

**PSA Examined****Article Series:**

**Article #1:**  
Intro &  
Outline



The Biblical Case for AND Against Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA) â??  
Series Intro

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Weâ??ll start with a definition of Penal Substitutionary

Atonement (PSA) so that everyone is on the same page. You almost certainly know the doctrine, even if you donâ??t know the name.

According to PSA, Jesus suffered the wrath of God by suffering the punishment for sins as a substitute for us instead of us taking that punishment ourselves, and as a result, we have Jesusâ??s righteousness credited to us and thus are restored to right relationship with God.

It breaks down thusly:

- **Penal.** This word refers to punishment, specifically saying that Jesus was punished on the cross.
- **Substitutionary.** This word indicates that Christ was punished â??in our placeâ? and â??instead of usâ? as our substitute.
- **Atonement.** This word is generally understood to mean a restoration of â??right relationshipâ?, meaning that according to PSA, Jesusâ??s penal substitution restores us to right relationship with God.

Now, many Christians might say â??Isnâ??t that just the Gospel?â? And the answer is yesâ?! according to some Christians, but definitely not all. Arguably the oldest Christian denomination in the

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world â?? the Eastern Orthodox Church (*off of which the Roman Catholic Church split because the Orthodox wouldnâ??t recognize the Pope*) â?? rejects PSA, and others do as well.

**This article series on PSA will be a thorough Biblical examination of the doctrine to see if it aligns with scripture.**

Why?

Because while doing my daily Bible reading some time ago, I ran across a passage that seemed to contradict PSA. (*Ezekiel chapter 18, which weâ??ll cover later in the series.*) I was taught PSA since childhood and only learned that a biblical case against it existed when I started investigating after reading that chapter that day.

**To be 100% upfront, Iâ??m still not entirely sure where I will land.** Iâ??m currently leaning in one direction, but Iâ??m not ready to â??plant my doctrinal flagâ?? either way as I write this series intro. No man is unbiased, but Iâ??ll try my best to keep my bias out of this article series. (*And I invite readers to call me out on any bias that they see in the comments.*)

**Like in a debate, this article series will present the arguments both for AND against PSA.**

This article series is partially my research notes, documenting the strongest arguments both for and against it. **Iâ??ll present the arguments from both sides and you â?? like in a debate â?? can decide which side is more compelling.** Regardless of whether youâ??re a firm believer in PSA, uncertain about it, or ardently against it, youâ??ll be far more familiar with both sides of the debate by the end of this series.

**I will do my very best to accurately and fairly represent both sides of the debate. There will be no â??straw manâ?? tactics, nor emotional rhetoric, and the sole arbiter will be the scriptures themselves.** We will look at other things (*like the Early Church Fathers for historical context*), but scripture alone is the sole arbiter of Christian faith and doctrine.

So please, settle in, put on your thinking cap, and maybe make yourself a nice cup of tea because this series wonâ??t be a short read. (*This intro is pretty short though.*)

Weâ??ll start with an overview of the core tenets of PSA.

## **The Core Tenets of Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA)**

The full doctrine of PSA actually comprises up to 17 different points in its fullest, most complete, historical form. **However, you can distill PSAâ??s core essentials down to far fewer points, and most modern PSA-believing Christians donâ??t hold to all 17.** Thus, weâ??ll only look at the absolutely essential parts of PSA.

**If you remove a single one of the following parts, you no longer have PSA.**

Note: I came up with this grouping of PSAâ??s core tenets. There are probably other ways to group them, but this made the most sense to me and followed Einsteinâ??s principle that: â??Everything

*should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.*•

Here are the core tenets of PSA:

1. The sin of man deserves God's righteous, just, and holy wrath.
2. Because God is perfectly righteous, just, and holy, He cannot simply leave sin unpunished, even if the sinner repents; to remain true to His own holy character, He **must** punish sin.
3. It is acceptable for God to punish an innocent substitute instead of the man guilty of sin, **provided that all three of the following conditions are met:**
  1. The substitute is of the same nature as the guilty. (*which is why animals won't do*)
  2. The substitute is 100% righteous with no sin whatsoever. (*Otherwise his own sin would need to be punished*)
  3. The substitute is voluntary.
4. Once the substitution has been made, the righteousness of the righteous substitute is transferred to the sinner, and the sinner's wickedness (*or sins*) are transferred to the innocent substitute. (*called imputation, and when it goes both ways, it's called double imputation.*)

This leads us right back to the definition that opened this article.

According to PSA, Jesus suffered the wrath of God by suffering the punishment for sins as a substitute for us instead of us taking that punishment ourselves, and as a result, we have Jesus's righteousness credited to us and thus are restored to right relationship with God.

Theopedia defines PSA this way:

**Penal substitutionary atonement** refers to the doctrine that Christ died on the cross as a substitute for sinners. God imputed the guilt of our sins to Christ, and he, in our place, bore the punishment that we deserve. This was a full payment for sins, which satisfied both the wrath and the righteousness of God, so that He could forgive sinners without compromising His own holy standard.

Again, the core elements of PSA can be distilled into the 4 core tenets above, and we'll examine them in detail in this series. **Some of the verses/passages that touch on PSA won't be covered in our examination of the core tenets. We will look at those verses/passages after examining the core tenets.**

In order to give you an idea of what to expect, here's an overview of what the series will cover.

## Series Overview

The current outline for the series is below, but **as with all works in progress, it's subject to change. I might change/add/combine any of these depending space and relevance.** I probably won't write/publish them in this order.

- **Series Intro** – what you’re reading now. Following this intro, there will be one article covering each of the core tenets of PSA
- **PSA’s core tenet #1** – This article is finished and you can find it [here](#).
- **PSA’s core tenet #2** – A thorough examination of it. You can read this article [here](#).
  - **What is Atonement?** – This will be a thorough look at atonement and what it means. You can read this article [here](#).
    - **The Day of Atonement and Old Testament sin offerings** – We will look at both in the same article, since the Day of Atonement includes a sin offering. You can read this article [here](#).
  - **What is Propitiation?** – Like the article on atonement we’ll take a thorough look at the word and what it means. You can read this article [here](#).
  - **Does the Levitical Sacrificial System support PSA?** – This will be an overview of the whole sacrificial system to see if it supports PSA. You can read this article [here](#).
  - **Is Death a Punishment from God or a Consequence of Sin? (Or both?)** – I’ve found both positions in my research, and given that PSA says that Jesus’s death was central to salvation, we’ll examine this thoroughly. You can read that article [here](#).
- **Mid series recap and why Jesus *had* to die (*The Gospel*)** – This article is exactly what the title says. It also contains what I’ve been calling the “cleansing model” of how we are saved. Regardless of if you believe PSA or not, this article’s understanding is crucial to a full understanding of the Gospel. **This might be the most important article I’ve ever written, so if you’re only going to read one article in this series, please make it this one.** You can read this article [here](#).
  - **What do Redemption and Ransom mean?** – These terms are used in some of the strongest passages used to support PSA, so we’ll take a close look at them. You can read this article [here](#).
  - **Biblical Spiritual Warfare, Passover, and the Defeat of Satan (Christus Victor?)** – This article builds on the one on ransom/redemption and explains how Jesus saved us from the powers of darkness. It also covers the full context around Passover to see if it supports PSA. You can read this article [here](#).
  - **Did Jesus Have to Die for God to Forgive Sins?** – This article will examine Matthew 26:28 (*which says Jesus died for forgiveness of sins*) to see if Jesus’s death was necessary for God to forgive sins, and other passages that use the Greek word translated “forgiveness”. You can read this article [here](#).
  - **Does Isaiah 53 support PSA? (verse-by-verse, with context)** – Like the title says, this will be a verse-by-verse study through Isaiah 53 to see if it supports PSA as strongly as PSA advocates say it does. You can read this article [here](#).
    - **Isaiah 53:6 – laid on Him the iniquities of us all**: This material was covered in my article: [How To Do a Word Study of a Greek or Hebrew Word in the Bible](#).
  - **Do 2 Corinthians 5:21 and/or 1 Peter 3:18 support PSA?** – These two verses have a lot in common when it comes to the important words, so we’ll look at them together. You can read this article [here](#).
  - **Does Galatians 3:13 support PSA?** – Many consider this to be a strong verse for PSA, so we’ll look at it thoroughly. You can read this article [here](#).
- **Did God Ever Punish the Innocent for the Sins of the Wicked in the Bible?** A thorough examination of the topic, and we’ll also finally wrap up PSA’s 3rd pillar as well. You can read this article [here](#).

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- **What is Faith? How Does Faith Save Us?** This will be important context for the following article on Justification, and important for the Christian life generally. You can read it [here](#).
  - **What is Justification? What Does "Clothed in the Righteousness of Christ" Mean?** It turns out that most Christians simply don't know what justification is according to the lexicons. The usual definition that's bandied about in theological circles has nothing to do with what the lexicons say that the Greek words mean. You can read this article [here](#).
    - **The Early Church fathers' views of Jesus's work on the cross.** The PSA school says that PSA was taught from the beginning, but the anti-PSA crowd says it was created by Calvin during the Reformation. I've been reading the original sources – the early church fathers themselves – and making notes as I read. I'll report what I find.
  - **Summary of the biblical evidence.** Exactly as the title says, this will summarize everything in the series so far, and hopefully wrap it up in a nice, neat little package.

If you can think of a verse/passage that strongly supports PSA that hasn't been covered in the series, please say something in the comments.

I'll update this article with links as I publish each article in the series.

Until then, I recommend you read my article: [How To Do a Word Study of a Greek or Hebrew Word in the Bible](#). Not only does this article look at an important passage in the debate (*Isaiah 53:6*), but it will also show you how to double-check my analysis of original language words, and enable you to do such analysis yourself.

You can read the next part of this series here: [PSA Series "Does Man's Sin Deserve God's Wrath? What is God's Wrath?"](#)

God Bless, and I'll see you in another article soon.