

# Intellectual workout

**MUST GOD PUNISH SIN?, \_\_\_\_\_**

**By Ben Cooper**

**Latimer Trust: 53 pages. £2.50**

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**The latest in the series 'Latimer Studies' (no. 62) from the Latimer Trust is this well-produced and interesting offering from Ben Cooper, curate at St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, London.**

The booklet is 53 pages long and ranges from detailed exegesis of the Old Testament to discussion of economic game theory, all in an attempt to answer the question of its title, *Must God Punish Sin?* It is thus a briefer, but more scholarly companion to the same author's more popular book, *Just Love: Why God Must Punish Sin* (The Good Book Company, 2005). The question is a crucial one (pun intended): recent reports in *Evangelicals Now* have focused on some professing evangelicals who deny that Christ

is punished in our place on the cross. If it is necessary, as Cooper argues, for God to punish sin, then the arguments against penal substitution founder: if Christ didn't bear our punishment, then we must bear it ourselves.

After a brief introduction, Cooper discusses the nature of punishment, arguing briefly for a retributive aspect to divine punishment. He then spends some 15 pages in an interesting and scholarly discussion of punishment in the Old Testament. The bulk of the booklet is given over to answering the question of whether it is God's free decision to punish sin, or whether God had to punish sin because he had to be just and justice demands it. Cooper argues with Owen, Edwards, and Turretin — but against Twisse, Rutherford, and (perhaps) Calvin — for the second alternative.

The booklet is hard going in parts, particularly the discussion couched in terms of possible worlds. It is rewarding, however, and recommended to readers of *EN* desirous of a serious intellectual workout regarding an important theological question.

**Daniel Hill**