the holiness of his own being. While the language of God's anger

¹²Ibid., 2.16.2.

¹³Ibid., 2.16.3.

¹⁴See also, Calvin's commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:19 in *Commentary on 2 Corinthians, and Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, trans. T. A. Small, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, vol. 10, eds. D. F. and T. F.

towards us is metaphorical, in a very real sense we are enemies of God apart from Christ. However, as Calvin explains, while it is appropriate to speak of God's anger over our sin, the actual cause of Christ's death on the cross is God's love. This is certainly different from Green's and Baker's characterization of the penal substitution view as being motivated primarily, or even solely, by the wrath of God. Thirdly, and perhaps most important for this discussion, is the fact that Calvin clearly recognizes that sin is a problem for humanity only because it is first a problem for God. What I mean by this is that Calvin recognizes that sin is a barrier to fellowship with God precisely because it is God who demands absolute purity in his people. As Calvin explains, God loves us, but he cannot love the unrighteousness that he sees in us. Human sin cannot be viewed in isolation from the righteousness of God. It is the righteousness of God, and only the righteousness of God, that makes human sin a problem for humans. If God did not hate our sin and view our condition with disdain, then our sin would not be sufficient cause for the separation from God that we experience. Therefore, it is God's demand, God's standard of righteousness that required the death of Christ. In short, God's demand for holiness had to be *satisfied*.

The idea that the death of Christ was somehow necessary in order to *satisfy* some notion of justice in God or some debt owed to God is rejected outright by Green and Baker. Frequently they speak disparagingly of the notion that God is not free merely to forgive us, that the penal substitution model assumes that God somehow had to be appeased or satisfied before he could offer us forgiveness.¹⁵ For example, they praise Anselm for attempting to express the atonement in a way that his culture could readily understand, but they criticize Anselm's idea that Christ

Torrance (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), 78-79.

¹⁵“The Scriptures as a whole provide no ground for a portrait of an angry God needing to be appeased in atoning sacrifice,” Green and Baker, 51.

paid a *debt* in order to *satisfy* the Father.¹⁶ This suspicion of the idea of satisfaction is readily seen in a statement they make in relation to the release of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement. The authors point out that the scapegoat is released—it is not sacrificed in any attempt to “appease God.” They go on to state that the scapegoat not being killed teaches us that “*God is not the problem, but sin is.*”¹⁷ However, in opposition to this position we must remember that sin is a problem for humanity precisely and only because sin is first a problem for God. It is true that the scapegoat was spared its life and was removed from the camp, but this was done because the camp was where the presence of God dwelt. Sin is a problem for the community of God only because God dwells in that community and God *demand*s absolute purity in his people.

Contained within God’s explicit *demand* for purity in his people is an implicit requirement that God’s demand for purity be *satisfied* before communion can take place. While Green and Baker recognize that the removal of the scapegoat symbolizes the cleansing of the community and the banishment of sin, to imply that God is not an issue in this equation fails to recognize the implicit demand for satisfaction of God found in his demand for purity. This and similar passages indicate that Green and Baker have overlooked something that Calvin recognized to be central to understanding the atonement—God’s displeasure with sin, yes, even His righteous anger over sin, is the reason why sin is a barrier between us and God. Were sin not a problem for God, it would not be a barrier between us and God.

Green and Baker stress throughout the book that graciousness is at the center of who God is. They argue that forgiveness is something that God does willingly—God does not need to be

¹⁶Ibid., 133.

¹⁷Ibid., 80. Emphasis added.

made forgiving.¹⁸ Yet, by rejecting the idea that God had to be satisfied in some way, Green and Baker have failed to answer the main questions that both Calvin and Anselm realized must be answered—“Why the God-man?” “Why the cross?” If God did not need to be satisfied, then why did Christ die for our sins? If Green and Baker answer that Christ’s death cleanses us of our sins, they have not removed God from the equation precisely because it is God who demands this cleansing. It was God’s demand for absolute purity in his children that had to be satisfied before communion could be reestablished.

This implicit demand that God be satisfied is found in all language of sacrifice. This is clearly evident even within an example given by the Green and Baker as to how the idea of sacrifice was able to bring about reconciliation within the Tanzanian Church.¹⁹ As the authors tell the story, in 1942, after much tension in the church in Tanzania, the Spirit moved people to confess the sins that had led to this tension. The person leading the prayer time declared that forgiveness and reconciliation had been made possible for the members of that body because of the blood shed by Christ. The authors go on to explain that, unlike those of us living in the West, the concepts of sacrificial cleansing and reconciliation were easily understood by those attending the meeting because they were familiar with a particular sacrificial rite practiced by the predominant tribe in Tanzania—the Luo tribe.

The authors explain that in the Luo tribe a village member is cast out of the village for a serious transgression such as killing someone or sleeping with one of his father’s wives. These outcasts may remain separated from their tribe for decades, living their lives without any tribe. Yet, not wanting to die outside of the identity and care given by the tribe, it is common after

¹⁸Ibid., 51-53.

¹⁹Ibid., 187-191.

many years of separation for the transgressor to return to the tribe seeking reconciliation. The process of reconciliation includes the sacrifice of an animal and that animal's blood being sprinkled over the transgressor. Green and Baker use this illustration to demonstrate how a familiar idea of sacrificial cleansing had been utilized by the Tanzanian Church to bring about reconciliation among its members.

In their explanation of this ritual it appears that Green and Baker fail to recognize the real parallel between the atonement of Christ and the ritual practiced by the Luo tribe. In the Christian understanding of atonement and reconciliation, it is God who demands our cleansing, not other Christians. Yet, Green and Baker only seem to see in this ritual an illustration of reconciliation taking place between humans. It is true that in the Luo ritual all the players are human. But if we are to understand this ritual as somehow analogous to the atonement brought by Christ, which seems to be what the authors intend, then the characters must change. If we are to press the analogy, God is represented by the tribe, a tribe who demands that its notions of justice and its requirements for fellowship be *satisfied* before fellowship is extended to the wayward tribesman. Yes, it is true that reconciliation and cleansing are primarily in view in this ritual; however, this cleansing is necessary only because of the tribe's prior requirement that its notions of justice and purity be satisfied. If this requirement is not satisfied, then reconciliation cannot take place. Yet, it is this very notion, that God must somehow be satisfied, that the authors resist throughout their book. They seem to be blind to the fact that all language of sacrifice contains an implicit demand that God be satisfied. It is God who demands that we be cleansed of our sins, not other humans. Only when God is satisfied that our sins have been covered are we able to enjoy a proper relationship with Him. This implicit demand that God be satisfied is recognized and accepted by Calvin but it is explicitly rejected by Green and Baker.

Perhaps it is because of their rejection of the idea that God must somehow be satisfied that Green and Baker give so much credence to feminist caricatures of the penal substitution model. In agreement with, or perhaps in deference to the sensibilities of feminists, Green and Baker frequently claim that the penal substitution model portrays God as a divine child abuser—that God is an angry parent who had to be appeased through the punishment of his innocent son. They also resonate with the claim that the penal substitution model presents the Father as a sadist inflicting pain on his masochistic Son.²⁰ It is difficult for this present writer to fathom how someone could interpret the penal substitution model in this way. Yet, I recognize that such a view might be the natural result of an improper understanding of the penal substitution theory. Only if one views the wrath of God as being the sole motivation behind the atonement would such a scenario readily come to mind. However, if like Calvin, we recognized that it is the love of God and not his wrath that moved God to send Christ to die on the cross, we will be moved to appreciation and love of God rather than horror and fear.

Moreover, this particular critique of the penal substitution theory is insufficiently Trinitarian for it assumes that the Father and Son were working at cross purposes—that the Son had to make his angry Father to be loving. The authors' critique of Anselm's satisfaction theory is instructive in this regard. They appreciate Anselm for not basing the atonement on the idea that God's wrath had to be appeased, but critique him for still presenting the Son as paying a "debt" that was owed to the Father. Even though Anselm's position avoided the charge of "divine child abuse," Green and Baker claim that his position could have easily developed along those lines. They go on to write that perhaps Anselm was aware of this possible problem and therefore stressed that the death of Christ on the cross was voluntary. The authors doubt that this

²⁰Ibid., 30.

qualification is sufficient. Such a qualification is sufficient, however, if one understands that it was the love of God that was the cause of the death of Christ and not his wrath. The Father's sending his Son to die on the cross was an act of love for humanity, an act of love willingly and voluntarily expressed by his Son.²¹ Yet, it was an act of love that took into account both our need and God's demand for absolute holiness. God was in Christ anticipating our need but this was not done in isolation from his demand for purity. The authors' caricature of the penal substitution theory as an instance of divine child abuse is dependent upon understanding the Father as a wrathful God who had to be made loving—a caricature that misses the point of a truly balanced understanding of the work of Christ as being the loving work of a Triune God.

Other Deficiencies in *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*

Green's and Baker's concern for issues of social justice is also a factor in their rejection of the penal substitution theory. The authors claim that not only has the penal substitution theory been the cause of untold abuse of the powerless, where believers are told to follow Christ's example and simply accept the suffering that comes their way, but they also claim that there is no impetus in the penal substitution model for holy living or for working for social justice. However, while it is true that because we are united to Christ, we will also be united to his suffering, the suffering in view here is not an acquiescence to the evils of a supposed patriarchal society. Rather, we will suffer the rebuke and oppression of those fighting against the message of good news that God has brought to the world.

The authors' claim that there is no impetus for holy living in the penal substitution theory is similar to the charge leveled at Calvin by some in the Catholic Church over the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. These Catholics claimed that there would be no motivation for holy

²¹See Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.16.5 for a discussion of the voluntary nature of Christ's sacrifice.

living if people were taught that they were saved by faith alone with no importance placed on good works. Calvin answered their charge by explaining that when we are joined to Christ in faith, we do not receive a partial Christ but all of Christ—we receive not only Christ’s justification but his sanctification as well.²² Calvin understood that the salvation of the individual would result in the transformation of society, but only because the individual had first been transformed. God was, and is, concerned with unjust political and social systems. However, God’s formula for overcoming these unjust systems begins with the transformation of the individual. A central theme in Calvin’s theology is that the believer is actually united to Christ, the crucified and resurrected savior, a theme very much central to the apostle Paul as well. By joining himself to humanity, Christ was creating a new humanity. Christ, as the second Adam, is the head of this new humanity creating in his members the ability truly to love God and to love their neighbors as themselves. Christ is able to bring about this transformation in those who are united to him only because he first took upon himself the sin that separated them from God, the source of our life and all blessings found in Christ. Without this sacrifice, humanity would still exist as enemies of God rather than his children.

Calvin stressed, as did the apostle Paul, that humanity’s answer lies in their union with the new man, the crucified divine Son of God. When we live our lives in union with the new man Jesus Christ, then love for God and neighbor becomes possible. But this is made possible only because Christ has overcome the sin barrier that existed between us and God and has made true humanity possible—a humanity existing in union with its redeemer.

Finally, I would like to address two minor issues raised in *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* that warrant comment. First, the authors claim that the concept of individual objective

²²Ibid., 3.16.1.

guilt on which the penal substitution model is based, a concept which they claim is a predominantly western concept, is not easily communicated to people in other cultures. For example, they argue that Japanese culture is shame based rather than guilt based.²³ The authors claim that this cultural difference has made it very difficult to communicate the penal substitution view of the atonement in Japan. Perhaps if one denies that there exists a universal humanity created in the image of God, then one might conclude that concepts such as objective individual guilt could not be understood by people in other cultures. Either Green and Baker deny the existence of this common humanity, or it is a racist claim that an entire culture is incapable of understanding the concept of individual objective guilt.

Secondly, Green and Baker want to claim that the atonement of Christ has the power to transform culture. However, they do not seem to allow the possibility that this influence has extended to include western culture itself. Their criticisms of western models of the atonement seem to rest on the assumption that there has been little or no positive Christian influence on western culture for nearly two thousand years. If Christ actually has the power to influence culture, then perhaps that influence has truly been experienced in western culture. Given this possibility, then western Christianity might actually have something to teach the rest of the world. I realize that this is speaking contrary to “postmodern” sensibilities. However, we must entertain the possibility that western Christianity, which has had the benefit of hundreds of years of reflection on the biblical message of Christ, might possibly be in a better position to express with greater clarity the central issues involved in the doctrine of the atonement?

²³Green and Baker, chapter 6.

Conclusion

Green and Baker are right to remind us that the meaning of the atonement cannot be exhausted “without remainder” by any one theory of the atonement.²⁴ However, proponents of the penal substitution theory recognize the validity of other images of the atonement, such as cleansing from sin and victory over evil. However, Green and Baker present those who hold to the penal substitution model of the atonement as holding to this model to the near exclusion of all other models or images. One need only to refer to the other stanzas of the hymns mentioned at the beginning of this article to find references to cleansing, victory over sin and other images of the atonement.

The criticisms of the penal substitution model of the atonement offered by Green and Baker center on the notion that the wrath of God is the central element in view in this model. While the wrath of God is indeed one element of penal substitution, it is neither the sole element nor the primary element. Indeed, as our examination of Calvin’s writings indicates, it was the love of God that was the central factor leading God to send his Son to die on the cross. In their failure to recognize the centrality of the love of God in the penal substitution model, the criticisms offered by Green and Baker are aimed at a caricature of this model and not its true substance.

Furthermore, in their mistrust of the idea that the death of Christ on the cross was necessary in order to *satisfy* some principle in God,²⁵ Green and Baker have failed to provide a sufficient reason for the cross. If, as their arguments suggest, God is free to forgive us without his prior requirements of righteousness or purity being satisfied, then why the Cross? The very

²⁴Ibid., 13, 23.

²⁵Ibid., 132-33.

occurrence of the cross of Christ and the Apostolic witness that claims that it is because of the cross that we are forgiven should lead us to believe that it was necessary for our forgiveness. Moreover, the existence of sacrificial language used to describe the atonement presupposes a prior demand by God that his requirement for purity in his people be satisfied. By rejecting the concept of satisfaction, Green and Baker have removed any necessity for the cross. Calvin recognized that the love of God could not be viewed in isolation from the righteous demands of God. It is God who demands absolute purity in his people. That it is God who demands cleansing from sin presupposes a prior demand that God's requirement for purity be satisfied.

While Calvin recognized that the love of God was the cause of Christ's death on the cross, he also recognized that God's anger over our sins could not be overlooked. This balanced and more biblical explanation of the predicament in which humanity finds itself is far more satisfying than that of Green and Baker. One final sobering statement from Calvin's commentary on Galatians 3:13 illustrates his approach:

He could not be outside God's grace, and yet He endured His wrath. For how could He reconcile us to Him if He regarded the Father as an enemy and was hated by Him? Therefore the will of the Father always reposed in Him. Again, How could he have freed us from the wrath of God if he had not transferred it from us to Himself? Therefore, He was smitten for our sins and knew God as an angry judge. This is the foolishness of the cross and the wonder of angels, which not only exceeds but swallows up all the wisdom of the world.²⁶

²⁶Calvin, *Commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans., T. H. L. Parker, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, vol. 11, eds. D. F. and T. F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), 55.