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At Lent last year, I was very powerfully affected by Derek Flood's 2012 book, *Healing the Gospel*, and I summarised some of its chapters in [50–54,57]. This week, I remembered that it had a fair bit to say about Isaiah's 'suffering servant' – often quoted in the NT – so I was drawn to it again. Rather than reading my regurgitation, why not take it as a Lent book? I have a couple of copies that I could lend to my Norwich readers.

Flood's book presents a practical and biblical critique of the gospel 'as we've always been taught' (penal substitution), and then offers an understanding of the gospel which I think is (a) closer to what the (whole) Bible teaches, (b) something that I could share without embarrassment with unbelieving friends, and (c) practically applied to show that it can positively affect society as a whole, rather than just concentrating on individual, personal salvation.

I could say much more, but I'll restrain myself (difficult!). Either just trust me and read it, or look at what a proper theologian says of the book. Here are extracts from Brian McLaren's foreword:

For me, growing up evangelical meant growing up believing that the gospel *was* the theory of penal substitutionary atonement. Trusting Christ, accepting Christ, getting saved, being born again all meant – covertly or overtly – accepting the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement...

That's the version of the gospel that we broadcast 24/7 on radio and television across America and around the world. That's the version of the gospel that many missionaries use to define effectiveness, that many theologians use to define faithfulness, and that many Christians and non-Christians use to define Christianity itself.

[Brian then relates his own tentative and difficult steps, some years earlier, in questioning this view.]

And back then, there was no book by Derek Flood to help me. But now there is such a book to help you.

You may never have heard the term "penal substitutionary atonement", but you "know" it – it's the point of everything for millions of Christians around the world: [What is] the only problem that really matters? *God's just and infinite wrath at our sin*. The only good news that really matters? *How to be rescued from the fiery lake of divine wrath*. The main reason that Jesus matters? *Because Jesus took that wrath upon himself, so we don't have to*.

If you've had qualms about some parts of that doctrinal system, this is the book you need. I'm enthusiastic about it for four reasons.

First, it's simple and short ...

Second, it engages with Scripture in a responsible, mature, and faithful way ...

Third, it engages with Christian history with equal maturity, responsibility, and faithfulness ... Where he must disagree ... he does so respectfully, sympathetically, and fairly.

And fourth, this book combines the mind of a theologian with the eye and heart of an artist. Derek sees that meaning comes in images and narratives, not just formulas, theories, or models. [*Communicating through images and narratives is **exactly** what Jesus did!*] So he combines the two, and, in the process, presents us with something we thought we knew but didn't really.

No doubt that's a big part of what *repentance* means ... acknowledging that we didn't really know before, and thereby opening ourselves up to a fresh and deeper knowing. [*Very much my experience.*]

I had two great fears when I began rethinking my inherited understanding of the gospel and the atonement. First, I was afraid that I would get in trouble with my authority figures and my peers ... Second, I was afraid that I would end up somewhere less biblical than where I started. Because I didn't have a book like this available to me, I stepped out with great fear and trepidation.

But as I now read Derek's book, I feel more than ever that the view he proposes is not *less* biblically defensible ... but even *more* so. I think you'll agree that the view he proposes is most faithful to Scripture in its totality, both in a close reading, where all the details are attended to, and in a more expansive reading for the broader themes and narratives that it explores.

This fresh approach to the Bible not only heals our understanding of the gospel, but it also offers healing to us – because a distorted gospel will inevitably harm us. And through us, a distorted gospel harms the world at large. [*That's **exactly** what I feel has happened!*]

Our world suffers not only from the ravages of sin – personal and systemic – but also from the ravages of sincere and zealous, but misguided and misleading, religion. [*and then some!*] This book, like the original gospel it seeks to clarify, is about being saved, freed, and healed from all those ravages, in all their forms.

That's why I am so grateful for this book. If you are willing to step out and walk through the following pages with Derek Flood as your guide, a lot of healing can flow. A lot of healing indeed. [*Absolutely!*]

Brian D. McLaren, 2012

[*Paul Bev, 11.02.20*]