

PLAIN TRUTH®

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

Who Killed Jesus?

By Greg Albrecht

It's high noon in Dry Gulch. Two lone figures are walking down the dusty street, getting closer and closer to their inevitable face-off.

According to religious interpretations, God the Father is the good guy on the streets of Dry Gulch. God is the Lawman—the quickest and fastest draw ever. Nobody ever gets the drop on God.

The bad guy? That would be, according to religion, you and me. God the Lawman has said “enough already.” He has called us out and we are approaching the gates of hell.

Our mothers told us if we didn't change our ways, we would pay a severe penalty. Our pastors and priests warned us about God's wrath. This is our Judgment Day, and Father God is the judge, jury and executioner.

The badge on the Father's chest reflects the noonday sun—lightning bolt flashes of intense light momentarily blind us. We are

resigned to our fate—this won't end well.

Thoughts are racing through our minds with each and every step of our death march. God has cut us so much slack over the years, maybe he has lost his patience and he is tired of us taking advantage of him. Maybe this time he just can't look the other way. We broke his laws and now his laws will break us. This time we'll have to pay for our sins.

God the Father, the Lawman, has had it “up to here” with bad guys like you and me who keep breaking his laws. Sure, we've been told the Father loves us, but Father God has to make us pay because he enforces law and order.

When the distance between us narrows to about thirty feet, Father God stops. We stop. The time has come.

We're staring death in the face—death in the unflinching, stern face of the Lawman whom we have been told loves us so much.

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This showdown at high noon is God's love? The Lawman loves us so much that he will kill us and send us to an ever-burning inferno of eternal hellfire?

Did God Kill Jesus?

Suddenly, wearing a white hat, Jesus, the Son of God, jumps out from an alley.

Just as the Father fires on us, Jesus jumps in front of us and takes the bullet. We can't believe it—we look down at Jesus who is lying in a pool of blood that would have been ours. The Father turns his back and walks away, returning back to his office in the jail.

The penalty has been paid. Jesus took our place. Justice has been served. The law has triumphed. God the Father intended to kill us, but Jesus took our sins on himself and God killed him instead.

Jesus saved us—from God!?

One thing is sure. Jesus is dead. We can see that. But now our thoughts are racing about the motive and the reasons behind his death. God the Father killed God the Son so that justice could be served and the penalty could be paid?

But God doesn't sin. Killing is a sin. If God shoots down Jesus in the streets of Dry Gulch, or crucifies him in Jerusalem, then God the Father is killing God the

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Son and punishing Jesus for crimes he never committed.

God is one—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—who perfectly and harmoniously love each other—so why would Father God kill God the Son? Does the Father love us or is Jesus really the one who loves us? Fine—“what a friend we have in Jesus.” But is the Father our friend too? This is confusing. God the Father seems like the embodiment of the saying, “With friends like him, who needs enemies?”

Is an outraged and wrathful Lawman more in love with his law than he is with us—leaving Jesus to be the one who really loves us because he sacrificially took the bullet with our name on it?

We stumble away from this awful scene of bloodshed and walk into the whitewashed church at the other end of town. We find a priest/pastor—and we ask him to tell us what just happened because we can’t figure it out. We listen, as this religious authority provides an interpretation of high noon in Dry Gulch:

“God the Father killed God the Son, who willingly took your place so that God the Father’s wrath would be satisfied. The Father would have killed you and been justified in doing so but Jesus took your place. Justice is served. The penalty is paid. Blood has been shed.”

The pastor/priest continues: *“You see, the cross of Christ is all about the legal demands we have failed to keep and the penalty Jesus paid in our stead.”*

We walk out of that church even more perplexed than when we entered. Are we to be assured that God’s anger is appeased because the blood of Jesus flows in the streets of Dry Gulch/Jerusalem? Can we now really believe God loves us, and will never, ever again go ballistic and lose his cool because he took out his wrath on his one and only Son?

The Cross of Christ—Anger or Love?

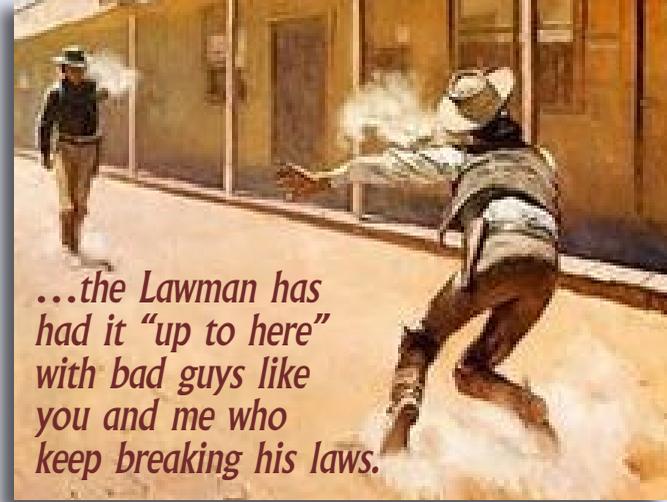
This is essentially the religious interpretation of the cross called **penal substitution**—God’s law was broken, he was offended, he got angry and someone had to die. Thankfully, Jesus was our substitute. It’s a warped and twisted idea isn’t it?

The vast majority of North American churches today teach their members that the cross is the ultimate symbol of God’s anger. God is angry with us because of our sins, they say—and since the wages of sin is death then we deserve to die. But Jesus, thankfully, came to stand between us, so that we would not be tortured forever in hell by the wrath of God.

Consequently, much of Christendom has corrupted the central meaning and focus of the cross. If you buy into **penal substitution** as a way of understanding the cross of Christ, you must believe that God the Father puts his love for laws ahead of his love for us. That’s

preposterous—but that’s what many churches teach!

But when you fully comprehend the gospel of Jesus Christ, you realize that the gospel is good news because God is love—he never has lost his cool, he never has gone ballistic, and his primary inclination toward you and me is not anger and wrath but love and grace.



...the Lawman has had it “up to here” with bad guys like you and me who keep breaking his laws.

What is the Significance and Meaning of the Cross of Christ?

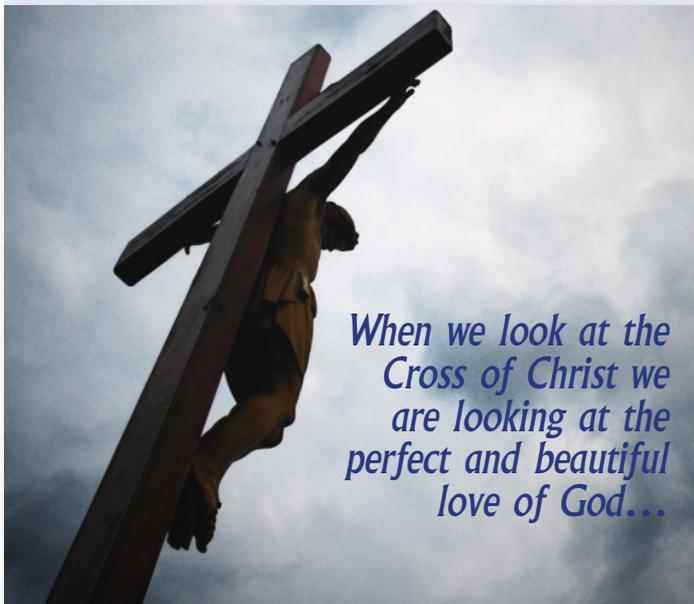
Jesus died, but the Father didn’t kill him. Jesus died, willingly, as a lamb led to the slaughter, because of the hatred and vengeance of humanity. God the Father did not kill Jesus. Jesus did not save us from the wrath of the Father. **People killed Jesus.**

Human civilization killed Jesus because he was such a threat to the status quo. **Rome and religion killed Jesus.** Human authorities, civil and religious, killed Jesus. Jesus revealed the fullness of God—he revealed the Father and all his love. Out of the united and supreme love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit Jesus accepted all human hatred, lust, violence and bloodshed for all time—absorbing it without retaliation or revenge.

On his cross, God (in the person of Jesus) opens his arms to everyone—to every warmonger, every racist, every addict and all the homeless, diseased and dying. God spreads his arms on the cross in welcome to the poor, the prophets, the prostitutes—even to the pompous priests who arranged for his brutal torture and execution.

Theologian Jurgen Moltmann points to the cross of Christ, telling us “This is God and God is like this.” **God is not Pilate requiring an execution of Jesus. God is not organized religion demanding the crucifixion of Jesus.**

When we look at the Cross of Christ we are looking at the perfect and beautiful love of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the love of God who returns good for evil.



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In return for torture, beating and gruesome execution, Jesus gave forgiveness.

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Who was it on that cross? It was God in the person of Jesus on that cross. Who killed Jesus? The Father didn’t kill Jesus because God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is ultimately and absolutely defined as love. God did not kill God.

People killed Jesus.

Our Loving Father

We humans can easily fathom and get our heads around God as perceived through the prism of laws and punishment. That is the most popular perspective and identification of God within Christendom. Throughout all world religions, “the gods” are seen as the judges and we humans are viewed as shameful, guilty perpetrators. Christendom at large characterizes God as disenfranchised from and angry with us, because we are sinners who will never measure up to his holiness and justice.

On the other hand, the gospel reveals God more accurately understood as our heavenly Father, who truly loves us beyond our wildest expectation or imagination. The intimacy and bond of love between parent and child is the relationship that by far and away prevails when God reveals and illustrates the way he feels about us and the invitation he offers us. We’re not talking about anger—

we’re talking about love.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, God is portrayed as a father, not as a judge. But although the son received his father’s love, he didn’t expect it, did he? When the son decided to go home, he started to rehearse the speech he would give to his father when he finally arrived home.

He would tell his father he had sinned and he was not worthy to be his son—the son decided to ask his father to just accept him as a hired servant, a day laborer, and give him a job so that he could pay off his debt.

If the father of the Prodigal Son was the God that much of Christendom would have us believe, then when the son returned home, the father in the parable would have said, *“Your sins need to be paid for. Right now you are no son of mine. Get out there in the fields and work and pay off your debt. Then maybe when you realize what you turned your back on we might talk about you being my son again.”*

But the father didn’t mention one word about sin—the father didn’t mention anything about the son paying off his debt—nothing at all about signing a contract guaranteeing he would never be a foolish son again.

No, instead of bringing out

overalls, boots and a shovel, the father brings out a robe and a ring. Then the father throws a celebration, replete with eating, singing, drinking and dancing.

What happened on the cross was an epic, once-and-for-all demonstration of the greatest love story ever told. God in the person of Jesus took human hostility and hatred, he absorbed it with all of the torture and violence humans could dish out. Jesus turned the other cheek. Jesus did not respond with retaliation—nor did he become angry. **God was not, is not and will never be filled with and identified by wrath.**

In return for torture, beating and gruesome execution, Jesus gave forgiveness. In return for human abuse, Jesus offers his open arms in embrace. In return for evil, Jesus responds with love and goodness.

So I ask you, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ—was it all about the wrath of God and the *penal-substitution* he “needed” to satisfy his laws? Or was it all about the love of God revealed through Jesus Christ? □

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