

PSA Examined

Article Series:

Article #9:
Why Jesus
had to Die
(The Gospel)



PSA Series Mid-Series Recap & Why Jesus Had To Die (the Gospel)

Description

PSA Examined

Article Series:

Article #9:
Why Jesus
had to Die
(The Gospel)



We've covered a lot of ground in this series on Penal

Substitutionary Atonement (PSA) while investigating if it's true or not. (*Intro article [here](#) if you want to start at the beginning.*) Given that the evidence seems to be mounting against it, I've been trying to understand why Jesus would need to die if PSA isn't true. Thankfully, I think I've found an explanation that goes right back to the early church fathers, and it was heavily (*and clearly*) foreshadowed in the levitical sacrificial system as well.

We'll get to the explanation after a short review of some of the things we've learned. (*And by the way, I do mean we've been writing the articles as I do the research, so there's a very real sense where I'm learning this right along with you.*)

Mid-series recap

Here are some important things we've learned so far, with the numbers in the list indicating the article in the series that covered each topic.

1. In the intro article, we defined PSA and saw that it rested on four foundational pillars.
2. We investigated the first pillar, whether man's sin deserves God's wrath, and discovered that it does indeed.
3. **We asked if God's character/nature requires Him to always punish all sin. We couldn't find a single verse to support that, and many verses seemed to contradict it.**

1. We saw that if PSA is true, unbelievers are **â??** or can be **â??** more loving, merciful, and forgiving than God because they can forgive without punishing but God canâ??t.
4. We asked **â??What is atonementâ??** and found that **â??** according to the modern understanding **â??** it means **â??**to cover over a wrongdoing to pretend itâ??s unseen in order to bring reconciliationâ??•. Notably, the focus is on reconciliation.
 1. We also saw that the English word originally meant reconciliation, but it changed meaning over time in Christian theological circles.
5. We looked at if sin offerings and the **â??Day of Atonementâ??** supported PSA, and discovered that they donâ??t at all.
6. We looked at the word **â??propitiationâ??** and discovered that it doesnâ??t mean to appease an angry person, but rather to increase your favor with someone, sometimes with the idea of reconciliation. **More importantly, the underlying Greek words are connected to mercy, reconciliation, and sin offerings.**
7. We looked at the levitical sacrificial system and saw that there isnâ??t even a shred of support for PSA in the entire system. None.
 1. **We saw that **â??sin offeringâ??** actually means **â??purification offeringâ??**, and also that **â??make atonementâ??** actually means to purge/cleanse.**
8. **We looked at death and discovered that God did not institute death as a punishment for sin, but rather, death is a natural consequence of sin.** We also saw that Jesus dying vicariously in our place as our substitute makes no sense because:
 1. If He died a physical death, that doesnâ??t make sense because Christians still physically die.
 2. If He died a **â??spiritual deathâ??**, that violates the prophecy of Psalm 22:24, breaks the Trinity, and/or makes His death unnecessary.

Now, all of that begs the question: why did Jesus have to die if PSA is wrong?

Weâ??ll look at that in a moment, after a recap of the things weâ??ve learned about why Jesus had to die. (*And again, I do mean **â??weâ??**; I didnâ??t start this series with a conclusion in mind.*) Here are a few things that weâ??ve learned so far that are relevant for the rest of this article.

- The Day of Atonement **â??** which Hebrews uses to explain Christâ??s work on the cross **â??** is explicitly stated to be about **cleansing from sin** according to Leviticus 16:30. Thus, Jesusâ??s work on the cross must be about **cleansing** from sin. (*All of Hebrews 8-10 is concerned with **cleansing** as well.*)
- **â??atonementâ??** is about **â??purgingâ??** in the sense of **purifying/cleansing**
- Jesus is our **â??sin offeringâ??**, which actually means **â??purification offeringâ??**
- Blood has **cleansing** properties.
- Blood = life.
- **Death is an enemy of God.**
- The devil has the power of death.
- Romans 5:10 says that we are saved **â??much moreâ??** by Jesusâ??s life than his death.
- 1 Cor 15:17 says that **if Jesus wasnâ??t raised, our faith is useless and weâ??re still in our sins.**
- Jesusâ??s physical/bodily death was necessary to accomplish Godâ??s plan of salvation.
 - At the same time, Jesusâ??s death (*by itself and without the resurrection*) wasnâ??t **enough** to accomplish our salvation.
- Jesusâ??s resurrection was necessary to accomplish Godâ??s plan of salvation.

If it seems like it's impossible to square all those points into a cohesive understanding of what Jesus did and how He did it, I completely understand. That's where I was for *months*. It was like a jigsaw puzzle where I just kept finding more pieces that didn't fit quite right, even though I had a vague general outline of where it was going. I knew there was an answer and it felt like it was on the tip of my tongue (*or mind*), but I couldn't find it.

It was maddening.

However!

If you ignore the "the devil has the power of death" line which we'll discuss in detail in the next article (*or two*) of this series I did finally find the answer in scripture. I probably shouldn't have been surprised that the answer was in Hebrews all along, but it was. We'll look at one speculation quickly first, then an important verse for context, and then dive right in.

A note about sin and death

This section is mostly my own conjecture, which is why it's so short. I was wondering why sin leads to death while researching the article on death, and a thought occurred to me. Effectively, it's a logic chain that goes like this:

- Anyone who sins is imperfect
- Imperfect physical things are subject to decay
- Things that decay eventually break down and cease functioning
- That cessation of function in a living being is called "death"

It's entirely possible that the reason that sin causes death could be this simple. Again, this is merely my own speculation. However, I do think it somewhat explains why sin results in death.

Anyway, moving on.

An important verse for context

There's a passage that's relevant to what we'll discuss immediately afterward. Here's the passage in the LSB, which is a slight modification of the NASB 95 that gets an important word slightly more literal in the verse that's important to our topic.

Titus 3:4-7

4 But when the kindness and affection of God our Savior appeared, **5** He saved us, not by works which we did in righteousness, but according to His mercy, **through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit**, **6** whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, **7** so that having been justified by His grace, we would become

Definition: **Washing**, Bath

Meaning: a bath (of water, not the vessel), water for washing, **washing**.

Usage: The term **loutron** refers to a washing or bathing, often with a connotation of cleansing. In the New Testament, it is used metaphorically to describe spiritual **cleansing** or **renewal**, particularly in the context of salvation and sanctification.

So **washing** makes perfect sense as a translation. And again, this is how Jesus saved us. Now, let's pause for a moment to consider an important question:

How can Titus 3:5 make sense with PSA?

According to PSA, our primary problem is God giving us the sentence of death for our sins. (*And we'll ignore the previous article where we saw that this makes no sense.*) PSA's solution is then for Jesus to be punished vicariously in our place as our substitute, after which the sentence is commuted/pardoned. However, what part of that speaks of washing or renewal? How is that related to the core problem that PSA insists on, which they would say is God's righteous judgement/wrath against sinners.

How can **the washing of regeneration and renewing** solve the problem that PSA says we have?

(*The only thing I've heard that comes remotely close is saying that it refers to baptism. However, even if you think that baptism is necessary for salvation, that doesn't work to explain this particular verse because baptism isn't a washing by the Holy Spirit.*)

How can PSA understand salvation coming through a washing administered by the Holy Spirit?

Anyone?

I can't think of a way.

(*And if you want to be careful with your translation, it should be translated: **He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit**. It's tied directly to the Holy Spirit, meaning it's something that the Spirit is doing. According to PSA, the Holy Spirit doesn't really cooperate in our salvation directly, but rather is a perk after salvation.*)

Anyway, now we're ready to look at the reason that Jesus had to die.

Why Jesus had to die

Context first, mostly in the way of recap. (*We've covered all of this before in detail in previous articles in this series.*) We'll start by reiterating that blood = life:

Deuteronomy 12:23

23 Only be sure not to eat the blood, **for the blood is the life**, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh.

And also:

Leviticus 17:11

11 For **the life of the flesh is in the blood**, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for **it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.**

Remember that while "atonement" (*kapharâ*) is the normal Hebrew word to express reconciliation, it has a homonym that means "to purge" in the sense of purifying/cleansing, and it's the homonym that's used in the Mosaic Law. So you have *it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement purges/cleanses*. **To reiterate, blood = life, and blood cleanses.** (That's important.)

This connection with cleansing is what makes things holy according to Exodus:

Exodus 29:36-37 (modified)

36 Each day you shall offer a bull as a sin [purification] offering for atonement [purging/cleansing], and you shall **purify the altar** when you make atonement for to cleanse it, and **you shall anoint it to consecrate it.**

37 For seven days you shall ~~make atonement for~~ **purify** the altar and consecrate it; **then the altar shall be most holy**, and whatever touches the altar shall be holy.

Now, please keep all these things in mind for the next two passages.

Hebrews 2:9

9 But we do see **Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus**, because of His suffering death crowned with glory and honor, **so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.**

Okay, this is obviously talking about the incarnation. According to this verse, **Jesus became man so that He might taste death for everyone**. Now that we have some context, we'll skip forward a few verses to the part that really unlocks this whole thing.

Hebrews 2:14-17

14 Therefore, **since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death** He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, **15** and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. **16** For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. **17** Therefore, **He had to be made like His brethren in all**

things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Notice the phrases: "that through death" and "He had to be made like His brethren in all things". (*Except of course He never sinned.*)

Verse 17 says that He had to be made like His brethren in all things, and in context, this is talking about the incarnation. **However, there's one way that the incarnation didn't make Jesus like us: death.** Remember that death is a result of sin and Jesus never sinned. However, we have sinned, so even believers have dead/dying bodies, as it is written:

Romans 8:10

10 If Christ is in you, **though the body is dead because of sin**, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

So in that one way, Jesus was unlike us. **We were dead (because of our sin), but Jesus wasn't dead (because He never sinned).** However, remember the important point:

Jesus had to be made like His brethren in all things.

He had to.

It wasn't optional.

For our salvation, it was required.

Remember that God's presence His life is too much for sinful man to bear.

Scripture tells us that explicitly.

Exodus 33:18-20

18 Then Moses said, "I pray You, show me Your glory!" **19** And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." **20** But He said, **You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!**

God is *other*.

He is Holy.

God is so unlike sinful man, He is so other, that a sinful man merely seeing His full glory is too much for our corrupted mortal bodies.

This is repeated in Leviticus 16, the passage that describes the Day of Atonement Purification/Cleansing (*Which Hebrews uses to explain what Jesus did.*)

Leviticus 16:1-2

1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they had approached the presence of the LORD and died. 2 The LORD said to Moses: **Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.**

The reason that Aaron would die is stated in that final clause: because God would appear over the ark. **Just like with Moses, seeing God would kill Aaron.** Again, God said that "no man can see Me and live", and this is reinforced later in the same chapter.

Leviticus 16:12-13

12 He shall take a firepan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground sweet incense, and bring *it* inside the veil. 13 **He shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on *the ark of the testimony*, otherwise he will die.**

The presence of God **even the sight of God is dangerous to our corrupted mortal bodies.**

His glory would kill us.

This isn't even God dishing out punishment, it's because the radiance of His glory is too much for our corrupted mortal bodies to bear.

God is holy, He is *other*.

We are sinful and corrupted.

We talked in the previous article about how part of the reason Jesus died was to save us from death by sharing His life with us. Scripture obviously records Him giving eternal life to us, which is that.

Here's the problem: if merely seeing God is too much for our corrupted mortal bodies, what do you think would happen if God shared His holy, perfect, and completely *other* life with us?

You see the problem.

Thus, if God wanted to share His life with us **if He wanted to give us a blood/life transfusion** He needed a method where His holy and *other* life wouldn't overwhelm and outright kill our corrupted mortal bodies. **He needed an adapter! a mediator;** He needed someone who was still God, but enough like man that God's glorious and completely *other* life wouldn't overwhelm and destroy our corrupted mortal bodies.

Here's an analogy that might help.

Consider a blood transfusion. There are two conditions that must be met before you can (*safely*) get a blood transfusion: **(1)** The donated blood must be from a compatible species (*human*), and **(2)** the donated blood must be of a compatible blood type. Getting the wrong type of blood or God forbid blood from another animal can easily kill you.

An ABO incompatibility reaction can occur if you receive the wrong type of blood during a blood transfusion. It's a rare but **serious and potentially fatal** response to incompatible blood by your immune system. An ABO incompatibility reaction **can be life-threatening unless your doctor successfully treats it right away.**

[Source.](#)

Before the incarnation, Jesus was God and wasn't human, so He wasn't a compatible species because He wasn't human. After the incarnation, He was human and therefore a compatible species but He wasn't dead and we were. Thus, He had a different blood/life type than us (*metaphorically speaking*). **But after He died after he truly became like His brothers in all things He then became a compatible blood/life donor for us.**

Jesus had to be made like His brethren in all things to save us, but He wasn't dead even though we were dead.

Thus, He had to die in order to be made like His brethren in all things so that He could safely give his life/blood to us without killing us.

Again, it's like a blood transfusion. His death made Him like us in every single way because our bodies are dead. Thus, His death is how He became a compatible blood/life donor to mankind.

That's why He had to die.

Our salvation was only made possible by His death because again, Jesus's death is what made him the same blood/life type as the rest of us who were dead/dying (*because we sinned*). However, because Jesus never sinned, He needed to be killed in order to taste death for everyone so that He could be exactly like us and thus be able to save us.

Before He died, his blood/life would've killed our fragile, corrupted mortal bodies instead of saving us.

But once He was exactly like us, then He could give His blood/life to us in order to keep us alive.

Another analogy: If you've seen the movie *Captain America: The First Avenger* (*or just know the story*), you'll know that Steve Rogers was given a super soldier serum to become a superhero. (*You can watch that scene [here](#) if you'd like to refresh yourself.*) Steve Rogers was young and healthy,

so he survived it well. But what if they had tried to give that super soldier serum to an 80-year-old Steve Rogers who had cancer and a weak heart? Instead of becoming the (*physically*) ideal man, he would've died.

It's like that with Jesus's blood.

His blood is like the super soldier serum and we're like an 80-year-old man with cancer and a weak heart. (*Of course, the analogy breaks down if you take it any further so I won't.*) Thus, going back to the blood transfusion analogy, Jesus became exactly like us so His life could sustain our lives.

Thus, Jesus effectively became our life support system.

His life sustains our lives, as it is written:

John 14:16-20

16 I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. 20 In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

And also:

John 5:21

21 For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

We can live eternally because Jesus lives eternally. His life sustains our lives. Notice also that raising the dead is connected with giving them life; those two ideas are connected.

Obviously this isn't something that we can earn and it's entirely because of God's grace. We are as dependent on God as a man with a pacemaker is on his pacemaker, which means every single moment of every single day.

Elsewhere, scripture states that this life support is administered through the indwelling of the Spirit. Even in the John 14 passage that we just looked at, the Holy Spirit is mentioned close at hand.

Romans 8:11

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

(The Titus 3:5 verse about washing says the same thing.)

Notice that the verse specifies "mortal bodies". We had no life in ourselves because our sin brought our death. We needed a "life transfusion" in order to live, and Jesus's blood/life provided us with that.

We needed a life transfusion and Jesus provided it through the Holy Spirit's indwelling.

The role of the resurrection

However, there was still a problem with Jesus giving us a blood/life transfusion after He died. Namely, the problem was that after he died, He was physically dead and thus couldn't share His (*physical*) life with us because He didn't have any physical life because His body was dead. He needed to be alive i.e. resurrected in order to share His (*physical*) life with us.

That's why Jesus had to rise again; that's also why we are saved much more by His resurrection/life than His death.

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, He wouldn't have (*physical*) life to share with us. Without Him sharing His (*physical*) life with us, we wouldn't be saved from death.

Paul talks about this obliquely in 1 Corinthians, making it clear that without the resurrection, our faith doesn't matter and our sin problem isn't solved.

1 Corinthians 15:17-19

17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. **18** Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. **19** If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Again, if Jesus hadn't been resurrected, He couldn't share His (*physical*) life with us and thus *those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished*. This is because if Jesus didn't have physical life to share with us, then His life/blood wouldn't give us life.

As Jesus says of Himself elsewhere:

Romans 6:8-9

8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, **9** knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.

And again:

Revelation 1:17-18

17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; **I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.**

(Note: as covered in the previous article, "Hades" is the place of the dead.)

Jesus literally **can't** die anymore!

and He shares that life with us!

Further, this idea that being joined to God is what saves us isn't a new idea.

You might never have heard this before, but it was **central** to the gospel preached in the early church. (Though, there was another central focus and we'll get to it in the next article or two.) One of the most famous quotes from the early church fathers comes from Gregory of Naziansus, who said:

For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half of Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole.

Gregory of Naziansus: Letter to Cledonius. [Source](#).

This is not a new idea.

(Which is good, because I'd be skeptical if it was.)

We'll look at more early church father quotes later in this article, but I want to drive home that I didn't come up with this idea myself. **I merely contributed the "mechanics" of it, how we needed Jesus to be an "adapter" for God's blood/life so it wouldn't kill us.** That's it. Most of the rest of this (much of which we'll cover later in this article) can be found all over the early church fathers, and I'll have more quotes on this later.

Thus, this isn't a "new" gospel; it's a very, very old Gospel, going right back to the beginning.

That's important because if you can't find the central tenets of what you think is the gospel in the early church fathers, then you're probably wrong. To be sure, Christians have grown in their understanding of many things over the years by puzzling it out from the scriptures. However, something as central as the gospel is attested to right from the beginning.

That's important.

Now, the fact that Jesus died to save us from death isn't even the best part!

Seriously.

Iâ??m not kidding.

Remember that the Tree of Life couldâ??ve done that. God raised the dead before Jesus died, so clearly solving our â??deathâ?? problem wasnâ??t an issue for Him. Enoch and Elijah were taken up to heaven so they wouldnâ??t see death, so again, death isnâ??t the problem.

The ***actual*** problem and the thing that we ***actually*** needed saving from is sin and its resultant corruption.

Thankfully, Jesus saved us from those as well.

How Jesusâ??s blood cleansing us saves us

Remember that verse in Titus about how weâ??re saved by washing? This is where that verse is about to make perfect sense. **Remember that the blood of the sin purification offering purifies/cleanses.** Jesusâ??s blood does the same thing. The exact same thing.

1 John 1:6-7

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; **7** but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.**

Thereâ??s Old Testament precedent for this in the sacrificial system as well.

Remember how sin purification offerings (*symbolically*) cleansed sin and its corruption from whatever they were sprinkled on?

Jesus is called our sin purification offering several times in the New Testament, as we saw in [a previous article](#). We just talked about Jesus being our â??life support systemâ?? for our mortal bodies through the Spiritâ??s indwelling. However, keeping us alive in a sin and disease-ravaged body wasnâ??t good enough for God. No, He wanted better for us. As Athanasius put it in â??On the Incarnation of the Wordâ?? in the early 300s AD:

It was, then, out of the question to leave men to the current of corruption; because this would be unseemly, and unworthy of Godâ??s goodness.

Hereâ??s the problem, even with Jesus being our â??life support systemâ??, we still had bodies that were ravaged by sin. **Frankly, if God had decided to keep us alive despite our sin-ravaged bodies, we would be like some kind of zombie, where itâ??s alive but also dead.**

Romans 7 talks about this when speaking of the law:

Romans 7:13 & 21-25

13 Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of death* for me? May it never be! Rather **it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good**, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

â?!

21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. **22** For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, **23** but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. **24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?** **25** Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Our bodies were dying/dead. Of course, God couldâ??ve kept us alive in that state, but He decided not to. **He didnâ??t want to keep us alive like zombies, shambling around in bodies riddled with the corruption of sin and sinâ??s natural consequences: disease and death.** Instead, He decided to heal/purify/cleanse that disease and death. He decided to obliterate it and replace it with wholeness.

Thatâ??s where Jesusâ??s blood comes in.

All over scripture, God pictures Himself as a â??refinerâ??s fireâ?•

Zechariah 13:9

9 â??And I will bring the third part through the fire,
Refine them as silver is refined,
And test them as gold is tested.
They will call on My name,
And I will answer them;
I will say, â??They are My people,â??
And they will say, â??The LORD is my God.â??â?•

Think of Jesusâ??s blood like this.

Itâ??s like a fireâ?! no, itâ??s like a **blast furnace**. It obliterates every trace of sin and its corruption in our bodies because itâ??s the blood/life of God Himself. Maybe itâ??s better to think of it like a lightsaber from Star Wars, vaporizing sin and its corruption whenever it touches them.

Or perhaps think of how light banishes darkness. No, think of it like a **floodlight** shining on one tiny corner of a room and the darkness there being obliterated.

Or maybe the best analogy would be a fire hydrant or power washer. Imagine for a moment that Jesusâ??s blood is like a burst fire hydrant thatâ??s pointing at you full force, blasting away the dirt and grime (*sin and its corruption*) from your body, while miraculously leaving your body itself unharmed. (

Thanks to the Spirit's indwelling giving us life.)

Jesus's blood is POWERFUL.

Extremely powerful.

It cleanses away our sin and the resultant corruption from sin and replaces it with wholeness. It's like if you injected a zombie with a vial of blood that was an antidote of some kind, and the result was that the zombie returned to its pre-zombified state; a complete and whole man once again. That's what Jesus's blood does for us by cleansing our sin and sin's effects: disease and death.

It's only because of Jesus's death and resurrection that He can cleanse us. Without that, He wouldn't be a compatible blood/life donor and his blood/life would've killed us instead of saving us and cleansing us.

It's because of the cleansing power of Jesus's blood that we get those glorified and incorruptible bodies on the New Earth.

1 Corinthians 15:42-43 & 51-57 (NKJV)

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. *The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.*

â?

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but *we shall all be changed* **52** in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and *the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.* **53** *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.* **54** So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: *â?Death is swallowed up in victory.â?*

55 *â?O Death, where is your sting?
O Hades, where is your victory?â?*

56 The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. **57** *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Jesus doesn't just solve our â?life deficitâ? problem, He also solves our corruption problem! With sin gone on the New Earth â? obliterated by Jesus's blood/life â? its corruption will also be gone! On the New Earth, there will be no more disease, no more aches and pains, and no more death!

That's good news!!!

And as they say on TV, â?But wait, there's more!â?

It actually gets better!!!

Seriously.

Surviving The Presence of God

Remember how being in God's presence with corrupted mortal bodies would mean that the radiance of God's glory would destroy our corrupted mortal bodies because scripture says of God: "no man can see Me and live". **Our sin and its resultant corruption of our mortal bodies alienated us from God in this way: simply being in His presence would kill our corrupted mortal bodies.** Thus, even if PSA is 100% true, it still wouldn't solve the problem of us being alienated from God's presence.

This problem isn't because God decided to slaughter anyone who comes into His presence. It's due to His presence automatically burning away corruption and sin, for "our God is a consuming fire". The trouble is, we are riddled with corruption and sin!

That's another reason that Jesus had to die in order to cleanse us, so that we could survive being in the presence of God Himself and not die.

God's desire was always to dwell with His people. First in the Garden of Eden, then in the Tabernacle, later the Temple, and currently in us through the Holy Spirit. However, in the future on the new earth, it will be even better:

Revelation 21:1-5

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. **2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, **the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,** **4** and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

None of that could happen without the cleansing power of Jesus's life/blood, made possible because He died to become a compatible blood/life donor, and then rose again to share His (physical) life with us.

Without that, none of it would be possible.

Without Jesus's blood/life cleansing us, our corrupted mortal bodies would instantly die in His presence. However, what about our incorruptible glorified bodies that have been cleansed and renewed by Jesus's life/blood which we'll have on the new earth? Well, that's a different story. Entirely different. Those bodies since they have a perpetual life support system from

God via Jesus through the Holy Spirit's indwelling, and since they are incorruptible and cleansed/renewed by Jesus's blood **those incorruptible, glorified bodies can be in God's presence without instantly dying.**

That's good news!!!

Without the cleansing power of Jesus's blood, we could never actually be in God's presence.

Ever.

He is simply too glorious, and the radiance of His glory would instantly kill our corrupted mortal bodies.

Now, some might object and mention, for example, Isaiah and the apostle John seeing God's throne in Isaiah and Revelation respectively, among other visions that various prophets have had. However, it's important to take all of scripture into account. John's gospel makes this clear:

John 1:18

18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

Also, don't forget that: *no man can see Me and live*. The prophets saw visions of God, not God Himself. In many of the passages, it's explicitly stated to be a vision. In the rest, it's obvious by the context. Like Moses in Exodus 33, they did indeed see God, but not His full glory. A portion of His glory to be sure, just as Moses did, but obviously not all of it or they would have died.

If you want to be in God's presence without instant death, you first need the cleansing power of Jesus's blood to purify sin's corruption, and the life of Jesus to sustain your life through the Holy Spirit, otherwise you'll die.

Hebrews talks about this:

*(Note: For clarity, *holiest* probably should've been translated *holiest place*. The NKJV is sometimes a bit too literal in that regard and clarity suffers, but most other translations ignore the context and the fact that the word is plural here and translate it simply *holy place*, which is wrong. The NKJV is correct that it's referring to the holiest place.)*

Hebrews 10:19-22 (NKJV)

19 Therefore, brethren, **having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil,** that is, His flesh, **21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**

Remember how seeing God, even God's presence above the ark of the covenant, would kill us? Thanks to the blood/life of Jesus, we can now see God Himself and be in His presence without dying!

That's good news!!!

Now, as we already saw, this is a promised future reality because we won't see this fully realized until the New Earth comes. That's our future hope and we'll talk more about why it's future and not present in a moment. We get unending life thanks to the Spirit's indwelling, and that life will be in glorified and incorruptible bodies forever free from sickness, disease, and death thanks to the cleansing power of Jesus's blood. Much more, we can be in the presence of God Himself for all eternity without the radiance of His glory killing us. And we get all of this because Jesus was willing to suffer and die a horrible death so that He could become exactly like us; He did it because He loved us that much.

That's good news!!!

And there's yet more good news too.

The cleansing effect of Jesus's blood/life will be **extremely** important for the next article (*Or two depending on length*), but the point has already been made as far as sin, disease/sickness, death, and surviving the presence of God goes. Thus, we'll leave the **other** way that the cleansing effect of Jesus's blood saves us until the next article. (*Or two.*)

Blood = life and cleansing

I realize that I have somewhat artificially separated Jesus giving us His life through the Spirit from the cleansing effect of His blood. That wasn't my intent. In reality, those two concepts are extremely closely connected with virtually no difference between them because they have the same source. So when Titus says that we were saved *through the washing of regeneration and renewing*, it's Jesus's blood/life that does the washing and regenerating and it also gives us life at the same time, all through the Spirit's indwelling.

So while I separated them because it was easier to explain the effects in isolation, please realize that they aren't isolated from each other. In fact, since blood = life and also blood = cleansing, it's Jesus's blood that makes this all possible, both giving us life and cleansing us at the same time. (*Though not until the New Earth; more on that in a moment.*)

There's another thing that Jesus's blood does, but again, we'll save that until the next article (*or two*) because we'll need more context.

The early church focused on this, on the restoration of man

A clarification first about what the heading means. I don't mean that the mechanics above were the focus. They weren't. The focus of the early church was the result *our* cleansing and purification *not* the mechanics above. I've never actually heard anyone else describe the mechanics above. However, the restoration of man was definitely a focus of the early church fathers.

In fact, **the restoration of man was one of two central focuses of the gospel that the early church taught.** We'll explore the other central focus in the next article or two, and notice that I'm not saying that they *didn't* teach PSA. Again, we'll leave that discussion for a future article. However, **even if they did believe PSA, it certainly wasn't a central focus.**

What they did teach was this idea that the second person of the Trinity (*The Word* according to *John 1:1*) becoming man, dying, and rising again is what brought us life and purged the corruption of sin from us.

The following quote is from the very first treatise on why God left heaven to become a man, suffer, die, and rise again. It was written by Athanasius, who if you recall from earlier articles in this series was the one who believed in substitution that *wasn't* penal substitution. To summarize, Athanasius believed that Jesus died so that we wouldn't have to die permanently, but could be resurrected and live forever! just like we saw above.

It was written around the year 320 AD and was the first treatise from an early church father on the subject. I recommend that you read the whole thing (*though I don't agree with it 100%*), but as far as what Jesus did, the following two excerpts give an overview.

And thus taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death He gave it over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father doing this, moreover, of His loving-kindness, to the end that, **firstly, all being held to have died in Him, the law involving the ruin of men might be undone (inasmuch as its power was fully spent in the Lord's body, and had no longer holding-ground against men, his peers), and that, **secondly**, whereas men had turned toward corruption, He might turn them again toward incorruption, and quicken them from death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of the Resurrection, banishing death from them like straw from the fire.**

!

And thus He, **the incorruptible Son of God, being conjoined with all by a like nature, naturally clothed all with incorruption, by the promise of the resurrection.** For the actual corruption in death has no longer holding-ground against men, by reason of the Word, which by His one body has come to dwell among them.

On the Incarnation of the Word by Athanasius

And just a bit later he cites the same verse I did above, Hebrews 2:14 as proof. And again, here is probably the most famous quote from the early church fathers:

For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half of Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole.

Gregory of Naziansus: Letter to Cledonius. [Source](#).

The early church focused on the healing of man's corrupted nature.

Obviously they taught other things as well, and at least one other thing was a major focus. (*Again, we'll get to that in the next article or two.*) However, by and large, the restoration of man was the focus: God becoming man, dying a horrible death, and then resurrecting to heal man's brokenness and to purge our sin and its corruption so that we could live with Him in His presence forever on the New Earth in glorified bodies.

When I read "On the Incarnation of the Word", this line jumped out at me:

It was, then, out of the question to leave men to the current of corruption; because this would be unseemly, and unworthy of God's goodness.

Notice that the focus isn't on God's justice against sin, but on His compassion and mercy for our fallen state of corruption.

To summarize what the early church fathers focused on:

Mankind was created in God's image, but when we sinned, we corrupted ourselves and defaced that image. God's goodness wouldn't allow Him to let us remain in our fallen/corrupted state, nor allow His image to remain defaced. Thus, He sent Jesus to incarnate, suffer, die, and rise again to heal our corruption and restore the original image of God in us by cleansing us of our sin and its corruption, thus "un-defacing" man's corrupted image of God. The result is that we are joined to God and live forever in His presence in perfected and incorruptible physical bodies on the New Earth.

Obviously that's lacking all kinds of nuance.

Obviously.

I can't summarize in a single paragraph what dozens of men wrote in hundreds of documents over many centuries. That goes double because they all didn't agree on everything, much like modern Christians don't. However, while they might have minor disagreements on the mechanics, nuance, or technical points, I don't think a single early church father would disagree with the summary above. (*Unless it was to point out that it's missing the thing we'll talk about in the next article or two.*)

The above summary was the focus of the early church, as I hope the quotes above demonstrate. (*And there are plenty more quotes that weren't included for space reasons.*)

The red summary above is the understanding of the gospel I'm arguing for in this article.

It's also what the early church fathers taught.

Thus, it's very old.

The point of this section is this: *Iâ€™m not teaching a new gospel here.*

Iâ€™m teaching a very *old* gospel that has been forgotten by large portions of Christendom, with the Eastern Orthodox church â€” literally the oldest denomination on the planet â€” being the remnant that still teaches this, what you could call the â€”original gospelâ€•. Itâ€™s not like this gospel was lost or forgotten, the West has just ignored the Orthodox church which has been teaching it for two millennia now.

(I disagree with them on many things, like baptism being required for salvation, confession, and communion, which is why Iâ€™m not Orthodox. However, they have this part right. They do sometimes add works to it depending on the specific flavor of Orthodox, and there are other issues with how they teach salvation, but the core of God healing manâ€™s corrupted nature is central to their understanding, which is what Iâ€™m pointing to here.)

Again, I recommend that you read â€”*On the Incarnation of The Word*â€• by Athanasius if you want a more complete picture of what the early church fathers taught on salvation. He was a huge figure and extremely influential, so itâ€™ll give you a good idea of what Christians thought in the 300s.

This cleansing understanding was foreshadowed by the Mosaic Law

If you remember from the article on the levitical sacrificial system, the offerings concerning sin were about purification. Theyâ€™re even called ~~sin~~ purification offerings. Most of the rest of the system was obsessed with various kinds of washings as well. Hebrews even comments on this.

Hebrews 9:6-14

6 Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, **7** but into the second, **only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood**, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. **8** The Holy Spirit *is* signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, **9** which *is* a symbol for the present time. Accordingly **both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, 10 since they relate only to food and drink and various washings**, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; **12** and **not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13** For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled **sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14** how much more will **the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**

Notice the focus on cleansing?

Also, did you notice that Jesus was a sacrifice to God? You might very well ask how that is, especially since it's not the only verse that mentions this:

Ephesians 5:1-2

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; **2** and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, **an offering and a sacrifice to God** as a fragrant aroma.

(Note: PSA fellows will likely latch onto the phrase "gave Himself up for us" and announce that clearly indicates substitution. It only does in English, as the Greek word translated "for" there (ἀντὶ/ὑπὲρ) means "for the benefit of", and cannot indicate substitution. We'll look deeply into this when we start examining the various passages most often used to support PSA.)

Jesus was definitely an offering to God.

How does that work?

- From a PSA perspective, that's an easy answer: He was offered as a sacrifice to absorb the wrath of God vicariously in our place as our substitute.
- From a non-PSA perspective, the answer is equally easy: Jesus died so that He could offer His blood to God so it could be used to cleanse man of sin's corruption.

Anyway!

Most of the sacrificial system was concentrated on cleansing and purifying so that the Israelite could enter sacred space and be near to God. Does that sound familiar?

I think I read wrote that somewhere recently!

For example, just consider the veil being torn when Jesus died.

Matthew 27:50-53

50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. **51** And behold, **the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom**; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. **52** The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; **53** and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

(Note, the ark wasn't in the temple at this point since it was lost when Jerusalem fell hundreds of years earlier. Yes, that means they did the Day of Atonement Cleansing without the ark, and presumably sprinkled the blood where the ark would be even though there was no ark.)

Remember how the high priest needed to be careful not to enter the Most Holy Place without making sure there was a cloud of smoke over the ark because seeing God's glory would kill him if he saw it?

Not anymore.

Through the cleansing power of Jesus's blood/life, that veil of separation has been taken away. Personally, I imagine God ripping that veil with glee because now, at long last, He could dwell directly with His people again like He had wanted to do in Eden. Obviously that's just my speculation, but I think it makes sense.

For the last year or so, I've been studying how Jesus saves us in a very serious fashion. **This is the only understanding I've found that seems to harmonize every single passage perfectly, has clear support from both the Old and New Testament, and was believed by the early church as well.** Further, not only does it harmonize everything, but I can't find any verses to disprove it either. There's a bit of push-back from a couple, and we'll look at those below, but the overall lack of opposing verses also makes it very strong.

I like that.

Perhaps most notably for this series, I don't think this understanding is directly contrary to PSA.

If you are reading this and you're firmly committed to PSA, that's fine. Maybe you know something about scripture that I don't or have some context I'm missing, which is why you firmly believe PSA (*though, if that's the case, please share it in the comments or via email from the [contact page](#).)* **Thus, a man's commitment to PSA is no reason to object to the above because it doesn't contradict PSA.**

As I've said before, Jesus could've died for more than one reason.

He could've died vicariously in our place as our substitute to appease the wrath of God, ***and also*** died to become exactly like us so that he could become a compatible blood/life donor to give us eternal life through the Holy Spirit, and also to cleanse us of sin's corruption so we could be free from death and disease on the New Earth and be in God's presence without instantly dying.

Those understandings don't present any inherent contradiction.

They can all be true at the same time without conflict.

Now, some of the foundational premises might have some contradictions (*like the source of death*), but the actual statements themselves don't. We'll look at those potential conflicts next, along with a few other considerations this understanding of the gospel might bring up.

Other considerations

This understanding brings up some other questions which we'll look at now.

Does PSA solve our corruption problem? Is it opposed to the above understanding?

As we just saw, PSA isn't opposed to the above on its face, but it might have conflicting foundations with the above. Specifically:

- PSA says that death is a punishment from God for sin, making God the source of death.
- The understanding above says that death is an enemy of God that He wants to defeat, and that it's a natural result/consequence of sin.

Now, those understandings might seem diametrically opposed, but it might be possible to harmonize them! maybe.

Let me steel man PSA for a moment.

It might be possible to say that God created the world in such a way that death is a natural result/consequence of sin as a way of judging sin! maybe.

For example, let's say you are the designer of a bicycle race, and the route has a single 90 degree turn in it. Let's further say that there's a shortcut the racers could use, but you don't want them to. Thus, you warn them that: "If you take this shortcut, you'll lose the race", and then you dig about a foot deep hole in the shortcut path and fill it with quicksand about a foot deep. When a biker chooses to take that shortcut, he'll hit the foot-deep quicksand, which will dramatically slow him down and gum up the gears on the bike, ensuring that he'll lose the race if he takes the shortcut.

(And no, I don't bike race, so if that's a terribly inaccurate analogy, sorry.)

In this case, the bike racer losing the race isn't a result of the judge disqualifying him or a direct punishment, it's (sort of) a natural consequence of him taking the shortcut. It's a sort of "natural punishment" because of how the race course was built by its creator.

PSA could claim to be like that.

Personally, I find that unsatisfactory when looking at the verses in the previous article. (*This idea didn't occur to me while writing it, which is why I'm mentioning it here.*) However, this might be a "loophole" that would allow for PSA to "kind of but not really" say that "sin gives birth to death", as we saw in the previous article. Again, I find this unsatisfying because I personally feel that it makes God sneaky, and not in a good way. It seems like a way of getting around the scripture's clear teaching on the topic, but it's not wholly anti-scriptural either.

It's the difference between:

- God instituted death as a punishment for sin via direct intervention
- God instituted death as a punishment for sin via natural mechanisms

Honestly though, it seems like a distinction without any meaningful difference because it still makes God the source of death.

However, if you wanted to hold to both PSA *and also* the understanding above, then that would likely be the way to do it. I don't see another way to harmonize those passages with PSA because they have two very different premises:

- Death is a natural result of sin and an enemy that God will defeat
- God instituted death as a punishment for sin (*either via direct intervention or natural mechanisms*)

Those two understandings seem diametrically opposed.

Are those two ideas compatible? I suppose there might be a level of mental gymnastics that would make them coexist together, but really, they do seem diametrically opposed. I suppose you could say that God instituted death as a punishment for sin, but He also considers the punishment of death that He Himself instituted an enemy that He needs to defeat. Does that really make sense? Doesn't it pit God against Himself?

It certainly seems to.

Again, maybe you could find another way to harmonize them, but that requires a level of mental gymnastics that I'm personally not comfortable with.

Possibly a bigger problem is that there's no solution for our corruption in PSA, which means being in God's presence would still kill us. PSA's usual response is to say that we're clothed in the righteousness of Christ, so when God looks at our sinful selves, He sees Christ's righteousness. However, when we say that God's presence would kill us, we aren't talking about judgement; we're talking about a natural result of the corruption of our sin being in God's presence.

Now, I suppose a PSA adherent could respond that **being clothed in Christ means that his righteousness acts like a shield, protecting our corrupted mortal bodies from God's glory so we don't die.** I suppose that works. It seems to lack the cleansing focus found all throughout scripture, but it's logically and internally consistent.

However, if death was a punishment from God and not God's enemy then why couldn't God simply end it? Yes, I know PSA guys will say because His justice demanded it. However, don't forget that in 1 Corinthians 15, **scripture explicitly tells us that death itself is an enemy of God Himself. Unless you want to say that God's own justice is His own enemy (because it leads to death in the PSA view), then it doesn't make sense that He couldn't simply end the punishment when someone repents.**

But it gets worse.

PSA seems to require God's own justice to be His own enemy because if PSA is correct God's justice demands death as a punishment for sin, and scripture says that death is God's enemy.

How does that even make sense?

We've now reached the point where PSA doesn't even seem to be internally consistent, let alone scripturally consistent. Obviously that's a problem. I would steel man PSA here, but honestly, I've got nothing. I've been trying to give PSA an out on everything and/or give

an alternate explanation, but here â?? on this foundational issue of PSA â?? I donâ??t see a way around it.

A fly in the ointment?

Now, you might remember something we covered in the article on death that might seem to derail this whole thing.

Genesis 3:22-24

22 Then the LORD God said, â??Behold, **the man** has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, **he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live foreverâ??** **23** therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. **24** So **He drove the man out**; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction **to guard the way to the tree of life.**

So, if man eating from the tree of life would allow him to live forever, then Jesus wouldnâ??t need to die so that we could live forever.

Thatâ??s 100% true.

Howeverâ?!

It assumes that Jesus died and rose again only to give us eternal life. He did do it for that reason, but thereâ??s more to it, as weâ??ve already seen.

But for those who arenâ??t satisfied with that and think that God shouldâ??ve left the tree of life, there are several reasons why it simply wasnâ??t enough.

For starters, the tree of life wouldnâ??t have cleansed us of our sins.

Because of that, while it couldâ??ve kept us living forever, we wouldâ??ve been living in a state of sinfulness and perpetually plagued by sin. To use the zombie analogy, it wouldâ??ve been like keeping us alive as zombies forever, and that wasnâ??t good enough for God. He wanted better for us, including saving us from sinâ??s corruption and also from sin itself. Further, we wouldâ??ve been forever alienated from the presence of God because the tree of life couldnâ??t enable us to even see God, let alone live in His presence.

So yes, the tree of life wouldâ??ve solved our physical death problem. However, it wouldnâ??t solve our sin/corruption problem nor allow us to live in Godâ??s presence. I think thatâ??s part of the reason that God didnâ??t allow the tree of life to solve our death problem, and Iâ??m grateful He didnâ??t. **Man probably wouldâ??ve ignored the true solution to our sin problem if some fruit wouldâ??ve kept us physically alive.**

Here are a few other possible reasons:

- The Tree wouldn't have been able to help anyone who was murdered because it wouldn't cause resurrection, merely prevent (*natural*) death. Thus, anyone who was killed would've been out of luck.
- How long would it have been before some wicked man looked at the tree of life and thought: *â??I need to control that tree!â??*• **Thus, I suspect that the area around the tree of life would've become a constant game of â??king of the hillâ?? and thus a war zone between wicked men trying to control it in a never-ending struggle for power.** At the end of the day, only a select few wicked men would've had control of it and the rest of everyone would've died anyway since they wouldn't be able to get access. (*Someone please write that into a fantasy or Sci-Fi story; that would be super interesting to read/watch if done well. But I digress!â??*) Even if that didn't happen, we would've been walking around physically alive but enslaved to sin forever, which I'm virtually certain God would hate.
- **Also, if a tree gave us life, how long before we would've started worshiping the tree?** Seriously? It almost certainly would've become an idol for us. God obviously doesn't want us worshiping false gods or idols, hence denying access.
- **More importantly, if God hadn't denied us access to the tree, it would mean that we could go to something other than God for eternal life.** Seriously. If you think about it, leaving the tree of life would've provided us with a path to eternal life apart from God. (*Sort of, obviously He created the tree.*) What are the odds that God would allow a path to eternal life without Him? I would say about 0%. (*If you disagree, please leave a comment below explaining why and based on what passage.*)

Most importantly, the tree of life could never have solved our corruption problem in such a way as to allow us to be in God's presence. It simply couldn't do it.

There's another thing that Jesus's death and resurrection saved us from that the tree of life couldn't save us from! but that's beyond the scope of this article. We'll begin to cover it in the next article or two, depending on length.

That said, there's an obvious question you're probably asking.

But why wait!

Obviously we still have death, sickness, and disease now, so clearly we haven't reached that blissful state of completely cleansed from our sin and its corruption while living without disease and death in God's presence. Thus, someone might say *â??If Jesus died to save us from death and sin's corruption, then why do Christians still die? Why haven't we received the promise yet?â??*• We covered this briefly in the previous article about death, but it's worth covering in more detail here.

Thankfully, God told us.

2 Peter 3:3-13

3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, **4** and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." **5** For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God *the* heavens existed long ago and *the* earth was formed out of water and by water, **6** through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

8 But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. **9** The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.**

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. **11** Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, **12** looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! **13** But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a **new earth**, in which righteousness dwells.

For the last 2,000 years, men have been wondering why Jesus doesn't simply return and bring the New Earth with Him. The answer is in verse 9: God wants to offer salvation to everyone. Like the military medic who runs back into the fray while under enemy fire, God has a "No man left behind" policy in regards to the opportunity for salvation.

If Jesus had returned 2,000 years ago, very few would've been able to repent. **His delay means that more people have the chance to accept Him as their Lord and Savior.** According to verse 9, that's why He delays: He wants to give more people the chance to accept Him.

God's down payment on the promise

Now, God left us with more than just a promise; He actually gave us some "earnest money" (*Metaphorically.*)

Ephesians 1:13-14

13 In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, **14** who is the **guarantee** of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

The word translated "guarantee" is "ἀρραβών" ([arrabōn](#)), and it means:

Definition: Pledge, Guarantee, Deposit

Meaning: an earnest, earnest-money, **a large part of the payment, given in advance as a security that the whole will be paid afterwards.**

Word Origin: Of Semitic origin, akin to the Hebrew word אָרָבָה (arabown)

Corresponding Greek / Hebrew Entries: אָרָבָה (arabown) Strong's Hebrew 6162, which also means pledge or security.

Usage: In the New Testament, **ἀράβων** is used to describe a pledge or a down payment that guarantees the fulfillment of a promise. It is a term that conveys the idea of a first installment or a deposit that secures a future transaction or fulfillment. In a spiritual context, it is used to describe the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of the believer's future inheritance in Christ.

We already saw that eternal life is administered through the Holy Spirit's indwelling giving life to our mortal bodies. Well, the Holy Spirit is God's down payment and/or earnest money to demonstrate to us that we would get the rest: eternal life in God's presence without sin or death on the New Earth.

Metaphorically speaking, it's like there's a valve on the high-pressure hose of Jesus's blood, it's just in the off position right now because it isn't time yet; God wants everyone to have a chance to accept Him. At some point and we don't know when He'll open the flow and we'll get the final judgement and the new earth.

When is up to Him.

It might be five minutes, it might be five millennia. No one knows the day or the hour, so we watch and wait. To help us wait, among other reasons of course, God gave us His Holy Spirit to demonstrate to us that we would get the rest in the future.

Was Jesus's death substitutionary?

As we saw in a much earlier article, there are understandings of Jesus's death that involve substitution, but not penal substitution. The most notable understanding in this category is the one put forward by Athanasius in *On the Incarnation of the Word* in the early 300s AD. However, there are others. **That includes this understanding.**

Put simply: Jesus died a temporary death so we wouldn't need to die a permanent death.

He died so we didn't need to.

From a certain point of view, you could definitely call that substitution, but notice that it still isn't penal substitution. Again, substitution doesn't require penal substitution. To insist it does overstates the text and the definition of the word substitution. The word substitution can

include penal substitution of course, but it doesn't follow that it must include penal substitution.

Personally, I wouldn't call it substitution anymore than I would call it a substitution when Boromir sacrificed himself to save the hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Rings*. I think that's properly called self-sacrifice. However, I can certainly see why someone would call it a substitution and I wouldn't quibble about it too much.

Addendum #1: Baptism

We've talked about the importance of Jesus **cleansing** us from our sins rather a lot in this article. So then, **is it surprising that baptism is effectively a super-quick public washing?** That's really all Baptism is. Sure there's more to it, but at its core, it's a public washing/cleansing ceremony.

This really shouldn't be surprising because the Day of Atonement was explicitly stated to be about cleansing, and so is Jesus's work for our salvation. Cleansing is the goal, and baptism symbolizes that very well.

Addendum #2

Now, one important element of the above is the cooperation by the Trinity:

- The incarnation happened when the Son was conceived in Mary by the Father through the Holy Spirit
- The Father guided the Son (*Jesus*) through the Spirit to cause Jesus's death in order to make the Son like us in every way
- The Father raised the Son from the dead, who now is the bridge (*mediator*) between God and man, and He sent the Spirit into us to give us life.

Notice the harmony and unity among the Trinity in accomplishing our salvation?

That stands in rather stark contrast to the PSA model which, as discussed in the previous article, seems to have some major problems in that area.

One more semi-related thing.

Another important facet of this understanding is that it explains some very strange verses, like this one:

2 Peter 1:4

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you **may become partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

We become partakers of the divine nature through the Spirit giving Jesus's life to us through the Spirit's indwelling. We partake in the sense that the divine nature gives us something which sustains us and keeps us alive.

Counter Arguments

I don't think there's a Christian alive who will deny that Jesus died to give us eternal life and cleanse us from our sins. Thus, **the understanding above mostly serves as an explanation of the mechanics of how salvation works.** You are of course free to say that it's wrong, but then please leave a comment explaining how the problem of our corruption was dealt with. (*Not our guilt before God as PSA claims to solve, the corruption of sin in our bodies.*)

However, you might object that the understanding above isn't enough to explain the whole of salvation. I would actually agree, since I've been saying there's another huge element we'll start looking at in the next article or two. However, to those who would say that you still need PSA to understand the cross, we'll examine the counterarguments to the above next.

That understanding makes light of sin.

This is commonly used of almost every single explanation for our salvation that isn't PSA. However, it's not applicable here. If death is the natural result/consequence of sin, then our sins are literally killing us. This understanding makes sin the source of every single bad thing in the entire world without exception, including death and disease. I don't see how that could possibly make light of sin.

I would actually argue that PSA makes light of sin.

I've been pondering PSA for some time now and noticed something: someone who believes PSA doesn't need to worry about sin because according to PSA, sin does nothing to us whatsoever. According to PSA, death is God's punishment for sin, and Jesus took that punishment vicariously in our place as our substitute. Thus, we don't need to worry about being punished for it anymore.

Thus, if sin does nothing bad to us naturally as PSA says, and we don't need to worry about the punishment because PSA says that Jesus took it vicariously in our place as our substitute, then why do we need to worry about sin at all?

Anyone?

Some will say that you can lose your salvation a debate we won't get into here so that could be one reason. But even those who believe you can lose your salvation usually say that only major sins can cause that, not minor ones.

Consider, according to PSA:

- **If sin does nothing bad to you naturally**

- **And if** God won't punish you for your sins
- **Then** why is sin a big deal?

The obvious answer is because it's wrong because God commands us not to.

However, God often uses a father/son analogy to describe His relationship with us. Thus, consider how a child would likely behave if he was taught that misbehavior won't have naturally bad consequences, and also that his father wouldn't punish him for misbehaving. How would that child behave?

Possibly like one of the insane number of PSA-believing evangelical leaders who have fallen in recent years?

Could that be a contributing factor?

Obviously the root problem is our sinful nature, but good teaching can help restrain that nature somewhat and bad teaching can make it worse. If PSA is bad teaching, could it be making it worse? It could be completely wrong, but it's worth considering.

What about God's wrath?

As you saw [in the first article after the intro](#), God's wrath is very real.

Romans 1:18

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

There's also the next chapter:

Romans 2:5-8

5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, **6** who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: **7** to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; **8** but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

The nuance is to notice who the wrath is directed against: the unrighteous and the unrepentant; i.e. those who rebel against God Himself.

God certainly has wrath in this world, and in the next also. However, the wrath is directed toward the wicked. We see this in Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:21-23

21 Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. **22** Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? **23** And **then I will declare to them, I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.**

I think most Christians will agree that this is a reference to the Great White Throne Judgement of Revelation chapter 20. Now, notice who that judgement is directed at:

Revelation 20:15

15 And if **anyone's name was not found written in the book of life**, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The judgement is against the **un**repentant, not the repentant.

For those who repent, God has a different prescription. We covered this at length in the article: [PSA Series Does God's Own Character Require Him to Punish Sin?](#) We saw that there's no verse in the Bible which says that God's character requires Him to punish sin. And further, He is perfectly capable of abundantly forgiving. In fact, God clearly states that He does this:

Ezekiel 18:21-23

21 But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. **22** All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live. **23** Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?

Paul continues this theme in Romans 4.

Romans 4:4-8

4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. **5** But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, **6** just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

7 BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.

8 BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.

Notice: **not take into account**. **This is what happens when a man truly repents; God doesn't take His sin into account at judgement.**

Now, there will still be consequences in this life for his sin. If you steal and are thrown in prison for your crime, becoming saved won't rescue you from the rest of your prison sentence. At the final judgement, all of a repentant man's sins will not be remembered against him, and the Lord will not take [his sin] into account.

At the final judgement:

- Wrath is poured out on the unrepentant; i.e. rebellious men who have rejected God
- A pardon/forgiveness is given to the men who repented and believe in Jesus.

God does have wrath.

You cannot be **(1)** intellectually honest **(2)** biblically literate, **and (3)** deny God's wrath. You can't do it. You can have 2 out of 3, but not all 3. So no, this understanding doesn't deny God's wrath. **It simply says that God's wrath is applied to the rebellious, not the repentant.** There's rather a lot of scripture to support that. Additionally, there's a lot of scripture that demonstrates that God can forgive without needing punishment first. Again, see [this article](#) in my PSA series.

Romans 5:10

Currently, this is the only verse that I can think of (*besides the various PSA proof text verses, which we'll get to in a later article*) that might seem to argue against the position above.

Romans 5:10

10 For if while we were enemies **we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son**, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Someone could argue that Jesus's death reconciles us to God according to PSA, but that the cleansing/life-giving understanding above doesn't reconcile us to God. However, we have the entire levitical sacrificial system to reply to that. In the levitical system, you had to be purified to approach God or you would die. As we saw above, God is so *other* that us approaching him or even seeing Him as He said to Moses would destroy our corrupted mortal bodies.

If we can't even see God because His otherness would destroy us, and Jesus's death allowed us to live in His presence, that is absolutely a type of reconciliation.

Additionally, this is arguably one of the most potent passages against PSA in the entire New Testament.

Why?

Because if you read the verse carefully, us being reconciled to God is **not** equivalent to salvation.

It's part of the process, maybe even an initial step, but reconciliation to God does not equal salvation. In fact, they are clearly and distinctly **separated** in this verse. However, according to PSA, man's biggest problem is our sin separating us from God. Thus, reconciling to God is equivalent to salvation in the PSA understanding. However, this verse makes it clear that reconciliation to God doesn't equal salvation, but is different from it. Connected, but different.

(Also, PSA says that we're saved by Jesus's death, not His life, but we already looked at that in a previous article.)

But Jesus died to forgive our sins, and this doesn't involve the forgiveness of sin?

The short answer is: **Jesus died for more than just one reason. Nothing of the above contradicts the idea that Jesus died for the forgiveness of sin. Nothing. It's entirely possible that the forgiveness of sin is another reason that Jesus died.** In fact, I started looking into that and even started writing a section of this article about that.

However, one of the more important verses would've needed rather a lot of additional context. That context is going to be the topic of the next article or two anyway, so it seemed better to wait and get that context first, then come back and look at whether Jesus's death was required for God to forgive sins.

Yes, I know many of you will instantly think of this verse:

Matthew 26:27-28

27 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; **28** for **this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.**

However, there's some very interesting linguistic context around the word translated "forgiveness" there, which makes things interesting. The verb form is even more fascinating, and encompasses meanings that include "forgive", but also "abandon", "permit/allow", "leave", and "divorce". Yes, "divorce". Hopefully you can see that it won't be a quick thing to go through, and I haven't even done all the research yet.

Again, we'll come back to this topic in a later article once we've gathered more context.

Until then, consider the following verse which clearly record God forgiving people before Jesus died, and doing so with words that do indeed clearly mean forgive/pardon.

Numbers 14:19-21

19 *Pardon*, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also *have forgiven* this people, from Egypt even until now. • **20** So the LORD said, *I have pardoned them* according to your word; **21** but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD.

Thus, if Jesus needed to die in order for our sins to be forgiven, I have questions!

Anyway, we'll do a deep dive into that in a later article. For now, we'll move on to another topic before closing this article.

God Punishing vs. God Restoring

Stepping outside of the realm of theology to its effects, we'll take a moment to discuss the ramifications of the two positions.

According to PSA: Death comes from God and it's a punishment from Him for sin. Logically, this makes disease from God as well (*since it leads to death*). It also tends to cause people to think that God causes all the things that lead to death as well, such as natural disasters. (*Whether they're right or wrong.*) PSA says that God is perfectly just for doing this, but that answer simply doesn't satisfy a lot of people. In fact, this issue of God creating death is a major obstacle to people accepting Christ.

An enormous number of people blame God for killing someone who they knew and loved, regardless of how that person died. *If PSA is true, then that blame is correctly placed: God did indeed kill their loved ones. As a logical extension of that, they can also validly claim that God directly and intentionally caused sickness, disease, and the other pains of life.*

Understandably, that turns a lot of people away from Christianity. Telling them that God intentionally killed their loved ones and that they should not only believe that He loves them, but also that they should love Him in return and glorify God for killing their loved ones is a hard sell. Basically everyone we've ever heard present the gospel softens it, almost certainly for this reason.

However, what if PSA isn't true? (*Which seems increasingly likely.*)

We saw in the previous article that God didn't create death. Thus, objecting to the notion that God intentionally killed their loved ones is entirely valid and biblical, though of course they don't know that.

With the understanding in this article (*which is very little different from what the Early church focused on*), if an unbeliever expresses rage at God for killing a beloved friend or relative, the response can be: *God didn't kill your friend/relative. Satan tempted man to sin, and sin causes death, not God. Death is an enemy of God that He hates and wants to destroy. Jesus came, died, and rose again so that death could be defeated and we could be resurrected even if we die.* •

That comes across very differently, doesn't it?

- Ultimately, PSA makes God the author of much of the world's pain and suffering (*from death and disease*) because it's inflicted by Him as a punishment.
- Conversely, the understanding above makes nearly all the world's pain and suffering a natural result of **(1)** the devil since he tempted us, and **(2)** our sin because we didn't resist the temptation; it then casts God in the role of the One trying to save us from those things.

Ultimately, it matters which is true, not which one sounds better. However, there is an element of "know them by their fruit" at work. Christianity is slowly dying in the West and I can't help but wonder if that's because the gospel we're preaching is wrong because the early church grew at a prodigious rate in a far less moral culture. Obviously there are far more factors and correlation doesn't equal causation. However, again, "know them by their fruit" might apply.

(Related, if PSA is true, then God's primary attribute would seem to be His justice, since His judgement takes center stage in the gospel and in Jesus's work to save us. As an anecdotal statement, since starting this series, I've personally noticed that the more a church focuses on PSA, the more judgemental that church tends to be. (Again, anecdotally.) This is even true of individual teachers, including ones who tend to be more genial and ecumenical. Mike Winger is one such example, who called those who deny PSA "poop faces", despite him normally avoiding such language. Again, anecdotally, I've recently noticed this is the case.)

A Return to Eden?

In Eden, Adam and Eve lived sinless lives in a perfect paradise (*until the fall*). On the New Earth, we will all live sinless lives in a perfect paradise. To me, that sounds like a "bookend" on the story of mankind; it ends how it began. God will restore what we lost in the Garden:

Acts 3:19-21 (*Peter's second sermon*)

19 Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; **20** and that He may send **Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, 21 whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things** about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.

And right after the description of the New Earth, God says this:

Revelation 21:5

5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, **I am making all things new.**" And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

The end will be like the beginning. God will renew/restore this planet to be the paradise it was always intended to be, with man being sinless as it was always intended to be.

My current position on PSA

So far, I haven't seen a shred of *convincing* evidence for PSA. Yes, I know that I haven't addressed the most prominent PSA passages yet in this series, but I've definitely looked at them, and yes that includes Isaiah 53. **More importantly, I've looked at them in the original languages.** It's possible that I'll find something to swing my opinion back toward PSA as I go through the passages in detail, but I'm doubtful. I'll keep an open mind, but I'm doubtful.

That goes double because after doing the research for this article, I have a complete model to understand how Jesus saves us that explains everything, especially the things that never made sense before. **Conversely, the deeper I look into PSA, the less it makes sense.**

Now, all that said, after the next article or two, my *current* plan is subject to change is to do articles on each of the PSA passages, like 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter, 3:19, Isaiah 53, etc. I'll probably make each one its own article, and I'll probably do the Isaiah 53 one last because it'll take a lot longer than the others since I intend to do a verse-by-verse through it and the end of chapter 52.

Alternatively, I might do an article on whether Jesus's death was required for him to forgive us first, and then do those articles afterward.

After that, I think we'll finally have enough context to look at PSA's 3rd pillar, which is that it's acceptable for God to punish an innocent substitute instead of a man guilty of sin, provided that all of three specific conditions are met. (*The [intro article](#) lays out those conditions.*)

Conclusion

As we've seen throughout most of this series, cleansing from sin seems to be of primary importance to God. It's all over the Mosaic Law, especially the Day of Atonement Purging/Cleansing, which Hebrews uses to explain what Christ did to save us. Titus 3:5 says that we are saved *through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit*.

Blood is life and it cleanses. God wanted to heal our life deficit by giving His life to us. However, since man even seeing God's full glory is enough to kill our corrupted mortal bodies, Him giving us His life would kill us too. **Thus, He sent Jesus to become man and then to die so that He could become like us in every way, except that He didn't sin. Once Jesus was like us in every way, including being physically dead, Jesus was a compatible blood/life donor for us. Then, He rose again so that He would have physical life to share with us.**

This life is shared via the Holy Spirit's indwelling.

Jesus's life/blood cleanses our corrupted mortal bodies of their sin, enabling us to live forever and without death and disease on the new earth in incorruptible bodies that are capable of being in the very presence of God without dying.

That's good news!!!

The Early church fathers focused on this, on the restoration of man on the new earth. That makes this understanding extremely old, not a "new gospel", but rather a restoration of the original gospel. However, there are more elements to it, not just this. We'll cover one of them in the next article or two.

PSA doesn't directly contradict this understanding, but the foundations do seem to conflict. **Most tellingly, PSA seems to require God's own justice to be His own enemy because according to PSA God's justice requires death as a punishment for sin, and yet scripture says that death is God's enemy.** I simply don't see a way to square that circle. Additionally, PSA does nothing to cleanse our sins. It could borrow from other views and integrate their understanding(s), but doesn't have that understanding inherent in it.

Wow.

I've been a Christian for decades and yet the first time I heard the gospel was while doing the research for this article. **It's so much better than I knew!** I can't even begin to describe how much learning this has changed my outlook, and for the better. It's also been a bit humbling, as I considered myself a reasonably well-studied Christian and yet hadn't even heard the gospel yet. Talk about humbling.

The next article will be on what "ransom" and "redemption" mean, and that will introduce another major component of the gospel that the West largely ignores. Or at least, large segments of the West ignore it.

See you there. :-)

EDIT: The article is published and you can find it here: [PSA Series What Do Ransom and Redemption Mean in the Bible? Do They Support PSA?](#)

God Bless,

Berean Patriot