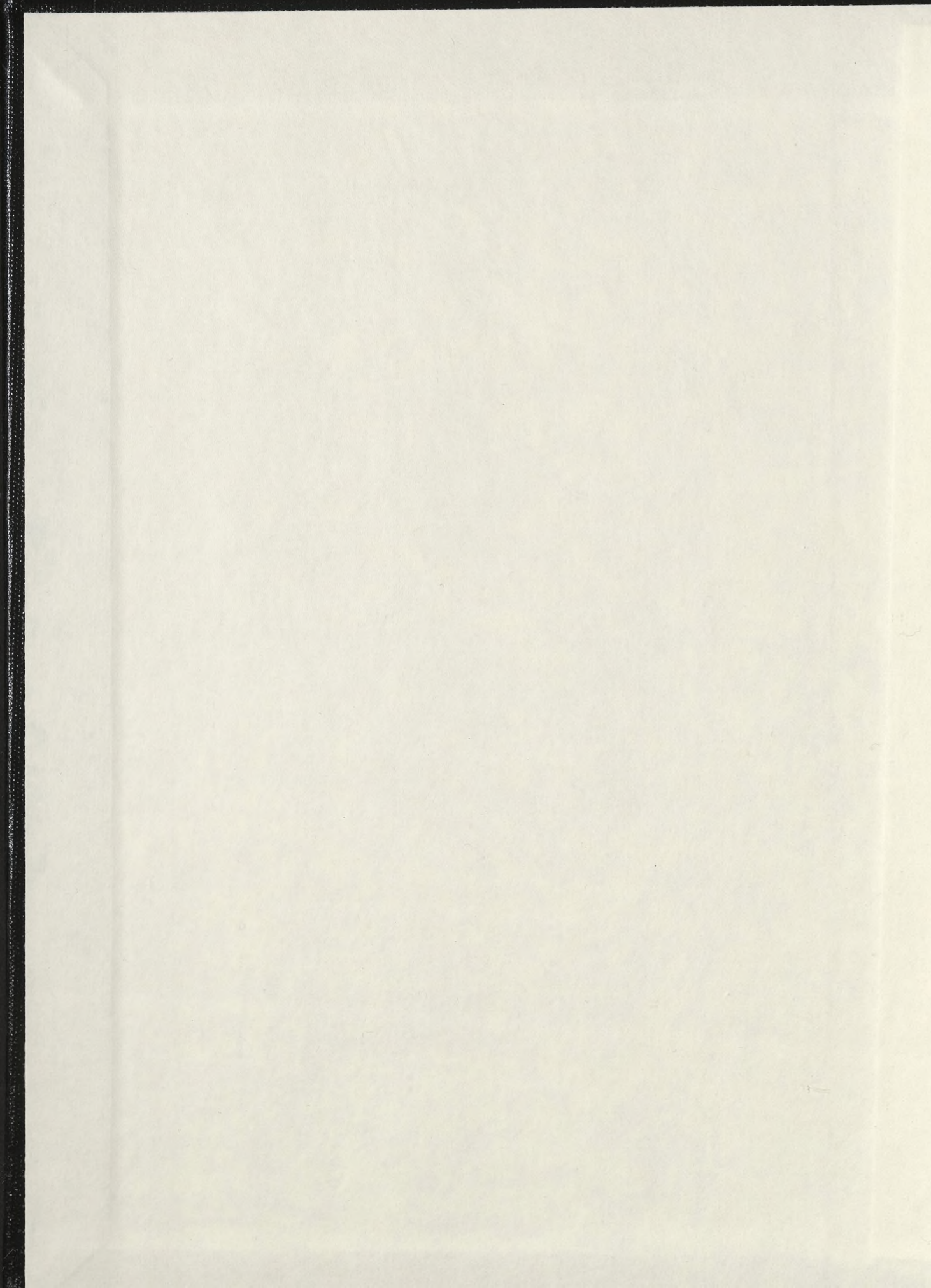


ADOPTED FOR THE KINGDOM

BY

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by

Matthew D. Burkholder, BRE

A thesis submitted to
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in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

“Adopted for the Kingdom”

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This thesis examines the penal substitutionary atonement theory (PSA) considering recent critical theological scholarship. The theological implications of PSA are applied to several systematic categories such as the Trinity, God’s wrath, sin, and forgiveness, demonstrating that Evangelicals should adopt a different framework to articulate the meaning of Jesus’ death. Instead of describing Jesus’ death in punitive and legal terms, this thesis contends that Jesus’ death should primarily be understood and communicated as being “for us,” and imagined as a kingly and fatherly “intervention.” Finally, this thesis makes several applications as to how the evangelical church should communicate atonement theology.

CONTENTS

SUMMARY PAGE	ii
SIGNATURE PAGE.....	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1: WRATH AND THE TRIUNE GOD	16
CHAPTER 2: DIVINE INTERVENTION	42
CHAPTER 3: IN JESUS' OWN WORDS	66
CHAPTER 4: THE ATONEMENT AND THE CHURCH	94
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	108

INTRODUCTION

The death of Jesus Christ remains one of the most captivating events in history. Each Christian generation has wrestled with the important question, “Why did Jesus die?” Like the Apostle Paul, heralds of the Christian faith desire to preach “Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23 NRSV) and proclaim that the blood of Christ’s death “is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28). For centuries Christian theologians have developed theories to explain the relationship between Christ’s atoning death and resulting forgiveness. For many, the question finds its answer in the various atonement theories developed throughout church history. Is Christ’s death a victory over Satan for our forgiveness, like the early church fathers believed? Did Christ’s death “satisfy” God’s justice allowing him to forgive, as Anselm and Calvin claimed? Or perhaps Christ’s death inspires moral change based on his loyalty and faithfulness to God’s mission? Or is Christ’s atonement, as J. Denny Weaver recently articulated, an event that overcame the forces of evil in a dramatic display of the power of non-violent resistance?¹ The theological well of Christ’s death is deep for every generation to draw.

However, it is also incumbent upon every generation to assess the accuracy of its received theology of the cross. At times, the Church has needed to refine its thinking. For example, up until the time of Anselm the ransom theory dominated the corporate

¹ See Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*.

imagination of the church.² However, this view had one significant flaw—why would *God* need to pay Satan for the debt of human sin? Anselm, seeing this weakness, reminded his generation that it is *humanity* who owes *God* their debt. In his brilliant work, *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm synthesized Christ’s Incarnation with the atonement arguing that “the restoring of mankind ought not to take place, and could not, without man paid the debt which he owed God for his sin. And this debt was so great that, while none but man must solve the debt, none but God was able to do it; so that he who does it must be both God and man.”³ Over time, Anselm’s ideas were further systematized by the Protestant Reformers into the Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA) theory, which has emerged as the predominant evangelical explanation of Christ’s death.⁴ Simply defined, the theory of PSA states that Jesus Christ not only paid the debt of righteousness humanity owes God, but did so by suffering the wrath of God for human sin.⁵ While theologians often understand Christ’s death in multifaceted ways, the common evangelical position is that this judicial metaphor of PSA must take priority.⁶ Seeing the cross as the place where God poured out his wrath on Christ has become an enduring image of how to receive divine forgiveness. According to PSA, “that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed” (Acts 13:38) is based on a “wondrous exchange” of our sins onto Christ, “as if they were his own.”⁷ However, recent scholarship has raised questions about the alleged centrality of the PSA view. An important challenge being

² Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 7.

³ Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 82.

⁴ Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 21.

⁵ Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 21

⁶ Treat, *The Crucified King*, 179.

⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, book 4, chapter 17, para. 53, location 24952.

raised is whether PSA's theological system answers a question that the authors of Scripture simply were not asking. Or rather, the judicial component PSA claims as central may perhaps be but a means of understanding a different question.

Instead, this thesis examines the question of the meaning of Jesus' death considering the self-understanding of Jesus in the context of the soteriological narrative of Scripture. Fortunately, the Scriptures contain insight into the life, teaching, and actions of Jesus the Messiah. Considering that the focal point of atonement theology is Jesus Christ, this thesis considers whether or not the claims of PSA are consistent with Jesus' self-understanding of forgiveness. If PSA is the definitive lens for understanding the atonement, then satisfying God's punishment should be communicated in Jesus's teaching on forgiveness. This is not the case however. Critically, this thesis argues that PSA is inconsistent with Jesus' understanding of his death and forgiveness. Constructively, this thesis shows that the atonement restores humanity to the family of God for rendering the kingdom of God.

However, when probing the mystery of Christ's atonement, one must, like the Apostle Paul, exclaim in doxology the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Rom 11:33). All theories of the atonement are but human explanations of a profound enigma. This thesis demonstrates but one aspect of Christ's atonement—how and why Christ restores humanity to the family of God and is not intended to function as the only lens by which one understands Christ's death. There are, after all, a plethora of metaphors and symbols to describe Christ's death. Instead, this thesis will sharpen one's understanding of God's grand purpose for humanity as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. However,

this thesis shares the concern of many others that the evangelical church has overstated the legal and judicial understanding of Christ's death.

To justify this concern, this thesis first raises several theological problems regarding PSA. Although this thesis intends to discover how the Gospel writers communicate Jesus' "overarching vision of the ideal human being's relationship with God and their relationship with other creatures of God,"⁸ it first engages in a systematic critique of PSA's implications on the Trinity, justice, wrath, sin, and forgiveness—all of which are key terms in understanding how the atonement brings about salvation. Proceeding under the assumption that the cross stands as the key to understanding the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the Christian faith, this thesis proposes that an alternative framework for interpreting the cross is necessary. Unencumbered by the theological problems of PSA, this alternative framework offers better wisdom in how the Church should communicate the gospel and allows for a clearer interpretation of the Gospel texts concerning forgiveness. With both the critique of PSA and alternative framework in view, this thesis will finally examine several key Gospel passages that confirm that that *the atonement restores humanity to the family of God to render the kingdom of God*.

When examining the Gospel texts, this thesis uses an approach developed by Kevin J. Vanhoozer who states that "the *substance* of theology is dramatic because it concerns what God has said and done in Jesus Christ [and that] the *form* of theology is dramatic inasmuch as it concerns a word addressed by God to human readers and

⁸ Ezigbo, "Contextual Theology," 108.

people's response."⁹ Just *how* the atonement represents what God has said and done to procure forgiveness and how the Church should respond is the major topic of this thesis. In his essay, *The Atonement in Postmodernity*, Vanhoozer describes one postmodern critique of PSA relevant to this thesis. According to Vanhoozer's commentary, from a postmodern perspective PSA suffers from both methodological and material challenges.¹⁰ Considering its method, PSA privileges one metaphor over the others; considering matter, PSA processes the metaphor according to the economy of law that focuses the atonement according to God's retributive justice and Jesus' punitive death.¹¹ Vanhoozer reminds the atonement theologian that, "The cross is simultaneously the definitive critique of religion and the enabling condition of true spirituality. One lesson we can take from postmodernity is not to think too highly of theory. A doctrine of atonement that pretends to explain fully the saving significance of Jesus' death is probably guilty of preferring the clarity of unifying concepts to the messiness of multiple metaphors."¹²

So how should one approach the Gospels to discover what God has said and done in the atonement? In the *Drama of Doctrine*, Vanhoozer describes two helpful categories in approaching the relevant biblical texts: "interpretation of narrative" and "social demarcation." Interpretation of narrative is that which both "clarifies the basic plot or logic of the dialogical action" and "suggests ways in which Christians can perform and so continue the story in new contexts."¹³ Social demarcation "preserves the identity of the Christian church by directing its members to participate in the triune missionary drama

⁹ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 44.

¹⁰ Vanhoozer, "The Atonement," 381.

¹¹ Vanhoozer, "The Atonement," 381.

¹² Vanhoozer, "The Atonement," 401.

¹³ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 104.

whose climax is Jesus' death and resurrection."¹⁴ This thesis will establish that the substantial locus of the logic of *atonement* theology is in the gospel dialogues of Jesus and that the judicial assumptions of PSA are theologically inadequate to form a participatory human response to Christ's death and resurrection.

The Interpretation of Narrative

The narrative of the Gospels becomes the narrative of God's direction for humanity, with Christ's atonement being the climax of God's plot of redemption. According to Vanhoozer, because "the biblical narrative is a three-dimensional discourse that operates with historical, literary, and ideological principles,"¹⁵ theology is the means by which the reader comes to know God by "attending to the uses to which language of God is put in Scripture itself."¹⁶ Simply put, the language of Scripture contains an overarching meta-narrative of redemption that culminates in Christ. The gospel writers regularly describe Jesus speaking as if "the unfolding drama of his own life and work was the 'same' as that ongoing, though unfinished, story of Israel and Yahweh."¹⁷ In this sense, the gospels present a narrative in which Jesus sees himself as "the content of the Scriptural witness, the one who interprets the Old Testament witness, and the one who commissions the New Testament witness."¹⁸ Proceeding under the assumption that the gospels are the faithful witness of how Christ understood himself to be the historical fulfillment of all the

¹⁴ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 104.

¹⁵ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 18.

¹⁶ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 22.

¹⁷ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 195.

¹⁸ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 195.

Scriptures (Luke 24:27), this thesis is based upon a hermeneutical principle that “Christian theology is perhaps best located in the interpretive practice of Jesus and the apostles.”¹⁹ Accordingly, this thesis argues that Jesus’ atonement theology reflects an understanding of forgiveness that is restorative.

The question being asked is whether the judicial elements inherent in PSA enhance or impede an understanding of the biblical narrative of redemption. To “clarify the plot” of restorative forgiveness this thesis ultimately accesses Christ’s “dialogical action” in the gospel narratives in the context of the biblical story of redemption. That is to say, “divine deeds require divine words if they are to be adequately understood; redemption entails revelation.”²⁰ For example, Jesus’ words of forgiveness to a paralyzed man (Mark 2:1–12), sinful woman (Luke 7:36–50), lost son (Luke 15:11–32), and words of warning regarding the unmerciful servant (Matt 18:21–35), all describe a restorative action of forgiveness in the kingdom of God. By analyzing the content of Jesus’ teaching of forgiveness, the context of Jesus’ act of atonement comes into focus. Specifically, the parable of the lost son is a compelling picture of the overarching biblical narrative of redemption, with the metaphor of “adoption” emerging as the primary key to understanding the forgiveness of God. Furthermore, whereas PSA affords divine forgiveness in response to Christ’s satisfactory death, the gospel narratives show that Christ exercises his free authority to restore and forgive humanity in response to sincere faith (Matt 9:1–8).

¹⁹ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 22.

²⁰ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 147.

This thesis sets out to consider how one is to understand the various Gospel descriptions of the atonement. For example, in *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, authors Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green trace how the gospel writers communicate the efficacy of Christ's death. Luke stages the rejection of Jesus and his resulting death as leading to the confession of a Gentile centurion, recalling the concept that God's family includes all people, Jew and Gentile.²¹ John uses vocabularies such as believing, understanding, seeing, and knowing to refer to the transformation of people into children of God.²² Furthermore, in discussing the Last Supper narrative in Matt 26:17–30, N. T. Wright notes that when Matthew metaphorically describes Christ's blood being poured out "for the forgiveness of sins," he does so not to suggest that "Jesus' death will accomplish an abstract atonement, but that it will be the means of rescuing YHWH's people from their exile plight" and that "this was part of the eschatological plan for the fulfillment of YHWH's kingdom-purposes."²³

Social Demarcation

Important to this thesis' theological approach is that Scripture exists to direct the church to participate in the triune missionary drama whose climax is Jesus' death and resurrection. Social demarcation, therefore, moves beyond theology as a science of propositional truth into the realm of social action. In the context of this atonement theological study, its proposed task is not merely to elucidate the meaning and mechanics

²¹ Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal*, chapter 3, para. 22, location 989.

²² Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal*, chapter 3, para. 32, location 1046.

²³ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, chapter 12, para. 55, location 11341.

of Christ's death, but to offer followers of Christ a compelling framework of participation. Not only is Christ's forgiving atonement restorative, but it allows for the kingdom of God to be actively rendered on earth. However, in PSA the substitution of Christ is an objective, legal transaction between the Father and Son, rendering humanity as passive observers and receivers of an imputed righteousness. To be forgiven of one's debt (Matt 6:12) in this paradigm fails to connect one's experience of divine forgiveness with one's forgiveness of others (Matt 6:14). If the identity of the Christian Church is to *actively* recreate the drama of Christ's death in society, does PSA adequately explain Christ's death to accomplish this task? If the experience of Christ suffering the weight of human sin on the cross is God's gracious reconciliatory event (2 Cor 5:19), and Christ enables his followers to respond to a sinful world with grace and forgiveness, to participate in God's restorative salvation drama, one must understand Christ's death as being "for us" and not a payment of punishment to God. This in turn "reveals the full character of the powers that enslave humankind and that oppose the rule of God, and it reveals what it cost Jesus to fulfill his mission."²⁴ The cross becomes the juxtaposition of humanity's failure and God's triumph—a dramatic display of humanity's most profound rejection of God, and the deepest display of God's free willingness to restore his lost children. Since humanity is incapable of obeying God and reversing the effect of sin, Christ's "substitution" is that which allows participation in the undoing of human sin and rendering of the kingdom of God. According to Vanhoozer, "canonical-linguistic theology recognizes the need for a plurality of vocabularies and even conceptual schemes to do justice to the complex, multidimensional reality of Jesus' death. Not every metaphor or

²⁴ Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 94.

literary form—or atonement theory for that matter—works in the same way or on the same level.”²⁵

While one simply cannot ignore that a legal metaphor for the atonement is used in Scripture (Rom 3:21–31), such an objective description fails to explain the biblical evidence for the deeply intimate forgiveness Christ calls his followers to experience. The legal metaphor may speak to a truth evidenced on the cross, but it should not be used as the metaphor to explain *forgiveness*. Instead, the legal metaphor expounds the irony of the atonement—where one expects to find divine judgement, one unexpectedly discovers unfathomable forgiveness (Luke 23:34). In this sense, the cross “necessitates a discontinuity of the legal order: there is no satisfaction of God’s justice, for the relation of man to God is viewed in the light, not of merit and justice, but of grace.”²⁶

Thesis Outline

Chapter 1: Wrath and the Triune God

Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to Anselm’s satisfaction theory of the atonement by discussing Anselm’s key argument concerning the relationship between the Incarnation and salvation,²⁷ as well as his thesis that Christ satisfies humanity’s debt to God.²⁸ This chapter then examines the doctrine of the inseparable operations of the Trinity considering PSA. This chapter draws from the theology of Jürgen Moltmann to

²⁵ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 386.

²⁶ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 146.

²⁷ Cone, “Non-Penal Atonement,” 28.

²⁸ Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 16.

demonstrate the importance of conceptualizing God regarding a “unified Spirit of surrender.”²⁹ This chapter then argues that a cruciform understanding of God allows for a more coherent trinitarian theology, as opposed to PSA, which creates conflict between the Son and the Father.

Chapter 2: Divine Intervention

Chapter 2 deconstructs and challenges the theological coherence of PSA. By examining the theological categories of sin, this chapter argues that the metaphor of “intervention” is more appropriate in understanding the accomplishment of the cross. This chapter agrees with PSA that Christ’s death is necessary to forgive sin but disagrees that it is inappropriate to prioritize the atonement as primarily benefiting humanity. A major section of this chapter relies on several New Perspective authors in its research.

Chapter 3: In Jesus’ Own Words

Chapter 3 examines the Gospels to determine that Jesus’ understanding of his death was primarily restorative. Jesus’ teaching on wrath, sin, and forgiveness will be examined to demonstrate that the atonement restores humanity to the family of God to render the kingdom of God. This chapter argues that PSA not only misconstrues forgiveness but represents a concept of forgiveness that is inherently Pharisaic.³⁰ In contrast, God freely

²⁹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 245.

³⁰ I am grateful to my supervisor Dr. Steve Studebaker, for noting the relationship between the punitive themes of PSA and the punitive attitudes of the Pharisees. The dichotomy between Law and Grace is deeply embedded in evangelical theology and connecting PSA with the legal motif of the Pharisees will be a poignant challenge to my readers.

forgives based on simple faith, carefully defining “free” as a term that does not imply debt repayment. Based on the parable of the lost son, this chapter concludes by establishing “adoption” as the means by which the Church should understand its position in Christ.

Chapter 4: Adopted for the Kingdom

The final chapter will be devoted to how the theme of forgiveness in the Gospels should be applied and communicated by the Church. Since humanity is in need of forgiveness, and Christ intended humanity to enter the kingdom of God, the Church has a responsibility to communicate an accurate representation of the atonement.

Final Considerations

In focusing on the Gospels, some may ask, what about Paul? Paul’s theology of the atonement is equally as complex as one devised from the Gospel narratives. As Pauline expert N. T. Wright writes in *The Day the Revolution Began*, “Paul, like Jesus himself, like the gospels themselves, was saying from a number of different angles and in a variety of different contexts the two things that together comprise the larger picture the early Christians had grasped . . . First Paul shared the early Christian vision of the goal of redemption . . . second, that goal would be attained by means of the death of Jesus.”³¹ In other words, both the Gospel writers and the Apostle Paul are contributing to a script

³¹ Wright, *The Day*, 227–28.

with the same “through line”—the connecting theme that runs throughout the drama of God’s plot of redemption. When analyzing the conceptional elements of this drama, this thesis draws from many biblical sources to demonstrate that God has a consistent concern for humanity’s restoration above and beyond the penal satisfaction motif. However, since the theological goal of this thesis is to express Jesus’ *self-understanding* of the atonement, the Gospels will serve as its final destination.

One may also argue that rejecting the primacy of PSA is a rejection of crucicentric Evangelicalism as outlined by David Bebbington.³² However, according to Vanhoozer, “the core ‘evangelical’ conviction is that God has spoken and acted in Jesus Christ and that God speaks and acts in the canonical Scriptures that testify to him.”³³ Since this thesis intends to discover a theology of the atonement based on Jesus’ self-understanding, and affirms that Scripture is the place of God’s communicative action, this thesis is a project of evangelical theology.

Finally, this thesis is not primarily an exercise in historical theology and does not attempt to provide an in-depth historical overview of the development of PSA. While figures such as Anselm and Calvin will be discussed, the focus of this thesis is on the current debate surrounding PSA, how it is currently conceived, relates to systematic theology, fits within the Gospel narratives, and informs the Church’s communication and living out of the gospel.

³² Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*.

³³ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 26.

How This All Began

This thesis arises out a perceived conflict in the way PSA theologians have discussed the concept of wrath and punishment. For example, how can some PSA theologians claim their theory rescues humanity from the punishment and wrath of God through Christ while simultaneously claiming that God did not *punish* Christ? This has certainly been the case for some of the most nuanced PSA advocates and it not difficult to imagine why. The punishing of a person implies conflict, something unthinkable between God the Father and God the Son. For example, John Stott in *The Cross of Christ* wisely contends that “we must not, then, speak of God *punishing* Jesus or of Jesus persuading God, for to do so is to set them over against each other as if they acted independently of each other or were in conflict with each other. *We must never make Christ the object of God’s punishment* or God the object of Christ’s persuasion, for both God and Christ were subjects not objects, taking the initiative together to save sinners.”³⁴ Or consider the remarkable claim by Howard Marshall, “The holy and loving God upholds righteousness through judging sinners and saving those who accept what he has done in his Son on their behalf. *It is not a case of God punishing Christ* but of God in Christ taking on himself the sin and its penalty. Indeed, at some point the challenge needs to be issued: where are these Evangelicals who say that God punished Christ? Name them!”³⁵

One does not have to wade deep into the evangelical world to discover the many authors who claim that God punished Christ on the cross. For example, Wayne Grudem

³⁴ Stott, *The Cross*, 150.

³⁵ Marshall, “The Theology,” 63.

explicitly states that Christ became the *object* of God's punishment on the cross.³⁶

Canadian writer Tim Challies, once dubbed "one of the finest young evangelical thinkers of our day,"³⁷ emphatically declared that God punished Jesus on the cross.³⁸ And why shouldn't he? While theologians such as Stott and Marshall attempt to nuance the concept of God punishing Jesus, if a penal quality is at the heart of Christ's substitutionary death, then wouldn't God necessarily have to punish Jesus? Is not the central problem that PSA solves that God must punish the *sinner* and that Jesus suffered the wrath of God in humanity's place? Into this complex theological conversation this thesis now enters.

³⁶ "Yet more difficult than these three previous aspects of Jesus' pain [physical pain and death, the pain of bearing sin, and abandonment] was the pain of bearing the wrath of God upon himself. As Jesus bore the guilt of our sins alone, God the Father, the mighty Creator, the Lord of the universe, poured out on Jesus the fury of his wrath: *Jesus became the object* of the intense hatred of sin and vengeance against sin which God had patiently stored up since the beginning of the world" (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 574–75).

³⁷ As endorsed by R. Albert Mohler Jr. in Challies, *The Discipline*.

³⁸ Challies ("Take This Cup") in his reflection on the cross writes, "just a few short hours later Jesus' battered body was nailed to the wooden cross. As He hung there, alone and naked before God, He began to drink that cup. He faced God's judgment and drank in the horror, desolation, shame and destruction that are rightfully mine. How the Father must have felt, having to punish His own Son with every bit of the wrath of His righteous anger against sin. At the time His Son needed Him most, He was unable to comfort Him. The Father poured out punishment against His Son that human minds can never comprehend. Hour after hour God's wrath poured in, on and through Jesus. Finally, hours after He began, Jesus did what no other person ever could do—He emptied that cup, drinking down the last drops of God's wrath, until there was no more. The wrath that deserved to be poured out against me was consumed by the One who loves me more than I can ever know."

CHAPTER 1: WRATH AND THE TRIUNE GOD

The concept of Jesus' substitutionary death is the result of a radical theological paradigm shift that occurred at the turn of the eleventh century with the publication of Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo*. Reacting against the "ransom-to-Satan" theory that was prevalent in his time, Anselm arrived at an Incarnational understanding of the atonement that saw humanity's violation of God's honour via sin as the major problem for humanity. According to Anselm, the solution was that Christ's death was a necessary "satisfaction" of that violation.¹ For Anselm, the debt for humanity "is total, the obligation to pay for it, total, the power to pay it, zero."² Therefore, Christ, who is God, became a man to pay this infinite debt carried by humanity. This satisfaction, however, not only satisfies divine justice, but merits a reward.³ However, as Anselm explains, "he who rewards another either gives him something which he does not have, or else remits some rightful claim upon him. But anterior to the great offering of the Son, all things belonging to the Father were his, nor did he ever owe anything which could be forgiven him. How then can a reward be bestowed on one who needs nothing, and to whom no gift

¹ Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 58.

² Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 55.

³ Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 56.

or release can be made?”⁴ Since Christ is in need of nothing, he graciously bestows the gift of salvation on those who believe in him.⁵

Consequently, the Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA) theory emerged as a Anselmian explanation of Christ’s death by the hand of John Calvin, Martin Luther, and Huldrych Zwingli.⁶ However, whereas in Anselm’s model Christ gave himself to God as an equivalent to punishment, in PSA Christ himself is punished for sinners: “in the satisfaction theory, the action is from Christ to God. In the penal substitutionary theory, the action is from God to Christ.”⁷ Rightfully understood, the theory of PSA contends that Jesus Christ suffered the wrath of God in humanity’s place.⁸ For many Evangelicals, rejecting PSA’s conception of the cross as the place where God punished Christ to satisfy God’s wrath is “not merely a dismissal of a ‘theory’ that has been present at least since the Reformation and in some form the early church; it is avoiding (or drastically reinterpreting) the major biblical theme of the wrath of God.”⁹

However, many theologians from various backgrounds have raised doubts over the validity of PSA.¹⁰ One such objection is that the separation described by PSA contains an inherent contradiction concerning the ontological unity of the Trinity.¹¹ Yet, the cry of Jesus in Mark 15:34 implies Christ experienced separation and wrath. This chapter therefore, will establish the undivided operations of the Trinity as an orthodox

⁴ Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 85.

⁵ Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 56.

⁶ Peterson, *Calvin*, 88.

⁷ Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 57.

⁸ Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 21.

⁹ Treat, *The Crucified King*, 182.

¹⁰ For a collection of essays written in opposition to PSA, see: Jersak and Hardin, eds., *Stricken by God?*

¹¹ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 2:776.

doctrine, raise questions concerning the internal logic of PSA, differentiate between Christ's and humanity's punishment, and argue that PSA curtails the cruciform image of God. Finally, this chapter will contend that eliminating God as a direct agent of wrath produces a more coherent description of the nature of the Triune God.

The Undivided Trinity

According to an axiom developed by Karl Rahner, "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity."¹² Rahner's axiom serves as a reminder that God's nature and activity are intrinsically linked, and one must consider one in light of the other. This chapter examines a doctrine known as the inseparable operations of the Trinity and how it relates to a penal theory of the atonement.

The inseparable operations of the Trinity was established early in the Church as an orthodox doctrine. For example, in the West, Augustine describes in his writing (414–420 CE) the relationship between the Trinity in strong, unequivocal terms:

The Catholic faith, made firm by the Spirit of God in its saints, holds this against every heretical depravity: The works of the Father and the Son are inseparable. What is it that I have said? Just as the Father himself, and the Son himself are inseparable, so also the works of the Father and the Son are inseparable. . . . Therefore, as there is an equality and inseparability of the persons, not only of the Father and the Son but also of the Holy Spirit, so also the works are inseparable. I shall say still more clearly what this means, the works are inseparable. The Catholic faith does not say that God the Father did something and the Son did something else, but what the Father did, this the Son also did, this the Holy Spirit also did.¹³

¹² Rahner, *The Trinity*, 22.

¹³ Augustine, *Tractates*, 79:166.

While Augustine argues that the works of the Trinity are inseparable, he does not suggest that each action is identical to one another (i.e., only the Son was born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, rose again on the third day, etc.).¹⁴ Every action involves a joint action of the Trinity. In other words, the only way to make a distinction between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is to relate one action to the action of another.¹⁵ The relationship between the Trinity explains how the Father can *send* the Son; they are distinct from one another, but neither sending nor receiving alters the *essence* of God.

Likewise, in *Summa Theologica* (1265–1274 CE), Aquinas discusses the unified role of the Trinity in the Incarnation of the Son. Quoting Augustine, that “the works of the Trinity are inseparable,” Aquinas anticipates a potential objection to the Incarnation. After all, if the works of the Trinity are inseparable, does it not suggest that the entire Godhead was incarnate in Jesus? Aquinas responds that the Incarnation implies: the *act* of the assumption, which involves all three persons; as well as *term* of the assumption, which involves only the one.¹⁶ This unity allows the “whole Divine nature . . . to be ‘incarnate’; not that It is incarnate in all the Persons, but inasmuch as nothing is wanting to the perfection of the Divine Nature of the Person incarnate.”¹⁷

Aquinas’ theology supports Rahner’s thesis by making a connection between the relational being of the divine persons (the immanent Trinity) and the common activity of the divine persons (the economic Trinity).¹⁸ In the relationship between God the Father

¹⁴ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 17.

¹⁵ Levering, *The Theology*, 163.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 3, a. 4.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 3, a. 4.

¹⁸ Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology*, 309.

and God the Son, this dichotomy is eliminated. By executing the Father's work, the Son reveals his unity of nature with the Father; the acts of the Son are not diverse nor different than that of the Father, but rather function from one singular operations.¹⁹ In this context, the Trinity jointly willed Christ's death.

It is not only Western theologians who stress the inseparable operations of the Trinity, but Eastern theologians as well. Gregory of Nyssa, responding in 375 CE to the charge that early Christians believed in three Gods, explained his belief of divine inseparability: "Rather does every operations which extends from God to creation and designated according to our differing conceptions of it have its origin in the Father, proceed from the Son, and reach its completion by the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that the word for the operations is not divided among the persons involved. For the action of each in any matter is not separate and individualized."²⁰

While not directly deploying the word *περιχώρησις* to describe the relational Trinity, Gregory does draw from this concept in his theology. As one theologian explains: "One could say that the Father embosoms the Son and envelops the Spirit within Himself; the Son enthrones the Father and enfolds the Spirit within Himself; and the Spirit enshrines the Father and encompasses the Son within Himself. Each participates in the utter fullness of mutual inclusivity and co-extensive existence."²¹ The doctrine of the undivided operations of the Trinity is theologically grounded in both the West and the East and is considered a common Christian confession.²²

¹⁹ Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology*, 309.

²⁰ Nyssa, "An Answer," 262.

²¹ Stramara, "Gregory of Nyssa's Terminology," 263.

²² Swain, "Pro-Nicene Theology."

PSA: Divine Child Abuse?

Predictably, when Steve Chalke referred to PSA as a form of “divine child abuse”²³ in his 2003 book *The Lost Message of Jesus*, therein assuming PSA implies unilateral action on the part of the Father,²⁴ advocates of PSA reacted swiftly. Many proponents of PSA describe the image of a “loving Son, pacifying the wrath of an angry Father” as being a gross mischaracterization. Multiple theologians crafted defences in response to Chalke.

For example, J. I. Packer and Mark Dever, in their book *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement*, focus PSA according to biblical trinitarian principles. Concerning the Incarnation, when God the Son began living as a human, his sense of being was uninterrupted.²⁵ Christ’s life, death and resurrection represent a jointly willed plan by all the members of the Trinity and demonstrated the eternal solidarity of mutual love. Therefore, “notions like ‘divine child abuse’ as a comment on the cross are supremely silly and as irrelevant and wrong as they could possibly be.”²⁶

Furthermore, many theologians have written recent articles echoing Packer and Dever’s response. Keith Johnson argues that the theology of inseparable operations necessarily implies that each member of the Trinity is involved in God’s redemptive act and that each member shares in “one will and execute one power.”²⁷ Johnson lists several common properties shared among the Trinity, including holiness, aseity, eternity,

²³ Chalke and Mann, *The Lost Message*, 182.

²⁴ Johnson, “Penal Substitution,” 53.

²⁵ Packer and Dever, *In My Place*, 22.

²⁶ Packer and Dever, *In My Place*, 22.

²⁷ Johnson, “Penal Substitution,” 54.

simplicity, sovereignty, grace, justice, will, and mercy.²⁸ Alternatively, the personal properties of the Trinity include paternity (Father), filiation (Son), and procession (Holy Spirit).²⁹ Johnson argues that both the commonly shared properties of love and wrath among the Trinity were displayed and satisfied in Christ's death; albeit in distinctly personal ways.³⁰ Johnson concludes that to create a subject/object dichotomy among the Father and the Son is to undermine their essential unity and is incompatible within a PSA framework.³¹

Likewise, Mark Thompson argues that God the Son is also an offended party in need of satisfaction since He is joined in existence to the Father in eternal unity.³² Thompson also draws from the theology of inseparable operations arguing that the interaction between the doctrine of the Trinity and the atonement demonstrates that Christ experiencing God's wrath is not an external transaction between the Son and the Father, but rather an event that happens within the Incarnate one who is both God and man.³³ Accordingly, he concludes: "any explanation of the gospel which pits the Father against the Son must be judged deficient because of who the Son is. He is the one who lives in perfect union with the Father and the Spirit."³⁴

Furthermore, in his essay *Defending Substitution*, Simon Gathercole offers three defences against Chalk's criticism. First, Chalk neglects the reality that Christ's death is not a third-party event, but the "self-substitution of God."³⁵ He notes that this

²⁸ Johnson, "Penal Substitution," 62.

²⁹ Johnson, "Penal Substitution," 63.

³⁰ Johnson, "Penal Substitution," 64.

³¹ Johnson, "Penal Substitution," 65.

³² Thompson, "From the Trinity," 24.

³³ Thompson, "From the Trinity," 22.

³⁴ Thompson, "From the Trinity," 23.

³⁵ Gathercole, *Defending Substitution*, 23.

characterization infers a low Christology that is not held by most advocates of PSA.³⁶ Secondly, Scripture teaches that Christ gave his life as a sacrifice “in line with his own will”³⁷ thus rendering any passivity in Christ’s death incoherent with PSA. Finally, Gathercole concludes that this caricature of PSA is inconsistent with the experience shared by millions of Christians throughout church history.³⁸

Proponents of PSA have considered the undivided operations of the divine persons and have carefully articulated that Christ’s death represents a unified willed action of the Triune God. The labelling of PSA as “divine child abuse” is misleading, disturbing, and should be abandoned.³⁹ The PSA position that “Christ (willingly) suffered the wrath of God in humanity’s place” is consistent with a historical understanding of the Trinity.

However, when investigating the content of God’s unified action, the claims of PSA suffer from logical inconsistency. Nonetheless, PSA is a resonating theory since it properly recognizes that the punishment of sin is morally acceptable; after all, no person rejoices when a criminal gets away with a crime or goes free on a technicality. Yet PSA infers that God punished someone He knew to be innocent; an act that seems intuitively unjust. The term punishment contains meaning that contradicts the claim of PSA. PSA claim’s that: “it is good for God to exact punishment in response to human sin” and that “God exacted punishment on the innocent Christ, who voluntarily received it in the place of sinners.”⁴⁰ The problem lies in an omniscient Triune God executing punishment upon

³⁶ Gathercole, *Defending Substitution*, 24.

³⁷ Gathercole, *Defending Substitution*, 24.

³⁸ Gathercole, *Defending Substitution*, 24.

³⁹ Jeffery et al., *Pierced*, 230.

⁴⁰ Kyle, “Punishing and Atoning,” 203.

a person known to be innocent of any crime and who constitutes the essence of God. The claim that: “God has punished the innocent Christ, who voluntarily endured this in the place of sinners” is indeed the appropriate interpretation of PSA⁴¹ and is therefore logically problematic; “God has punished” cannot be followed by phrase “the innocent Christ” since just punishment implies a clear knowledge of guilt.

Anselm’s theory itself does not appear to make such contradictory assertions. A key element of Anselm’s theology is that he *differentiated* between satisfaction and punishment. This becomes clear when one acknowledges that the essence of God is unchanged by human sin. Anselm carefully articulates this in *Cur Deus Homo*:

And when the being chooses what he ought, he honors God; not by bestowing anything upon him, but because he brings himself freely under God’s will and disposal, and maintains his own condition in the universe, and the beauty of the universe itself, as far as in him lies. But when he does not choose what he ought, he dishonors God, as far as the being himself is concerned, because he does not submit himself freely to God’s disposal. And he disturbs the order and beauty of the universe, as relates to himself, although he cannot injure nor tarnish the power and majesty of God.⁴²

In this capacity, humanity, not God, experienced the effects of sin while God remains completely whole despite our most grievous attempt to alter his created order.⁴³

Therefore, satisfaction becomes a prerequisite to restoring harmony rather than to exact revenge: “God’s provision for satisfaction, *rather* than a punishment, shows God’s great mercy. Satisfaction is not identical to punishment but is instead an alternative to it.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Kyle, “Punishing and Atoning,” 207.

⁴² Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 30.

⁴³ Erdman, “Sacrifice as Satisfaction,” 464.

⁴⁴ Erdman, “Sacrifice as Satisfaction,” 464.

However, Anselm's theory remains problematic. In their book *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green discuss the relationship between Anselm's feudal context and theology. Baker and Green argue that Anselm was not only inspired by his feudal society in his illustration of the debt we owe God but that he unwittingly allowed Medieval concepts of honour to define how God should act.⁴⁵ Accordingly, they argue that Anselm drew the belief that God cannot simply forgive our sin from the historical and social context of his era and not Scripture. They write, "Jesus declares that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins, and he is capable of exercising that authority without requiring, say, restitution or sacrifice (e.g., Mark 2:1–12). Not in the pages of Scripture but according to the social norms of his day it was unbecoming for a feudal lord simply to ignore or forgive a debt owed him by a vassal."⁴⁶ Baker and Green conclude that although Anselm's theory of the atonement affirms Jesus as both the subject and object of our reconciliation, it leaves the reader with a sense that Jesus provides the appropriate merit they require for a right standing before God. Furthermore, this right standing is earned by Jesus *from* God instead of a seeing forgiveness as God's gift.⁴⁷

However, what exactly then was Christ experiencing on the cross? There is secondary definition of punishment that doesn't logically conflict with justice. Although "God did not punish Christ in the primary sense of the term, certainly, Christ received a horrendous *form of punishment* in his crucifixion."⁴⁸ PSA is a theory asking the right

⁴⁵ Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal*, chapter 5, para. 6, location 1684.

⁴⁶ Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal*, chapter 5, para. 6, location 1684.

⁴⁷ Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal*, chapter 5, para. 6, location 1698.

⁴⁸ Kyle, "Punishing and Atoning," 215.

questions but coming to the wrong conclusion. Are human beings deserving of punishment because of their sin? Are they separated from God because of their disobedience? These are fundamental evangelical convictions, yet PSA requires that for God to be merciful, a knowingly innocent person must be punished to recover something that God never lost. The beautiful image of the cross is that Christ willingly suffered *human* punishment to bring about something infinitely good: something that *human beings* lost because of their disobedience. What is missing from PSA's interpretation of Anselm, is that "to accept satisfaction and also give punishment would be unjust, for exactly in accepting the satisfaction a just judge is laying aside punishment."⁴⁹ When one begins to see that the just Judge and the dying Messiah are one in the same, one sees *what* God has done is firmly rooted in *who* he is.

The Crucified God

One of the most important individuals to connect the nature of the Triune God with the cross of Christ is German theologian Jürgen Moltmann. In his major work, *The Crucified God*, Moltmann sets out to prove that the crucified Christ is the heart and test of all Christian theology. For Moltmann, the true mark of Christian identity is to "follow Christ along the way of self-emptying into non-identity."⁵⁰ Moltmann's well-articulated theology of Christ's suffering grounds God's nature in the historical event of the cross. Although published nearly three decades after the Second World War, the shadow of that conflict still raised questions about the nature of God. Moltmann's theology of the cross

⁴⁹ Cone, "Non-Penal Atonement," 35.

⁵⁰ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 18.

involves the ultimate solidarity; a God who by his nature enters our suffering through his own.

Moltmann rejects analogy as the primary method of speaking about God and sees the truth of God discovered through the paradox of the crucifixion. In the crucified Christ one finds contrary ideas: humanity seeks God in law, yet finds Christ condemned by law; humanity seeks God in the will for political power, yet finds Christ powerless; humanity seeks God in the cosmos to become divine, yet finds a dying Christ.⁵¹ For Moltmann, a theology of the cross liberates mankind from “self-justification, self-assertion, and self-deification.”⁵² According to Moltmann, the unique truth claim of Christianity is that the crucifixion is the pathway to the consciousness of God.⁵³ Moltmann acknowledges the role Luther’s theology of the cross plays in his thought, and one can clearly see the influence of Moltmann on contemporary cruciform theologians.

The Trinity is a critical element in Moltmann’s thesis. Moltmann describes the event of the cross as taking place between God and God.⁵⁴ God himself is ontologically active in the suffering of Jesus, although not suffering in a patripassian sense: “The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son.”⁵⁵ The ultimate nature of God is love, a love which is demonstrated in the fullness of Christ’s humble humanity.

Moltmann uses the doctrine of kenosis to buttress this argument, concluding that faith

⁵¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 69.

⁵² Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 69.

⁵³ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 97.

⁵⁴ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 151.

⁵⁵ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 243.

“must think of the suffering of Christ as the power of God and the death of Christ as God’s possibility.”⁵⁶

Furthermore, Moltmann quotes from Karl Rahner’s trinitarian theology, rejecting a dichotomy of the economic and immanent Trinity.⁵⁷ The nature of the Trinity is reflected in Christ. God is “transcendent as Father, immanent as Son and opens up the future of history as the Spirit.”⁵⁸ By seeing the event of the cross in Trinitarian terms, Moltmann avoids seeing Christ merely as a functional figure acting in time and space who becomes superfluous in the eschaton. For Moltmann, Christ’s cross is not an inauguration, but a permanent consummation of his suffering love, a subtle yet profoundly novel understanding of the kingdom.

Therefore, the Trinity at work in Christ’s death is God’s way of transforming society. All conceptions of authority need to be viewed through the lens of the cross: “God allowed himself to be humiliated and crucified in the Son, in order to free the oppressors and the oppressed from oppression and to open up to them the situation of free, sympathetic humanity.”⁵⁹ The crucified Christ shines his light on the oppressed, and any system, political or otherwise, that emphasizes any master-slave relationship is incoherent with the crucified God. Accordingly, Moltmann sees any political movement that emphasizes liberty as an ally of the Christian faith. This is both a strength and a weakness in Moltmann’s argument. He rightfully concludes that a cruciform God identifies with us in our suffering; yet wrongly concludes that God is therefore defined in

⁵⁶ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 215.

⁵⁷ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 240.

⁵⁸ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 256.

⁵⁹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 307.

egalitarian terms with humanity; benevolence in one's power does not logically imply a lack of power.

Moltmann describes the cross in these terms: "When the crucified Jesus is called the 'image of the invisible God,' the meaning is that this is God, and God is like this. God is not greater than he is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he is in this humanity."⁶⁰ Far from being a picture of the Father punishing Christ, Christ's died in accordance with a trinitarian, unified "spirit of surrender."⁶¹ God the Father becomes an active agent, experiencing self-surrendering and self-sacrificing love, and identifying himself "with his own being in the dying Jesus and [suffering] with him."⁶² Because God the Father "delivered" up his Son, the Father experiences Sonlessness. Likewise, the Son experiences Fatherlessness as he is delivered up by the Father.⁶³ Therefore, it is an act of trinitarian will to be "in the godforsaken and accursed death of Jesus on the cross."⁶⁴

God, therefore, constitutes his existence as love and demonstrates that love in the event of Christ's cross. Far from being a place where a transaction of guilt happens between humanity and Christ, the cross is an event that takes place between "God and God."⁶⁵ The implications for atonement theology are broad. To begin, the entire scope of the cross becomes a display of God's nature, with salvation emerging as a connection

⁶⁰ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 205.

⁶¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 245.

⁶² Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 190.

⁶³ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 243.

⁶⁴ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 244.

⁶⁵ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 151.

with God's self-sacrificial being. We are forced to wrestle with a paradox present at the cross, to which Moltmann describes as being "community between Jesus and Father in separation, and separation in community."⁶⁶ Moltmann describes the event of the cross in a way more conducive to the theology of the undivided operations of the Trinity. We can infer from the relational essence of the Trinity that we should conceive of the death of Christ as an event between "God and God." Moltmann argues for a reciprocal nature of the Triune God, while, PSA argues that Christ "willingly suffered the wrath of God in humanity's place" to repay our debt.

While the experiences of the Triune God are not identical the image of the Father pouring out wrath on the Son to achieve atonement adds confusion to the nature of God. Forgiveness in the PSA model is predicated on the repayment of debt, while Christ taught that forgiveness is a gift based on God's love (Mark 2:1–12; Luke 7:36–50; Matt 18:21–35; Luke 15:11–32). If restitution is a requirement for forgiveness, has forgiveness been achieved, or merely debt repayment? If, the crucified Jesus means "that this is God, and God is like this," using punishment to achieve forgiveness is problematic in the description of God's nature.

The Problem of God's Wrath

But what about God's wrath? According to Leon Morris, the Hebrew Bible alone uses more than twenty words to describe God's wrath in more than 580 passages.⁶⁷ Perhaps none are more difficult than the seemingly genocidal commands attributed to God (Deut

⁶⁶ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 244.

⁶⁷ Morris, *The Atonement*, chapter 7, para. 10, location 2072.

20:16–17), that include a command to kill non-combatants, women, children, and livestock (1 Sam 15:3). However, is it possible to imagine Jesus issuing such a command? The Jesus who invites children to “come to him” (Matt 19:14)? The Jesus “who chose to die for his enemies rather than to crush them?”⁶⁸ As Brian Zahnd has popularly coined, “God is like Jesus. God has always been like Jesus. There has never been a time when God was not like Jesus.”⁶⁹ How are we to rectify the seemingly contradictory images between God wrathfully commanding genocide, a morally offensive action, and the God who was “reconciling the world to himself in Christ Jesus, not counting people’s sins against them” (2 Cor 5:19)? This challenging theological question is what theologian Gregory Boyd tackles in his two-volume work, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God*. Boyd concludes that these two depictions of God exist in conflict and that the church must endeavor to resolve them.⁷⁰ Furthermore, because Jesus and the New Testament writers held the traditional view that all Scripture, including the Old Testament and its violent depictions of God, to be “God-breathed,”⁷¹ one cannot jettison portions of Scripture that appear inconvenient or difficult.⁷² According to Boyd, “the self-sacrificial, other-oriented, agape-love of God that was supremely displayed when Jesus freely offered up his life on the cross out of love for his enemies and at the hands of his

⁶⁸ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 1:xxviii.

⁶⁹ Zahnd, *Sinners*, 11.

⁷⁰ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 1:xxviii.

⁷¹ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 1:4.

⁷² Boyd also argues that any discussion regarding the historicity of the Old Testament accounts are anachronistic interpretations using post-enlightenment methodology. Boyd outlines his biblical methodology on pp. 348–78 in volume 1 of *The Crucifixion*. In Boyd's understanding, Scripture being “God-breathed” means the text itself is inspired and “not the relationship between the text and ‘actual history’ (363). Regarding Boyd's thesis, this means that “it becomes evident that our opinions regarding the positive or negative relationship of any text to ‘what actually happened’ should not affect our conviction regarding the divine authority of any canonical text” (352).

enemies . . . [will function] as the ‘magic eye’ that re-frames all of Scripture’s violent portraits of God.”⁷³

In his study on the literature and theology of the Hebrew Scriptures, Terence Fretheim argues that two theological realities emerge when engaging the moral dilemma of the Old Testament violent depictions of God.⁷⁴ First, the way in which the Bible talks about divine violence must be taken seriously and are critical in our reflection about God and God’s way in the world.⁷⁵ Secondly, some of how the Bible depicts God’s violence must be evaluated and challenged.⁷⁶ Ultimately, as Fretheim has noted, “God’s uses of violence—and the phrasing is important—are associated with two basic purposes: judgement and salvation.”⁷⁷ God uses violence to bring about his judgment in response to human sin and uses violence as the means to deliver his people from the sins of others and themselves.⁷⁸ Ultimately, “God’s use of violence, inevitable in a violent world, is intended to subvert human violence in order to bring the creation along to a point where violence is no more.”⁷⁹ And yet, according to Fretheim, if one is not critical of the texts where God engages in violent act and speech, one commends a way of life for those who follow this God.⁸⁰

Boyd’s solution to the problem is based on the cross being the “definitive revelation of God,”⁸¹ a theme he draws deeply from the theology of Jürgen Moltmann.

⁷³ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 1:140.

⁷⁴ Fretheim, *What Kind of God*, 133.

⁷⁵ Fretheim, *What Kind of God*, 33.

⁷⁶ Fretheim, *What Kind of God*, 133.

⁷⁷ Fretheim, *What Kind of God*, 134.

⁷⁸ Fretheim, *What Kind of God*, 136.

⁷⁹ Fretheim, *What Kind of God*, 136.

⁸⁰ Fretheim, *What Kind of God*, 137.

⁸¹ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 1:497.

Boyd sees Moltmann's theology as anticipating his cruciform hermeneutical principle.⁸² If Christ is going to be understood entirely in the light of the cross, as Moltmann argues, Boyd concludes we must accept that God's nature is opposed to violence.⁸³ The hermeneutic that Boyd proposes is "structured around the concept of covenant and oriented towards the cross as the culmination and fulfilment of God's covenant with Israel, and through Israel with all of humanity."⁸⁴ Quoting from Moltmann, Boyd writes that God, "out of covenantal fidelity with his people behaves 'like a servant' who 'bears Israel's sin on his back. . . . Out of his humble love for his people, God 'meets men' by identifying with 'those who are in straights, in the lowly and the small.' All such activities must be viewed as 'accommodations'⁸⁵ of God to the limitations of human history."⁸⁶

Furthermore, a theology that models violent images of God certainly can become a theology for living.⁸⁷ Genocide in God's name has at times been used to justify

⁸² Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 1:476.

⁸³ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 1:476.

⁸⁴ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 1:479.

⁸⁵ The analogy that Boyd uses to explain these accommodations, what he coins the "Principle of Cruciform Accommodation," is that of a "heavenly missionary." Often, when missionaries encounter people groups with old or barbaric customs, it would be foolish of the missionary to think they could just point out the inhumanity of such traditions and expect the group to change (*The Crucifixion*, 2:702). Because God honours the agency of the persons he has created, he works employing influence instead of coercion (*The Crucifixion*, 2:702) and allows a fallen people to project their conceptions of him and create him in their image (*The Crucifixion*, 2:706). Boyd sites multiple scenarios in which the cultural conditioning of the Hebrew people eventually led to God's acquiescence. For example, God permitted divorce because of the hardness of people's hearts, even though his ideal for marriage is monogamous and for life. God remained silent while allowing polygamy to happen (*The Crucifixion*, 2:714). Furthermore, God allowed Israel to be ruled by a king even though he was to be their Monarch, even using their rebellion in his redemptive plan (*The Crucifixion*, 2:717). God also allowed himself to be viewed as a slave master instead of a loving husband (*The Crucifixion*, 2:721) and be seen as a nationalistic deity, even though he intended to "be king over the whole earth" (*The Crucifixion*, 2:729).

⁸⁶ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 1:477-78.

⁸⁷ Weaver, *The Nonviolent God*, 149.

crusades, holy wars, and other revolutionary violence.⁸⁸ It is essential to consider the potential impact on the human conscience of embracing, without reservation, a God who sanctions massacres on men, women, and children.⁸⁹ One should view the Old Testament as an ongoing, unresolved conversation about the nature of God, one that is finally resolved with the testimony of Jesus' life and death.⁹⁰ When one considers what God is like, the image of Christ should be at the forefront of our mind. When one reflects on God's actions, the values of God's kingdom should be the model for one's life.⁹¹ In the context of PSA, what does God violently punishing Christ ultimately say about that kingdom?

John Calvin, one of PSAs most important contributors, clearly describes a need for Christ to experience the full weight of divine punishment to achieve forgiveness and satisfaction. In discussing Christ's decent into hell, Calvin writes: "Nothing had been done if Christ had only endured corporeal death. In order to interpose between us and God's anger, and satisfy his righteous judgment, it was necessary that he should feel the weight of divine vengeance. Whence also it was necessary that he should engage, as it were, at close quarters with the powers of hell and the horrors of eternal death."⁹² Yet Calvin wisely differentiates between God's disposition toward the Son, and the experience of Christ: "We do not, however, insinuate that God was ever hostile to him or

⁸⁸ Hinlicky, "The Theology," 274.

⁸⁹ Weaver, *The Nonviolent God*, 148.

⁹⁰ Weaver, "Jewish and pacifist," 33.

⁹¹ Christ's Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7) is a powerful example of the dichotomy between the way of Old Testament violence and the way of Christ. Jesus' repudiation of the *lex talionis* and elevation of the love of enemies (Matt 5:38–48) leads Boyd to state that Jesus would have not considered Elijah, Moses, Joshua, Samson, Elisha, David and other OT individuals to be children of God (*The Crucifixion*, 1:82). Boyd's provocative statement invites legitimate criticism about the lengths he is willing to push his thesis.

⁹² Calvin, *Institutes*, book 2, chapter 16, para. 32, location 9497.

angry with him. How could he be angry with the beloved Son, with whom his soul was well pleased? Or how could he have appeased the Father by his intercession for others if He were hostile to himself? But this we say, that he bore the *weight* of the divine anger, that, smitten and afflicted, he experienced all the signs of an angry and avenging God.”⁹³ Christ experienced the weight of this experience because “the guilt which made us liable to punishment was transferred to the head of the Son of God.”⁹⁴

Yet transference of guilt between humanity and Christ is logically confusing. If Christ experienced God’s wrath because he *literally* received our guilt, how can He be the innocent atoning sacrifice? Would he not also need to be atoned for?⁹⁵ This suggestion is of course absurd and explains perhaps why proponents of PSA must discuss their theory in terms of mystery: “When man justifies the wicked, it is a miscarriage of justice which God hates, but when God justifies the ungodly it is a miracle of grace for us to adore.”⁹⁶

But this raises the question, is the punishment of Christ our punishment? The central reality of human existence in the Bible is to be the image bearers of God.⁹⁷ While often understood as an innate characteristic, the image of God equally pertains to the human vocation.⁹⁸ The goal of the human vocation is to commune and worship God and reflect His image back into the world.⁹⁹ However, humanity turned away from its source

⁹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, book 2, chapter 16, para. 33, location 9507.

⁹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, book 2, chapter 16, para. 25, location 9401.

⁹⁵ Kyle, “Punishing and Atoning,” 211.

⁹⁶ Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?” 35.

⁹⁷ Wright, “Rethinking the Tradition.”

⁹⁸ Wright, “Rethinking the Tradition.”

⁹⁹ Wright, “Rethinking the Tradition.”

of life and worshiped creation instead of their Creator. The ultimate result of unbelief is eternal separation from God in hell.¹⁰⁰

One explanation of hell describes it as a place where humans who do not worship God eventually will cease to bear the image of God. Consequently, in the afterlife these creatures become ex-humans: creatures that once shared in the image of God, but no longer do, nor will ever do so again.¹⁰¹ Ultimately God respects our human autonomy and allows us to be given over to our destruction should we so choose. Consequently, separation from God is predicated on rejection of the human vocation. This judgement occurs because we have *ceased to be human and* done so because we have *willfully* rejected God. This model of punishment absolves God from the morally dubious conflict of “choosing” the ultimate end of individual human beings.¹⁰² However, Jesus Christ succeeded in his vocation to be an image bearer in the world and live in perfect communion with the Father. The Father marks the beginning of Jesus’ ministry with love and approval (Matt 3:17). Likewise, Jesus describes his relationship with the Father as constituting a perfect and eternal unity (John 10:30). Presumably there is a causal relationship between the rejection of God and the punishment of God. Therefore, how

¹⁰⁰ The following discussion is merely one view of hell. For an overview of the topic, see Walvoord et al., *Four Views on Hell*.

¹⁰¹ Wright, “Rethinking the Tradition.”

¹⁰² In defending the necessity of libertarian free will to justify hell, Wilko Van Holten in his article writes: “It is at the heart of Christian theism that God is a God of love and that He wants to live in a relationship of mutual love and fellowship with human beings . . . Now in order to enable human beings to enter into such a relationship with him, God necessarily needs to create them as persons who have the freedom to respond to his love—for love presupposes freedom. However, this freedom in turn necessarily entails the very possibility of rejecting God’s love decisively. This, I suggest, should be thought of as the choice for hell. From a theistic point of view this is the worst thing that can ever happen to an individual: being apart from God forever. Therefore, paradoxical though it may sound, the very possibility of people going to hell is created by God in order to enable human beings to gain the highest good. Without the possibility of hell there is no ultimate happiness. In this sense, both heaven (union with God) and hell (separation from God) flow essentially from God’s love” (“Hell and the Goodness of God,” 53).

can one conclude that Jesus' experienced the punishment of God when He never rejected God?¹⁰³

In describing the wrath of God, the Apostle Paul writes: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them (Rom 1:18–19)." Three times Paul uses the indicative verb *παρέδωκεν* (v. 24, 26, 28) to describe the process by which the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven. Remarkably, this implies that human beings themselves are responsible for experiencing the wrath of God. God *gives humanity over* to their natural desires and is not the primary agent in the distribution of His wrath. We can conclude, therefore, that "if we worship [creation], or some part of it, instead of the life-giving God, we are *invoking death upon ourselves* instead of life."¹⁰⁴

Bringing it Together: Wrath and Cruciformity

As this analysis has demonstrated, one must conceptualize of the substitution of Christ for humanity in two ways. Jesus Christ is a man simultaneously acting in God's place and dying in humanity's place.¹⁰⁵ God is identifying himself in Jesus Christ, an identification

¹⁰³ Proponents of PSA will commonly cite Isa 53:3–7 to defend the claim that God is the primary cause of Christ experiencing the wrath of God. In his essay, E. Robert Ekblad ("God," 180–212) compares the different interpretations of Isa 53 found in the LXX and Masoretic Text. He concludes that the LXX rightly interprets Isa 53:3–7 in a way which disassociates God from the servant's suffering.

¹⁰⁴ Wright, "Rethinking the Tradition."

¹⁰⁵ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 367.

of divine life and love.¹⁰⁶ The discovery that God, who is love, suffers immensely and gives himself over for the sake of humanity, is a profound insight of modern theology.¹⁰⁷

Boyd describes the cross as the place where all three persons of the Trinity willingly experience suffering in unique yet equal ways.¹⁰⁸ Boyd attributes human beings, under the influence of evil powers, to be the primary agent of Christ's punishment.¹⁰⁹ Boyd defines the wrath of God as the withdrawing of God's "loving, protective presence, thereby delivering his Son over to these violent agents, in accordance with the plan the Son had freely agreed to. It was in this sense that Jesus was 'punished,' 'stricken,' 'afflicted,' 'pierced,' 'cut off,' and 'crushed' by God."¹¹⁰ God, therefore, instead of experiencing anger towards his Son, experiences tremendous grief as He allows his creatures to physically and spiritually abuse His Son.¹¹¹

Boyd describes this act of God as "the supreme expression of the loving union of the three divine Persons."¹¹² Only in unity can the Godhead experience forsakenness.¹¹³ Like Moltmann, Boyd describes the cross in paradoxical terms, describing it as a place where "the three divine Persons sacrificed their previously uninterrupted experience of perfect loving union in order to express the perfect loving union that defines them as God."¹¹⁴ Boyd differentiates between the experience of God and the essence of God, arguing that only the former was interrupted during the event of the cross. Whereas PSA

¹⁰⁶ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 367.

¹⁰⁷ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 373.

¹⁰⁸ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 2:781.

¹⁰⁹ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 2:781.

¹¹⁰ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 2:781.

¹¹¹ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 2:781.

¹¹² Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 2:777.

¹¹³ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 2:777.

¹¹⁴ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 2:778.

describes Christ himself experiencing the fullness of God's punishment, Boyd's model includes all three divine persons experiencing what he calls "horrific separation."¹¹⁵

In PSA, Christ alone is our substitute who experiences wrath by God's hand. Consequently, this assertion of PSA misconstrues the sacrifice of Christ. Remarkably, the event of the cross involves a type of sacrifice that is far more profound. Christ, the creator of all (Col 1:16) became subject to human wrath to bring about our salvation. Christ accomplished this salvation in conjunction with the triune God—an act of profound love demonstrated by the separation of the divine persons. While PSA does describe an experiential separation between the Father and the Son, it fails to capture the proper cause of that separation. Whereas humanity experiences separation from God by invoking death upon itself, God experiences separation from himself by displaying His loving nature.

As mentioned above, humanity's salvation is equally rooted in who God is and *what* God has done. God's nature displayed on the cross truly should be described as being *cruciform*, a theme that runs throughout the New Testament. In reflecting on the theology of the Apostle Paul, Michael Gorman argues that Paul accepts a form of substitutionary atonement, but that his emphasis is elsewhere.¹¹⁶ Paul primarily understands the cross as the voluntary act of Christ to demonstrate God's love.¹¹⁷ Gorman writes: "He was not the passive recipient of punishment but the initiator of an act of love . . . Christ is not a passive victim but 'actively accepts suffering for the sake of

¹¹⁵ Boyd, *The Crucifixion*, 2:777.

¹¹⁶ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 376.

¹¹⁷ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 376.

transforming the world’ and that Christ suffers, not as a scapegoat, but as a ‘volunteer in the battle against evil.’”¹¹⁸

Gorman further contends that Paul is not necessarily concerned with the details of Christ’s atonement, but is interested instead in Christ’s motivation of love regarding His death and the consequences of that love.¹¹⁹ As a member of the Trinity, Christ’s motivation of love and the consequences of that love represent a unified action set on transforming humanity and working against the “cosmic powers of this present darkness [and] against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). God, seeing that his creation was in bondage (Rom 8:21), and being motivated to liberate humanity, sent the Son to be given “up for all of us” (Rom 8:32). One should be extremely uncomfortable equating Christ’s liberating love with overcoming God’s wrath. To use a war metaphor, if the battle between good and evil was won on the cross, shouldn’t one have a clear understanding of the battle lines? This battle, which involved Jesus demonstrating a liberating love even to the point of rejection and crucifixion, should not be understood as “mere momentary events in Christ’s biography,”¹²⁰ but as the defining timeless characteristics of God himself.

Therefore, when Jesus took up his cross, he was transforming it from a symbol of oppression into a symbol of love and peace – or as N. T. Wright says, from a symbol of human strength into a symbol “of the victory of God.”¹²¹ That victory, however, is not predicated on God the Father punishing Christ, but rather the *entire* Godhead submitting

¹¹⁸ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 376.

¹¹⁹ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 376.

¹²⁰ Jersak, *A More Christlike God*, 172.

¹²¹ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, chapter 7, para. 43, location 12364.

willfully to those who call God their enemy. The cross thereby becomes a symbol of dramatic irony, where the Creator of all things willingly submits himself to show His beloved creation the path back to himself. A trinitarian, cruciform understanding of Christ's sacrifice, resolves the tension that PSA creates when it asserts Christ suffered divine punishment in our place.

Conclusion

While PSA asserts that each divine person wills the punishment of Christ, it mistakenly describes that punishment as a direct action of God. This chapter has not been an attempt to categorically reject substitution atonement theology but define the wrath of God in a logically consistent way consistent with orthodox trinitarian doctrine. While it is unfair to describe PSA as a theory that advocates divine child abuse, it is a theory that produces a potentially confusing description of the nature of God. Furthermore, considering the internal logical inconsistency discussed in this chapter, Evangelicals should at the very least clarify the term "penal" as the *injustice* of the cross by humanity's evil hand. However, since PSA conflates forgiveness with debt repayment, it would seem appropriate to remove the term "penal" altogether from atonement theology.

CHAPTER 2: DIVINE INTERVENTION

At the start of this thesis, it asked a question: Why did Jesus die? As discussed in the introduction, the goal of this thesis is to discover “Jesus’ overarching vision of the ideal human being’s relationship with God and their relationship with other creatures of God.”¹ Central to discovering this overarching ideal is the conviction that the cross shows this vision for humanity and solves the problem of humanity’s estrangement from God and *that the atonement restores humanity to the family of God*. A natural starting point to view God’s visionary revelation is through the Gospel accounts of the life and work of Jesus.² Before examining the Gospels to discover Jesus’ understanding of this vision, another theological problem arises—Why did Jesus die to forgive sin? After wrestling with this question, this chapter argues that *intervention* is the best analogy for understanding how the cross “restores humanity to the family of God.”

To Forgive Sin

Every atonement theologian must tackle the looming problem of sin. However, if Christ’s atonement is primarily a benefit of restoring humanity into the family of God to render

¹ Ezigbo, “Contextual Theology,” 108.

² Using the Gospels as a launching pad for an atonement theology is by no means a new methodology. Heider in his article, “Atonement and the Gospels,” demonstrates how the Gospel writers emphasizes differing atonement models.

the kingdom of God, does not this diminish the seriousness of human sin and the centrality of God's holiness? According to proponents of PSA, "the awesome beauty of God's holiness becomes nearly invisible when the focus shifts to human beings and the benefits we accrue from the atonement."³ In a PSA paradigm, a believer only experiences forgiveness upon God satisfying his inner moral nature through Christ's propitiation.⁴ The effects of Christ's sacrifice on and for human beings, therefore, are a by-product and not the focus of his atonement. Subsequently, any human-centric theory of the cross allegedly diminishes the holiness of God, and by extension, God's holy response to sin.

However, what exactly *is* sin? Before engaging the Gospel's insight into the relationship between Jesus' death and forgiveness, it is important to define the nature of sin and why it is an obstacle that God needs to overcome. In *The Crucifixion*, Fleming Rutledge defines sin as "something very much more consequential than wrongdoing; it means being catastrophically separated from the eternal love of God. It means to be on the other side of an impassable barrier of exclusion from God's heavenly banquet. It means to be helplessly trapped inside one's own worst self, miserably aware of the chasm between the way we are and the way God intends us to be."⁵ Sin is not merely a violation of God's moral law—it is a state of isolation that manifests itself in not seeking after God (Rom 3:11 NRSV). Like cancer slowly debilitating the body, sin renders humanity incapable of executing God's original plan of intimacy between Creator and creation. "Every kind of wickedness" is the *result* of humanity who "did not see fit to acknowledge

³ Schreiner, "Penal Substitution Response," 149.

⁴ Gruenler, "Atonement," 94.

⁵ Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 174.

God” (Rom 1:28–29). This in turn shattered the ideal divine-human relationship and left humanity in the predicament of being estranged and needing reconciliation.

Is it possible to conclude that a law-court motif will suffice as the primary metaphor to explain God’s reconciliatory action found in Jesus Christ? Humanity needs much more than a passive, objective, legal statement of imputed righteousness, it needs to experience the restoration of a broken divine family. While it is theologically correct to conclude that Christ died for sin, something that “is permanently and emphatically fixed in the biblical text,”⁶ it must stand beyond dispute that, “*for our sake*, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). This New Testament section (2 Cor 5:11–21) contains “no hint that God is estranged from this ‘world.’ Rather, Paul affirms that God’s love always has the upper hand in divine-human relations and that the work of Christ had as its effect the bringing of the ‘world’ back to God.”⁷

Proponents of PSA, however, claim that primarily focusing on the atonement’s effects conflicts with the substitutionary nature of Christ’s death. For example, J. I. Packer claims “the type of account which sees the cross as having effects entirely on [humanity]” as leaving “little or no room for any thought of substitution, since it goes so far in equating what Christ did for us with what he does to us.”⁸ If substitution does not involve penal satisfaction for sin, “satisfaction which God’s own character dictated as the only means whereby his ‘no’ to us could become a ‘yes,’”⁹ then God’s holy response to

⁶ Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 175.

⁷ Green, “Kaleidoscope View,” 168.

⁸ Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?” 19–20.

⁹ Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?” 21.

sin is allegedly misconstrued. This thesis does not suggest that God is unmoved by human acts of sin. As N. T. Wright explains,

When God looks at sin, what he sees is what a violin maker would see if the player were to use his lovely creation as a tennis racquet. But here is the difference. In many expressions of pagan religion, the humans have to try to pacify the angry deity. But that's not how it happens in Israel's scriptures. The biblical promises of redemption have to do with God himself acting because of his unchanging, unshakeable love for his people.¹⁰

The drama being played out on the cross is the preeminent consequence of human sin. To use Wright's analogy in the context of the cross not only reveals sin in terms of inexplicable harm towards God's lovely creation, but as a profound crime against the creator himself. When one begins to see the cross as the final act of a plot to murder God, it becomes clear why one must exonerate God as the active agent of Christ's punishment. J. Denny Weaver elaborates this reasoning in his book *The Nonviolent God*. According to Weaver, a strange juxtaposition occurs in the framework of satisfaction when both the forces of evil (the devil, the mob, the Romans) and God are responsible for killing Jesus.¹¹ The innocent Jesus, who is obedient to the will of God, becomes sin and receives our punishment, "and the evil powers—however understood—who oppose the reign of God by killing Jesus are actually assisting the will of God by killing Jesus to provide the debt payment that God's honor or God's law demands."¹² Implicating both the forces of evil and God as carrying out the will of God "results in nonsense" and one cannot "avoid the implications of such mutually contradictory claims by cloaking them in a category such as mystery, or by claiming that the acts of God are too big for our categories to

¹⁰ Wright, *The Day*, 132.

¹¹ Weaver, *The Nonviolent God*, 65.

¹² Weaver, *The Nonviolent God*, 65.

contain.”¹³ Consider Paul’s account of his conversion in Acts 26:12–18. After confronting Paul’s persecution (vv. 14), Jesus commissions Paul to the Gentiles “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (vv. 18). The implication is that Christ stands in *opposition* to the power of Satan and that the gospel defeats evil to make way for forgiveness.

Antagonistic is any relationship between the forces of Evil and God’s will.

It is a peculiar claim that by focusing on the benefits of the atonement God’s holiness becomes invisible. It is because of God’s holiness that one must avoid such contradictory claims. The very reality of God’s holiness should cause one to pause and ask a very relevant question—why would *God* need to change in this broken family relationship? Humanity instigated its separation from God resulting in the human-divine conflict, and humanity must objectively change before experiencing forgiveness. Although sin finds its ultimate victim in God (Ps 51:4), one must resist defining this victimhood concerning God being harmed or divided. God experiences victimization only in the sense that humanity has failed to live up to “truth in the inward being” (Ps 51:6). An experience of a “broken and contrite” heart, therefore, is what God desires among humanity (Ps 51:17) and his holiness about dealing with sin is most aptly demonstrated via a redemptive activity involving human transformation. Also, what greater redemptive act is there than the cross? Even throughout the narrative of the Old Testament, the goal of God remained constant – he desired to be humanity’s Father-God and have his people obey his voice (Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Deut 26:17; Jer 7:23).

¹³ Weaver, *The Nonviolent God*, 65.

Remembering that it was humanity who rejected God's role as the divine Father and brought damage to a relationship that was intended to reflect his creational sovereignty (Gen 1–3), the purpose in focusing on the benefits accrued by the atonement is to illustrate the profound, personal and corporate alienation from God caused by humanity.

The Divine Murder Plot

Since the human-divine conflict has always resided in humanity, the question becomes—How can humanity's no to God become a yes? The charge of rejecting God is repeatedly brought against God's people (1 Sam 8:7; Jer 11–13; Luke 11:47). Considering this rejection, the crucifixion is a fitting act for a people who oppose their Creator and the truth of their existence. The truth of human existence, which is summarized by Jesus' statement of the greatest commandments (Matt 22:34–40), has been hindered for humanity since the very beginning. Fittingly, Pilate's question before Jesus¹⁴ heralds back to the serpent's question¹⁵ in the garden. The sin of Pilate and those who rejected Christ confirmed humankind's original sin—the rejection of truth and God's way. From creation to the cross, it has been as if humanity has been enacting a murder plot that would eventually kill God.

Beyond forgiveness then, the cross must also render humanity forgivable. The natural disposition for humanity since the Fall has been to reject God's highest moral imperative of loving him and others. A *process* is required wherein humanity transforms from this state into one that freely and whole-heartedly worships God. However,

¹⁴ “What is truth?” (John 18:38).

¹⁵ “Did God say?” (Gen 3:1).

arguments that suppose this process univocally resemble human forgiveness fail to appreciate the gravity of both human sin and its solution. There are those who reason that if “God could not (and would not) dispense his pardoning grace without an atonement” it “is to think meanly of him.”¹⁶ That remains as foreign a thought to this thesis as it would to a proponent of PSA. As John Stott pointed out, “For us to argue ‘we forgive each other unconditionally, let God do the same to us’ betrays not sophistication but shallowness, since it overlooks the elementary fact that we are not God.”¹⁷ In the mind of Stott, “the crucial question we should ask, therefore, is a different one. It is not why God finds it difficult to forgive, but how he finds it possible to do so at all.”¹⁸ Indeed, how can a holy God who experiences righteous anger towards sin accept humanity back into relationship? A valid solution to the problem of sin must see the cross as necessary as well as effectual for forgiveness.

This necessity, however, ought to be predicated on a moral transformation for individuals who “rejected the Holy Righteous One” and murdered Christ “the Author of life” (Acts 3:14–15). Stott himself freely admits that what was “transferred to Christ was not moral qualities but legal consequences,” calling such concepts of moral transference “absurd and unbelievable to imagine.”¹⁹ But how then does Christ suffering the legal consequences of sin transform humanity? Christ’s act undoubtedly accomplished for humanity what it could not and is therefore pervaded in the language of substitution, but

¹⁶ McDonald (*Atonement and Forgiveness*, 116) concludes that the view that the cross “simply renders man forgivable” is for those “who would deny that God’s forgiveness requires the atonement.” Obviously, I object to such classifications.

¹⁷ Stott, *The Cross*, 88.

¹⁸ Stott, *The Cross*, 88.

¹⁹ Stott, *The Cross*, 148.

if humanity's fundamental problem is that they are morally separated from God, then the cross must satisfy this deficiency. However, for Stott, "the righteousness of God which we become when we are 'in Christ' is not here righteousness of character and conduct (although that grows within us by the working of the Holy Spirit), but rather a righteous standing before God."²⁰

By describing "righteousness of character and conduct" as a post hoc effect, Stott has unfortunately created a difficult scenario as to why humanity must not only stand righteous before God but live righteously before God. For example, consider the following analogy. Imagine for a moment a man standing in a courtroom accused of a gratuitous, personal, defenceless, and capital crime (Rom 5:12). As the Judge walks into the courtroom, he explains to the defendant that the crime was committed against the Judge and his Family (Ps 51)! However, before the courtroom proceedings begin, the Judge's family joins him and announces that a deal has been reached among them. The Judge and his family had decided that before the crime was even committed (1 Pet 1:18–20), they had planned to allow the Judge's Son to experience the punishment the defendant deserves. And not only that, but that such an event would give the defendant right standing before the court. While one can argue it is the prerogative of the Judge to act in this way, there is no guarantee that the defendant should not continue living out his life of crime. This scenario, a dramatized version of PSA, demonstrates an incredible level of mercy on the part of the Judge, but it fails to secure a demonstrative change in the behaviour of the defendant to ensure they will not commit the same crime in the future.

²⁰ Stott, *The Cross*, 149.

Packer concludes that PSA “won us forgiveness, adoption and glory” and that “to affirm penal substitution is to say that believers are in debt to Christ specifically for this, and that this is the mainspring of all their joy, peace and praise both now and for eternity.”²¹ Is this what God desires—that humanity express joy, peace and praise as an obligation to a different debt? What of God’s free love for humanity and the ideal of receiving free love in return? Stott instead replies that the human response of transformation is through “the working of the Holy Spirit.” But in effect, the responses of Stott and Packer ground these two Christian experiences—namely, spiritual empowerment and gratitude—extrinsically to the atonement. The only thing that has a definite causal relationship to the cross in a PSA paradigm is the satisfaction of God’s wrath equaling an imputation of right standing before God (i.e., justification). What exactly about the cross is supporting the relationship between one’s justification and sanctification? In the New Testament much is alluded to one’s “new life” in Christ²² with salvation from God’s wrath coming after a restored and morally transformed life.²³ For example, the Apostle Paul, in setting up his argument for “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” (Rom 3:22), first establishes God’s moral requirement for

²¹ Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?” 25.

²² Wallace and Rusk (*Moral Transformation*, 189–91) cite multiple examples in which this is the case.

²³ Wallace and Rusk, *Moral Transformation*, 185.

escaping God's wrath.²⁴ God is deeply concerned with humanity's deficient moral life, and it naturally follows that the cross, the most excellent demonstration of his love for humanity (John 15:13), would intrinsically transform this brokenness.

Righteousness: A New Perspective?

Recent New Testament scholarship has brought new insight into Paul's usage of "the righteousness of God" that further raises the need to challenge a penal understanding of the cross. This new scholarship, dubbed the "New Perspectives on Paul" (NPP), is a series of Pauline interpretive approaches that attempt to place Paul in a more Jewish context and challenge the Reformed theological tradition of centralizing justification by faith alone.²⁵ The NPP has led to a general agreement among scholars that "first-century Judaism was not the legalistic religion of past caricatures."²⁶ For example, consider this thoroughly Jewish hymn discovered in Qumran:

If I stagger because of the sin of flesh, my justification shall be by the righteousness of God which endures forever . . . He will draw me nearby his grace, and by his mercy will he bring my justification. He will judge me in the righteousness of his truth and in the greatness of his goodness he will pardon all my sins. Through his righteousness he will cleanse me of the uncleanness of man and of the sins of the children of men (IQS 11:11–15).

²⁴ "Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will repay according to each one's deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality" (Rom 2:3–11).

²⁵ Yinger, *The New Perspective*, 73.

²⁶ Yinger, *The New Perspective*, 12.

How is one to understand such phrases as, “by his mercy will he bring my justification,” and “through his righteousness he will cleanse me of the uncleanness of man and of the sins of the children of men” but as soteriological statements of grace? If first-century Judaism was not the legalistic religion assumed by the Reformers, what exactly was Paul arguing against? Also, in the context of this thesis, what impact does this have on why Jesus died “to forgive sin?”

These and other new Pauline considerations were first discussed in E. P. Sander’s 1977 work, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Sander’s work led him to conclude that “salvation is given graciously by God in his establishing the covenant with the fathers, a covenant which he will not forsake; individuals may, however, be excluded from Israel if they sin in such a way as to spurn the covenant itself.”²⁷ This idea, coined “covenant nomism,” is “the view that one’s place in God’s plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments while providing means of atonement for transgressions.”²⁸ The laws were not seen as burdensome but “as a blessing, and one should fulfill them with joy. They are accompanied by strength and peace, and they are a sign of God’s mercy.”²⁹ Sanders accepts that Christ’s death “achieved atonement for the trespasses of others so that they would not be reckoned to those who accepted his death as being for them.”³⁰ For Sanders, however, Paul’s atonement is primarily eschatological. He does not exclude

²⁷ Sanders, *Paul*, 370–71.

²⁸ Yinger, *The New Perspective*, 8–9.

²⁹ Sanders, *Paul*, 110.

³⁰ Sanders, *Paul*, 463. Sanders cites Rom 3:22–25; 4:24; 5:6; and 1 Cor 15:3 as proof texts to support this statement.

the possibility that Paul thought of Christ's death as an atonement for past sins, but that "the emphasis unquestionably falls elsewhere: not backwards towards the expiation of past transgressions, but forwards, towards the assurance of life with Christ whether one is alive or dead at his coming."³¹ Furthermore, in the first century the language of propitiation, expiation, and participation is not clearly distinguishable, but instead Christ died so that he might become Lord and thus save those who belong to him and are 'in' him."³²

James Dunn, among other NPP scholars, argues that Luther and other Reformers imposed their struggle against the legalism of Rome onto the Pauline texts.³³ For Dunn, the soteriological question concerning Paul is not Luther's question, "How may I, a sinner, find a gracious God?"³⁴ According to Dunn, the parts of Paul's letters that deal with justification are answering the question, "How may Gentiles take part in God's saving grace to Israel?"³⁵ For Dunn, the "works of the law to which Paul objected (as a requirement in addition to believing in Jesus Christ) were, in this case, the boundary markers, the laws that marked out Jews in their distinctiveness/separation from other nations. In this case, 'works of the law' and 'living like a Jew' overlap and are almost synonymous."³⁶ The result is a mystery unveiled for Paul through the gospel's demonstration that it was "God's purpose to bring Jew and Gentile together in shared worship of the one God."³⁷

³¹ Sanders, *Paul*, 465.

³² Sanders, *Paul*, 465.

³³ Dunn, "New Perspective View," 180.

³⁴ Yinger, *The New Perspective*, 23–24.

³⁵ Yinger, *The New Perspective*, 23–24.

³⁶ Dunn, "New Perspective View," 194.

³⁷ Dunn, "New Perspective View," 188.

Finally, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1997) articulates N. T. Wright's application of his perspective on Paul and its relationship concerning the meaning of Jesus' life and death. For Wright, "the reformers had very thorough answers to the question 'why did Jesus die?'; they did not have nearly such good answers to the question 'why did Jesus live?' . . . If the only available answer is 'to give some shrewd moral teaching, to live an exemplary life, and to prepare for sacrificial death,' we may be forgiven for thinking it a little lame. It also seems, as we shall see, quite untrue to Jesus' own understanding of his vocation and work."³⁸ Vocation is a key theme developed throughout the writings of Wright. According to Wright, the primary problem for humanity is that they have failed to live up to their vocation of worshipping their creator³⁹ and bearing God's image. Humanity's original vocation was intended to reflect "God's wise authority into the world and the glad praises of creation back to God."⁴⁰ This failure of vocation has led to humanity's exile from God and death, personified in the history of God's people Israel.⁴¹ Christ's death, in this context, is a reversal of this plight and leads to a "life after life after death." According to Wright, "based on the revolutionary meaning of Jesus's crucifixion, is that 'life after death' is . . . the life of the resurrection and the ultimate new creation; that "human behavior" from a biblical point of view is quite a different thing from the normal view of codes of either morality or self-discovery, because what matters is not 'works' (whether ours or Jesus's), but vocation, the human calling to worship God and reflect him into his world."⁴²

³⁸ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, chapter 1, para. 25, location 624.

³⁹ Wright, *The Day*, 98.

⁴⁰ Wright, *The Day*, 102.

⁴¹ Wright, *The Day*, 102.

⁴² Wright, *The Day*, 407–08.

At this point, one would be wise to consider Packer's warning against "the impropriety of treating half-truths as the whole truth, and of rejecting a more comprehensive account on the basis of speculative negations about what God's holiness requires as a basis for forgiving sins."⁴³ Do NPP scholars and the Reformers have to exist in tension with one another?⁴⁴ For example, is Luther's question about justification still a valid starting point for Pauline exegesis? While a full discourse on the current discussion concerning Paul's usage of relevant terms such as righteousness, works, and grace are beyond the scope of this thesis, one should not interpret Paul according to "contemporary Christian notions of grace," which "frequently fail to take into account the effective nature of grace. That is, the aim of God's gift of the Christ is to set us free from our slavery to sin, the law, and evil powers and to transform us so that we become new creatures, righteous in the Messiah (Rom 5:20–21; cf. 2 Cor 5:17–21; Gal 1:1–6; 6:15; Titus 2:11–14)."⁴⁵ In an attempt to synthesize Reformation thought and the NPP, John Barclay makes an important observation regarding God's gift and humanity's responsibility to be transformed. God's grace does not oppose recompense but is given simultaneously as a gift and reward.⁴⁶ Such a perspective does not make the gift any less a gift and does not result in the gift becoming something that is paid for. As Barclay states, "those who deserve gifts are still the recipients of gifts, given voluntarily and without legal requirement. They do not *cause* the gift to be given (that is always a matter

⁴³ Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve?" 21.

⁴⁴ It should be noted that the NPP is by no means a monolithic approach. However, these three authors generally agree that the Reformers imposed their own conflict with Rome in varying degree onto the Pauline text.

⁴⁵ Bates, *Salvation*, 104.

⁴⁶ Barclay, *Paul*, 316.

of the benefactor's will), but they prove themselves to be its suitable recipients and thus provide the *condition* for its proper distribution."⁴⁷ According to Barclay, the ancient conception of gift and grace was celebrated as a reward to "those who were fitting recipients of its free and lavish beneficence."⁴⁸

This brief discussion on the NPP has been included to highlight a much-needed perspective relevant to the atonement. PSA requires that atonement, grace, and righteousness be defined in terms devoid of human contribution. What Sanders, Dunn, Wright, and Barclay have demonstrated, however, is that Paul had other concerns in mind when using this vocabulary. If Luther and the other Reformers did impose their conflict with Rome onto the Pauline texts, it becomes possible to pursue a different theological interpretation of Christ's death. Accordingly, one can include a willingness to incorporate human involvement in the act of God's grace. Furthermore, when taken together, these NPP authors have raised solutions to the problem of sin that do not primarily fall under the category of penal substitution. For Sanders, the cross achieves Christ's lordship and union with humanity. For Dunn, the cross demonstrates God's universal plan of salvation regardless of one's ethnicity. Moreover, for Wright, the cross restores humanity's vocation to worship God and reflect him into the world. Although these perspectives are not without their problems and critics,⁴⁹ they force us to consider the salvific language of Paul in its broader restorative and transformative sense. Unlike the courtroom drama of PSA, which "offers instant forgiveness without challenging basic day-to-day moral

⁴⁷ Barclay, *Paul*, 316.

⁴⁸ Barclay, *Paul*, 316.

⁴⁹ For example, Chris VanLandingham (*Judgement & Justification*) responds to Sanders claim that first century Jews did believe in works-righteousness by demonstrating that a robust theology of "final judgement" existed in Jewish thought.

behaviour,”⁵⁰ a different metaphor should be appropriated to embody Christ’s accomplishment on the cross.

To Restore Humanity to the Family of God

In tackling the theological problem of sin, several key points have arisen. First, the issue of human sin is a problem of estrangement from the family of God. Sin involves violating God’s moral expectations but entails a much more debilitating problem—a complete relational separation from God and a rejection of his original creational ideal of bearing and embodying his image. Secondly, the primary accomplishment of the cross is both necessary and effectual in rendering humanity forgivable. Finally, God is deeply concerned with our moral status and through the cross offers humanity a way of experiencing restoration and transformation. What atonement framework should one pursue that allows all three of these statements to cohere? Admittedly, any analogy used will fail to fully grasp “the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom 11:33). However, is there a better way forward to describe God’s restorative and transformative redemptive act while still maintaining his holy disposition towards sin?

The courtroom metaphor still offers one theological benefit. Humanity is indeed guilty before a holy God. However, the remainder of this chapter demonstrates that for the atonement to restore humanity to the family of God, one should view Christ’s death as an act of divine intervention. At this point, a preliminary analogy may prove beneficial. Imagine for a moment a man standing before his Father who is guilty of

⁵⁰ Chalke, “The Redemption,” 41.

plotting a gratuitous, personal, defenceless, and capital crime against him (Rom 5:12).

The Father explains that before the crime was even plotted (1 Pet 1:18–20), he had planned to intervene and send an exact representation of himself in the form of his perfect Son to restore the man into his family (Rom 5:11). Not only would the Son speak to the man's sin, but also the Father's desire for forgiveness. The Father, however, knowing the nature of his son knew his perfect Son would be rejected (Mark 8:31) and that a heinous plot would be carried out against him. However, the Father also knew that such a loving act could potentially restore the son into the family. This analogy when expanded will prove more beneficial as a primary understanding of the cross than a penal metaphor. The word intervention is being used in its relational sense, wherein one harmed party (Father/Son/Spirit) confronts the harming party (humanity) to persuade them to change.

The intervention of God to confront and restore humanity in a sense has been happening since the beginning of biblical history. From the time of Noah to the Prophets, God communicated his desire to lead his people into relationship with him (Gen 6–8; Gen 22; Jer 18:1–6). However, God has spoken most clearly to humanity “by a Son” who is the “reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being” (Heb 1:2–3). Remarkably, as T. F. Torrance notes, “in the Incarnation the Son of God staked his own divine being for us by entering into human existence as it had fallen under the judgement of God and the imminent privation of being, in order to redeem us.”⁵¹ The Son, through whom all things find their existence (John 1:3), and who exercises the entirety of God's judgement (5:22) came to “what was his own” and yet, “his own people did not accept

⁵¹ Torrance, *Atonement*, 274.

him” (1:11). The Incarnation, which poured into Christ the most potent act in God’s redemptive plan, is juxtaposed with humanity’s rejection of God as their Messiah.⁵²

Many throughout Church history established a link between the Incarnation and humanity’s restoration, even using substitutionary language in their soteriology. For example, both Irenaeus and Athanasius use “a notion of ‘exchange’ or substitution in their theology of salvation through the Incarnation, but with the sense of redemptive solidarity and divine human-interchange: “God the Son becomes incarnate so to take the part of humanity under sin and death and thus suffer the death of sinners ‘one on behalf of all,’ thereby to redeem humanity from tyranny under sin and death and thus to restore humanity to communion with God.”⁵³ In the writings of Irenaeus and Athanasius, the primary purpose of the Incarnate Christ is not to satisfy God’s honour or wrath, but that through his death and resurrection he would renew creation and restore humanity to its divine likeness and purpose.⁵⁴

According to Irenaeus, the Lord restored humanity to friendship by His Incarnation, being made Mediator-between God and men.⁵⁵ And while Irenaeus continues that the Incarnation does indeed “appease the Father in our behalf, against whom we have sinned,” this is accomplished by “assuring our disobedience by His own obedience.”⁵⁶ Considering that humanity is estranged from God because it “rejected God’s role as the divine Father and brought damage to a relationship that was intended to reflect his

⁵² Although Christ’s Incarnation stands as a unique moment in history, it should be noted that the Holy Spirit’s role in redemption has and can easily be overlooked. For more on the Holy Spirit’s role in redemption, see Studebaker, *From Pentecost*.

⁵³ Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 349.

⁵⁴ Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 349–50.

⁵⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5:489.

⁵⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5:489.

creational sovereignty,” it follows that the atonement overcomes God’s righteous anger through Christ’s recapitulation of creation and humanity’s subsequent participation in this accomplishment. Likewise, Irenaeus does discuss the relationship between Jesus’ death and God’s wrath, but does so according to the developing motif of intervention for the sake of confrontation and change:

Those therefore who cast in our teeth and say, God could not save His people without the Egyptians being smitten, and drowned in the sea as they were following Israel—will be met by this answer: We then could not be saved, without the Jews becoming murderers of the Lord (which was to themselves the loss of eternal life); nor without their slaying the Apostles and persecuting the Church, and so falling into the abyss of wrath. For as they by the Egyptians; so we too by the Jews’ blindness have received salvation; *the Lord’s death being surely the condemnation of those who crucified Him, and believed not His coming, but the salvation of such as believe in Him.*⁵⁷

Because Christ is the Incarnate Son of God who recapitulates human obedience, those who obey, repent, and believe in him will begin a process of moving out from condemnation and receive the gift of forgiveness.

The themes of Incarnation, restoration, and repentant belief run throughout the Gospel of John. After discussing the Incarnation of Christ (John 1:1–28), the Apostle John includes a statement by John the Baptist that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29), a theme that foreshadows Christ’s sacrificial crucifixion during the Passover (19:1–41). The Passover was a celebration of God’s deliverance during the Exodus and required that a lamb be slaughtered, eaten whole, and have its blood applied to the home’s doorposts (Exod 12). The Passover served as a reminder that the tenth plague of Egypt “passed over” the Hebrew homes and protected its inhabitants

⁵⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4:395.

from tragedy. Members of the home entirely consume the Passover lamb with no part of it ever consumed on an altar for God, and for that reason it is never called an “offering for God.”⁵⁸ The fact that John’s identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God is fulfilled in a Passover context reveals that Jesus’ blood benefits humanity and “has the power of shielding the human community from danger and death.”⁵⁹ The fact that Jesus is identified as the Passover Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world reveals that Christ’s death has moved beyond the scope of benefiting the home (Israel) but to saving the whole world and establishing a universal family. Jesus promotes this benefit to those who show him honour, confronting those who have encountered him to either believe in him and experience eternal life, or reject him and come under judgement (Matt 5:23–24).

It is important to note that only God, through the Incarnational Christ, can instigate such an intervention. Humanity is incapable of establishing a forgivable state for itself for several reasons. First, humanity lacks knowledge of the extent of its sinfulness—it would not be until the death of Christ that humanity would commit its greatest offence. Even during the height of sin during the time of Isaiah, who charged God’s people with “sin in terms of abandoning and rebelling against God so as to set up one’s own gods, and consequently disobeying God’s commands so as to practice evil and injustice”⁶⁰ were a people who did not understand their rebellion (Isa 1:3). However, the

⁵⁸ Eberhart, *The Sacrifice*, 120.

⁵⁹ Eberhart, *The Sacrifice*, 120.

⁶⁰ Brondos, *Salvation*, 7.

heinous rebellion during Isaiah's ministry cannot compare to the ultimate sin of murdering God.⁶¹

God was also unwilling to restore humankind by a mere command. Athanasius supposed that the Incarnation was required to address the definite need of humanity's inherent mortal nature,⁶² for, "once it had put on corruption, it could not have risen again unless it had been put to life. Moreover, death likewise could not, from its very nature, appear, save in the body. Therefore, he put on a body, that he might find death in the body, and blot it out. For how could the Lord have been proved at all to be the Life, had he not quickened what was mortal?"⁶³ In what better way could Christ demonstrate that "what came into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all the people" (John 1:4) than to transform the human body from death to life *with* a body?⁶⁴ As one who pondered Athanasius' *On The Incarnation* once wrote, "while restoration by a mere fiat would have shown God's power, the Incarnation shows his love."⁶⁵

To develop further the ways Christ's death functions as an Intervention, it needs to be connected to the larger narrative of his life. Throughout the Gospels Jesus ministers in a variety of ways: he heals the sick, casts out demons, extends mercy to sinners, and proclaims the coming kingdom of God. The activity and words of Jesus demonstrate to the world that "God is with him to bring healing, wholeness, and salvation in the lives of

⁶¹ The speech of Stephen (Acts 7) tells the history of Israel's rejection of God. Stephen ultimately charged the religious leaders of betraying and murdering the Righteous One (vv. 52), a confrontation that would get him stoned.

⁶² Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 76.

⁶³ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 78.

⁶⁴ The subject of ζωή is a theme that runs deep throughout Christ's ministry. For example, the noun is used a total of 42 times in all but seven chapters of John's Gospel.

⁶⁵ Cited in Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 77.

others.”⁶⁶ This “other-focused” philosophy served as a bedrock of his kingdom. When Jesus announced his self-understanding as the one who would fulfill the prophet Isaiah (Luke 4:16–21), he did so declaring that it would “bring good news to the poor,” “proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,” and “let the oppressed go free.” This salvation of others, however, is brought with a caveat: Jesus called his followers to repentance and into a new way of life, that they too were to forgive others, practicing justice and mercy, and sharing their possessions with the needy.⁶⁷ Jesus’ teaching stood in direct contrast to the culture of his day, in which giving was understood concerning patronage.⁶⁸ Slaves were indebted to their masters, fathers ruled sons, and the emperor was indebted to the gods.⁶⁹ Jesus spent a considerable deal of time communicating his counter-cultural message to those close to him. While his disciples struggled with questions of greatness, Jesus proclaimed that his kingdom belonged to little children and the lowest members of society.⁷⁰ Jesus, even considering his position as the Son of God, “insisted that status in the community must be measured by one’s role as a servant.”⁷¹

In an Israelite context the phrase “kingdom of God” referred to a semi-Utopian hope for a better future.⁷² For many Israelites, this hope for a better future involved visions of a politically independent kingdom free from Roman rule.⁷³ Instead, Jesus taught that his kingdom would be brought about and embodied by his followers (Luke

⁶⁶ Brondos, *Salvation*, 20.

⁶⁷ Brondos, *Salvation*, 20.

⁶⁸ Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal*, chapter 2, para. 8, location 492.

⁶⁹ Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal*, chapter 2, para. 8–9, location 492.

⁷⁰ Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal*, chapter 2, para. 10, location 501.

⁷¹ Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal*, chapter 2, para. 10, location 501.

⁷² Wallace and Rusk, *Moral Transformation*, 49.

⁷³ Wallace and Rusk, *Moral Transformation*, 49.

17:20–21) through repentance (Mark 1:15) and humility (Mark 4:30–32; 10:14–15). One could summarize Jesus' entire life activity as confronting "the distance between God's ways and the ways typical of human communities. Top-down relations of power, social obligations, struggling for honour and recognition"⁷⁴ meant that his death was predictable.⁷⁵

In the context of Jesus' life, it is more fitting to see his death as something that could restore humanity and transform it into something that could execute his kingdom vision. The ethos of Jesus' kingdom could have it no other way. In this sense, Jesus' death acts as an intervention via martyrdom. The earliest Christians certainly saw Jesus' death as the climax of a ministry of active, other-focused, healing love.⁷⁶ The way of this

martyr was to take upon himself the suffering that hung over the nation as a whole. The way of the shepherd-king was to share the suffering of the sheep. The way of the servant was to take upon himself the exile of the nation as a whole. As a would-be Messiah, Jesus identified with Israel; he would therefore go ahead of her, and take upon himself precisely that fate, actual and symbolic, which he had announced for nation, city, and Temple. He would do, once and for all, what he had done in smaller, anticipatory actions throughout his public career, as he identified with the poor and sinners, as he came into contact with lepers, corpses and other sources of impurity. 'He has gone in to eat with a sinner' (Luke 19:7) would turn into 'he has gone out to die with the rebels.'⁷⁷

Jesus' mission of restoring the family of God, a family who lived out God's ideal vision of love and self-sacrifice, made his death inevitable. It confronted the very fabric of humanity's murder plot of God. Christ's intervening death as a martyr, however, would transform the life of a thief dying next to him (Luke 23:39–43) and a Roman

⁷⁴ Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal*, chapter 2, para. 15, location 520.

⁷⁵ Wallace and Rusk, *Moral Transformation*, 56.

⁷⁶ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, chapter 12, para. 164, location 12285.

⁷⁷ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, chapter 12, para. 165, location 12285.

centurion (Matt 27:54) watching over him. Indeed, what better way to confront sin than to demonstrate its fullest potential? The cross would serve as the final act of intervention, revealing both the height of human sin and the lengths of God's love. It would lead to a "life after life after death"—a new body through resurrection that would invite the world to join him in restoring what was lost.

Conclusion

In tackling the question "Why did Jesus die?", this chapter has challenged the notion that PSA is the best theological explanation as to why Jesus "died for sin." Crucial in any atonement theology is answering the problem of human sin. When one sees the cross primarily as a benefit to humanity for intrinsic restoration instead of external legal satisfaction, one addresses this problem in a way consistent with Jesus' message of kingdom transformation. While in need of further development, the analogy of an "intervention" has emerged as a more appropriate descriptor than the passive, objective, legal statement of imputed righteousness.

CHAPTER 3: IN JESUS' OWN WORDS

Until now this thesis has challenged the theological implications of PSA and offered an alternative framework for consideration. This chapter examines the Gospels to let Jesus speak for himself concerning his atonement and confirm that the atonement restores humanity to the family of God *to render the kingdom of God*. However, three initial statements regarding this process must first be made.

First, a significant amount of Gospel passages stress that Jesus was deeply committed to the vocation of teaching (Matt 4:23; Mark 4:2). Jesus' teaching amazed his listeners (Matt 7:28; Mark 6:2) because he spoke with an authority unlike anyone else (Luke 4:32). Jesus' teaching had such a profound effect on his society's religious order that the religious leaders began to plot his death when he began teaching in Jerusalem (Mark 11:18). While this is hardly a novel insight into the ministry of Jesus, one is reminded of the necessity of sitting under the teaching authority of Jesus. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt 28:18), writes Matthew, a reminder that the task and purpose of the Christian Church converges on Christ. The context of Jesus' life reflects God's spoken word to us. While the last week of Jesus' life certainly serves as the climax to the narrative of his ministry, no atonement theology should be embraced, which favours Jesus death at the expense of his life.¹

¹ Chalke, "The Redemption," 39.

Second, Christ's entire ministry should be an extension of his proclamation of the kingdom of God (Matt 4:23).² Although there is a remarkable diversity of statements and interpretations regarding the kingdom of God, grouping Jesus' ministry under this umbrella provides a helpful context to understand how the Gospel writers communicated Christ's understanding of his mission.³ Although recent books such as *The Crucified King* by Jeremy Treat harmonize a theology of the cross with a theology of the kingdom, they rarely intersect in theological works.⁴ Treat cites six reasons for why he believes this is so.⁵ First, a discrepancy between the cross and the kingdom is a result of reactionary debates between the two fields of study. With the rise of the social gospel movement and an advocacy of the kingdom of God to the exclusion of substitutionary atonement, conservative theologians reacted by focusing and reclaiming a crucicentric theology. Secondly, since the Enlightenment a fragmentation of the Scriptures occurred resulting in the Bible not being a unified whole. Why then even attempt to synthesize two seemingly incompatible ideas such as the reign of God and the death of God? Third, an "ugly ditch" exists between systematic theology and biblical studies. While the field of biblical studies is replete with studies on the kingdom of God, these studies often neglect a systematic approach to atonement theology. Fourth, The Gospels, where the theme of the kingdom is most present, have largely been ignored as a source for theology. Fifth, there has been

² It should be noted that "'the Kingdom of God' and 'the Kingdom of Heaven' are obviously interchangeable. Furthermore, 'the Kingdom of God' and 'the Kingdom of Heaven' are both interchangeable with eternal life. Mark, Luke, and John always speak of the Kingdom of God, Matthew alone has the Kingdom of Heaven; and in 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43, Matthew has the Kingdom of God. The difference between the two phrases is to be explained on linguistic grounds. The Kingdom of Heaven is the Semitic form and the Kingdom of God is the Greek form of the same phrase" (Ladd, *The Gospel*, 32).

³ Ladd, *The Gospel*, 16.

⁴ Treat, *The Crucified King*, 25.

⁵ Treat, *The Crucified King*, 26–28.

an over systematization of doctrines regarding the states and offices of Christ. For example, if Christ's states are divided between humiliation and exaltation, and the cross resides only in the state of humiliation, one would see no need to see the cross in the kingdom at all. Finally, "if one has a mistaken view of the kingdom or the cross respectively, then properly relating the two will be impossible. For example, if the cross is understood solely in terms of personal salvation and the kingdom as future eschatology, then never the twain shall meet."⁶ This thesis is in part an attempt at addressing some of Treats' observations.

Third, the kingdom of God encapsulates the entire biblical narrative from God's initial creation of the "heavens and earth" in the beginning (Gen 1:1) to the "new heaven and new earth" in God's future redemption (Rev 21). Responding to the criticism that modern atonement theologies are "de-historicized, de-dramatized, and decontextualized,"⁷ this chapter aims to properly apply the context of Jesus' understanding of the kingdom to the cross. Of the definitions of the kingdom of God, perhaps none are better than the one developed by George Eldon Ladd in his book, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*:

The Kingdom of God is His kingship, His rule, His authority. When this is once realized, we can go through the New Testament and find passage after passage where this meaning is evident, where the Kingdom is not a realm or a people but God's reign. Jesus said that we must "receive the kingdom of God" as little children (Mark 10:15). What is received? The Church? Heaven? What is received is God's rule. In order to enter the future realm of the Kingdom, one must submit himself in perfect trust to God's rule here and now. We must also "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt 6: 33). What is the object of our quest? The Church? Heaven? No; we are to seek God's righteousness—His sway, His rule, His reign in our lives. When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," are we praying for heaven to come to earth? In a sense we are praying for this; but heaven is an

⁶ Treat, *The Crucified King*, 28.

⁷ Treat, *The Crucified King*, 47.

object of desire only because the reign of God is to be more perfectly realized than it is now. Apart from the reign of God, heaven is meaningless. Therefore, what we pray for is, “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This prayer is a petition for God to reign, to manifest His kingly sovereignty and power, to put to flight every enemy of righteousness and of His divine rule, that God alone may be King over all the world.⁸

Finally, one must avoid reading Jesus merely to attain a theoretical model of the atonement. Upon examining God’s spoken word through Christ concerning the atonement, one must consider how this message demonstrates to both the past and present Church how to communicate the gospel. What are the core motivations behind the story of salvation? How does an understanding of the kingdom and the atonement reflect the nature of God? As secondary audiences to the events of Jesus’ life, the temptation exists towards abstraction. However, Jesus’ life and death were observed in an ancient historical context by His disciples, adversaries and biographers who had real-world concerns of their own. While this may seem obvious to some, there is a danger that a strictly systematic approach to the atonement may remain within the confines of the theoretical.

⁸ Ladd, *The Gospel*, 20–21. However excellent a definition Ladd provides, Ladd fails to mention the atonement in the entirety of *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Treat highlights this when discussing the six observations listed above. Nonetheless, Ladd’s definition allows on to proceed with an interpretation of the cross based on the Gospels with kingdom applications.

A de-contextualized approach to the atonement allows one to ask questions seemingly fitting to one's context, but risks giving answers the Gospel writers never intended.⁹

The goal of critiquing PSA in this thesis was to demonstrate that PSA offers inconsistent and at times harmful answers to the important questions being asked in atonement theology. As Steve Chalke pointed out, "the greatest theological problem with penal substitution is that it presents us with a God who is first and foremost concerned with retribution for sin that flows from his wrath against sinners. The only way for his anger to be placated is in receiving recompense from those who have wronged him, and although his great love motivates him to send his Son, his wrath remains the driving force behind the need for the cross."¹⁰ But is that how Jesus understood his Father in heaven? Is that how Jesus wanted His people to conceive of and communicate with the Author of their salvation? With a critique of PSA in retrospect, the goal is to now learn from Christ and how the Church should communicate the meaning of His death.

⁹ Wright (*Jesus and the Victory*, chapter 12, para. 134, location 12000) goes to great lengths to challenge an abstract approach to Jesus' death: "Jesus constructed his mindset, his variation on the Jewish worldview of his day, on the assumption that he was living in, and putting into operation, the controlling story which the Scriptures offered him, which was now reaching its climax. This was not a matter of him plucking from thin air one or two proof-texts which might serve to generate or sustain a few abstract ideas or beliefs. Nor, for that matter, was it a case of him, as an individual, behaving in a manner which we have to designate as 'weird'. It was a matter of his living within the story of YHWH and Israel as it drew towards its goal. Jesus lived in a world where it might well make sense to believe one was called to take upon oneself the fate, the exile, of Israel. I propose, then, that we can credibly reconstruct a mindset in which a first-century Jew could come to believe that YHWH would act through the suffering of a particular individual in whom Israel's sufferings were focused; that this suffering would carry redemptive significance; and that this individual would be himself. And I propose that we can plausibly suggest that this was the mindset of Jesus himself."

¹⁰ Chalke, "The Redemption," 38.

Jesus on Wrath

How did Jesus speak about God's wrath? According to Tim Challies, on the cross Jesus emptied a cup, "drinking down to the last drops of God's wrath, until there was no more."¹¹ So often is this cup interpreted according to the PSA paradigm as an appeasement of God's wrath that it seems like a foregone conclusion that the term could have any other meaning.¹² But did Jesus have this conclusion in view when he spoke of drinking the cup God intended him to drink?

To answer this question, one must remember that the cross is primarily an example of God's divine intervention to restore and benefit humanity. God is concerned with the trajectory of human sin. Because of this concern, God entered history, in and through Christ, to redeem and execute His will of total human salvation (2 Pet 3:9). Salvation, however, meant more for a 1st century Jew than simply an eternal future with God. Mark, Jesus' earliest known biographer, communicated the gospel during a time of heightened tension between the Jewish people and Rome due to the Jewish war for independence.¹³ Mark, along with his fellow messianic Jews, found themselves at odds with both the Jewish and Roman communities.¹⁴ Facing the fate of execution at the hands of their enemies, questions naturally abounded for Mark's audience. Mark, recognizing the same fate befell both John the Baptist and Jesus for their preaching,¹⁵ pointed his

¹¹ Challies, "Take This Cup."

¹² Lane, "Bernard," 256.

¹³ Paterson, *Beyond the Passion*, 56.

¹⁴ Paterson, *Beyond the Passion*, 56.

¹⁵ Paterson (*Beyond the Passion*, 56–7) cites the narrative pattern of being "delivered up" to one's enemies based on Mark 1:7; 1:14; 9:31; 10:33.

audience to Jesus' words of solidarity to two disciples who had similar concerns about the future:

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with (Mark 10:35–38)?"

If Jesus intended his disciples to make a connection between drinking the cup and draining God's wrath, one would anticipate a different response to James and John's request. If PSA were so, Jesus' question of, "Are you able," would demand a resounding no. Instead, Jesus replies that "the cup I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized" (10:39), clearly referencing martyrdom.¹⁶ The disciples, now upset with James and John's hubris, begin to argue among themselves about who is the greatest (10:41). Jesus, seeing this moment as an opportunity to teach his disciples a fundamental principle of the kingdom, responds by telling them, "But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (10:43–45).

Jesus frames the nature of His death (here, as a "ransom") not in isolation from His followers, but according to the other-focused ethos of His nature and kingdom. Jesus is asking His followers to consider if they can face what awaits them if they follow him in preaching the kingdom of God. Will they follow the way of their new community and

¹⁶ Paterson, *Beyond the Passion*, 57.

strive “first for the kingdom of God” (Matt 6:33), even to the point of martyrdom? Or will they, like the rich young ruler described in the previous verses (Mark 10:17–31), value earthly wealth and power over the things of God? Jesus took the mission of His kingdom to the very end—would His disciples?¹⁷

A sense of communal mission is also present at the Last Supper as Jesus once again uses the imagery of the cup to describe His death (Matt 26:26; Luke 22:17). The cup, now a symbol of the New Covenant (Luke 22:20) was given by means of sacrifice, a sacrifice that would solidify his followers into a community that would devote themselves to Jesus’ ways.¹⁸ While the Last Supper invites Jesus’ followers to participate in Christ’s mission, it also exposes those opposed to His ways. Matthew’s Jesus seems concerned with challenging his audience to choose sides in a conflict between the kingdom of God and a humanity determined to rule and reign their own hearts (Matt 13:10–17). Here one must see the larger picture Matthew encapsulates with the events described in chapter 26, a passage packed full of tension between Jesus and those around him. They include: a plot to kill Jesus by the religious leaders (1–5), the disciples’ anger over a woman’s offering of worship (6–13), Judas agreeing to betray Jesus (14–16), The Passover meal and exposure of Judas’ betrayal (17–25), The Lord’s Supper (26–30), Peter’s denial (31–35), Jesus prayer’s in the garden (36–39), the inner circle’s failure to support Jesus in His time of need (40–46), Jesus’ betrayal, arrest, and appearance before the high priest (47–63), Jesus’ declaration of his messiahship and authority (64), the high priests rejection of Jesus (65–68), and Peter’s denial of Jesus (69–75).

¹⁷ Paterson, *Beyond the Passion*, 57.

¹⁸ Paterson, *Beyond the Passion*, 84.

The “cup” that Jesus asked in the garden to be allowed to pass from him (Matt 13:39) finds its context in Jesus being abandoned by those who should have received him with open arms as their king. From the experts of religion who missed that Jesus was the Messiah, to Jesus’ most intimate disciples who abandoned him, no one *except* God journeyed with Jesus to the cross. Only the knowledge that He was carrying out the “will of God” (42) to establish God’s kingdom rule on “earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10), allowed Jesus to persevere to the end. In the Gospels, Jesus’s death cannot be understood apart from the context of this narrative.¹⁹ According to scholar and theologian Joel B. Green, the Gospels are unanimous that in his conflicted environment Jesus anticipated his death and reflected on its meaning according to his mission of redeeming the people of God.²⁰ Green writes, “Jesus was no masochist looking for an opportunity to suffer and die, but saw that his absolute commitment to the purpose of God might lead, in the context of ‘this adulterous and wicked generation’ (Mark 8:38), to his death. This, as he discerned and embraced in prayer on the night of his arrest, was the cup given him by God.”²¹

So how did the Gospel writers communicate Jesus’ understanding of God’s wrath (*ὀργή*)? In the synoptics, the word is used exclusively once in Matthew and twice in Luke. Matthew attributes *ὀργή* to John the Baptist during his confrontation with the Pharisees (3:7). Luke likewise attributes the word once to John the Baptist (3:7), but also to Jesus during His prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem (21:23). The word is only

¹⁹ Green, “Must We Imagine,” 157.

²⁰ Green, “Must We Imagine,” 157.

²¹ Green, “Must We Imagine,” 157.

found in the Gospel's elsewhere once, in John's Gospel, whose usage is perhaps the most relevant for this thesis' discussion:

The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life but must endure God's *wrath* (3:31–36).

In this passage, Jesus makes two important statements relevant to His understanding and communication of God's wrath. The first is that Jesus "is above all," sent from God who "speaks the words of God." There cannot be any cognitive dissonance between one's conception of God the Father and God the Son because they exist in truthful harmony with one another. The context of the chapter is love (3:16) and John goes to great lengths to frame Jesus' relationship with the Father as one of mutual love, which manifests itself in extending mercy to those who are lost (John 10:1–18). Any "outpouring" that occurs internally between the persons of God, occurs entirely out of love. In the words of one commentator, "the center of our chapter is the love of God (3:16); the frame of the chapter is the warning."²²

What is one to make of Jesus' warning against enduring God's wrath? Because Jesus is sent by God, to believe in Jesus is to have eternal life; consequently, to "disobey the Son" is to endure God's wrath, "for God is love" (1 John 4:8). The ontological implications of this statement are not to be avoided. Far from existing in tension with one another, love and wrath exist as realities to be experienced either by way of repentance

²² Bruner, *The Gospel*, 231.

and belief (Mark 1:15) or its opposite. Here is Jesus, speaking in complete unity with his Father—a response is both inevitable and necessary. However, one should avoid conceiving of God’s wrath as an emotional reaction of a self-concerned God or that which is expressed towards those who have no opportunity of belief.²³ God requires nothing on humanity’s part to remain whole. Once again, the kingdom is to be the framework to make sense of Jesus’ statements (John 3:3). Like the metaphorical cup of martyrdom offered to James and John, the kingdom becomes a place where one must enter and remain through “belief” to experience the love and life of God. However, this raises an important question: can salvation from God’s wrath truly be a simple matter of “belief?” Why does Jesus in John 3:36 condemn based on “disobedience” (works), but reward salvation based on “belief” (faith)?

The subject of belief is the topic of discussion in a recent book by Matthew Bates entitled, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*. The book offers a new paradigm to harmonize the biblical categories of “faith” and “works.” For example, Bates raises the question as to how Paul can write both that God “will repay according to each one’s deeds” (Rom 2:6) and “to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness” (Rom 4:5)—a similar conundrum to the one just posed concerning John 3. According to Bates, the solution is that “the gospel is not primarily about the necessity of the human response of ‘faith’ in Jesus’ saving work, but rather about how Jesus came to be enthroned as Lord of heaven and earth.”²⁴

²³ Bruner, *The Gospel*, 230.

²⁴ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance*, 13.

Central to this proposed revision is the conviction that “rather than speaking of belief, trust, or faith in Jesus, we should speak instead of fidelity to Jesus as cosmic Lord or allegiance to Jesus the king.”²⁵ According to Bates, faith is not fideism,²⁶ in opposition to works,²⁷ nor is it a “conjured optimism.”²⁸ Instead, faith links the gospel enthronement and reign of Christ. Accordingly, Bates can critique the binary paradigms of “faith” and “works,” without abandoning one for the other. For Bates, allegiance has three dimensions: faith/belief (πίστις) implies intellectual agreement that the gospel correspond to reality, a confession of loyalty to Jesus in recognition of his reign, and an embodied fidelity as a citizen of his kingdom.²⁹ Therefore, faith and works intermingle. Bates thesis rightly sees the gospel as the story of the enthronement of God – that faith isn’t merely an internal experience of deciding to follow Jesus to avoid wrath, but an allegiance to “Jesus the atoning King”³⁰ as He works with believers to bring the wider story of God’s redemption into reality.

This is foremost what Christ’s atonement accomplishes—an atonement based on his life, death, and resurrection—to draw humanity back into the family of God in the ultimate move towards humanity. How can Jesus say that the one who “disobeys the Son will not see life but must endure God’s wrath?” To reject Christ as the king is to reject God’s kingdom, and to reject God’s kingdom is to choose death over life. So often the linguistic debate regarding God’s wrath narrowly focuses on the application of

²⁵ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance*, 5.

²⁶ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance*, 18.

²⁷ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance*, 21.

²⁸ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance*, 23.

²⁹ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance*, 93.

³⁰ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance*, 30.

propitiation and/or expiation concerning Christ's *death*, one loses sight that as Christ brought the kingdom into the hearts of his followers through His *life*, people moved out from under God's wrath. So much so, that Christ was able to declare salvation to one who made allegiance to Christ's ways (Matt 19:8–10). Jesus gave no hesitation to explain the "secrets of the kingdom of heaven" to His disciples (Matt 13:11) wherein "the one who hears the word and understands it" (Matt 13:23) will have life.

This inevitably introduces tension for PSA theologians who will be quick to cite Isaiah 53 and Romans 3 and point out that Christ's death is explicitly linked in Scripture with turning aside God's wrath. However, the Gospels simply do not insist upon such a dichotomy. The solution is to see Jesus' life and death in the larger narrative of God's inauguration of His kingdom. In the perfect and faithful life of Christ, one sees an obedient allegiance to God, even to the point of death. When wrath is both understood as God "giving over" humanity to sin and the consequence of rejecting God as king, the result of which is the murder of God and the separation from God respectively, it becomes clear how the apostle Pāul could speak of Jesus' death as a propitiation for sin. Paul, like Jesus, understood that to escape Gods' wrath one must make a commitment of allegiance (Rom 3:26; John 3:36). Far from experiencing God's wrath on the cross, Jesus was enacting the perfect example of how one finds life, and the depths to which one must traverse to find it.

This serves as a more natural reading of Jesus' comments concerning the cross. Jesus telling His followers to "take up their cross daily and follow me" in Mark 8:34 is once again demonstrative of the other-focused nature of Christ's atonement. This section (8:31–38) outlines what faith entails when one "follows" Jesus. Like Jesus, a first century

Christian could expect to experience suffering and rejection at the hands of one's community (31). Far from being mere words of encouragement and inspiration, Jesus equates "taking up one's cross" with salvation (35) and seeing the kingdom of God (9:1). Furthermore, Jesus' cry of abandonment (Mark 15:34) should be interpreted as being spoken for the benefit of His followers. From the perspective of Jesus, He was abandoned by all. However, for Jesus, the fact that God raised him from the dead demonstrated that God had not abandoned him on the cross after all—an important point of encouragement for those who would "take up their cross" and follow him.

Jesus on Forgiveness

According to Mark, Jesus believed His gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) to be a time of when "the kingdom of God has come near" and for His listeners to "repent and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). In the over systematized world of theology, the atonement rarely is considered an extension of this motif, yet how would a first century audience reading the Gospels think about such a juxtaposition? For much of the evangelical world, the crucifixion has become an abstract idea, but in the first century, Christ's crucifixion represented a tangible real-world event demonstrative of the power of both spiritual and physical kingdoms. What was at stake was a winner between the kingdom of God and those in opposition. For those aligned with the kingdom of God—the *forgiveness of sins* was their prize.

Forgiveness Granted by the King

Jesus is clear that as his kingdom advances in victory, sins would be forgiven. Jesus immediately moves from declaring the arrival of his kingdom to calling his disciples (Mark 1:16–20) and demonstrating that His kingdom authority over the spiritual realm (21–28) and the physical realm (40–45) is irrefutable.³¹ Christ's irrefutable authority is a prolific theme in the Gospels (Matt 7:29; 9:8; 28:18; Mark 1:27; 2:10; 3:15; 11:29; Luke 9:1; 10:19). Early on in Mark's narrative, and the first account of Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders, Jesus makes a remarkable claim regarding how he intends to exercise that authority:

Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven' (Mark 2:1–5).

In the context of the greater atonement debate, the question that comes to the foreground is, "Yes, but how?"³² But was such a question even on the minds of Mark and his readers? Here at long last the kingdom of God has arrived, and the One who was casting out demons and healing lepers was now proclaiming the forgiveness of sins. By causing the paralytic to walk in view of his critics, Jesus was performing more than an act

³¹ Mark, whose opening chapter is replete with the word immediately (*εὐθέως*), a term he uses forty times throughout his Gospel, moves quickly from Jesus' kingdom proclamation to His kingdom execution. According to A. W. Pink ("Mark"), Mark uses *εὐθέως* to show his audience how God's perfect servant served: "There was no tardiness about Christ's service, but 'straight away' He was ever about His 'Father's business.' There was no delay, but 'immediately' He performed the work given Him to do. This word tells of the promptitude of His service and the urgency of His mission. There was no holding back, no reluctance, no slackness, but a blessed 'immediateness' about all His work."

³² For example, Paul Carter ("Can God") raises this question to Boyd and others Christus Victor theologians.

of mercy, he was announcing that the kingdom of God was drawing near.³³ With God's promise that the "lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy" (Isa 35:6) in the back of his audience's mind, Mark is declaring that what was once thought to be a future hope of salvation was very much a present reality.³⁴ God himself was intervening in human history and restoring the world to its proper order. As Jesus continues to heal both the spiritually and physically oppressed, the future of God's kingdom becomes increasingly clear—the kingdom of God has arrived and will win its conquest. That Jesus is exercising his kingdom authority to forgive sins as the Son of Man *on earth* (Mark 2:10) stands in contrast to the religious leader's opinion that such an act is confined to the heavenly dwelling place.³⁵ No wonder all who witnessed the event "were amazed and glorified God" (Mark 2:12).

However, the religious leader's initial reaction to Jesus' statement reveals a different question for Mark's audience.³⁶ Jesus' death would indeed bring about the "forgiveness of sin," but it was not how but *who* declared this to be and to *whom* this forgiveness of sins was given that concerned Mark.³⁷ It was obvious to Mark and his audience that Jesus can forgive the sins of his followers because *that's what happens in*

³³ Lane, *The Gospel*, 99.

³⁴ Lane, *The Gospel*, 99.

³⁵ Martin, "It's My Prerogative," 72.

³⁶ "At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the paralytic— 'I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.' And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'" (Mark 2:8–12)

³⁷ Even Paul seems more concerned with this question in Romans 3, who develops his arguments to demonstrate the need for both Jews and Gentiles to express faith in Christ (3:1; 9; 20; 22–24; 26; 28–30).

*the kingdom of God.*³⁸ While the religious leader's question is often attributed as proof of Christ's divinity and consequent authority,³⁹ the thematic context of the kingdom of God implies there is evidence pointing to a different truth. Christ's authority remains the centrepiece of the passage, but the religious leader's disapproval that this whole scene was occurring among the rejected seems to be the underlying problem at hand. The radical truth of the atonement found in the Gospels is that to those the world rejected, Jesus would dedicate his life and death to include in his kingdom.⁴⁰

It is easy to sweep aside the ire of the Pharisees as simple ignorance, but their reputation in the first century for their legal expertise and high ideals⁴¹ does not afford us that luxury. Here is a group known for being well versed in the Torah and having a strong

³⁸ The question of whether the Messiah had the authority to forgive sins in Second Temple Judaism thought has been the focus of debate for some time. There are those who suggest that the Jews expected a Messiah who would forgive sins by his own authority or that the statement simply is mistaken and incorrectly attributed to the religious leaders. In his research on the various positions, biblical scholar Daniel Johansson makes the following conclusion: "No conclusive evidence has been put forward in support of the view that other figures than the God of Israel forgave sin in early Judaism. Passages which have been invoked to demonstrate exceptions appear to depict various agents who expiate sin, intercede on behalf of others, or mediate forgiveness from God. But they do not pardon sin" (Johansson, "Who Can Forgive," 369).

³⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 548.

⁴⁰ The question of how this sacrifice works to establish the New Covenant in the New Testament is of course a major topic of discussion among atonement theologians. In his essay, Steve Motyer ("The Atonement in Hebrews," 136–148) points out that any description of Jesus' sacrifice throughout the book of Hebrews depends on a contrast between the "old" and "new." Accordingly, one cannot assume the author of Hebrews is simply "importing Old Testament atonement theology unchanged" (137). Motyer makes the follow conclusions regarding sacrifice in the book of Hebrews: 1. His death first and foremost qualifies the Son of God to be the Greatest Human Being. 2. His Incarnation means sharing our suffering, with death as its supreme expression. 3. Atonement thus arises fundamentally out of the Incarnation, rather than just out of Jesus' death and resurrection. 4. The fundamental action in atonement is, therefore, that he goes before us. Motyer concludes: "This is not penal substitution but something even more compelling and vigorous. We are not dealing here with a static satisfaction of a principle of justice in God or a negative dealing with wrath on our behalf. We do not find any notion of bearing punishment in our place. These ideas are completely foreign to Hebrews. Whether we find them elsewhere in the New Testament is beyond the scope of this essay. What we do find in Hebrews is a powerful, worship-evoking presentation of a God who 'brings' his firstborn into the world (1:6), so that he may lead a redeemed people in a mighty new exodus out of the power of death into God's rest, away from Mount Sinai and up to Mount Zion (12:18 – 24). He does this by embracing our suffering and death along with our flesh and blood, thus becoming the High Priest who leads his people, as one of them, into the Most Holy Place" (145–146).

⁴¹ Marshall, "Josephus and Mark," 60.

respect for their elders and traditions, who are seemingly on the outside of the kingdom looking in.⁴² How could this have happened? According to NPP scholars like Sanders, Wright, and others, the conflict between the religious leaders and Jesus was not that Jesus was offering forgiveness and they were legalistic moralists, but that Jesus was offering the total eschatological hope—the return from exile, the renewed covenant, the forgiveness of sins, all elements of the kingdom of God, “outside the official structures, to all the wrong people, and on his own authority.”⁴³

The unexpected nature of the forgiveness of sin—even for experts of the Torah—serves as a warning for those who demand God act in a certain way. For example, according to atonement scholar Leon Morris, “If a God like the God depicted in the Old Testament is to save men, then he will do so in a way that is right, a way which takes due notice of the place of law and justice.”⁴⁴ But certainly the Pharisees must have thought their expectations of Jesus were just according to their understanding of the Torah? However, once again the portrait of Christ’s activity falls under the motif of being “for us.” Like its contrast with the expectations of the ancient Pharisees, the forgiveness of Christ contrasts itself with modern expectations of penal justice as well.⁴⁵ Christ’s “for us” forgiveness mirrors that of his “for us” Incarnation and death, that Christ entered humanity not to satisfy the law of punitive justice, but in spite of it.⁴⁶ God did not forego

⁴² Marshall, “Josephus and Mark,” 60.

⁴³ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, chapter 7, para. 72, location 5597.

⁴⁴ Morris, *The Atonement*, chapter 8, para. 19, location 2496.

⁴⁵ Belousek, “O Sweet Exchange,” 280.

⁴⁶ Belousek, “O Sweet Exchange,” 280.

the punishment of sinners through an act of penal satisfaction, but by transcending retribution in an act of redemption through Christ.⁴⁷

The life of Jesus was hardly one that conformed to a traditional understanding of law and justice—especially one that uses violence to achieve its end. A brief biological sketch of Jesus' life demonstrates this.⁴⁸ Jesus non-violently confronted the religious leaders who had led his people astray. Jesus crossed racial and gender boundaries, healed on the Sabbath and challenged the self-serving corruption of the temple priests who had aligned themselves with the pagan state of Rome – all without resorting to violence. He lived what he taught—when insulted and offended, turn the other cheek; when forced to pay for an unjust debt, give away the cloak off your back; when asked to help a soldier, go the extra mile. He rebuked Peter for coming to his aid with a sword, mocked his arrestors for thinking they needed to capture him with weapons, and stood before Pilate, a man of empire, violence, and war and told him the kingdom of God is not of this world. Finally, when the moment came to change the world—he allowed himself to be crucified. To then claim that the atonement achieves forgiveness by an act of divinely sanctioned violence creates a challenge as to why Jesus *non-violently* demonstrated the rule of his kingdom over the forces of evil. The Gospels repeatedly portray Jesus' mission as a visible manifestation of the reign of God, which confronts and poses an alternative to earthly powers.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Belousek, "O Sweet Exchange," 280.

⁴⁸ Many elements of the following biographical sketch are taken from, Weaver, *The Nonviolent God*, 125.

⁴⁹ Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 43.

Forgiveness Granted by the Father

Not only does Christ extend forgiveness based on his kingdom authority, he does so on behalf of a loving father. Of the imagery Jesus uses to communicate the nature of forgiveness, none are more profound than the parable of the prodigal son and his brother (Luke 15:11–32). The parable of the prodigal son provides an excellent case study on forgiveness for several reasons. The parable, which is the culmination of a series of three parables, is taught in response to the Pharisees' objection that Jesus "welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). Considering that the Pharisees are concerned that Jesus is extending the kingdom of God to outcasts, this parable not only teaches on the topic of forgiveness, but how forgiveness is to be understood in a kingdom context. Secondly, this parable uses various cultural nuances that are relevant in determining the historical context of Jesus' teaching. This allows the modern reader to align his/her questions with that of the first century audience. Third, atonement theology has a deep concern with the economy of God the Father. The parable of the prodigal son and his brother describes what God is like. As per Rahner's trinitarian axiom, a description of what God is like is a description of how God acts.

Those familiar with the various atonement theories may anticipate that this thesis has adopted the "moral influence theory" of the atonement, as this parable remains foundational for its argumentation. According to its critic John Stott, the moral influence theory is a theory of the atonement that sees the power of the cross "not in any objective, sin-bearing transaction but in its subjective inspiration, not in its legal efficacy (changing

our status before God) but in its moral influence (changing our attitudes and actions).”⁵⁰ Stott goes on to argue that the moral influence theory must be “confidently declared to be untenable”⁵¹ due to its adherents not taking Scripture seriously,⁵² that “it entirely lacks the profound biblical understanding of [humanity’s] radical rebellion against God,”⁵³ and that it creates a false dichotomy between God’s justice and love.⁵⁴ Taking aim at those who use the parable of the lost son as evidence of the moral influence view, Stott argues that the parables “tell us what we must do, but say nothing directly about what God has done for our forgiveness.”⁵⁵ In short, Stott equates a moral influence theory as teaching a gospel of forgiveness that does not require the atonement.⁵⁶

This thesis has intentionally avoided applying the moral influence theory label to its argumentation, in part because of these connotations raised by Stott. If one is to assume Stott’s first objection to be true, that adherents of the moral influence theory fail to take the Scripture seriously, then Evangelicals have no business applying it to their theology. Although Stott is a brilliant theologian, this argument echoes as hollow for its presumption. This thesis has cited a variety of atonement theologians—all of which hold a high view of Scripture. Furthermore, framing the cross as a necessary intervention to transform a sinful humanity, considering that humanity is guilty before a holy God, has alleviated the concern of not appreciating humanity’s radical rebellion against God. This thesis is, after all, an exercise in evangelical theology, and like all evangelical theology, is

⁵⁰ Stott, *The Cross*, 217.

⁵¹ Stott, *The Cross*, 219.

⁵² Stott, *The Cross*, 219.

⁵³ Stott, *The Cross*, 220.

⁵⁴ Stott, *The Cross*, 220.

⁵⁵ Stott, *The Cross*, 222.

⁵⁶ Stott, *The Cross*, 222.

predominantly concerned with being biblical. While those who hold to a traditional moral influence theory may generally not see the cross as vicariously necessary, as per Stott's assessment, this should not prevent one from considering whether elements of the theory are still biblically valid. A consistent claim made by PSA theologians is that the penal aspect of Christ's death must take priority. At the very least, this thesis challenges that assumption.

Regarding the parable of the prodigal and his brother, Stott refuses to see anything that would lend itself to understand what God has done for our forgiveness. Yet according to Stott, the cultural humiliation the father experienced in running towards his lost son exemplifies the cross. Stott concludes that "the cross was an unparalleled manifestation of God's love; that he showed his love in bearing our penalty and therefore our pain, in order to be able to forgive and restore us, and that the Parable of the Prodigal Son, far from contradicting this, implicitly expresses it."⁵⁷ How is this parable, if understood as a picture of humanity's rebellion and God's willingness to experience humiliation *to restore his son back into the family of God*, not an explicit example of an atonement that prioritizes restoration through Cruciformity and intervention?

Unlike Stott, the possibility of seeing what God has done to accomplish forgiveness is present in the parable. Jesus' usage of the family motif is rife with biblical and cultural connotations. "A man had two sons (15:11)," immediately would have raised the names Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, and Solomon and Absalom among the imagination of Jesus' audience.⁵⁸ Jesus' audience, however, would have been more

⁵⁷ Stott, *The Cross*, 223.

⁵⁸ Hawkins, "A Man," 165.

concerned by the younger sons brazen request for his inheritance. This request, which would have the younger son relinquish all future claims and benefits, severing his relationship with his family, as well as his father's compliant reply, are noticeable aspects of the story.⁵⁹ In the ancient near eastern patriarchal society of Jesus' era, a traditional father would be expected to drive his son away "with nothing except physical blows."⁶⁰ The son, who is effectually stating that he wishes his father dead, is abandoning what he owes his father, namely the responsibility as the younger son to care for his father until he dies.⁶¹ To Jesus' audience's presumed amazement, the father agrees and divides his family's estate (15:12). The act of acceding to his younger son's demand entails a significant cultural risk by both putting the success of the family farm in jeopardy and bringing shame to the family name.⁶²

Spending his wealth and finding himself in squalor, the younger son eventually "comes to himself" (15:17) and prepares to return home. As part of his preparation, the younger son plans to first ask for forgiveness before asking his father to treat him like one of the hired hands (19). The parable finds its climax when the younger son arrives home to find his father waiting with expectation for his arrival. Before the son can get out his pre-arranged apology, the father runs to his lost son and embraces him in love (15:20). The younger son proceeds to confess the sin of rejecting his father, but after experiencing such an outpouring of mercy, accepts his father's offer of forgiveness without attempting to make a deal to pay back the debt he owes his father—a deliberate omission by Jesus to

⁵⁹ Hawkins, "A Man," 165.

⁶⁰ Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 25.

⁶¹ Belousek, "O Sweet Exchange," 287.

⁶² Belousek, "O Sweet Exchange," 288.

frame the effect of the father's act of love.⁶³ Allowing his son to confess his sins (15:21), the father then celebrates his son's return (15:22). Just when the story seems to be near completion, Jesus tells of the older son's rebellion, who refuses to join the party out of anger he had never received a celebration for his "obedience" (15:29).

The older son's refusal to participate in the celebration would have been just as shocking and offensive to Jesus' audience as the actions of the younger brother at the beginning of the parable.⁶⁴ Once again, the father encounters a son who is guilty of a very serious offence that any normal ancient near eastern father would have severely punished.⁶⁵ And yet, for the second time in the same day the father extends mercy to try and redeem his other lost son who has selfishly brought shame to his family (15:28).⁶⁶ However, the son's response is one of derogation: "But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!'" (15:30) The older son, who fails to use the proper title of father (*πατήρ*) in contrast to the younger son in v. 12, clearly feels

⁶³ Wendland, "Finding Some Lost Aspects," 31.

⁶⁴ Wendland, "Finding Some Lost Aspects," 47.

⁶⁵ Wendland, "Finding Some Lost Aspects," 47.

⁶⁶ Wendland, "Finding Some Lost Aspects," 48.

as though justice has been violated.⁶⁷ In the mind of the older son, the prodigal may be received back as a servant, but *not* as a son.⁶⁸

The parable of the prodigal and his brother is the story of the broken family of God. Jesus, who is telling this story in ear shot of both the “tax collectors and sinners” and the “Pharisees and scribes” (15:1), challenges his audience to radically alter their perception of God. For the Pharisees the world exists as a set of fixed rules, and yet the father in this parable destabilizes those rules.⁶⁹ The father’s utmost commitment is not to meeting the specific demands of justice, as both sons deserve punishment, *but to his lost sons*.⁷⁰ The father is “guided by the indestructible love which makes space in the self for others in their alterity, which invites the others who have transgressed to return, which creates hospitable conditions for their confession, and rejoices over their presence, the father keeps re-configuring the order without destroying it so as to maintain it as an order of embrace rather than exclusion.”⁷¹ Coupled with Jesus’ focus on an inclusive kingdom, the story of the prodigal son is a powerful precursor to what he would demonstrate on the cross—that God’s love would make a way to restore his broken family.

⁶⁷ According to Miroslav Volf the older son is angry because his sense of justice involves an understanding of the basic rules that govern civil life. These rules seem to resonate even in the present day: “The one who works (v. 29) deserves more recognition than the one who squanders; celebrating the squanderer is squandering. The one who obeys where obedience is due (v. 29) deserves more honor than the one who irresponsibly breaks commands; honoring the irresponsible is irresponsible. The one who remains faithful should be treated better than the one who excludes the others; preference for the excluding one is tacit exclusion of the faithful one. When squandering becomes better than working and the breach of relationships better than faithfulness, justice will be perverted and the household will fall apart; there will be no place from which a prodigal could depart and no place to which he could return; we all will be in a “distant country” dreaming about filling our emaciated bodies with “the pods” for the pigs (v. 16)” (*Exclusion and Embrace*, 161–62).

⁶⁸ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 162.

⁶⁹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 166.

⁷⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 166.

⁷¹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 166.

Speaking to the Pharisees through the character of the older brother, Jesus speaks to the centrality of grace and mercy in this family. In the economy of God, God himself intervenes to find those who are lost (15:4), celebrates those who are found (15:9), and restores those who return to him in repentance (15:22).⁷² According to theologian Roger Nicole, this “parable presented by Jesus was certainly not a full expression of the redeeming process since it has no place for Christ himself. A death that is not specifically required for the relief of the loved one cannot be interpreted as an expression of love. . . . Unless the necessity of the atonement be grounded in eternal principles, even the death of Christ cannot be seen as a moving expression of God’s love.”⁷³

Analytic philosopher Robin Collins has taken the liberty of reworking the parable of the prodigal son and his brother with the “full expression” of the father’s response consistent with PSA:

But his father responded: “I cannot simply forgive you for what you have done, not even so much as to make you one of my hired men. You have insulted my honor by your wild living. Simply to forgive you would be to trivialize sin; it would be against the moral order of the entire universe. For ‘nothing is less tolerable in the order of things than for a son to take away the honor due to his father and not make recompense for what he takes away.’ Such is the severity of my justice that reconciliation will not be made unless the penalty is utterly paid. My wrath—my avenging justice—must be placated. “But father, please..” the son began to plead. “No,” the father said, “either you must be punished or you must pay back, through hard labor for as long as you shall live, the honor you stole from me.” Then the elder brother spoke up. “Father, I will pay the debt that he owes and endure your just punishment for him. Let me work extra in the field on his behalf and thereby placate your wrath.” And it came to pass that the elder brother took on the garb of a servant and labored hard year after year, often long into the night, on behalf of his younger brother. And finally, when the elder

⁷² There is a thematic irony that on the cross as Jesus died, and darkness swept over the land, (Luke 23:44), a celebration was occurring among the angels (15:10) for the salvation of a thief (23:43) and a Roman centurion (23:47).

⁷³ Nicole, “Postscript,” 448–49.

brother died of exhaustion, the father's wrath was placated against his younger son and they lived happily for the remainder of their days.⁷⁴

Is this the gospel? What Roger Nicole and others fail to consider is that Jesus is very much present in this story because he is the one telling it. In communicating an image of the Father, he is also communicating an image of himself. Jesus, like God the Father, like God the Holy Spirit, has been subject to the great dishonour of humanity's rebellion against the kingdom of God. The older brother exemplifies the demand for justice, and fundamentally appears to be in the right. Humanity *deserves* punishment for opposing God, for devouring God's property with the prostitution of idolatry (15:30). But instead of punishment, sinful humanity finds itself restored and adopted back to the family of God. And humanity, instead of living where the self rules and reigns, can find itself, through repentance and God's mercy, working once again to bear the image of God for the sake of the kingdom. Humanity, like

Israel could be allowed to sin, to follow pagan idolatry, even to end up feeding the pigs for a pagan master, but Israel could not fall out of the covenant purposes of her god. She could say to her god 'I wish you were dead', but this god would not respond in kind. When, therefore, Israel comes to her senses, and returns with all her heart, there is an astonishing, prodigal, lavish welcome waiting for her. Equally, the same generous love is still extended to those who, hurt and upset, cannot at the moment understand how it can possibly be right to welcome the prodigal home.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Collins, "Understanding Atonement."

⁷⁵ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, chapter 4, para. 11, location 2812.

Conclusion

This chapter has framed the nature of forgiveness as a central component in the kingdom and family of God. Far from communicating forgiveness in penal terms, Jesus' life demonstrates that forgiveness is based on his authority and on the loving nature of his father. In the other-focused ethos of Jesus' ministry, an atonement theology must take into consideration Jesus' primary purpose on earth—to render the kingdom of God. The decontextualized approach of PSA renders it highly unlikely that Jesus' self-understanding of his death was to accomplish an abstract transaction which satisfies the wrath of God. Instead, Jesus' death serves as a stark warning of the consequences of rejecting God and serves as a model for the future church to consider.

CHAPTER 4: THE ATONEMENT AND THE CHURCH

Having experienced a traditional evangelical church, it was not uncommon for the congregation to sing the following hymn:

My hope is in the Lord,
Who gave Himself for me,
And paid the price,
Of all my sin at Calvary.
For me He died;
For me He lives,
And everlasting life,
And light He freely gives.
No merit of my own,
His anger to suppress,
My only hope is found,
In Jesus' righteousness.
And now for me He stands,
Before the Father's throne,
He shows His wounded hands,
And names me as His own.
His grace has planned it all,
'Tis mine but to believe,
And recognize His work of love,
And Christ receive.

Who would have known that Norman J. Clayton's 1945 hymn, "My Hope is in the Lord," would encapsulate so well the heart of the atonement debate? Why did Jesus die? To "suppress" God's anger, or to give his life "for me?" Did Jesus die to pay a debt to satisfy the demand of justice, or as a work of grace and love for one to "Christ

receive?” Even the simple lyrics of a hymn written about the cross raise profound questions.

The question that this thesis engaged with truly is monumental. There are undoubtedly vast many more questions that can be asked and even more answers given concerning Jesus’ death—the cross indeed is an example of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Rom 11:33). Admittedly, countless individuals have been positively impacted by PSA. The author of this thesis came to faith in Christ based on the traditional evangelical model of the atonement. Even considering some of the individuals who have espoused the penal view—Calvin, Luther, Denny, Forsyth, Packer, Carson, and Stott—should humble every atonement theologian who wrestles PSA. Accordingly, one may ask: *“If many individuals have been impacted positively by PSA, why bother changing the way the evangelical church communicates the gospel?”*

Furthermore, readers with a PSA perspective may well agree with much of the argumentation of this thesis. They may think that this thesis has failed to heed Packer’s warning against “the impropriety of treating half-truths as the whole truth, and of rejecting a more comprehensive account on the basis of speculative negations about what God’s holiness requires as a basis for forgiving sins.”¹ PSA, in their estimation, is a more robust definition of justice, a more compelling picture of love and a more potent description of sin. This thesis has referenced dozens of PSA theologians who have committed thousands of pages in elaborating their theory of the atonement. This may lead to the question: *“Why should one trade a comprehensive theory of the atonement for an alleged “simple” one?”*

¹ Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?” 21.

Communicating Atonement

In answering the first question, this thesis' challenge of PSA contains both a vertical and horizontal element. Concerning the vertical component, what is at stake is nothing less than an evangelical conception of God. As A. W. Tozer once wrote, "What comes into our minds about God is the most important thing about us."² This thesis and the works cited in support of it believe that the theological inconsistencies present in PSA require a different understanding of the economy of God. Regardless of its positive impact, evangelical theology concerns itself with the quest for truth as revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. An obvious theme throughout PSA theology is that it believes itself to be the sole defender of God's wrath. Underlying this criticism, however, is the belief that challenging PSA's view of God's wrath is nothing more than an attempt at easing one's troubled consciences.³ Therefore, one needs to exercise caution on basing theological truth on its receptiveness. Regardless of how a theory of the atonement has impacted the church, PSA included, the church must evaluate its theological accuracy.

While no two theologians can (or should) think exactly alike, the evangelical theological community lacks a coherent description of something that, according to David Bebbington, is foundational to our identity. Those within the evangelical theological community who are committed to PSA must decide whether they want to continue to hold PSA up as a boundary marker of identity. The evangelical tradition has always included deep disagreements over theology but has unified around a high view of biblical inspiration and authority. Therefore, evangelical theologians should seriously

² Tozer, *The Knowledge*, 9.

³ Morris, *The Atonement*, chapter 7, para. 13, location 2088.

consider and engage biblically articulated theology, regardless of how radically they may shift their current perspective of God. There is a certain irony in the modern evangelical church, which draws its existence from the Protestant Reformation, rejecting theology that might challenge tradition. In the spirit of self-reflection and humility, one must never assume that one group's theology is entirely correct.

Challenging PSA, however, also affects the church horizontally. Part of the goal of this thesis was to examine how God directed the church to participate in the drama of his redeeming kingdom. Part of that mission applies to evaluate how the church communicates both internally to itself and externally to society. Considering that Jesus' primary teaching method (parables) *exclude* any notion of judicial satisfaction or a description of the mechanics of his death, the question is raised whether the evangelical church should be espousing PSA in its gospel proclamation. To preach the gospel is to preach human fallenness and both the need to accept the love of God and the consequence of rejecting that love (John 3). However, the kingdom message of forgiveness goes beyond these descriptions to include God constituting his existence *as* love and demonstrating that love in the event of Christ's cross. If the church's gospel proclamation fails to capture the nearly incomprehensible image of God the Father running towards the lost, then it must reconsider how it communicates the gospel.

Steve Chalke has argued that one of the weaknesses of modern theology is its inability to communicate, engage, or challenge the broader culture in a meaningful way, and believes PSA is partially responsible for this decline.⁴ Because of the nature of PSA, one can see how God's justice is perceived as being elevated at the expense of his love.

⁴ Chalke, "The Redemption," 36.

One could argue that this is merely a caricature or misunderstanding of the theory, but when the major problem that is addressed at the cross is God's wrath, one cannot be blamed for assuming God's love is secondary. The solution, however, is not to water down the theology of the atonement and remove anything that challenges culture, but to ensure that Christ's death is communicated according to Jesus' concern to speak to and elevate those without social power or standing.⁵

Speaking to those who feel powerless is one of the strengths of the "cross as intervention" metaphor developed in this thesis. Unlike PSA, the cross as intervention intimately involves both humanity and God in the process of restoration. If the evangelical community is going to communicate Christ's death correctly, a necessary change will be to move beyond "subjective" vs. "objective" categories of atonement theology. In the divine economy of making the first move of reconciliation (Rom 5:8), such categories become meaningless. There is no greater crime committed by humanity than to wish God dead and then actually commit the deed. There is no greater act of love demonstrated by God than to enter human misery and give life to reverse death. The cross remains objective in that it stands to condemn. The cross remains subjective in that it stands to restore. Atonement theology must always communicate both hurt and healing.

There are three aspects of the cross as an intervention that will benefit the church in its communication of the atonement. The first is that the cross as intervention uniquely

⁵ In his study on twentieth-century Christianity in America, Thomas Reeves (*The Empty Church*) traces the trajectory of liberal mainline churches from being one of the most dominant voices in American culture to an irrelevant community that lost its impact. Written near the end of the twentieth century, Reeves' trajectory is still very much a reality in the twenty-first century. According to Reeves, the cause of such a decline was the result of liberal Christianity's parallel of American political life and the abandonment of traditional Christian orthodoxy.

acknowledges the reality of sin. People who are at a point of needing intervention are much like the younger son in Jesus' parable; they have hit rock bottom and have come to the knowledge that they need forgiveness. Their solution is the same solution presented in Jesus' parable—repentance. However, Christ's death goes beyond him dying for sin. Christ died for the *sinner*—a subtle distinction that takes Christ's death out of the abstract world of law and into the historical world of personal reconciliation. In the world of PSA, the curtain remains drawn in the theatre of God's economy. In the world of intervention, the audience must sit and watch as the drama of its horrible sin is played out before their eyes. Some may leave disgusted, angry, insulted, and defiant (Acts 5:17), while others will experience transformation (Acts 10:43–44). But doesn't this thesis then merely reduce the cross to an inspirational story, suffering the same flaws as the moral influence theories of liberal theology? Only if Christ's death is seen in isolation from the larger narrative of Scripture could such a suggestion even be considered. This thesis has said very little of Christ's resurrection. However, the resurrection is further evidence that humanity's ultimate rejection of God would not force him to violate his covenantal faithfulness. The cross as intervention is but one part of a larger intervention, all of which brings about a reversal of the Fall. Or as the Apostle Paul put it, "Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:18–19). Evangelicals are committed to a worldview that sees sin as the fundamental issue of humankind. I see no reason that a rejection of PSA as the primary lens to view the cross needs to affect an evangelical understanding of sin.

The second strength of the cross as intervention is that it reveals both that God respects human autonomy but also pursues us for the sake of restoration. The father in Jesus' parable was willing to allow his son to leave his home, revealing that God is not a God of coercion. Furthermore, Jesus "left" his dwelling place through his Incarnation for the benefit of saving humanity.⁶ The cross as intervention allows for Jesus to intimately experience the pain and hurt, we experience but with the purpose of transforming humanity. For the Jewish younger son to eventually end up feeding the pigs (Luke 15:15) would have been an unbearable punishment. Likewise, as anyone involved in the field of pastoral counselling can attest to, many who attend evangelical churches are suffering their own version of living at rock bottom. The atonement must be communicated wherein one can imagine God, like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, experiencing shame for our benefit. The image stands in stark contrast to the God of PSA—who stands above humanity insulated from human sin. A proper trinitarian atonement theology, however, sees Cruciformity in all members of the Godhead.

Many Evangelicals will be uncomfortable with the notion of God respecting human autonomy as it seems to imply that he is no longer sovereign. If God allows humanity to make their own choices, isn't he the God of deism, a watchmaker who winds up the natural world before disengaging from it? Obviously, the entire Incarnation stands to condemn the God of deism. Furthermore, the cross as intervention sees God as the

⁶ Bradley Jersak's definition of the Incarnation (*A More Christlike God*, chapter 8, para. 42, location 2128) is an excellent summary of what Christ accomplished on earth: "In the Incarnation, Christ mysteriously and completely assumes or assimilates all humankind and the fullness of human nature (fallen Adam) into himself. He takes into himself, bears, suffers all that we suffer—in himself, in his whole life and most especially in his death. He suffers our weaknesses and our wounds, the depth and breadth of the human condition. He bears even our violence and sin, becoming the focal point of all human oppression and aggression."

active agent of human salvation. But just as distasteful to the notion of God abandoning creation is the notion of God determining and then coercing his creation.

Here one would be wise to follow the wisdom of the late Clark Pinnock whose trinitarian theology offers wisdom for atonement theology and communication in the context of God's sovereignty. Reacting against the danger of determinism, Pinnock writes, "we cannot believe if we have conceptualized God in existentially repugnant ways."⁷ For Pinnock, the Trinity plays a vital role in understanding God. At the heart of the Trinity is God's relational community: "it is appropriate to speak of God as a community of persons rather than as modes of being."⁸ Pinnock affirms the important theological truth that God is indeed self-sufficient but also is overflowing in love for his creation. Pinnock reminds us that God was under no obligation to create any potential world—in the Trinity the fullness of relation community is experienced; therefore, God does not owe us anything and requires nothing from us in return to complete his being. The Trinity also explains a world that contains significant freedom: "Being socially triune, God has made a world with-freedom, in which loving relationships can flourish. It is an ecosystem capable of echoing back the triune life of God. . . . As triune, God would be self-sufficient without creating any world, but as triune, God delights in a world in which he can interact with creatures for whom his love can overflow."⁹ God is like an artist, who transcends his work yet imparts something of himself into it. This God, who is all powerful, willingly delegates that power to His creation for the sake of being "covenant partners, opening up the possibility of loving fellowship but also of some

⁷ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 102.

⁸ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 108.

⁹ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 110.

initiative being taken away from God and creatures coming into conflict with his plans.”¹⁰

Pinnock describes the fall into sin as being directly opposed to the will of God. As Pinnock so forcefully writes: “To say that God hates sin while secretly willing it, to say that God loves the world while excluding most people from an opportunity of salvation, to say that God warmly invites sinners to come knowing all the while they cannot possibly do so—such things do not deserve to be called mysteries when that is just euphemism for nonsense.”¹¹ In the context of the atonement, it is vital that human freedom be respected. What better way to express human responsibility than to communicate the cross as an intervention?

The third strength of the cross as intervention is that it retains the family dynamic so central to Jesus’ teaching and brings diversity to the evangelical’s strict reliance on law court imagery. The legal metaphor of PSA is still a valuable way of communicating one’s sinfulness but can skew the cross when over-emphasized. Justification remains an important doctrine, but as Wright observes,

What has happened in the history of the ‘doctrine of justification’ is rather as though someone, rightly convinced of the vital importance of the steering wheel for driving a car, were to refer to the car as ‘the wheel,’ so that people who had never seen a car would be deceived into thinking that he was talking about the steering wheel itself as the entire machine, and then were to imagine a gigantic steering wheel cunningly equipped with seats and a motor, but still really just a wheel.¹²

¹⁰ Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” 115.

¹¹ Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” 115.

¹² Wright, *Justification*, 87.

It is no secret that the North American church is suffering the pain of broken family relationships. For many, the family dynamics of the parable of the prodigal son and his older brother are not far from reality. For many evangelical worshippers, it is simple to visualize a courtroom in which a judge declares them righteous but is an entirely different experience imagining a father loving them. Can one truly say that God loves anyone in the PSA paradigm? If the satisfaction of punishment is the standard to be declared righteous, then surely a declaration of love must have awaited the punishment of Christ as well? Obviously, the PSA theologians and pastors mentioned in this thesis would balk at such a suggestion, but isn't it possible that PSA has caused some to doubt the love of God? *Theologically*, PSA may not advocate "divine child abuse," but considering its claims, is bound to cause confusion.¹³

Evangelical churches must learn to balance the way they communicate the gospel by including essential topics such as the kingdom of God. Evangelical theologians and pastors should explore different metaphors that highlight the various aspects of the

¹³ N. T. Wright (*The Day*, 38–39) recently explained a common confusing evangelical line of reasoning: "The line of thought goes like this, usually based on a particular arrangement of biblical texts: a. All humans sinned, causing God to be angry and to want to kill them, to burn them forever in "hell." b. Jesus somehow got in the way and took the punishment instead (it helped, it seems, that he was innocent—oh, and that he was God's own son too). c. We are in the clear after all, heading for "heaven" instead (provided, of course, we believe it). Many preachers and teachers put it much more subtly than this, but this is still the story people hear. This is the story they expect to hear. In some churches, if you don't tell this story more or less in this way, people will say that you aren't "preaching the gospel." The natural reaction to this from many who have grown up hearing this message and feeling they had to believe it (if they didn't, they would go to hell) is that its picture of God is abhorrent. This God, such people instinctively feel, is a bloodthirsty tyrant. If there is a God, we must hope and pray that he (or she, or it) isn't like that at all. So, they react in one of a number of predictable ways. Some people reject the whole thing as a horrible nonsense. Others, puzzled, go back to their Bibles and to the great teachers of the early church, and there they find all sorts of other things being said about the cross, for instance, that it was the means by which God's rescuing love won the ultimate victory over all the forces of darkness. Or they find early writers urging Christians to imitate the self-giving love of Jesus, and they seize upon that as the "answer": the cross, they say, wasn't about God punishing sin; it was about Jesus giving us the ultimate example of love. Thus, many different interpretations have arisen, affecting the ways in which people have been taught the Bible and the Christian faith. This has been a recipe for confusion."

kingdom of God. The truth of the cross and the kingdom are diverse, and our vocabulary should reflect this reality. Very rarely have I heard the concept of adoption associated with the cross in my evangelical experience. Very rarely has the cross been communicated in terms indicative of divine initiated healing. Very rarely has the cross been linked with the kingdom of God. Even if pastors or theologians do not find the arguments in this thesis convincing, hopefully they have been challenged to reflect on the depths of Christ's death. If one is not careful, expounding the cross exclusively in penal terms constantly may have the effect of communicating not a God who is "slow to anger" (Exod 34:6) but a God who is only angry.

Which brings us back to Packer's warning. While there is a danger in a theology of treating half-truths as the whole truth, there is also the danger of treating the entire truth as incomplete. In discussing the limitation of the Christus Victor view, Gregory Boyd admits he is left with unanswered questions and warns against the danger of becoming incredulous against ancient models of the atonement for a lack of biblical details.¹⁴ As this thesis has pointed out, modern questions are not always in line with the ancient questions of the Bible. There is often a temptation to expand theology beyond its boundaries. For example, for centuries one small word "ransom" expanded into wild theories involving deceptive payments to the devil. How easy it is to assume our theories will stand the test of history. Could it be possible that PSA has reached a similar point?

However, this is not to suggest that the church can merely disengage from society and avoid their questions about the Christian faith and how the atonement can answer them. For example, many no longer perceive Evangelicalism to be a religious movement

¹⁴ Boyd, "Christus Victor View," 37.

but a political one, and an extremely narrow one at that. Many Evangelicals in the United States seemingly sacrificed the integrity of the evangelical Christian movement for the sake of political power, blind partisan devotion, and racial preference,¹⁵ an exchange inconsistent with many core Christian values. As Russell Moore observed, “for years, secular progressives have said that evangelical social action in America is not about religious conviction but all about power. They have implied that the goal of the Religious Right is to cynically use the “moral” to get to the “majority,” not the other way around. This year [2016], a group of high-profile old-guard evangelicals has proven these critics right.”¹⁶

What can a cruciform, kingdom focused theology of the atonement say to such a culture? To begin, the Incarnation speaks to the futility of human power. To be in Christ is to represent a way of thinking wherein the first will be last, and the last will be first (Matt 20:16). One can only imagine the transformation that would happen in society if this were adopted. What of the perception that the evangelical church is embroiled with bigotry? One should be reminded that as the kingdom of God expands, so does inclusivity, unity, illumination, civility and humility, characteristics seemingly absent in today’s extremely divided culture. If the evangelical church is to be serious about the atonement, it can start by following Christ’s example to respond to a sinful world with grace and forgiveness, and thus participate in rendering God’s restorative kingdom.

¹⁵ Hasan, “Many White Evangelicals,” 71.

¹⁶ Moore, “Why This Election.”

Faith: No Easy Task

As many have pointed out, the task of living out the Christian faith finds little continuity with Christ's death in a PSA model.¹⁷ This concern is hardly theoretical as it often surfaces in the evangelical world. For example, several years ago I was having a conversation with a prominent member of an evangelical church. Knowing that I was studying religious education, our discussion turned to sin and forgiveness when he asked me, "Do you ever wish you could go back in time to when you were single and have more sex?" Responding that I was happily married and believe sex outside of marriage to be sinful, he responded, "Of course it is! But Jesus died for my sins!" While any conservative evangelical pastor would object to such a statement, it is easy to see how an over-emphasis on the judicial metaphor could lead to such a conclusion. Instead, following Jesus to the cross is no easy task, and the church's kingdom atonement theology should communicate the scandal and struggle of faith.

What takes root upon taking up one's cross and putting faith in the crucified God is a life of worship. This life of worship however, is not simply an abstract emotion, but a connection to the larger narrative of Christ's expanding kingdom (Matt 16:18). Jesus is inviting his followers to join him to the cross, not so they could imagine a transaction between God the Father and God the Son but so they can observe the moment in history when evil would stand to do its worst, but God's love would win and God's power would bring life to death (Matt 26). Jesus is inviting those who have experienced his intervening love to now be salt and light in the world (Matt 5:13–16) and be agents of intervention so

¹⁷ Green, "Must We Imagine," 166.

that others may follow God (Matt 5:16). Jesus is inviting others to live out his other-focused kingdom as an act of worship, to participate with him and die to sin, identify with sinners, and to even become a martyr if so necessary. This faith is no easy task, but it has the potential to set one on a path to one who is waiting and watching for their return (Luke 15:20).

For the church, following Jesus is first and foremost a scandal. Living out the mission of the cross means scandalously proclaiming the kingdom of God to those who least expect it. The church cannot see itself as a passive repository of God's grace but an active agent to bring hope to a sinful world. The church must be willing to "eat" with sinners, which in Jesus' ancient near eastern culture was a sign of acceptance.¹⁸ Who are the sinners in our culture to whom Jesus would accept today? That the evangelical church of today has developed a reputation for who it *doesn't* receive aligns us more with the Pharisees than we may realize. The church must begin to take seriously Christ's authority and how that authority was demonstrated—not as power, coercion, or control, but as a benefit to others on the cross. Secondly, following Jesus is a struggle. The church must reiterate that the gospel is God's solution for human sin and that this solution took Jesus to the cross. No longer can the evangelical church be responsible for preaching a form of cheap grace that requires only a simple prayer to receive. To "take up one's cross," was more than a mere metaphor for Jesus and his followers. For them, it was the symbol of God's victory and that which restored humanity to the family of God to render the kingdom of God. Let it be so for us.

¹⁸ Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 10.

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