

## VII. COSMIC CHILD ABUSE

2.05.29

*“There is **a constant stream of misrepresentations...** straw man arguments **against penal substitution.**” Mike Winger*

*“Hey, **God is less grumpy because of Jesus**—atonement theory is seventeen seconds.” Rob Bell*

1. Mike Winger points out that many who dislike the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement don't actually understand it and misrepresent it instead. What is wrong with this approach and why? What was the name of the fallacy he said was used, and what is the meaning of that fallacy?

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*“Some years ago, I wrote a book called ‘The Lost Message of Jesus.’ In it I said the cross is not **a form of cosmic child abuse; a vengeful Father punishing his Son for an offense he didn’t commit.**” Steve Chalke*

*“There’s **a story** about a father, a son and a train that is **often used in youth groups** to illustrate the gospel. **It leaves the father with this horrible decision** that if he lowers the drawbridge, the passengers of the train **will be saved, but it will kill his son; but if he chooses to save his son, the train will actually derail and all the passengers will die.** And so the father ends up choosing to lower the bridge...”*  
Alisa Childers

2. Pastor Mark Dever comments on the illustration of the father and son at the drawbridge saying that people use it to express what they believe is the “abusive nature” of the penal substitutionary atonement. What does Pastor Dever say about the illustration? There are biblical illustrations that do much more to provide an honest representation of substitution, such as Abraham offering Isaac (Genesis 22:1-14) and Joshua’s exchange of garments before the Lord (Zechariah 3:1-5). Why do these illustrations still fall short?

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*“But what they’re forgetting is that **God is Triune**, that the Father and the Son and the Spirit, **they’re all of one essence**. And because they are all of one essence, **they all agree in terms of motivation** for the cross.”*  
James from Detroit

*“**It makes God a vindictive monster!** Does God really love me? **Or has he simply been paid off?**”* Brian Zahnd

3. The teachers in the film point out and comment on the verses in John 10, specifically verses 17 and 18. What difference do these verses make in answering the charges that substitutionary atonement is monstrous and abusive?

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4. Pastor Alistair Begg comments specifically on John 3:16 and how this verse should help us understand exactly what God’s love means in the context of

the atonement. What is it that Pastor Begg says that this verse in particular communicates about God's love?

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*"The scripture is clear that **to understand Jesus correctly** we have to understand that **He is the Son of God from all eternity.**"* Stephen Wellum

*"We have a trinitarian God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, **equal in rank and authority**, in power, and equally God. And **our plan of salvation flowed out of their love for one another.** So we should not at all picture a flailing son who's turning from a vengeful father."* Kevin DeYoung

*"**He's fully God with the Father in spirit**, and at a point in time, as John's gospel tells us, the Son of God, the Word, became flesh. And what this means is that **the Son of God added to His Divine nature a second nature**, a human nature, so that we can really say that He is the Son of God, God Himself is **taking His own righteous requirements upon Himself in our place.**"*  
Stephen Wellum

**5.** Theologically, what are the two most important doctrines which help you understand the atonement in a relational way between the Father and the Son? (Fill in the blanks below)

God is \_\_\_\_\_. This truth flows from the essential gospel doctrine of the \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus Christ.

*"When the Father sends, **He knows in sending [the Son] what He's giving up.**"* Paul Washer

*"The Son **responds in love** to the Father **by dying to redeem** the people **whom the Father gave to him.**"* Voddie Baucham

**6.** Voddie Baucham and Paul Washer spoke about the Triune love of the Father and the Son. Which verses did Pastor Voddie speak of when he was talking about the glory the Son had with the Father in eternity? What is the theological covenant that Pastor Voddie names? How should this doctrine and the verse in John 17 impact your understanding of the atonement?

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**7.** When Paul Washer said, "This is the doctrine that separates Christianity from every other religion in the world." Was he referring to the Trinity, penal substitutionary atonement, or both?

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GOD IS LOVE: God \_\_\_\_\_ Himself to others.

*"At the **end of the reformation** era there arose **a whole viewpoint known as Socinianism.**"* Stephen Wellum

*"This was **their argument:** 'If God demands a payment then **He isn't really forgiving.** If He forgives, **He shouldn't demand a payment.** You can either have sins forgiven or paid for, but **not both.**'"* Phil Johnson

8. Stephen Wellum described the different truths which the heresy of historic Socinianism denies. What were those? How does this heresy relate to the atonement?

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*"Why does God **need to kill anybody in order to forgive?**" Bart Campolo*

*"Forgiveness **always requires** some sort of **sacrifice.**" Phill Howell*

9. Phil Johnson says that scripture has a very clear answer to the argument that forgiveness doesn't need any sacrifice. What scripture passage does he quote?

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*"Why can't God **do what He asked us to be able to do? To freely forgive** without demanding retribution first?" Steve Chalke*

*"Jesus doesn't say, '**Punch him in the mouth, then you can forgive him.**' Or '**Kill their baby, and then you can forgive them.**' **Just forgive them!** If Jesus says we are just supposed to forgive each other, **why can't God just forgive us?**" Bart Campolo*

10. Alisa Childers said that the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is often used as an argument against penal substitutionary atonement because the

father never asked to be repaid by the wayward son. How do the teachers in the film answer this objection and what verses are used to demonstrate the answer?

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*"It is **a perfect design** where **each member** of the Trinity **voluntarily and freely does their part.**" Emilio Ramos*

*"What God does in the gospel is **He decides not to pay them back what they deserve, but rather bear the brunt of that sin** on Himself." Phill Howell*



## ‘YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS’

Leading up to this chapter, and in this chapter in particular, you have seen how the Progressive Christian movement is not always forthright in their presentation of views which they disagree with. A few questions above dealt with the issue of logical fallacies, which include misrepresentation of opposing views. When these misrepresentations are taken into consideration, they highlight the importance of knowing sound thinking (logic) and the ability to discern unsound thinking (logical fallacies). The study of logic as a tool for the Christian is very important! Consider what Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen says concerning this topic:

An army cannot be expected to wage a successful battle if its soldiers are unfamiliar with the various weapons they have at their disposal for dealing

with the enemy. Likewise a builder cannot construct or repair a house if he does not know what kinds of carpenter and plumbing tools are available to him and how to use them. In the same way, Christians who want to defend the faith should prepare for answering the criticism of unbelievers by familiarizing themselves with the “tools” of reasoning and argumentation that can be enlisted in apologetics. We should surely master the difference between reliable and unreliable ways of reasoning if we are to honor Christ and become effective in His service.<sup>1</sup>

Studying logic and logical fallacies is an essential with today’s flood of information bombarding Christians. God said on Mt. Sinai, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16). To engage in or promote misrepresentations of other’s views or twist the truth is to bear false witness. In other words, *it is to lie*. As a Christian, you should constantly be seeking to represent every view, no matter how unsatisfactory, with integrity and truth. Christians hold truth above all else because they serve Jesus Christ who identified Himself as *the Truth* (John 14:6).

## MORE ON JESUS’ TEACHING IN MATTHEW 5:38–39

In his commentary on Matthew, D. A. Carson says that Jesus’ instruction in these verses “formally contradicts the OT law.”<sup>2</sup> Carson does not say this to introduce a problem, but rather to help you understand that in Matthew 5:17-20, where Jesus teaches that He came to fulfill the law, He now has done away with aspects of the Old Testament law which were “enacted because of the hardness of men’s hearts (19:3-12).”<sup>3</sup> This means that in the age of the Spirit, in which you now live (Acts 2:33, 10:45), your heart (as well as every Christian’s) is changed by the Holy Spirit’s work which makes you capable of enduring the sufferings that come with the forgiving of others (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:27). The restraint that the law provided in its allowance for inadequate human retribution is no longer needed since God comes to live within each Christian upon conversion. In addition, such human retribution was never pure justice as only God enacts, since all men are sinners (Romans 3:23) and God is the only sinless one (2 Corinthians 5:21). Pure justice is only found through God enduring the punishment of sin Himself through Christ’s sacrifice (Ephesians 5:2) or it is executed on the day of judgement (Revelation 20:11-15). Carson summarizes Jesus’ teaching by saying that the “prophesies that curbed evil while pointing forward to the eschaton are now superseded by the new age and the new hearts it brings (cf. Piper, “Love

1. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*, ed. Robert R. Booth (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press; Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, Inc., 1996, 2018), 133, 135.

2. D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *Matthew & Mark*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 9, ed. Temper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 189.

3. *ibid.*



Your Enemies,” 89-91).<sup>4</sup> Forgiveness demonstrates that Christians like you are willing to suffer to bring others to know Christ, just as Christ suffered to bring you to Himself.

## CHALKBOARD ILLUSTRATIONS

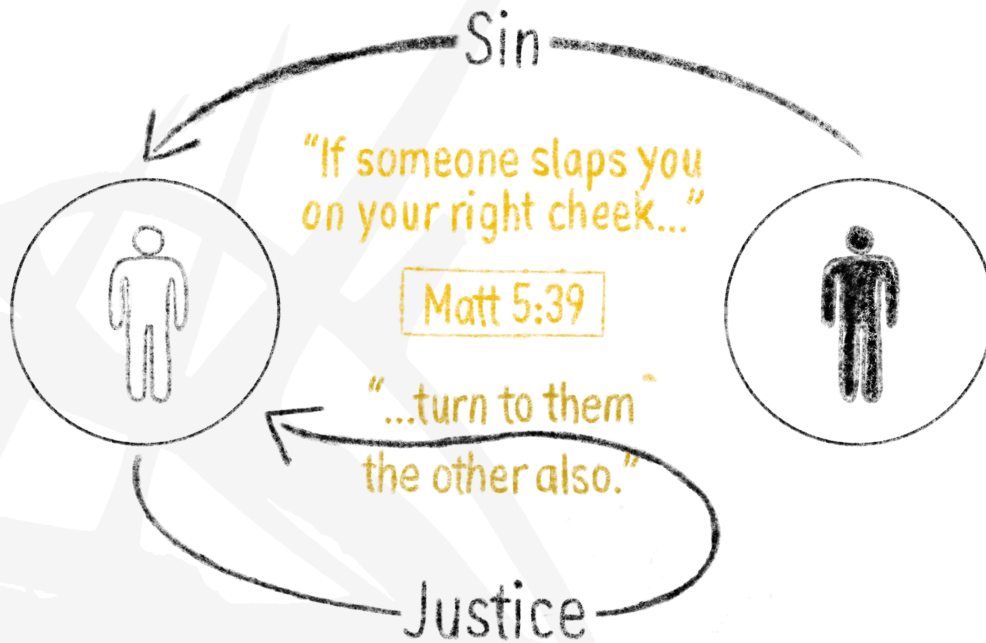


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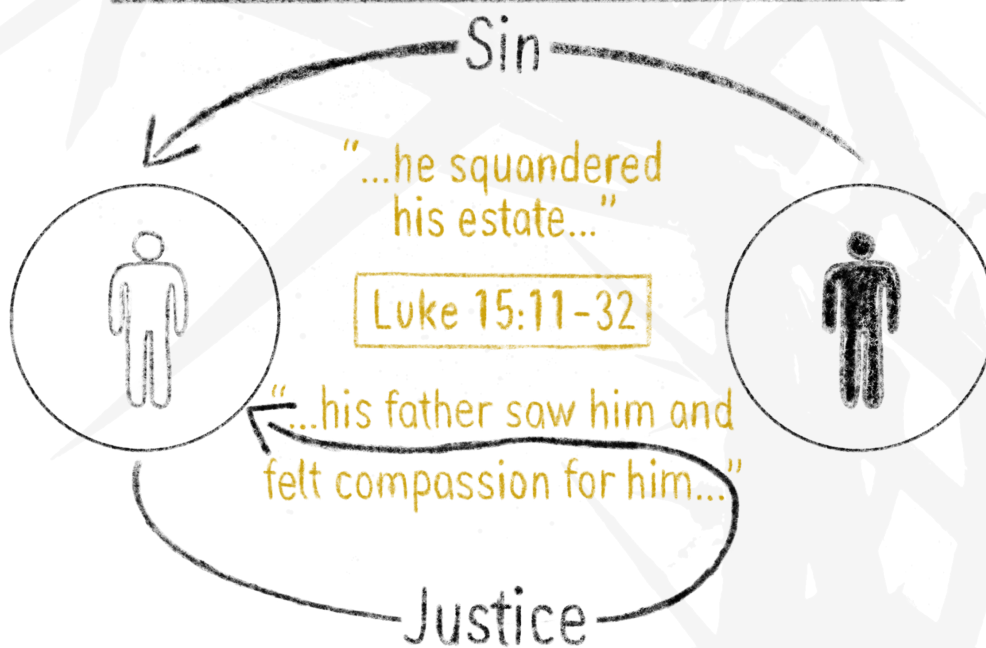
4. Carson, "Matthew," 189.



# Forgiveness



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# The Gospel



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