

PSA Examined**Article Series:**

Article #14:
Do 2 Cor 5:21
& 1 Peter 3:18
Support PSA?



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Welcome to the 14th article in this [series on PSA](#) (*Penal*

Substitutionary Atonement). We tackled all of Isaiah 53 in a verse-by-verse study last time, and this time weâ??ll look just as deeply at what many PSA-believing Christians consider to be the strongest single verse for PSA in the entire Bible: 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Hereâ??s that verse, and weâ??ll look at the full context for it soon.

2 Corinthians 5:21

He made Him who knew no sin **to be sin on our behalf**, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Obviously, as translated, it makes sense why itâ??s widely considered the strongest single verse in the entire Bible to support PSA. And because the important underlying Greek words in 2 Corinthians 5:21 are identical to the important underlying words in 1 Peter 3:18, weâ??ll look at that verse too. Here it is:

1 Peter 3:18

18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, **the just for the unjust**, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

Weâ??ll mostly ignore 1 Peter 3:18 until weâ??ve finished with 2 Corinthians 5:21, which weâ??ll investigate now.

A quick disclaimer first

As a slight spoiler, the PSA understanding of the verse is 100% legitimate. Before we get into the weeds of Greek word definitions, context, syntax, etc., itâ??s important to say right up front that the PSA understanding of this verse is indeed 100% legitimate. It doesnâ??t violate the immediate context, itâ??s consistent with all the Greek word definitions and grammar, and it doesnâ??t twist the passage away from the sense of the words either.

However, just because PSA has a legitimate understanding doesnâ??t mean that it has the only legitimate understanding.

There are many passages of scripture where thereâ??s more than one legitimate understanding. **Hereâ??s the question: is there more than one legitimate way to understand 2 Corinthians 5:21?** And I donâ??t mean â??is there a fringe understanding thatâ??s technically possible, even if itâ??s unlikely?â?• **That wonâ??t fly with me.** Iâ??m not interested in an interpretation that has a slim chance of being correct on a technicality. I want to know if thereâ??s a 100% legitimate alternate understanding that has just as much support as the PSA position does.

As it turns out, there is.

Even better, **I found that 100% legitimate alternate understanding from two places: (1) the worldâ??s most respected Greek lexicon: the Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich (BDAG) lexicon; and (2) from one of the worldâ??s most respected Greek scholars: Bill Mounce.**

Now, for those who donâ??t know about BDAG, itâ??s the Greek lexicon. Obviously there are other good ones, but BDAG is the gold standard. Now, sadly, itâ??s an expensive lexicon and not available for free online anywhere. I had to manually transcribe the small sections quoted below, so sadly, I canâ??t give you a source link so you can double-check the quotation. Iâ??m sorry, but thereâ??s nothing I can do about that.

Thankfully, Bill Mounce agrees with BDAG.

For those who donâ??t know, Bill Mounce literally wrote the Greek grammar that many seminaries use to teach Greek to pastors and scholars. (*You can see it on Amazon [here](#).*) He also has Greek courses on his website. (*Which you can see [here](#).*) Most importantly for our purposes in this article, he has a Greek lexicon and a reverse interlinear, both of which are available for free online. You can see the lexicon [here](#), and the reverse interlinear [here](#).

Weâ??ll get to that soon, but first weâ??ll look at the passage in context.

2 Corinthians 5:21 analysis

The passage is below with plenty of context. Notably, verse 21 is the last verse of the chapter, so I've included part of the next chapter as well. The next chapter doesn't bear on our verse much at all, which is why it's greyed out. I would've quoted less, but that's one of Paul's never-ending sentences, so I went until the next period! all 10 verses.

2 Corinthians 5:13-6:10

13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. **14** For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died **for (huper)** all, therefore all died; **15** and He died **for (huper)** all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again **on their behalf (huper)**.

16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him in this way* no longer. **17** Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. **18** Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, **19** namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors **for (huper)** Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you **on behalf (huper)** of Christ, be reconciled to God. **21** He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf (huper), so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2 Corinthians 6

1 And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain?

2 for He says,

AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU,
AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU.

Behold, now is THE ACCEPTABLE TIME, behold, now is THE DAY OF SALVATION

3 giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited, **4** but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, **5** in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, **6** in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, **7** in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, **8** by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; *regarded* as deceivers and yet true; **9** as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, **10** as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.

part. For that flesh is less precious than soul, everyone who has a spark of sense will acknowledge. And so the passage, **The Word was made Flesh, (John 1:14) seems to me to be equivalent to that in which it is said that He was made sin, (2 Corinthians 5:21) or a curse (Galatians 3:13) for us; not that the Lord was transformed into either of these, how could He be?** But because by taking them upon Him He **took away our sins** and bore our iniquities. This, then, is sufficient to say at the present time for the sake of clearness and of being understood by the many. And I write it, not with any desire to compose a treatise, but only to check the progress of deceit; and if it is thought well, I will give a fuller account of these matters at greater length.

[Source](#). (*Gregory of Nazianzus, Letter to Cledonius against Apollinarius*)

Gregory of Nazianzus lived and wrote in the 300s and was one of the most influential early church writers. Thus, simply because it was his position, we can be assured that it wasn't a fringe position. However, we won't spend much time on this for a couple of reasons.

1. Most importantly, it doesn't directly bear on whether PSA is true or not. Since that's the focus of this series, we won't get sidetracked.
2. I personally don't think it's the correct understanding. (*I prefer the "sin offering" understanding.*)

It might be fun to investigate this option, but this series is already too long. After investigating this position, I don't think it holds water. Thus, we'll spend our time investigating the PSA understanding and the "sin offering" understanding because those are the two that seem to have the most support. (*Obviously you're welcome to investigate this possibility on your own.*)

Understanding #2 "Jesus is viewed as representative and bearer of the world's sin"

This is the position that PSA holds, and it's a natural reading of the verse as it's usually translated.

2 Corinthians 5:21

21 He made Him who knew no sin **to be** sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Again, that's a legitimate understanding of this verse based on the Greek words, grammar, and immediate context. The basic understanding from PSA is that Jesus took into Himself all the sin of mankind and became guilty for those sins vicariously in our place as our substitute, and then He took the punishment for those sins vicariously in our place as our substitute.

This is bog-standard PSA and I'd wager most of you have heard a sermon to this effect at some point, so we'll look at the third understanding.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (*Mounce's reverse interlinear*)

21 He made him who knew no sin **to be a sin-offering** for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God

[Source.](#)

I'd like to point out that this isn't my translation; that's Bill Mounce's translation.

Remember the guy who wrote the book that many seminaries use to teach pastors and scholars Greek? That's Bill Mounce, and the above is his translation, which you can confirm at the [source](#) link. Bill Mounce isn't some random fellow on the internet, as evidenced by the fact that people use his book to teach Greek in many seminaries. He's a serious Greek scholar, and he even has a lexicon online.

Here's Mounce's lexicon entry on [ἡμίθεον](#) (*hamartia*), the word translated both **sin** and **sin offering**:

Gloss:

sin, wrongdoing; usually any act contrary to the will and law of God

Definition:

error; offence, sin, Mt. 1:21; a principle or cause of sin, Rom. 7:7; proneness to sin, sinful propensity, Rom. 7:17, 20; guilt or imputation of sin, Jn. 9:41; Heb. 9:26; a guilty subject, **sin-offering, expiatory victim, 2nd Cor. 5:21**

[Source.](#)

That's two respected lexicons that list **sin offering** as a possible meaning in 2 Corinthians 5:21 with one of them being the **gold standard** lexicon and at least one well-respected Greek scholar as well.

Thus, sin offering is a legitimate understanding/translation of this passage.

As we've covered before extensively, the **sin** purification offering doesn't support PSA at all, in any way, shape, or form. (See [the overview of the Levitical sacrificial system](#) for the evidence.) Conversely, it makes perfect sense with the cleansing model of salvation that we discussed in [the article on why Jesus had to die](#).

Now, according to the PSA understanding of the sin offering, translating it sin offering doesn't change the meaning of this verse.

Seriously.

Remember that the PSA camp views the **sin offerings** as either **(1)** a temporary measure to placate the wrath of God until Christ, or **(2)** a picture of what Christ was going to do even though they didn't do anything to affect our sin. Different PSA adherents will take one position or the other, so

we won't get bogged down in that debate. **The point is, the PSA understanding of the sin offering still makes 2 Corinthians 5:21 make sense as a PSA verse.** Of course, that assumes that the PSA understanding of the sin offering is correct, which it isn't. (As we've investigated multiple times in this series.)

Ultimately, the meaning of sin offering (which is more accurately a purification offering) depends on the Old Testament sacrificial meaning of the term.

- If you subscribe to the PSA understanding, you'll say that 2 Corinthians 5:21 still supports PSA.
- If you subscribe to the cleansing/purification understanding, you'll think that it doesn't support PSA at all.

With all of that said, we need to look at another Greek word: the one translated on our behalf.

The Greek word translated: on our behalf

Before we get into what it means, here's the use and why it matters.

2 Corinthians 5:21

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin **on our behalf (huper)**, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

That's the Greek word ὑπέρ (huper, sometimes spelled hyper), and PSA says that it means in exchange for in this context. PSA says that the idea is that Jesus was made to be sin in exchange for us, indicating a penal substitutionary death vicariously in our place as our substitute.

So we'll look at that.

As usual, we'll start with some lexical quotes.

5228 ὑπέρ (a preposition) properly, beyond (above); (figuratively) **to extend benefit (help)** that reaches beyond the present situation.

5228 /ὑπέρ (beyond) is usually best translated **for the betterment (advantage) of, i.e. focusing on benefit.** M. Vincent, **5228 (ὑπέρ) signifies something like in the interests of the truth . . . concerning.** J. B. Lightfoot (on Gal 1:4) . . . remarks that ὑπέρ has a sense of interest in, which is wanting to perish (WS).

[5228 (ὑπέρ) naturally expresses conferring benefit, i.e. for the sake of betterment (improvement, extending benefit).]

And from Thayer's Greek Lexicon:

debated sense of ἀντι, see Meyer and Van Hengel on Romans 5:6; Ellicott on Galatians and Philemon, the passages cited; Wieseler on Galatians 1:4; Trench, Synonyms, Å§ lxxxii.; Winer's Grammar, 383 (358) note.) **Since anything, whether of an active or passive character which is undertaken on behalf of a person or thing, is undertaken on account of that person or thing, ἀντι is used**

I'm sure you see why PSA loves this one. Here's the problem: did you notice the two disclaimers not just one, but two disclaimers about this definition? If not, here they are again:

which is more precisely expressed by ἀντὶ

On this debated sense of ἀντι

I've looked at other lexicons and they all express similar doubt about this meaning, but they all recognize it as a possible meaning. (Including BDAG; I checked.)

Most lexicons recognize this as a potential meaning, but notice that I said "potential meaning". There is a piece of evidence that PSA fellows could use to say that ὑπὲρ means "in the place of" and/or "instead of" in the sense of substitution. They probably won't like what that place says once we look at it, but it's part of their argument, so we'll look at it.

Irenaeus on ὑπὲρ, ἀντι, and exchange/substitution

A quick point of context: The Greek word ἀντι (anti) does mean "in exchange for", and no one disputes this because of its usage:

Matthew 5:38

You have heard that it was said, AN EYE FOR (anti) AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR (anti) A TOOTH.

As far as I'm aware, no one disputes the meaning of ἀντι, so I won't even bother quoting the lexicon. (Though feel free to double check me at the link just above.)

Context covered; now, back to ὑπὲρ.

The lexical quote mentioned that: *the two prepositions are interchanged by Irenaeus in adv. haer. 5, 1*, which is a reference to Irenaeus's five-volume work *Against Heresies*, citing book 5, chapter #1. Well, I went and grabbed that whole paragraph/section and copy/pasted it below so you can read it. But before we read the whole thing, I'll just copy/paste the snippet so it isn't lost, then the full context will be afterward.

Since the Lord thus has redeemed us through His own blood, **giving His soul for (huper) our souls, and His flesh for (anti) our flesh**, and has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man

Source. (*Irenaeus of Lyons, Against heresies, Book V, chapter 1, paragraph 1.*)

Before we get to the full quote, youâ??ll also need to know what Irenaeus means by the â??apostasyâ?

- Hereâ??s a quote from further down in the same document where Irenaeus tells us what he means:

For the Hebrew word **â??Satanâ?• signifies an apostate.**

â?!

â?the Word of God from the Father; and **the apostate angel of God** is destroyed by its voice,

Source. (*Irenaeus of Lyons, Against heresies, Book V, chapter 21, paragraphs 2-3.*)

So in Irenaeusâ??s mind, the â??apostasyâ?• = Satan. With that out of the way, hereâ??s the full context for that quote.

1. For in no other way could we have learned the things of God, unless our Master, existing as the Word, had become man. For no other being had the power of revealing to us the things of the Father, except His own proper Word. For what other person â??knew the mind of the Lord,â?• or who else â??has become His counsellor? â?• Again, we could have learned in no other way than by seeing our Teacher, and hearing His voice with our own ears, that, having become imitators of His works as well as doers of His words, we may have communion with Him, receiving increase from the perfect One, and from Him who is prior to all creation. We who were but lately created by the only best and good Being, by Him also who has the gift of immortality, having been formed after His likeness (predestinated, according to the prescience of the Father, that we, who had as yet no existence, might come into being), and made the first-fruits of creation -have received, in the times known beforehand, [the blessings of salvation] according to the ministration of the Word, who is perfect in all things, as **the mighty Word, and very man, who, redeeming us by His own blood in a manner consonant to reason, gave Himself as a redemption for those who had been led into captivity. And since the apostasy tyrannized over us unjustly, and, though we were by nature the property of the omnipotent God, alienated us contrary to nature, rendering us its own disciples, the Word of God, powerful in all things, and not defective with regard to His own justice, **did righteously turn against that apostasy, and redeem from it His own property, not by violent means, as the [apostasy] had obtained dominion over us at the beginning, when it insatiably snatched away what was not its own, but by means of persuasion, as became a God of counsel, who does not use violent means to obtain what He desires; so that neither should justice be infringed upon, nor the ancient handiwork of God go to destruction. Since the Lord thus has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for (huper) our souls, and His flesh for (anti) our****

flesh, and has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, attaching man to God by His own incarnation, and bestowing upon us at His coming immortality durably and truly, by means of communion with God,-all the doctrines of the heretics fall to ruin.

Source. (*Irenaeus of Lyons, Against heresies, Book V, chapter 1, paragraph 1.*)

Before we talk about *huper* and *anti*, we should take a moment to look at the bold underlined quote again, since this series is ultimately about PSA.

God of counsel, **who does not use violent means to obtain what He desires; so that neither should justice be infringed upon**, nor the ancient handiwork of God go to destruction.

Interestingly, Irenaeus says that God *does not use violent means to obtain what He desires* and explains that this was *so that* justice wouldn't be infringed upon.

Now, this is in the context of salvation, not Old Testament history. Irenaeus would obviously affirm that God does use violence in history, but Irenaeus was talking about the attainment of salvation. According to Irenaeus, God didn't use violence to attain our salvation, otherwise justice would've been infringed upon.

That's a very anti-PSA statement.

Notice too that the salvation isn't from God or God's wrath as PSA claims, but rather from the devil's ownership and dominion. (See [this article](#) in the PSA series for an exhaustive treatment of that topic.) However, that was merely his opinion and not scripture, so other than saying that Irenaeus definitely didn't believe PSA, there's little else to be gleaned.

Back to *huper* and *anti*.

Irenaeus uses the phrase: *giving His soul for (huper) our souls, and His flesh for (anti) our flesh*. PSA will almost certainly say that the intended sense is this: *giving His soul in exchange for (huper) our souls, and His flesh in exchange for (anti) our flesh*. However, think about that for a moment.

Really think about that.

!

!

Does it really make sense to say that Jesus gave His *soul* in exchange for our souls? Did Jesus lose His soul? Now, this issue is cleared up when you realize the Greek word used there is *ψυχή* ([psuchē](#)). You can look the word up yourself, but it definitely does mean *life* quite often. For example, in this verse:

Matthew 2:19-20

19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, **20** "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life (psuchÃ©) are dead."

So let's re-translate with that understanding so Irenaeus's words make sense when applied to Jesus. That gives us this: (*assuming the PSA understanding of "huper"*)

giving His life in exchange for (huper) our lives, and His flesh in exchange for (anti) our flesh.

Now, many places in the New Testament establish that part of the reason Jesus came was to give us eternal life. Thus, I suppose the PSA version does indeed make sense there.

It is 100% legitimate to say that Irenaeus is using "huper" and "anti" interchangeably here!

!but it's not required.

Be careful not to overstate the data. **You could also translate it as:**

giving His life for the benefit of (huper) our lives, and His flesh in exchange for (anti) our flesh.

Is that illegitimate?

If so, why?

Why do "huper" and "anti" need to be interchangeable here?

As a general rule, writers choose their words intentionally. I don't pretend to be a great writer, but I certainly choose them carefully. I see no reason to say that the PSA understanding must be the case when there's another perfectly legitimate way to understand it, especially when that perfectly legitimate understanding uses the normal/common definition for the word.

Back to "huper"

Thayer's lexicon lists several verses that are used as evidence that "huper" can mean "in the place of, instead of". Here's that part of the lexicon again:

2 Corinthians 5:14(15),15; add, 21; Galatians 3:13

Thus, we'll look at those verses now. **As you read these verses, ask yourself whether "in the place of", "instead of", or "in exchange for" is required, or if "for the benefit of" fits equally well, or even better.**

Here they are:

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died **for (huper)** all, therefore all died;

2 Corinthians 5:15 and He died **for (huper)** all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again **on their behalf (huper)**.

2 Corinthians 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin *to be sin* **on our behalf (huper)**, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse **for (huper)** us for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"

Did you notice something odd about these verses?

Something very odd about them?

Something relevant to PSA?

I did!

!but we'll come back to that in a moment.

Let's look at all those verses again with the normal understanding of "for the benefit of" translated in, though, "I do "for the sake of" for readability.

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died **for the sake of (huper)** all, therefore all died;

2 Corinthians 5:15 and He died **for the sake of (huper)** all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again **for their sake (huper)**.

2 Corinthians 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin *to be sin* **for our sake (huper)**, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse **for our sake (huper)** for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"

All of them make more sense (*to me*) as "for the sake of". However, the first one bears a closer look in the form of a contrast. Here are the various understandings of the relevant part of the verse:

- that one died **instead of (huper) all**, therefore all died;
- that one died **in exchange for (huper) all**, therefore all died;
- that one died **for the sake of (huper) all**, therefore all died;

Iâ??ve said this repeatedly in this series: we need to read the text carefully.

At first glance, â??instead ofâ?• seems perfectly legitimate in 2 Corinthians 5:14. However, if you take a closer look at it, itâ??s actually impossible that it means â??instead ofâ?• or â??in exchange forâ?•.

Why?

Because of the phrase â??therefore all diedâ?•. **It makes absolutely no sense whatsoever to say that Jesus died instead of us, therefore we died.** The whole point of â??instead ofâ?• would be that we didnâ??t die, but He did die. However, scripture always paints us as having died with Jesus, for example:

Romans 6:1-11

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? **2** May it never be! How shall **we who died to sin still live in it?** **3** Or do you not know that **all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?** **4** **Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death**, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. **5** For if **we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death**, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, **6** knowing this, that **our old self was crucified with Him**, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; **7** for **he who has died is freed from sin.**

8 Now if **we have died with Christ**, we believe that we shall also live with Him, **9** knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. **10** For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. **11** Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

There are other verses as well, but I think Romans 6 makes the point clear; scripture always paints a picture of us dying with Jesus.

Now, PSA does have a response.

Their response would be that Jesus did indeed die â??instead ofâ?• us and we get the results of His death applied to us, which is what scripture means by us dying with Him. I personally find that unsatisfying, but itâ??s not impossible.

Conversely, saying that Jesus died â??for our sake/benefitâ?• makes sense. If Jesus died for our sake/benefit, and we get the results of His death (*and resurrection*) applied to us, thereâ??s no inherent contradiction introduced by â??instead ofâ?•, because thereâ??s no â??instead ofâ?• to create problems.

Anyway?!

Back to that verse list.

Now, did you notice that all the verses where ἵνα ὑπεράσῃ is supposed to mean ἵνα instead of ἵνα or ἵνα in exchange for ἵνα are all PSA proof-text verses?

I find that? interesting.

Very interesting.

All throughout this series, we've seen that PSA tends to redefine words to fit its worldview (*like atonement, propitiation, forgiveness, and several Greek and Hebrew words as well.*) **Could ἵνα ὑπεράσῃ be another one of them?** It certainly seems possible because the normal/commonly accepted definition of ἵνα for the benefit/sake ἵνα works perfectly for ἵνα ὑπεράσῃ in those verses where PSA insists that it means ἵνα instead of ἵνα or ἵνα in exchange for ἵνα.

So again ἵνα like in many other places in this PSA series ἵνα we're seeing that PSA requires a rare and/or debated meaning of a word, even when the normal, common, and undisputed meaning works perfectly.

At this point, it's happening so often that it's becoming predictable. In fact, we might be up to double digits in the number of words that PSA redefines.

That's not good.

If it was only one or two words with a solid reason behind it, it wouldn't be a problem. I wouldn't even mind double digits if all of them had a solid reason behind them. However, they usually have very scant evidence or weak evidence for all the redefinitions.

Again, that's not good.

Thus:

- Because the lexicons say it's a debated meaning
- And because the evidence for ἵνα ὑπεράσῃ meaning ἵνα instead of ἵνα or ἵνα in exchange for ἵνα is incredibly weak,
- **And because 2 Corinthians 5:14 seems to make ἵνα instead of ἵνα impossible,**
- And because there is no verse in scripture where ἵνα instead of ἵνα is a clear meaning of ἵνα ὑπεράσῃ
- And because I haven't seen a single example outside of scripture where ἵνα instead of ἵνα is a clear meaning
- And because every verse where it's claimed that it means ἵνα instead of ἵνα or ἵνα in exchange for ἵνα is ἵνα without exception ἵνα a PSA proof text, (*indicating potential theological bias, even if subconscious*)

- And because PSA has such a long track record of redefining words,
- **Therefore:** For the rest of this series, I will say that *huper* cannot mean *instead of* or *in exchange for* as PSA claims.

Admittedly, that isn't an iron-clad position. However, given the complete lack of evidence for PSA's definition, I'm quite comfortable with it. If a PSA fellow wants to claim *in exchange for* is a valid definition, that's fine, but I'll need to see some evidence to be convinced; preferably strong evidence.

Now that all the word study parts are finished, we'll look at the passage again.

2 Corinthians 5:21, revisited

Based on everything we've seen so far, there are two legitimate ways to understand this verse:

2 Corinthians 5:21

PSA version: He made Him who knew no sin *to be sin for our sake*, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Non-PSA version: He made Him who knew no sin *to be a sin offering for our sake*, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Both of those translations are 100% legitimate. If a PSA fellow wants to claim that the PSA understanding is the correct one, it would be impossible to prove him wrong. However, likewise, if a non-PSA fellow said that the non-PSA understanding is correct, it would be impossible for a PSA adherent to prove him wrong as well.

It's an impasse!

!sort of.

The non-PSA version has precedent because Jesus is called a ~~sin~~ purification offering many times in the New Testament, plus it links Jesus back to the Old Testament sacrificial system. Conversely, there is no other place in scripture where Jesus is said to be made into sin, or to become sin.

(A PSA fellow might say that Jesus was made into a curse according to Galatians 3:13. We haven't looked at that verse deeply yet that's the next article but I've mostly finished my research on that verse and to make a long story short, that's not what it says.)

So while it's true that there's no objective way to settle the impasse, one option has broad support across all of scripture, while the other is completely without precedent.

I know which one I prefer.

Anyway, we'll move on to 1 Peter 3:18.

understanding of the ~~sin~~ purification offering), but most importantly, it's the correct translation.

Sadly, no translations use "sin offering" in 1 Peter 3:18 despite BDAG and the evidence previously covered that $\text{ἡ ἁμαρτία} \text{ (peri hamartia)}$ should be translated "sin offering".

It's almost depressing.

Anyway!

Further, everything that we said about "super" above applies to this verse as well.

It means "for the benefit/sake of" in this context. If you translate that into the verse and also include BDAG's recommended translation, it would look like this:

1 Peter 3:18 (*modified*)

18 For Christ also suffered once as a sin offering, the just for the sake of the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,

Do you see PSA there when it's properly translated? (*And when the ~~sin~~ purification offering is properly understood.*)

Me either.

The other "Jesus died for us" verses

Many verses in the New Testament have some variation of "Jesus died for us". Here's one example:

Romans 5:7-8

7 For one will hardly die **for (super)** a righteous man; though perhaps **for (super)** the good man someone would dare even to die. **8** But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, **Christ died for (super) us**.

Now, given what we just covered, I'm sure you know what I'm going to say: in these verses, "for" should be understood as "for the benefit of", not "in exchange for".

Literally every single "Jesus died for us" verse in the New Testament uses "super".

Every.

Single.

One.

No exceptions.

To use that Romans 5 passage as an example, here's how it should be understood.

Romans 5:7-8 (*modified*)

7 For one will hardly die **for the sake of (huper)** a righteous man; though perhaps **for the sake of (huper)** the good man someone would dare even to die. **8** But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, **Christ died for the sake of (huper) us.**

(That last bit would be translated "Christ died for our sake" for readability, not the woodenly literal and hard to read version above.)

You could also translate it "for the benefit of" and that would be equally correct.

The point is that the various "Jesus died for us" verses are about benefit to us; i.e. that "Jesus died for our benefit/sake"

They aren't about substitution.

Even if a PSA fellow insists that "huper" can mean substitution, understanding it as "for our benefit/sake of" is still a perfectly legitimate way of understanding the verse. That same PSA fellow can't insist that it must mean substitution/exchange because there's no contextual reason to.

One thing I've repeatedly heard from the PSA camp is that the phrase "Jesus died for us" is an obvious reference to PSA. For example, Mike Winger mentions this a few times in his PSA series, but that's based on a false assumption that "huper" means substitution.

It doesn't.

So whenever you see some version of "Jesus died for us" in the New Testament, realize that it's "huper" and thus should be understood as "for our benefit/sake", not understood as "in exchange for".

1 Peter 3:18 in context

Next, we'll look at the wider context of 1 Peter, and by that I mean the whole book. Much of the book is concerned with perseverance under persecution. Here are a few scattered verses about that:

1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, **you have been distressed by various trials,**

1 Peter 2:20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But **if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it,** this *finds* favor with God.

1 Peter 3:14 But even if **you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.** AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,

1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, **do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you,** which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;

1 Peter 5:10 **After you have suffered for a little while,** the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

Yes, that's one verse from each chapter of 1 Peter. However, I want to hone in on the immediate context of 1 Peter 3:18, which really starts all the way back in 2:18-12

1 Peter 2:18-25

18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. **19** **For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.** **20** For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.

21 For you have been called for this purpose, **since Christ also suffered for (hyper = for your sake) you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,** **22** WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; **23** and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; **24** and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. **25** For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Peter detours to talk about husbands, wives, and general Christian conduct immediately after this in 3:1-12, then returns to his discussion of suffering in 3:13 and following. However, please read verses 19 and 21 together again, because those two in combination seem to paint a picture.

1 Peter 2:19 talks about us suffering unjustly, then verse 21 says that God left us Jesus as an example to follow! when suffering unjustly?

The implication is that though it's not explicitly stated is that Jesus's suffering was unjust, which is why He is the example for us when we suffer unjustly.

This is confirmed even more by the numerous allusions to Isaiah 53 in verses 22-25. As discussed when we went through Isaiah 53 verse-by-verse, a focus of Isaiah 53 is that Jesus's suffering was not caused by God, but rather by man behaving wickedly when they attacked Him. (See [the article on Isaiah 53](#) for details.) Thus, that would fit with Jesus suffering unjustly as 1 Peter 2 seems to clearly imply.

However, it's an implication, not explicitly stated, and that difference is important.

Again, we need to read the text carefully.

It's bad to ignore what the text says, but it's just as bad and sometimes worse to overstate the text. Again, the implication is clear, but it's just that; an implication, not an explicit statement. Thus, while it certainly should be considered and taken into account when weighing the evidence for and against PSA, it should be considered softer evidence, not hard evidence.

Now, PSA does have a response.

Even if we assume that Jesus's suffering was unjust, PSA could reply that it was both just and unjust at the same time. **PSA would say that it was unjust for the people to kill Jesus, but it was just for God to use wicked men's wicked behavior to accomplish His purposes.** That is, it was wicked for the people to kill Jesus because Jesus was innocent. (*I don't think anyone disputes that.*) However, God has a long history of using man's wickedness to accomplish His purposes. (*Joseph comes to mind.*) He does this so often and it's so undisputed that I won't bother posting verses to support this.

I personally don't find this answer compelling because 1 Peter 2 seems to paint the whole event as unjust in its entirety. However, that is merely an interpretation of an implication. I leave it to you to decide for yourself which position makes more sense.

Now, before we wrap up this article, we'll look at the various "Jesus died for our sins" verses, since they all without exception use "hyper".

What about the "Jesus died for our sins" verses?

Because we've already spent so much time on "hyper" in this article, this is a perfect time in this series to look at these verses.

1 Corinthians 15:1-5

1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, **2** by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word

which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. **3** For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, **that Christ died for (huper) our sins according to the Scriptures, 4** and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, **5** and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

And also:

Galatians 1:3-5

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and **the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for (huper) our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age,** according to the will of our God and Father, **5** to whom *be* the glory forevermore. Amen.

Please notice that according to Galatians 1:4, Jesus died to rescue us from *“this present evil age”*, not God’s wrath. That makes perfect sense according to the cleansing model of how Jesus saves us that we saw in [this article](#), and also how Jesus rescued us from the enemy as we saw in [this article](#). However, it doesn’t make much sense under the PSA model of salvation. However, since we’ve already discussed those topics at length, we won’t do so again here.

Now, PSA will say that *“died for our sins”* indicates penal substitution, but does it?

Again, we need to read the text *carefully*.

PSA assumes that the *“for”* in *“died for our sins”* means *“in exchange for”* in the sense of substitution. We’ve already seen that this is extremely unlikely, but not wholly impossible. So for the sake of argument, let’s grant the PSA position. Even doing that, it still doesn’t teach PSA, not if you read it carefully. Why? Because what’s being substituted: Us or our sins?

- **PSA says it means:** *“Jesus died in exchange for us because of our sins”*
- **But the text says:** *“Jesus died in exchange for our sins”* (Assuming the PSA understanding of *“huper”* is correct here.)

PSA assumes the red portion above and reads it into the text, but that’s not what the text says. If the PSA understanding of *“huper”* is correct, then it means that *“Jesus died in exchange for our sins”*. I have no idea what that means, or what it could mean. Here’s what it would look like with all the PSA translation options:

- Jesus died **in exchange for** our sins
- Jesus died **instead of** our sins
- Jesus died **in the place of** our sins

Do any of those make sense?

Yeah, I don’t think so either.

We need to read the text *carefully*.

translation in 2 Corinthians 5:21. The "sin offering" was actually a "purification offering" used to cleanse sin's pollution from sacred space (*the tabernacle/temple in the OT*). It does not support PSA at all.

The Greek word *huper* properly means "for the benefit of" and/or "for the sake of". PSA says it means "in exchange for" and/or "instead of", but there is no strong evidence for that, the meaning is disputed, and it becomes nonsense to translate it that way in verses like 2 Corinthians 5:14.

Thus, there are two basic ways to legitimately translate 2 Corinthians 5:21:

2 Corinthians 5:21 (modified)

PSA version: He made Him who knew no sin *to be sin for our sake*, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Non-PSA version: He made Him who knew no sin *to be a sin offering for our sake*, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The former option is entirely without precedent in the rest of scripture, while the latter has the support of nearly a dozen other New Testament verses, plus the entire Old Testament sacrificial system behind it.

1 Peter 3:18 is similar, except that BDAG (*the gold-standard lexicon*) specifies that "sin offering" is the correct translation there. As we saw in previous articles, there's significant evidence for that. Thus, there are two ways to translate that verse as well.

1 Peter 3:18

PSA version: For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the just for the sake of the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

Non-PSA version: For Christ also died as a sin offering once for all, *the just for the sake of the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

The "Jesus died for sins" (*with huper*) verses indicate that the impelling cause that motivated Jesus to die was our sins, not that He died "in exchange for" or "instead of" our sins.

The "Jesus died for us" passages indicate that Jesus died for our sake/benefit, not "in exchange for us", indicating substitution.

The next article in this series will be an in-depth study of Galatians 3:13, which is another passage that is often used to support PSA. See you then. ☺

EDIT: You can read that article here: [PSA Series â?? Does Galatians 3:13 support PSA? What is a Curse in the Bible?](#)

God Bless,
Berean Patriot