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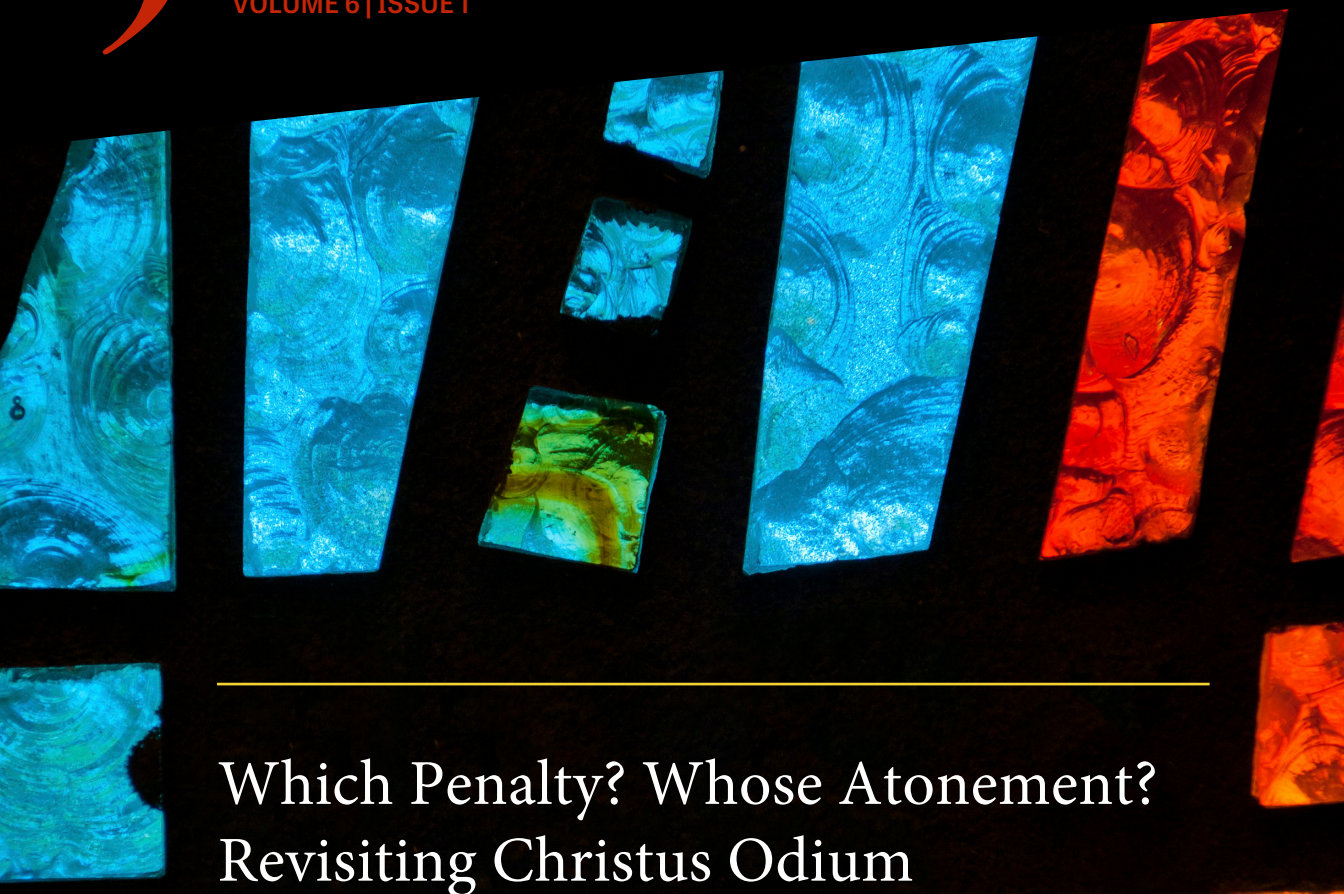

Which Penalty? Whose Atonement? Revisiting Christus Odium

by Joshua R. Farris & Mark Hamilton

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Abstract: So unreasonable is the idea that God the Father hated his Son in order to make atonement for the sin of humanity, it bedevils the mind to imagine anyone attempting reasoning out a theological defense for it. Nevertheless, the so-called Christus Odium variant of Penal Substitution has continued to garner support from when we first discerned its contemporary reappearance and waved the warning flag—initially in the form of a conference paper at ETS (2017) and eventually as an article in *JBTS* (2018) entitled, 'This is My Beloved Son Whom I Hate?' In *this* paper, we offer up a brief survey of some of the problems that Christus Odium presents, buffeting these problems with two historical accounts of Penal Substitution from John Calvin and Herman Witsius that directly warn against the Christus Odium variant. And then taking a cue from these historical sources, we break down the doctrine of Penal Substitution into some more manageable parts, in order to show that on a logically consistent understanding of this atonement theory, humanity is actually ultimately answerable to the moral law, and not God. The problem that this highlights for defenses made for standard accounts of Penal Substitution notwithstanding, we show that God can in nowise hate his Son as a substitute for offenses that are not answerable to himself. The moral law is as inflexible as it is dispassionate in its demands and it is the moral law to which the Penal Substitution theory is accountable. Thus, if it is the moral law that humanity's sin has offended, and if the Christus Odium variant is built upon the infrastructure of a Penal Substitution theory, then it looks like Christus Odium falls short of any coherent attempt to privatize a judicial matter that is clearly a public one.

Key Words: Calvin, Witsius, Penal Substitution, Christus Odium, private justice, broken trinity

Introduction: Whence Christus Odium?

The standard Penal Substitution theory of atonement is like a theological oasis for a majority of contemporary evangelicals. And yet, there are some among this group for whom this oasis is apparently not enough, having opted instead for the doctrinal mirage that we call the *Christus Odium* variant of Penal Substitution.

The Penal substitution theory says, roughly, that Christ dies in order to absorb the penal consequences of God's retributive justice precipitated by human sin, by his being treated by God as if he were those individuals to whom the debt of punishment were due. Historically speaking, this is the predominate, though not the only theory of atonement espoused by those of the Reformed tradition. The *Christus Odium* variant—a development that continues to gain ground among evangelicals—assumes the doctrinal infrastructure of Penal Substitution, but over-burdens explanations of several aspects of both the work Christ accomplishes and the manner in which he accomplishes it. This may explain, at least in part, why *Christus Odium* has hitherto remained largely undetected.[1]

In our previous work, we identified three specific points of departure that the Christus Odium variant makes from the standard Penal Substitution theory. These include:

1. Exercises of divine retribution are equivalent the exercises of divine hatred.
2. Paying a debt of punishment, the Son becomes the object of the Father's hatred.
3. When Christ dies on the cross, the Son of God himself dies.

We first detected and later distilled these three propositions from reading a number of authors who—whether consciously or unconsciously, we do not know—appear to be committed to such a view. Abner Chou, for instance, boldly asserts that "The culmination to Jesus's time on earth was His death on the cross. . . . In that death the wrath of God was poured out on Christ, and the darkness exploded. In that instant God cursed Jesus, *putting Him in a position of absolute, perfect hatred. God hated Him and desired to make Him nothing.*"[2] David Allender and Tremper Longman argue similarly that "God chose to *violate* His Son in our place. The Son stared into the mocking eyes of God; He heard the laughter of the Father's derision and felt Him depart in disgust. . . . In a *mysterious instant*, the Father who loved the Son from

1. Christus Odium having gone largely undetected might also be explained by the evangelical (over) emphasis on Penal Substitution as equivalent to the gospel. So common has Penal Substitution language become among evangelicals, it seems probable that the uncommon language of Christus Odium would be introduced without detection.

2. Adam Setser, "Big Picture of God's Mission"(blog), July 25, 2015, https://www.adamsetser.com/blog/2015/7/25/the-big-picture-of-gods-mission-a-concise-overview-of-the-entire-bible-by-dr-abner-chou. See also Chou, "The King, the Curse, and the Cross: OT Intertextuality, Paul's Logic, and Justification," unpublished paper, *Evangelical Theological Society*, 2010.

all eternity turned from Him *in hatred*. The Son became *odious* to the Father."[3] It is from passages such as these that we went on to argue that in some quarters of evangelicalism, Christianity appears to have something of a new message, the simple logic of which goes like this—quoting Allender and Longman—"The Son became sin; the Father cannot look upon sin without hatred; The Son willingly took our place of condemnation—and for an instant the Son bore the *fury* of God."[4] This logic sounds oddly similar to the recent words of David Platt, who appears to be the most recent prominent evangelical to fall into this doctrinal pit. According to Platt,

> The beauty of the cross is that when Jesus went to Calvary, He did not just pay the price for our lusting, our lying, our cheating, or whatever sin that we do—He stood in our place. *He took the holy hatred, holy judgment, and holy wrath of God that was not just due our sin but due us*. Jesus stood in our place and He took it upon Himself. So let us be very careful not to lean on comfortable clichés that sound good to us and rob the cross of its power.[5]

Notice that Platt is arguing that God hates sinners (not just their sin) and that in substituting himself for sinners (and not just their sin), Christ himself is hated by God's "holy hatred." This is apparently what he means when he says that "holy hatred . . . was not just due to our sin *but due to us*." So, when Christ "stood in our place" he experienced God's "holy hatred," which, according to Platt's logic, was a hatred for himself, that is, for his person (or at least his humanity) and not just for sins committed by humanity for which he was the representative. In other words, because Christ died for us (and not just for sin), and substituted himself for us (and not just our sin), according to Platt, he therefore suffers the hatred that God reserved for us.

When we first stumbled onto the *Christus Odium* variant, we thought it was isolated to a few disparate and relatively outlying evangelical voices. Learning that David Platt—again, someone who has a significant public evangelical platform (among Baptists anyway)—has recently joined the chorus of these voices, it may be that contemporary evangelicals have a much bigger problem on their hands than might have been at first thought.

Naturally, the next, most obvious question is to ask whether there is precedence in the tradition—the Reformed tradition, that is—for defending this doctrinal aberration. Was this what our theological forebears believed? For the sake of brevity, let us consider two straightforward examples of theologians who took pains to

3. Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman, *In the Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions About God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2015), 184–85 (emphasis added).

4. Allender and Longman, *In the Cry of the Soul*, 185 (emphasis added).

5. David Platt, "Does God Hate Sin but Love the Sinner," Radical, April 8, 2019, https://radical.net/does-god-hate-sin-but-love-the-sinner/ (emphasis added). Southern Baptist theologian Gregg Allison comes very close to affirming something similar concerning the Father pouring his wrath and derision on the Son in, "No Holy Spirit, No Penal Substitutionary Atonement," The Gospel Coalition, June 25, 2019, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/role-holy-spirit-penal-substitutionary-atonement/.

argue against the proposal that atonement was made in any way by God the Father *hating* his Son.

I. Who needs Tradition Anyway?

The Scriptures record unspeakably terrible things about what God has promised to those who at the consummation of all things will have ultimately rejected him. The language that the Scriptural authors use to describe these divine judgements varies in their dreadfulness from the awful thought of God's trodding them in his anger (Isa 63:3, ESV) to the even more frightening thought of Christ's "treading the winepress of the fury and wrath of almighty God" (Rev 19:15).

The illumination of these scriptural horrors appears perhaps in no greater detail and terror than in Jonathan Edwards's infamous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1742). So abysmal was the scene at Enfield, Connecticut that Edwards was quite literally forced to stop preaching, what with the tears, moans, and apparently outright shrieks of the people—some actually pulling at his clerical robe, begging him to stop—for fear of their eternal condemnation.[6] Here is a sermon that showcases

6. At one point in the sermon Edwards issues the following thought-provoking description of the wrath of God, and here we quote him at length: "Consider here more particularly several things concerning that wrath that you are in such danger of: *First*. [Consider] *Whose* wrath it is: it is the wrath of the infinite God. If it were only the wrath of man, though it were of the most potent prince, it would be comparatively little to be regarded. The wrath of kings is very much dreaded, especially of absolute monarchs, that have the possessions and lives of their subjects wholly in their power, to be disposed of at their mere will. *Proverbs 20:2*, 'The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger, sinneth against his own soul.' The subject that very much enrages an arbitrary prince, is liable to suffer the most extreme torments that human art can invent or human power can inflict. But the greatest earthly potentates, in their greatest majesty and strength, and when clothed in their greatest terrors, are but feeble despicable worms of the dust, in comparison of the great and almighty Creator and King of heaven and earth: it is but little that they can do, when most enraged, and when they have exerted the utmost of their fury. All the kings of the earth before God are as grasshoppers, they are nothing and less than nothing: both their love and their hatred is to be despised. The wrath of the great King of kings is as much more terrible than theirs, as his majesty is greater. *Second*. [Consider that it is] the *fierceness* of his wrath that you are exposed to. We often read of the *fury* of God; as in *Isaiah 59:18*, 'According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay fury to his adversaries.' So *Isaiah 66:15*, 'For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger *with fury*, and his rebukes with flames of fire.' And so in many other places. So we read of God's *fierceness*. *Revelation 19:15*, there we read of 'the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of almighty God.' [These] words are exceeding terrible: if it had only been said, 'the wrath of God,' the words would have implied that which is infinitely dreadful; but 'tis not only said so, but 'the fierceness and wrath of God': [it is] the fury of God! the fierceness of Jehovah! Oh how dreadful must that be! Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them! But it is not only said so, but 'the fierceness and wrath of *almighty God*.' As though there would be a very great manifestation of his almighty power, in what the fierceness of his wrath should inflict, as though omnipotence should be as it were enraged, and exerted, as men are wont to exert their strength in the fierceness of their wrath. Oh! then what will be consequence! What will become of the poor worm that shall suffer it! Whose hands can be strong and whose heart [can] endure? To what a dreadful, inexpressible, inconceivable depth of misery must the poor creature be sunk, who shall be the subject of this!" Jonathan Edwards, sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," July 8, 1741, Works of Jonathan Edwards collection 22:404–18.

the anger of God toward humanity. Upon reading it again, and thinking we might find Christus Odium-specific language, we found that those places where Edwards mentions the work of Christ in the sermon (or anywhere elsewhere for that matter, at least that we have found) say nothing about Christ's being *hated* by God with the contempt and derision in which he will send sinners who have rejected him to hell.

Why draw attention to this? Well, we draw attention to it because Edwards serves as an example of one who supposedly subscribes to the Penal Substitution theory, who edges more dangerously close to the possibility of saying something like Christus Odium—in a sermon entitled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God", mind you—but does not. In other words, not even the fieriest of Puritans would be so bold as to suggest that God hated his Son and that this was a necessary constituent to his making atonement! Perhaps we have not gone to the source of this theory. Maybe we will find something different.

If the doctrine of Penal Substitution had its origin in Calvin, and it is a pretty good bet that it did, the fact that Calvin was already defending against this idea during his own lifetime says something about when a *Christus Odium*-like set of ideas might have first been proposed.[7] The Son, according to Calvin, "always [does] those things that please Him," and "[Christ] could not cease to be the object of the Father's love, and yet he endured his wrath. For how could [Christ] reconcile the Father to us, if he had incurred his hatred and displeasure?"[8] Notice a subtle difference in what

7. Despite several recent and rather awkward attempts to forge a genetic link between contemporary evangelical articulations of this doctrine and the Fathers and Medieval Schoolmen, proponents of the Penal Substitution theory ought to be cautious when looking for the origin of this *theory* not to look much beyond the Reformation, particularly John Calvin. See for example, S. Jeffery, M. Ovey, and A. Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007). Of course, this has been recently and convincingly challenged in Adonis Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice: The Cross in Historical and Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 1ff. For an excellent treatment of the atonement in the patristic era, see, Ben Myers, "The Patristic Atonement Model," in *Locating Atonement: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 71–88. For more discussion on the history of the development of the penal substitution model of atonement in the Reformed tradition, see William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed), 451–55; Henrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: Collins, 1950), 475–79ff; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 455ff.

8. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. by William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 91–92. Two things are worth some additional note here. First, Calvin's proposal that "he endured his wrath" should not be misunderstood as that he endured divine hatred. Wrath is not equivalent to hatred so much as it is equivalent to the act of retribution. And the moral law merely requires transgressors to be punished, not hated. There is a marked difference between offending a piece of legislation that says transgressors will be punished for this or that and offending the legislator himself. The legislation (i.e. the moral law) is that to which humanity is accountable. Second, later in John 10.15 and 17, John records Jesus as saying, "I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . *For this reason the Father loves me*, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again," and in John 17.4, John records Jesus saying, "Father, I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which you gave me to do."

Calvin says and what the defender of Christus Odium affirms. Calvin does say that Christ endures the Father's wrath, but he distinguishes this from Christ taking on the displeasure and hatred of the Father (subtle though this may be in this one quote the difference, if it can be maintained, is an important one). While Calvin might have been the first to defend against something like what we are calling *Christus Odium*, he was not the last.

Dutch theologian Herman Witsius (1636-1708), for example, also considered "whether Christ was abominable to God on account of the sins which he had taken upon himself."[9] His answer is quite revealing and worth rehearsing. He says,

> [I]t is so far from being true that by the voluntary susception of our sins the love of God to him was any how diminished that on the contrary he never pleased the Father more than when he showed himself obedient unto death even the death of the cross. For this is that excellent, that incomparable and almost incredible obedience which the Father recompensed with a suitable reward of ineffable glory.[10]

Taking our cues from voices in the tradition like Calvin and Witsius,[11] in our previous work we warned that unchecked doctrinal development—better still, doctrinal *devolvement*—can be like a government program; once the people have it—and be assured, some already do—it is hard for them to imagine life without it. Taking another cue from what Tom McCall refers to as "broken trinity theology," we then went on to inventory and exposit a series of Christologically specific problems that advocates of *Christus Odium* ought to seriously consider as they think through just what Christ's work on the cross accomplishes.[12] Here we rehearse six such questions for you to consider which direction your atonement theory is going:

9. Herman Witsius, *Conciliatory or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain Under the Unhappy Names of Antinomians and Neonomians* (Glasgow: W. Lang, 1807), 39.

10. Witsius, *Conciliatory or Irenical Animadversions*, 44.

11. Consider also the Swiss–Italian theologian Francis Turretin (1623–87), for instance, who when he speaks of Christ's endurance of what he calls the "punishment of desertion," says, "But as to a participation of joy and felicity, God suspending for a little while the favorable presence of grace and the influx of consolation and happiness that he might be able to suffer all the punishment due to us (as to the *withdrawal of vision*, *not as a dissolution of union*; as to the want of the sense of *divine love*, intercepted by the sense of the divine wrath and vengeance resting upon him, not as to a real privation or extinction of it.) And, as the Scholastics say, as to the 'affection of advantage' that he might be destitute of the ineffable consolation and joy which arises from a sense of God's paternal love and the beatific vision of his countenance (Ps 16); but not as to the 'affection of righteousness' because he felt nothing inordinate in himself which would tend to desperation, impatience or blasphemy against God." Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* ed. James Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992–1997), 14, Q. II, VI.

12. For more on "broken trinity theology," see: Thomas H. McCall, *Forsaken: The Trinity and the Cross, and Why it Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

1. We all believe the Apostle Paul's assertions that "Christ became a curse for us" (Gal 3:13). *But*, do you believe that Christ was himself cursed or do you believe that humanity's curse terminated on Christ?[13] There's a difference.

2. We all believe that "The Word was God" and that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14). *But*, do we believe that God hated the *Word* enfleshed?

3. We all (hopefully) believe with the Chalcedonian tradition that the Son was "truly God and truly man." *But* do we believe that in making atonement, God somehow despised the divine nature of his beloved Son?

4. We all likely conceive of Christ's work in terms of his passive and active obedience, that is, his doing what the law required and his suffering on the cross. *But*, do we believe that there was a point in Christ's life when God went from loving him to hating him? What is more, does the Scripture testify to this change in God? If it does—we would be hard-pressed to identify where—when would that have been, precisely?[14]

5. We all believe that "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6). *But*, do we believe that it is metaphysically possible for one of the persons of the Godhead to somehow fall into non-being? Did Jesus's divine nature cease to be or change in some way?

6. We all believe "The Lord was pleased to bruise him" (Isa 53:10). *But*, do we believe that God was delighted/pleased to hate his one and only Son?

As *Christus Odium* continues to gain ground, there is one question that we keep coming back to that far out-weights the others, namely, *will anyone notice*?

13. It is not the case, recalling one of the statements at the beginning of this paper, that "God cursed Jesus, *putting Him in a position of absolute, perfect hatred. God hated Him and desired to make Him nothing*," Chou, *Big Picture of God's Mission*. Instead, see John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 91–2. Interestingly, Calvin himself goes on to point to John 8:29, which says that the Son, "always [does] those things that please Him," and argues that, "[Christ] could not cease to be the object of the Father's love, and yet he endured his wrath. For how could [Christ] reconcile the Father to us, if he had incurred his hatred and displeasure." While a subtle difference as we noted earlier, if this distinction can be consistently maintained between God's wrath toward Christ as distinct from the Father's hatred and derision, then that is an important distinction indeed.

14. How far have we come from understanding, like Machen, that "every event of his life was a part of his payment of the penalty of sin, and every event of his life was a part of that glorious keeping of the law of God by which he earned for his people the reward of eternal life," J. Gresham Machen, "The Active Obedience of Christ," *God Transcendent* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 191.

II. Which Penalty, Whose Atonement?

In our previous work we argued that even if the latter is the sub-structure for the former, the *Christus Odium* variant is not synonymous with the Penal Substitution theory. But because the lines between the variant and standard view are being increasingly blurred, there are some distinctions between the two that require some disentanglement. Specifically, we have to answer two questions. First, "which penalty are we talking about?" And second, "who is atonement being made for?" By answering these two questions we will see yet another set of reasons that the *Christus Odium* variant is fatally flawed.

Now, before we get to these questions, we first ought to level-set our discussion. So, if Penal Substitution is your preferred position, here is what you are buying into, minimally speaking:

A. Christ's atonement is necessary to his redemptive work.

B. Christ's death is sufficient to assuage divine retribution for all humanity.

C. Christ dies as a penal substitute for individual persons.

D. Christ dies in order to absorb the retributive (penal) consequences of divine justice precipitated by human sin, being treated by God as if he were those individuals to whom the punishment were due (i.e., the mechanism).

E. Christ's death pays a debt of punishment.

F. Christ's death is a vicarious sacrifice.

Now that we are all (hopefully) on the same page, let's tackle the first question. Which penalty are we talking about when Christ made atonement? First and foremost, it is a penalty that issues from the demands of retributive justice.[15] That is, it is a penalty for punishment's sake. This should be straightforward enough. But, it may come as a surprise to some here that, strictly speaking, this punitive demand has as its source the moral law. In other words, on a coherent picture of Penal Substitution, sin's offense is leveled against the moral law and not God himself.[16] And this is a

15. William Ames offers a helpful distinction when he talks about two issuances (that is, punishment and restitution) of "Corrective Justice" (correcting the injustice of persons). First, he says that "punishment is an act of corrective justice by which penalty is inflicted on a violator of justice. The end should be the amendment or restraint of the offender, peace and admonition to others and the preserving of justice and God's honor" (2.16.307). "Restitution," by contrast "is an accord of corrective justice in which a person is given possession of something of his own which was unjustly taken away. Hence an act which calls for restitution is against justice strictly so-called and not only against love" (2.16.307), Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, ed. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1968).

16. It is a curious thing that supposed exponents of Penal Substitution, like Jonathan Edwards, for example, argue that "sin is of such a nature that it wishes ill, and aims at ill, to God and men, but to God especially. *It strikes at God*; it would, if it could, procure his misery and death. It is but

problem facing all persons collectively, not as individuals, as it is so often thought to be the case.

Ironically, exponents of Penal Substitution make much of the fact that divine retribution for offenses against God are *private* legal affairs—that is, they are offenses against God *himself* by individual, morally responsible creatures, in contrast to say, a *public* offense, which is an offense against a society. You might be saying to yourself: "Didn't King David say that it was against God and God alone that he had sinned (Ps 51.4)? Doesn't this therefore fly in the face of the assertion that debts of punishment are paid to the moral law?" It is true that David did indeed reckon his sin to be an offense against God. It is not true what that sin was. So, the question is not whether it transgresses the categories that we have laid out. The question is whether your theory is compatible with the testimony of Scripture. If God is just and the justifier and not the moral law, and if the Penal Substitution theory is answerable to the moral law and not to God, then it looks like we might need to re-think our theory. But, we have just now seen that this is a contradiction in terms. The offense of sin does not take anything intrinsic or essential to God away from God. He himself is not at a loss because of sin. If penal offenses are both criminal and punishable, they are not, strictly speaking, private or individual so much as public or societal affairs that are punishable by the authority of a law, not an individual lawmaker.

Think of the difference between district or civil court trial versus those tried in a criminal court. We've discussed this example before, but because this concept of public versus private offenses and their relation to the Penal Substitution theory continues to trip people up, it is worth rehearsing once again. In a district court, someone might be sued, for example, for a breach of contract. Strictly speaking, this is not a *criminal* offense. This is a personal (and therefore private) offense—one person versus another (even another individual group, as in a class action lawsuit)—that is resolved by the *offending* party restoring or making reparation for the *offended* party. Criminal courts, by contrast, try criminal offenders. If someone is on trial for first degree murder, say, that person's offense is, again, strictly speaking, not against the one they killed but against the laws of the society to which both parties have presumably assented and which demand that murderers pay a debt of punishment to *society* upon the commitment of such a crime; a debt of punishment that is paid

suitable that with what measure it meets, it should be measured to it again. 'Tis but suitable that men should reap what they sow, and that the reward of *every man's hands should be given him*" (Jonathan Edwards, "The Necessity of Satisfaction" 1731, Work of Jonathan Edwards collection, 18:436). We say this is curious because, Edwards also goes on to claim that, "'tis requisite that sin should be punished, as punishment is deserved and just, therefore the *justice of God obliges him to punish sin*: for it belongs to God as the supreme Rector of the universality of things, to maintain order and decorum in his kingdom, and to see to it that decency and right takes place at all times, and in all cases. *That perfection of his nature whereby he is disposed to this, is his justice; and therefore, his justice naturally disposes him to punish sin as it deserves.* The holiness of God, which is the infinite opposition of his nature to sin, naturally and necessarily disposes him to punish sin. Edwards, "Necessity of Satisfaction," 18:437 (emphasis added).

by incarceration or in some states, death. Notice that the intention of this debt of punishment that a murderer faces is not restorative. That is, nothing is truly restored to the family who loses a loved one. The criminal (rather than the civil) court, and the laws that it upholds, determine guilt and execute punishment. In this way, murder, or any such criminal offense, is a public matter between the murderer and the society (and the laws they agree to uphold) at large, not between the murderer and the one that was murdered. Criminal proceedings carry no legal freight in a civil courtroom. If someone is convicted of fraud, they pay damages to the one defrauded, but no one who is convicted of fraud is executed as a penal consequence of civil proceeding.

So, what does all this mean? Well, it means that if you are a Penal Substitution theorist, and you wish to make a coherent case for your theory, you ought to be making a case that people are accountable to the moral law.[17] By limiting the scope of what Christ's atoning work accomplishes to the payment of a debt of punishment, Penal Substitution theorists limit the scope of the demands of the larger economy of divine justice. This explains retributive justice is virtually the only category of justice about which they have anything to say. Accordingly, Christ suffers a penalty, which means there must be a law by which to measure offenses; Christ suffers a loss of some sort instead of humanity suffering a loss; sin's offense is a criminal offense and therefore Christ suffers because he is counted as a criminal; if he is counted as a criminal and suffers loss, and he pays a debt of punishment on behalf of others, then, the debt he is paying is actually not for a private offense against God, requiring that something be restored to God. *Nothing* is *restored* to God (as in the examples given above concerning public versus private debts), in fact, on the Penal Substitution theory.[18] Penal Substitution seems only to make provision for God to restore righteousness to humanity, leaving God dishonored and his Son bruised (as the prophet Isaiah says) and all of this being of no apparent benefit to himself.

If sin's offense is punishable (and thus criminal) it is not, strictly speaking, a private or individual offense against another individual, so much as it is a public or societal offense that is punishable by the authority of a system of laws—in this case, divine laws—and not an individual lawmaker (i.e., God). Murder, for example,

17. This begs some questions about the notion of the "suitable equivalent" argument. Based on the idea of a "status principle," Penal Substitution theorists argue that because God's glory is of infinite worth, and because sin is an offense against God, sin must be an infinite offense. But, if sin's offense is against the moral law, and God is not numerically identical to the moral law, can the moral law be said to be of infinite worth such that Christ's sacrifice must be of infinite worth. Or can what Christ offers to offset the demands of the moral law be a "suitable equivalent," and thus not a sacrifice of infinite worth?

18. No doubt, some will find the assertion that on Penal Substitution nothing is restored to God objectionable. However, the burden of proof is on advocates of this view, who limit Christ's atoning work to solving a purely retributive justice problem to show how Christ's sacrifice does anything *for* God. The mechanism itself does nothing for God, but one might argue that the results of what is effected in Christ's death does something for God.

is not an offense against the one being murdered, strictly speaking.[19] Nor is it an offense, directly or primarily, against the lawmaker who legislated that murder is a punishable offense. Murder is an offense against a law, primarily as discussed above, that says murder is wrong, and murderers are punished because they break the law.[20] This is not an insignificant detail.[21] Indeed, this is the chief distinguishing detail that we most wish to draw attention to. In fact, the distinction that we raised above is an important one for making amends regarding the public nature of justice, which is a common distinction assumed in lawful cases. Hence, it is important that those who are conflating the public and private notions of justice concerning God spell out why they are doing so and how it is that Christ's atoning work satisfies the public aspect of justice and how that immediately and necessarily satisfies private offenses. For, by drawing attention to it, we effectively undercut (yet again) the idea that the Son was hated by God. How do we do this? We do this because the built-in mechanism of this theory of atonement precludes that God's anger is even involved in the payment of a debt of punishment. The moral law is not an agent that can magically become angry.[22] The moral law is the expression of what the tradition calls, God's "relative rectitude." It is that by which God manifests the righteousness of his self-love, makes his moral perfection and holiness comprehensible to humanity, and threatens those who despise his general benevolence toward and authority over his rational creatures.[23] It is the

19. It is important to make some distinctions. Of course, it is true to say that there is an offense against persons when individuals harm others. That said, there is something fundamental to that which needs satisfying. The debt is to the moral law for which God establishes in providentially governing the world. To say that what is primarily satisfied is the payment from individuals to other individuals, that is, as a private affair, presumes modern sensibilities concerning sins, following Immanuel Kant. In other words, a contributing cause in the development of Christus Odium is this modern notion of sin in the hands of neo-Calvinists.

20. We need to say something like: It might be reasoned that murder is an offense against God himself because murder is the destruction of the divine image in which the Scripture says humanity is made. However, the whole idea of murder is predicated upon the issuance of a law that says murdering another human is something for which murderers will be held criminally liable. This is a problem for Penal Substitution, in particular, because while the Scriptures confirm that sin is an offense against God, the theory confirms—however much it goes misunderstood—that sin is an offense against the moral law.

21. For further details, see our work in Farris and Hamilton, "Atonement in the Reformed Tradition: A Plurality of Orthodoxy?" (forthcoming).

22. For a scriptural example of the distinction between laws, legislators, and agency, see S. Mark Hamilton "Jonathan Edwards, Anselmic Satisfaction, and God's Moral Government," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17.1 (January 2015): 1–22.

23. For example, according to Edwards, "[The moral law] was the grand rule given to Adam; and the command of not eating the forbidden fruit was only given to try whether he would keep God's commands or no, to try whether he would be obedient to the law of nature, or moral law. As the moral law was the grand law given to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and is often called *THE LAW*, and is spoken of as *THE LAW* given to them, and the time of the giving of the Ten Commands is spoken of as the time of the giving the law, as if that had been the whole of the law given—and indeed, it was virtually so—and all those ceremonial laws that were added were only for the trial of their obedience to the great rules of this law, as particularly 'thou shalt have no other gods before me,' etc.: it was to try whether they would keep that moral law, the rules of which

moral law that is the measure of sin's offense, and it is to the moral law that man owes its debt of punishment. The moral law is a set of statutes whose requirements for paying a debt of punishment are not subject to incitements of anger. And this brings us to our second point.

A debt of punishment is quite different than a simple debt. It is astonishing just how many purveyors of this theory mishandle this distinction. Of course, Penal Substitution says that Christ paid a debt, but not just any kind of debt. Christ paid a debt of punishment.[24] Were it a simple debt, the creditor—the one to whom the debt is owed—should not incur a loss in the affair. If you buy a house, say, and you cannot pay your mortgage debt to the bank, the bank will take your house (and your investment with it). The bank will not suffer loss if things go south; they will take your house in order to be made whole. This is pretty straightforward. This is *not* what is going on where debts of punishment are concerned. Where debts of punishment are concerned, the *debtor* incurs the loss irrespective of the creditor being made whole.[25] This would be like saying that the bank has no interest in obtaining your house as of your inability to pay the note, the result of which is foreclosure; they only want you out on your duff (i.e., to suffer loss) whether the bank is made whole by its resale or not.[26]

Bringing this back to the atonement, Penal Substitution theorists should be quite careful to argue that humanity owes a debt of punishment, that is, a debt for an offense that requires humanity (the debtor) suffer loss (i.e., be punished). The loss to be suffered by humanity for not being able to pay this debt is a loss of (spiritual) life. Accordingly, Christ pays this debt of punishment, so it is said, by absorbing the penalty that is charged to individual sinners by acting as their representative—Penal

required that they should love God with all their heart, with all their souls, and with all their mind, and all their strength, and regard his authority and glory, and submit themselves wholly to him, and yield themselves up to him, and obey and serve him as their God" ("Miscellanies" n. 884, *WJE* 20:144; see also "Blank Bible," *WJE* 24:702, 1125).

24. According to Francis Turretin, "The satisfaction here discussed, is not taken widely for a simple and indiscriminate reparation of injury (as when one purges and excuses himself to him who has suffered injury). Rather it is taken strictly for the payment of a debt, with which is paid what another owes and with which he satisfies the creditor or judge who requires the *debt of punishment*. . . . The satisfaction exacted by the justice of God principally demanded two things: 1) that it should be paid by the same nature which had sinned; 2) that nevertheless it should be of an infinite value and worth to take away the infinite demerit of sin" Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* ed. James Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992–1997), 2.14.1, 3, 7, 418, 421 (emphasis added).

25. David Lewis argues that, "In the case of a debt, what is required is that the *creditor* shall not suffer a loss. . . . Whereas in the case of a debt of punishment what is required is that the *debtor* shall suffer a loss" Lewis, "Do We Believe in Penal Substitution?" in *A Reader in Contemporary Philosophical Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 329 (emphasis added).

26. For the sake of clarity, this is not what is going on when a bank forecloses on someone's property. There is not a punitive, but rather a commutative, angle in mortgage lending. For a more personal analogue than that of a house-deal gone wrong, see our "Capone Analogy" in Farris and Hamilton, "The Logic of Reparation: Contemporary Restitution Models of Atonement, Divine Justice, and Somatic Death," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 83, no 1 (Feb 2018): 62–77.

Substitution does nothing toward restoring anything to God.[27] Again, what might come as a surprise to some is that the Penal Substitution theory is surprisingly anthropocentric in terms of its chief goal, in that the problem facing sinners is *not* a matter of their failed effort to restore anything to God, so much as it is with his law requiring that law-breakers suffer a penalty. What Christ is doing as penal substitute when he dies is, at least on a consistent understanding of the theory, solving a specifically punitive problem that hangs over the heads of humanity. This theory is not doing anything *for* God. The work of Christ on the Penal Substitution theory is to suffer loss by paying humanity's debt of punishment to the retributive justice demanded by the moral law. To owe God a debt of any other sort is to owe God for something that requires that God (the creditor) not suffer loss. So, how do this help us answer the question: "who is atonement being made for?" To put it differently, if humanity's debt of punishment is owed to the moral law and not to God, how can Christus Odium theorists say that Christ is satisfying the debt as if he is assuaging the holy hatred of God? To put it bluntly, they cannot. Again, this is because the moral law is not an agent that can get angry with anyone and the debt of punishment is owed to the moral law.

Concluding Thoughts

After rehearsing some of the reasons that we are even talking about Christus Odium today, we launched into some theological clarification in hopes that Penal Substitution theorists would not only come to terms with what they are actually committed to, but would see just how dangerous a piece of theology Christus Odium is to the evangelical Church. Put into numbered theses, this is what we warned against:

A. Christ suffered a penalty for sins.

B. The penalty for sins is a demand of the moral law.

C. The moral law has no power of agency to become angered.

D. Christ cannot be hated by the law.

E. Christ was not hated by God.

As we have noted, Christus Odium overstresses certain categories within the structure of the Penal Substitution theory of atonement. And, it presses the boundaries of both

27. Restoring anything to God (or his moral law) is the work of a theory of atonement that we have proposed elsewhere, contra Penal Substitution. For more on such a theory, see Farris and Hamilton, "Reparative Substitution and the Efficacy Objection: Toward a Modified Satisfaction theory of Atonement," *Perichoresis* 15, no. 3 (2017): 98–111 and for a more recent and condensed sketch of this theory, see http://blogos.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/2018/09/11/why-so-dissatisfied-with-satisfaction-by-joshua-r-farris-and-mark-hamilton/.

our doctrine of God and our doctrine Christ beyond that of orthodox teaching. Our consistent question to evangelicals is: Is *this* the doctrinal inheritance in the Reformed tradition for which we derive spiritual nourishment? Is believing *this* how you enjoy God? We have shown that there are not insignificant problems with this variant of Penal Substitution ones for which once they are clear cannot be taken seriously. While Christus Odium is a variant of penal substitution atonement, it is unclear to us that it is, in fact, the best or most likely true variant of the doctrine. With that in mind, let us press advocates of Penal Substitution to think more carefully about their own constructions of the doctrine and the doctrinal inheritance they have received.

The worries facing what we think are standard accounts of Penal Substitution notwithstanding, if this is the new evangelistic message, we no longer have good news; not when the Son is praised for being the object of the Father's derision. By our lights, the defender of Penal Substitution must reject this Christus Odium variant or—if odium is what Penal substitution actually is—consider taking up an alternative theory of the atonement altogether.

Christus Odium certainly preaches well when you have a pastor hungry to see sin dealt with appropriately and a congregation that could use a strong dose of holy fear. Maybe you thought before now that Christ's assumption of the full fury of God's wrath was simply Penal Substitution atonement. Maybe you have heard of Penal Substitution in various forms, but thought nothing of it. The nuances of the theory slipped by undetected. But, is this how we wish to see the gospel preached? Is it, in fact, the gospel itself as some would have you believe?

One might think that a way to salvage Christus Odium is to utilize analogical language in how we think about Divine attributes. In theological language, there are three ways to make sense of propositions that apply to God and his creatures, either analogically, equivocally, or univocally. The doctrine of analogy, as challenging as it is to define, is often used as a magic wand to make sense of complicated theology. At times, the doctrine of analogy is used as an odd route of justifying theological propositions that seem incompatible. In this case, this seems like a rather odd route to salvage an already bizarre doctrine. Can we really say that there is something adequate in conveying that God truly poured out his hate on the Son? *Why even go there?*