

## ***104 I am not ashamed of the gospel***

The other reason why I'm still doing all this writing is my continuing concern for my (now 24) husbands who don't share their partner's faith – not to mention my own loved ones. So how can we communicate the gospel to them – and indeed to the vast majority of people around us?

What I'm going to say in this article may sound negative and over-pessimistic, but we ***do*** want people to come to faith, so we ***do*** need to be realistic, to face facts. And to do that, we need to recognise where we are today, in terms of people's perception of our faith, and especially of the words and concepts that we use to try to communicate God's love [103].

For 50 years, I've been in churches that saw the gospel, conceptually, as follows:

God is holy → We sin → God's punishment → DEATH

Jesus receives God's punishment instead of us

We repent and believe the good news → LIFE

I may be over-dramatising it, but this is fundamentally 'the gospel' that we, as Evangelical, Bible-believing churches, have always taught, right? So, in order for my loved ones and your loved ones to come to faith, they have to understand all of that, right?

This way of seeing God's work of salvation is called 'penal substitution', a term I didn't know until I left my church of 37 years, but this is the biggest issue that I've been wrestling with since.

I mentioned in [103] about the complete misconception of *metanoia*, for which the only English word we have is 'repentance', and I touched on the misunderstanding of 'sin', which people think of as 'doing bad things' – where 'bad things' are as defined by the church.

Add to that the common view of 'holiness' as being linked to 'holier than thou' attitudes.

Then there's the issue that people's first introduction to God is as one who punishes you when you sin. And this is particularly difficult for those from abusive homes when, at the same time, we talk about God as 'father'.

Then there's the difficulty of getting across the legal idea of 'substitution'. And some Christians feel it necessary and appropriate to use illustrations from prisoner of war camps [58].

And some people find difficulty in the idea of God killing his own son – which frankly sounds really weird. And how can killing one person 2000 years ago affect me, today?

Am I being overly negative, or am I just being realistic about the uphill struggle we face?

Well, whatever you think about what I've just said here, if you belong to a church that says that penal substitution is 'the gospel', then you simply have to face up to these difficulties and pray that God will help you find a way to explain it all to your loved ones.

But let's look at a few historical facts for a minute. A man was born, he walked through Palestine, he taught people about 'the kingdom of God', he cared for the poor and marginalised, he was killed by the authorities, his followers were totally demoralised. Suddenly they regained their courage, they said Jesus had come back to life, they said the kingdom of God had come, they were persecuted, some were martyred, but the message of Jesus' kingdom spread in a few short years throughout the known world.

In answer to 'What must I do to be saved?', did Peter, Paul and his contemporaries preach about 'the penal substitutionary death and resurrection of Jesus', as we do today? The NT account suggests, rather, that they preached about 'the kingdom of God' having come, about 'death defeated' and 'victory won'.

Personally, I have decided that penal substitution is **not** a helpful means of explaining the gospel in the 21st century. So am therefore I watering down the gospel, or maybe even preaching 'another gospel'? Well, we each have to study our Bibles, draw our own conclusions, and faithfully act on that.

Thank you all for your support over these past months!

Paul Bev. 12.1.20