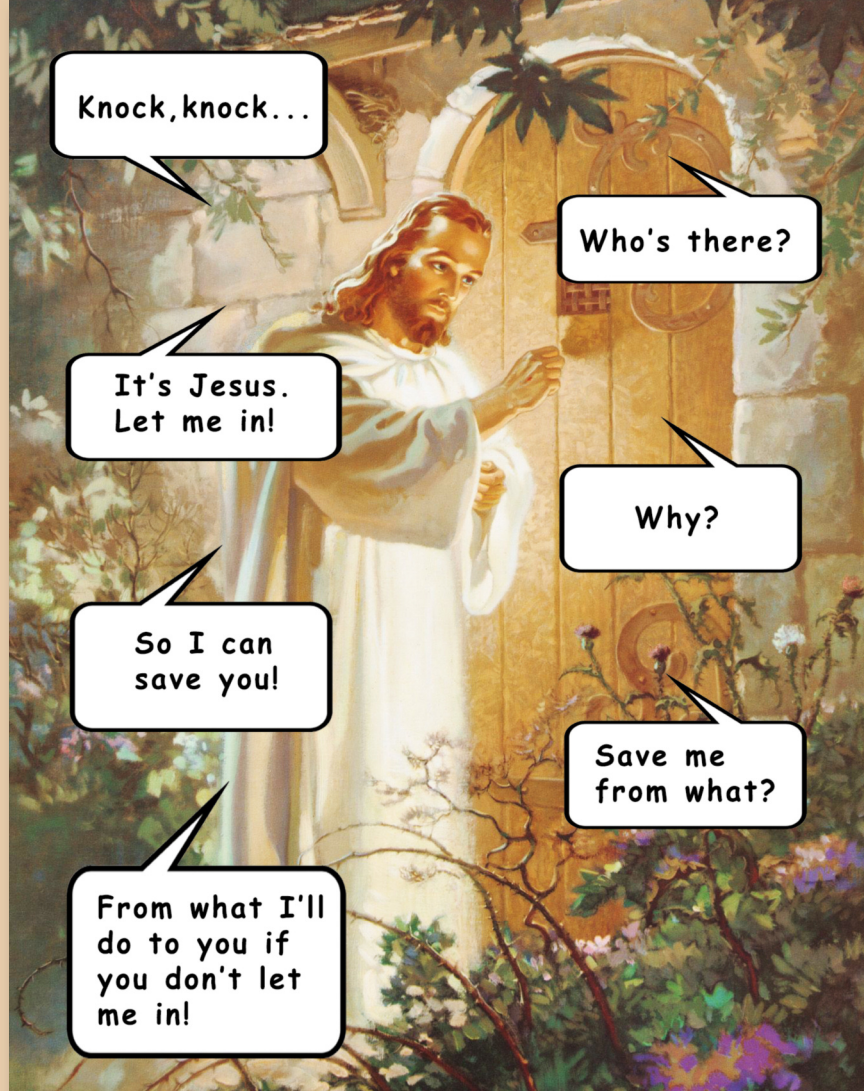


Does God Save Us...



from God?

Brad Jersak

Twitter statement: “God saves us from God. The One who mercifully drags us out of the rebellious city is the same One who rains down fire upon it.”

Thus wrote a popular tweeter whose handle I’ll withhold out of respect and concern. *God saves us from God?* How so?

Penal substitutionary atonement (PSA—see page 6) continues to be the most popular Western answer to the question, “Why did Christ die?” and is the primary interpretation for Scripture’s assertion that “Christ died for our sins.” Rather than treating it as one of many atonement theories, major denominations are now doubling down, dogmatizing PSA as non-negotiable, essential to the gospel and thus, to salvation. If it IS the gospel, then those who don’t affirm it are not even considered “saved.”

PSA as the uncritical masses understand and proclaim it is

neither necessary nor glorious, yet remains stubbornly popular. We hear it from 10,000 pulpits, public broadcasts and now social media across popular Christianity.

Theologically Perilous

The prevalent expression of PSA can be distinguished by its insistence on “wrath appeasement,” which puts God on par with a virgin-hungry, pagan volcano god. Yet beneath the question of wrath lurk deeper theological perils—ancient heresies already refuted by the early church. These errors resurface in PSA and need to be challenged.

Specifically, intrinsic to common PSA is a dangerous suggestion that the Trinity and/or the person of Christ can be divided. These errors appear inescapable for PSA and I’ve yet to see a response that takes them seriously.

TRITHEISM [the three-gods heresy]: First, no matter how we spin the Son’s willing conspiracy with the

Father to sacrifice himself for humanity, if Father and Son are separated in any way during the Passion, the indivisible unity of the Trinity is severed. If the Father afflicts something on the Son that absences the Father from the Son’s experience, whether an outpouring of wrath or actual abandonment, then the Trinity—“one in essence and undivided”—suffers a rending (however brief) and the three persons are no longer one inseparable God. That’s Tritheism, a formal heresy that we need not retry, if apostolic orthodoxy means anything to us.

ARIANISM [the inferior son heresy]: Second, pop-PSA reads Paul’s statement that Jesus became sin and a curse *literally*, as if he were transformed into something other than God—*less than* God. PSA says a holy God cannot tolerate sin and must punish it—he can neither look on it nor overlook it. Thus, as Christ bears and becomes sin—when PSA’s all-holy Father unleashes all hell on

the sin-cursed Son—Jesus becomes something different from the Father. Someone *less* holy and *less* divine than God, at least for several hours. As Christ hangs on the Cross under the judgment of God’s wrath, how can he remain “fully God”? By this logic, he can’t. That’s a form of Arianism, an error refuted prior to the close of the New Testament.

NESTORIANISM [the divided Jesus heresy]: One workaround to this problem is to divide the person of Christ himself. Christ is both fully human and fully divine, so it’s tempting to divide the two natures and assign sin- and wrath-bearing to his human nature alone.

If only his humanity “becomes sin” and endures the Father’s wrath, then Christ’s divine nature remains untainted. But this proposition again divides what can’t be divided: the one Person, Jesus Christ. As Cyril of Alexandria said, *Christ is one*. The two natures of Christ cannot be separated without making Christ two persons. That’s Nestorianism, another refuted heresy. To imagine the crucifixion event as solely the experience of Christ the human, rather than Christ the one divine-human Person, is to cut him in half.

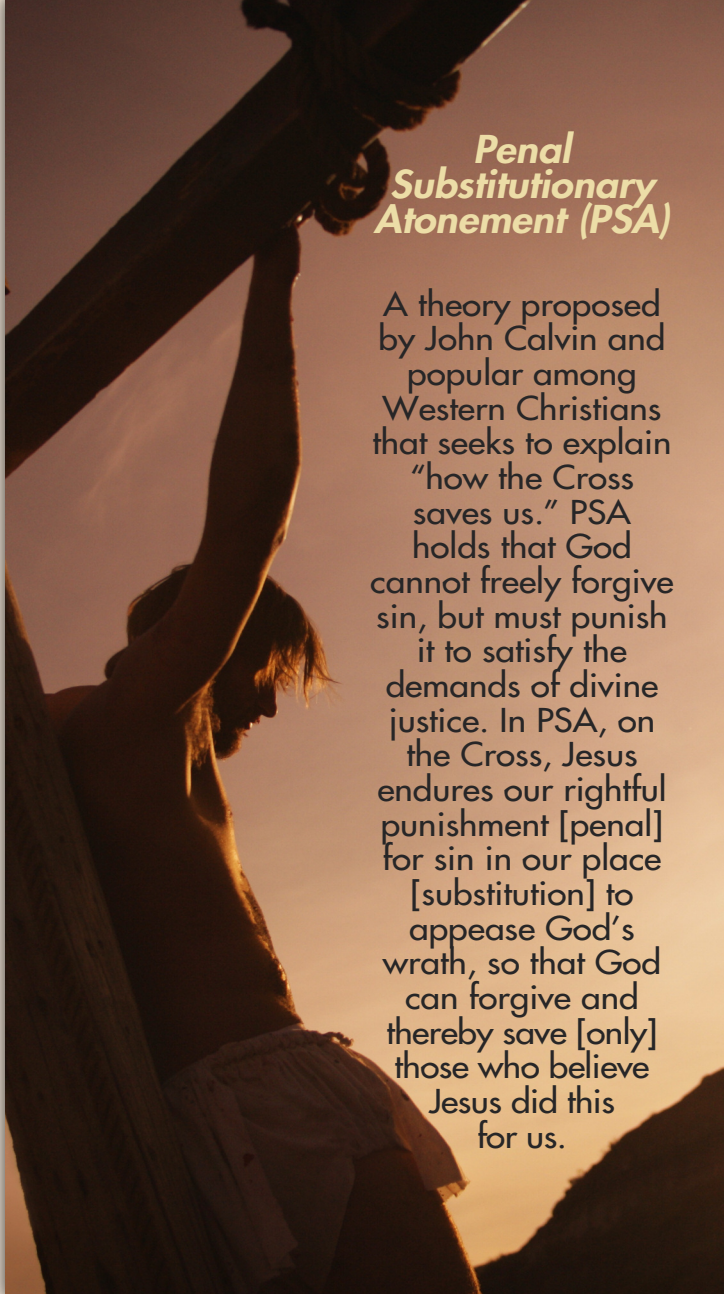
Either God hangs on the Cross or God does not hang on the Cross—PSA cannot have it both ways. And when they look for alternatives, ex-PSA adherents often flail about with no clear vision of the Cross.

As I said in *A More Christlike God* and will review in my soon-to-be-published *A More Christlike Way*, the Cross is not a revelation of God’s wrath, but of *his self-giving, radically forgiving, co-suffering love*. And the Cross is not Jesus’ way of saving us from his angry Father. Rather, as Paul says, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting our sins against us.” Where is Christ on Good Friday? He’s there, on the Cross, the Lamb who was slain, taking away (not punishing) the sins of the world (and not just the Christians). □

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Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA)

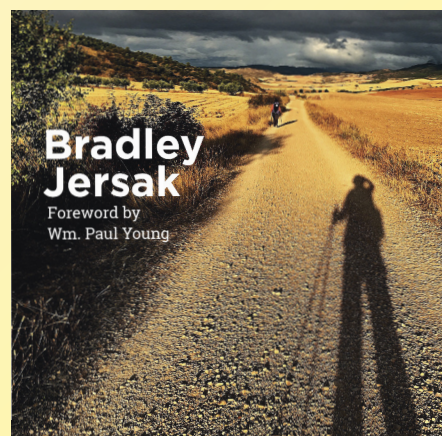
A theory proposed by John Calvin and popular among Western Christians that seeks to explain “how the Cross saves us.” PSA holds that God cannot freely forgive sin, but must punish it to satisfy the demands of divine justice. In PSA, on the Cross, Jesus endures our rightful punishment [penal] for sin in our place [substitution] to appease God’s wrath, so that God can forgive and thereby save [only] those who believe Jesus did this for us.



COMING SOON!

A More Christlike Way by Brad Jersak

The highly anticipated sequel to
Brad Jersak’s award-winning book,
A More Christlike God.



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