

Why Penal Substitution Damages
Asian Americans:
Asian American Spirituality
in the Context of
White American Evangelicalism

Mako A. Nagasawa



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

November, 2001

Updated March, 2013

Frameworks

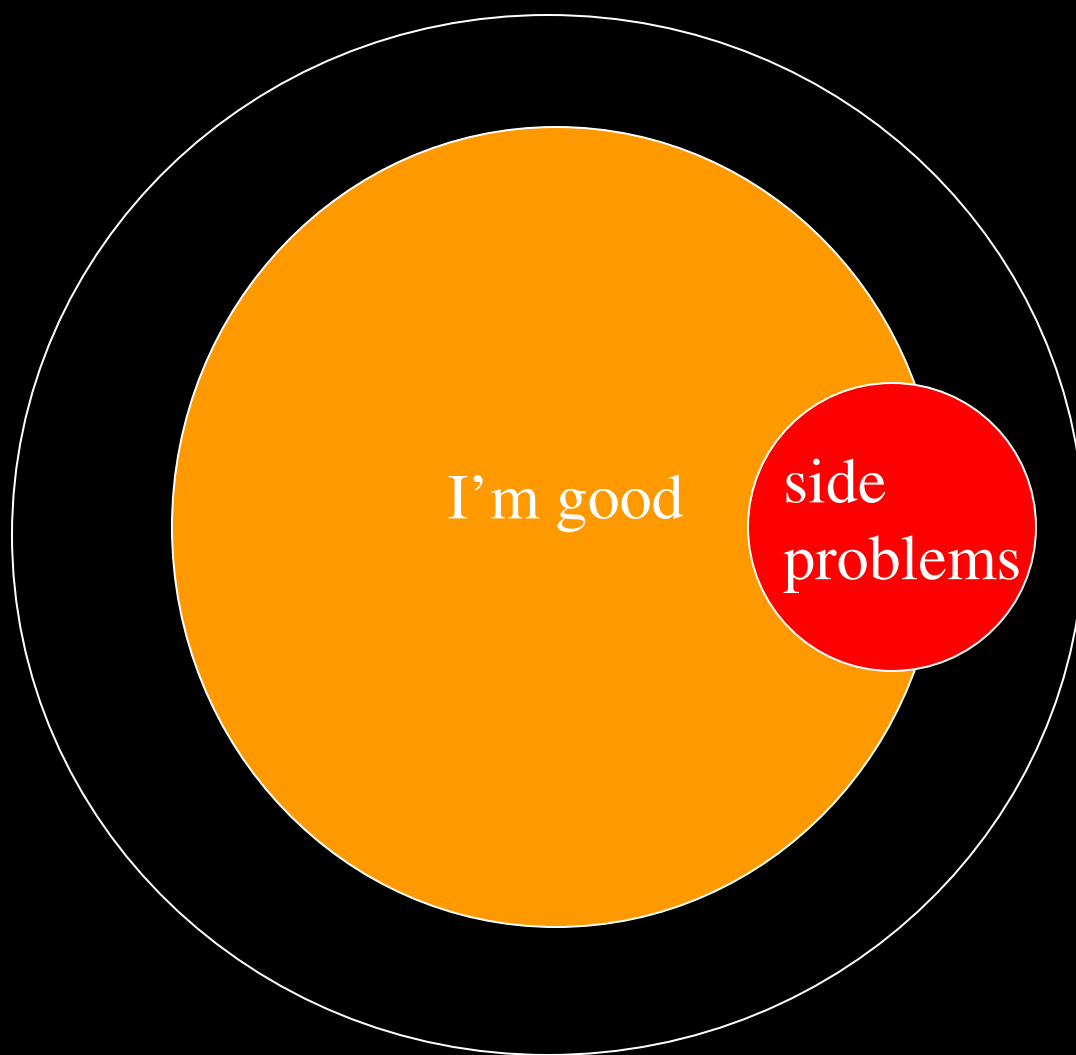
- Two basic types of people
 - Guilt based
 - Shame based
- Two basic theories of the Cross
 - Jesus died instead of us
 - We died with Jesus

Two basic types of people

- Guilt based
- Shame based

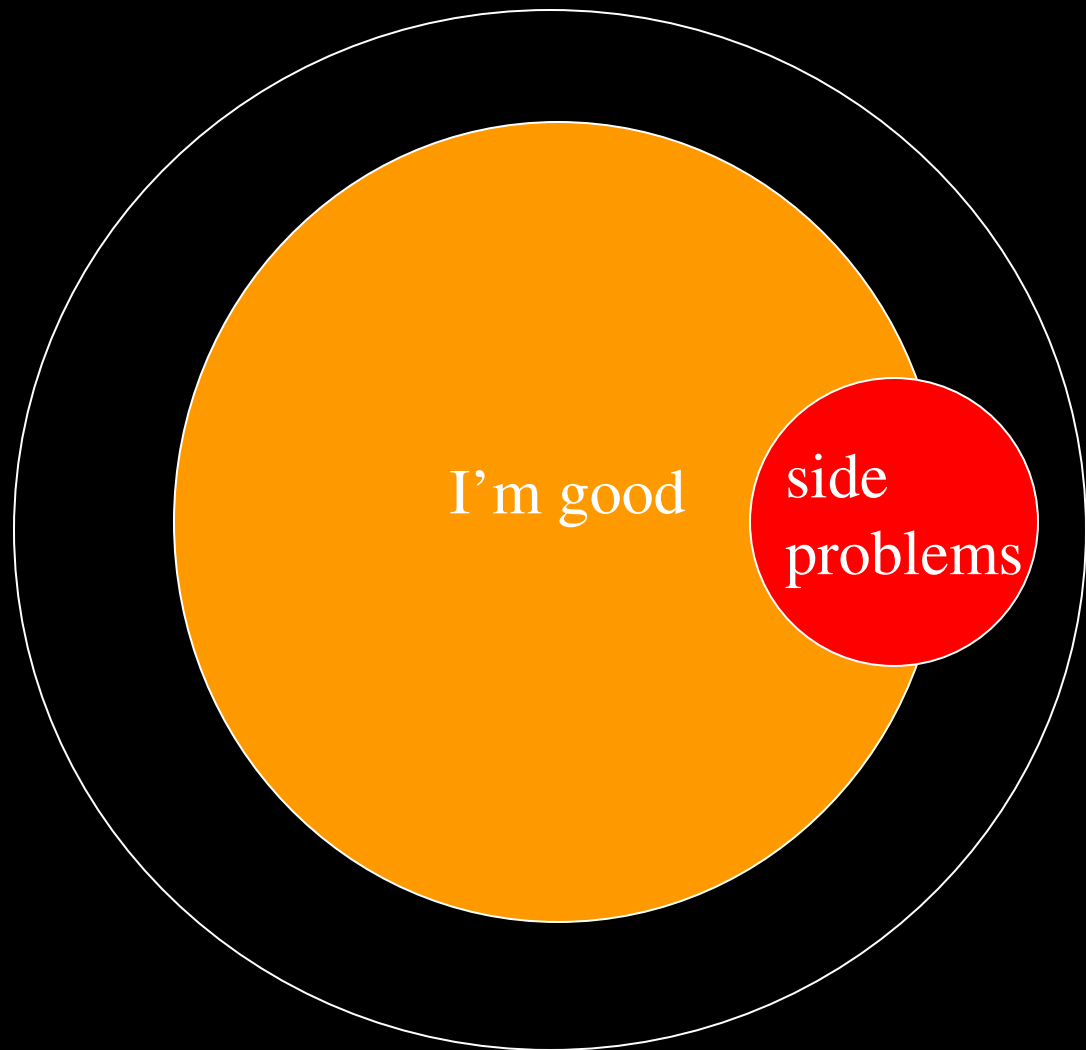
Non-Christian Self Concept #1 - Guilt Based

- There was a belief in the moral superiority of America and White Americans.
- This, family stability, and perhaps a rising humanism contributed to the “I’m good” mindset.
- This was the cultural climate of White America and thus Fundamentalism in the early 1900’s.



Non-Christian Self Concept #1 - Guilt Based

- Comes from having relational stability and internalizing a positive view of one's self.
- Says, "My mistakes don't define me. Though I have some problems, I'm essentially okay."
- Guilt based, in the sense that the person is motivated by self-improvement. White American Christians in the early 1900's were perhaps also influenced by Wesley's idea of attainable perfection.



Non-Christian Self Concept #2 - Shame Based

- People from non-Western communitarian cultures tend to think of the group as good and themselves as bad, perhaps by internalizing criticism to conform.
- Urban minorities internalized a lot of negative messages and relational instability.
- For some, the collapse of the White family in the 1960's led to painful relational instability.
- For some, the collapse of the triumphant White American story was also painful and shaming. Secular humanism failed.



Non-Christian Self Concept #2 - Shame Based

- Internalized a lot of rejection, criticism, or instability
- Says, “My relationships have failed. I must somehow be to blame.
- Says, “I have a lot of problems; I’m essentially bad. My bad character and mistakes define me.
- Says, “I have a layer of goodness that I need to project as a façade. I can’t let people know who I really am.



Differences Between the Two Non-Christian Self-Concepts

- I believe relationships are held together by...
 - Confession and honesty; or
 - Avoiding confrontation and exposure
- When I make a mistake, I...
 - Feel like my good decisions outweigh my bad ones; or
 - Feel defined by the mistake

Differences Between the Two Non-Christian Self-Concepts

- When I feel unworthy or like a failure, I...
 - Can pick myself up and go on; or
 - Feel paralyzed and powerless
- Towards authority figures, I feel...
 - Basically respected and welcomed into some level of intimacy; or
 - Basically under threat of criticism and prevented from intimacy

Differences Between the Two Non-Christian Self-Concepts

- I think that if others really knew me, they would...
 - Like me because I'm basically an attractive person; or
 - Dislike me because the real me needs to be changed or hidden

So how do these two types of people understand their own spirituality?

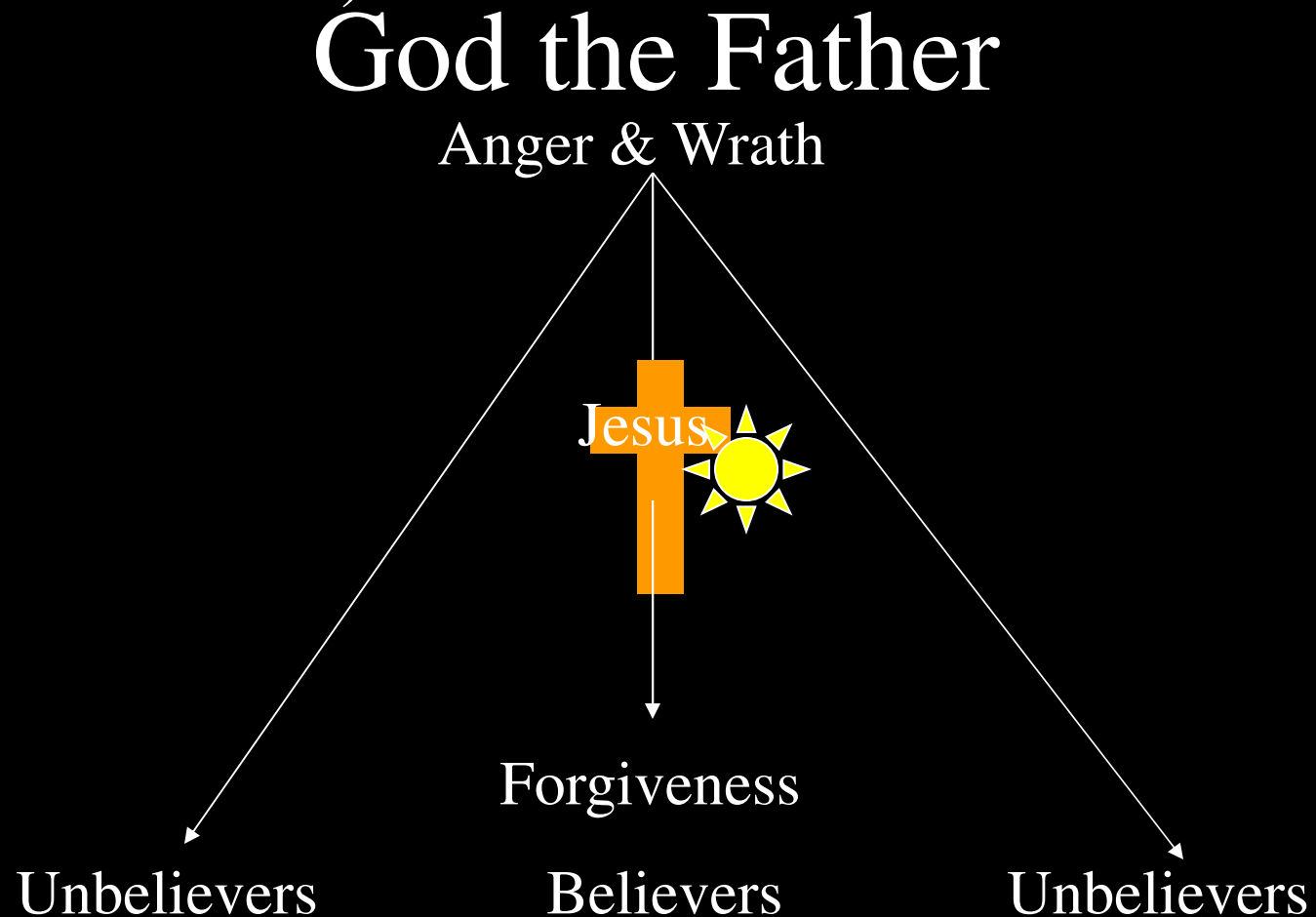
It depends on what view of the atonement they are presented with.

Two basic theories of atonement

- Penal Substitution:
 - Jesus died instead of us
- Medical Substitution:
 - Jesus shared our fallen humanity so we could share his healed humanity

Theory of the Cross #1: Penal Substitution

- Penal Substitution understanding (*American Fundamentalist*)



Theory of the Cross #1: Penal Substitution

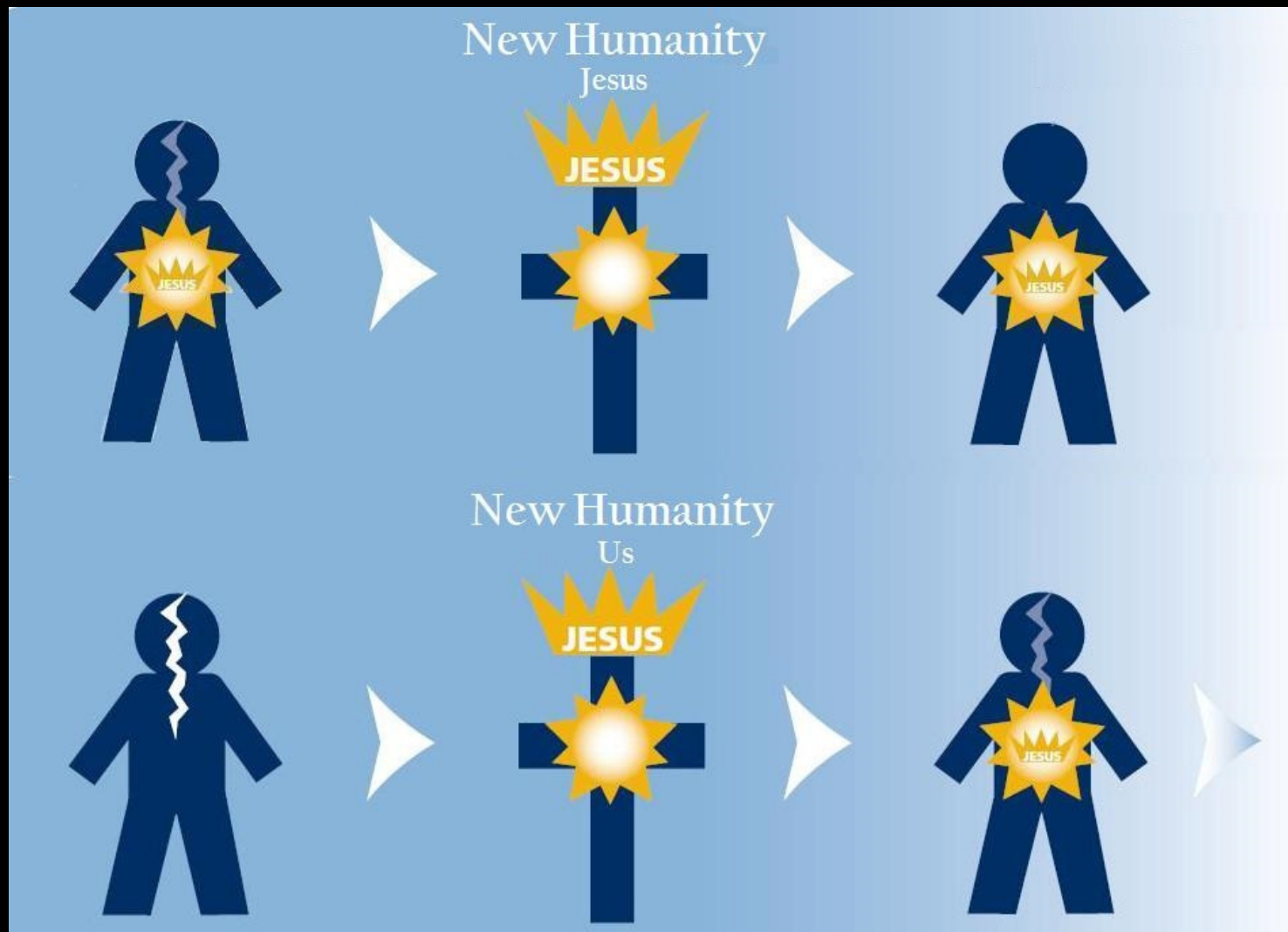
- Penal Substitution understanding (*American Fundamentalist*)
 - Jesus took on God's wrath and anger at the Cross
 - The Father seems like a Judge and stands for anger, justice, and wrath. The Son seems like an innocent victim and stands for love, mercy, and compassion.
 - Believing in Jesus means that God has no more anger left over for us
 - Hence Jesus died **instead of us**, to change how God feels towards us, though we tend to still fear the Father and appreciate the Son.
 - This has been called 'penal substitution.'

Problems with Penal Substitution

- *The Father's Image*
 - The Father never seems to lose His angry Judge demeanor. Does not address the yearning to have a loving Father. Strongly maintains the 'strict father' image of politically conservative White Americans.
- *Intimacy Not Organically Promoted or Modeled*
 - We still feel distant from God, even though He might not be angry with us. Does not address the yearning for spiritual intimacy.
- *Motivation for Obedience*
 - Obedience is not organically connected to the Cross, which is understood exclusively to mean "debt-forgiveness." But if we're forgiven for all disobedience, then another motivation for Christian obedience has to arise, which tends to be either (1) guilt-inducing or (2) self-centered (Christian hedonism).
 - "C'mon! Don't you know Jesus died for you?"
 - "If you obey Jesus, God will bless you and make your life better."

Theory of the Cross #2: Physical Redemption

- *Medical Substitution* understanding (*Classical*)



Theory of the Cross #2: Physical Redemption

- *Medical Substitution* understanding (*Classical*)
 - Jesus cleansed his human nature of the disease of sin through his life, death, and resurrection, and fully reunited human nature with divine nature, in himself (Rom.8:3)
 - Jesus poured out the wrath of God on the corruption in his human nature (not from Father onto Son)
 - Jesus perfected the antibodies to our sinfulness in himself, so he could share himself by his Spirit (Rom.8:4)
 - What Jesus did in himself by the Spirit, he does in us by his Spirit – he starts to heal, cleanse, and purify our hearts and desires, and will perfect us in eternity
 - God's wrath is directed not at our personhood but at the corruption in our nature; God's wrath burns against the cancer in our bodies because He loves us

Answers Given By Medical Substitution

- *The Father's Image*
 - God's Fatherhood can now be understood from Jesus' relationship with his Father. He is delighted in, intimate with, and exalts His child.
- *Intimacy Organic to Salvation*
 - There is no other way to experience God as Father but to be 'in Christ,' and the 'in Christ' and 'union with Christ by the Spirit' language powerfully addresses the yearning for spiritual intimacy.
- *Motivation for Obedience*
 - Obedience is organically connected to identity because our old identity has died, and our new identity has been born through Jesus' resurrection, in union with him by the Spirit. Thus, it is possible and necessary to appeal first to a Christian's new identity (e.g. Romans 6:1 – 11). This affirms our original goodness in the image of God (Gen.1:26 – 27).

Differences between the Two Theories

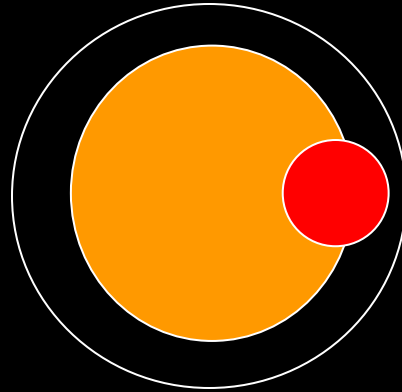
Penal Substitution

- **Sin** is wrong actions, thoughts, activities.
- **Jesus died** at the Cross.
- God's Fatherhood is defined by **anger and wrath**.
- The Cross comes **between the Father and the Son**.
- The Cross is about **debt-forgiveness**, about Jesus paying our debt in our place.
- Separation and intimacy with God **must be added later** into the discussion.
- Holy Spirit **must also be added** into the discussion.
- **Legal and penal**

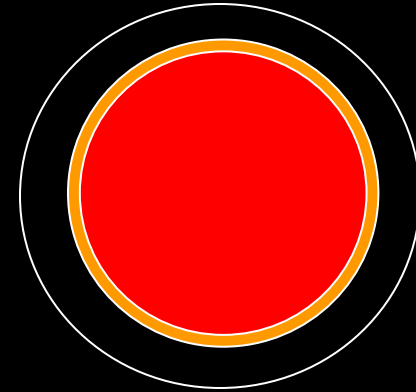
Medical Substitution

- **Sin** is a wrong state of being; 'sins' of thoughts and acts are what result.
- **We died with Jesus** at the Cross.
- God's Fatherhood is defined by **His love for Jesus**.
- The Cross comes **between the old creation and the new**.
- The Cross is about **victory over sin**, dying to your old self and rising new.
- Separation and intimacy with God **are organic** and must be discussed as part of the event.
- Holy Spirit **fits organically** and of necessity into the model.
- **Ontological, medical, familial and relational**

Ministry During Much of the 20th Century



Guilt-Based Person



Shame Based Person

Jesus died
instead of you

+

White American Christians believing in America's moral goodness, but trying to rationally convince people of their sin and guilt

-

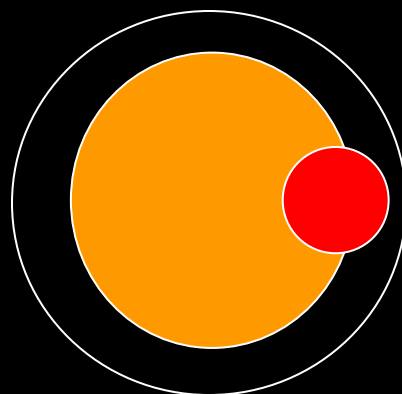
Jesus died, and you
with him, to
transform you into a
new creation

-

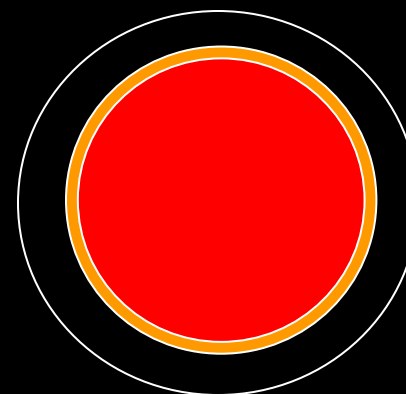
+

African-American Christians, with people already aware of their sin and shame, offered personal change and freedom from sin.

Ministry During Much of the 20th Century



Guilt-Based Person



Shame Based Person

Jesus died
instead of you



White American Church argued, "You need God because you're not perfect." But they could still handle it in the "I'm basically good" self-concept.

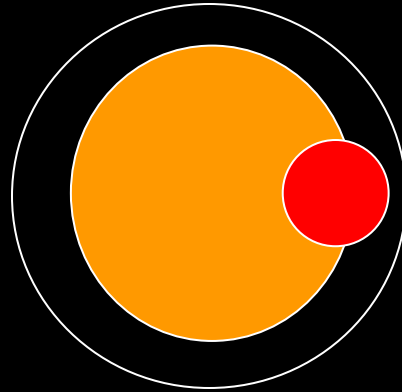


Jesus died, and you
with him, to
transform you into a
new creation

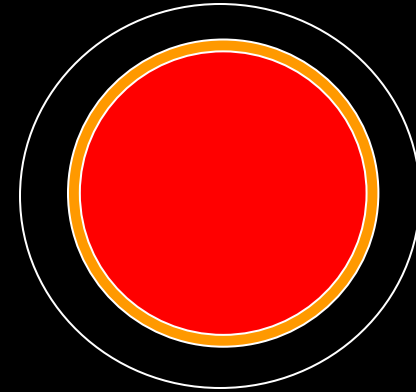


African-American ministers said, "My life was in trouble, I was messed up, but God grabbed hold of me and turned me around. You wouldn't have wanted to know me before Christ rescued me from the devil."

Ministry During Much of the 20th Century



Guilt-Based Person



Shame Based Person

Jesus died
instead of you

+

So White American Christians
experienced forgiveness for not
being perfect

-

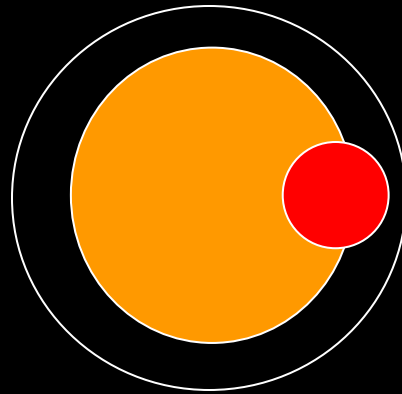
Jesus died, and you
with him, to
transform you into a
new creation

-

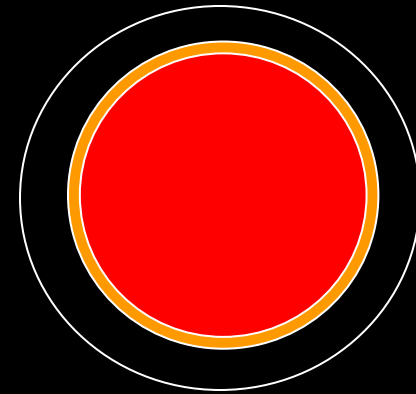
+

And African American Christians
experienced transformation

Ministry During Much of the 20th Century



Guilt-Based Person



Shame Based Person

Jesus died
instead of you

+

So White American Christians
experienced forgiveness for not
being perfect

-

Meanwhile educated East Asian-
American Christians were searching
for a meaningful theology.

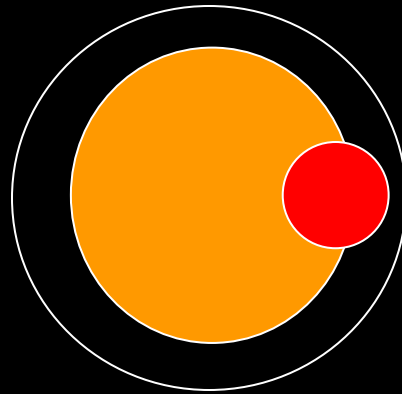
Jesus died, and you
with him, to
transform you into a
new creation

-

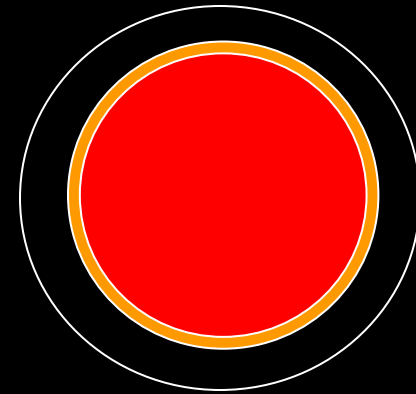
+

And African American Christians
experienced transformation

Ministry During Much of the 20th Century



Guilt-Based Person



Shame Based Person

Jesus died
instead of you



So White American Christians
experienced forgiveness for not
being perfect

Most Asian-American ministers were
trained at White seminaries and tried to
adopt White Fundamentalist-
Evangelical theology.

Jesus died, and you
with him, to
transform you into a
new creation

-

+

And African American Christians
experienced transformation

One Indicator: The Effect on Asian Americans

Shame Based Person



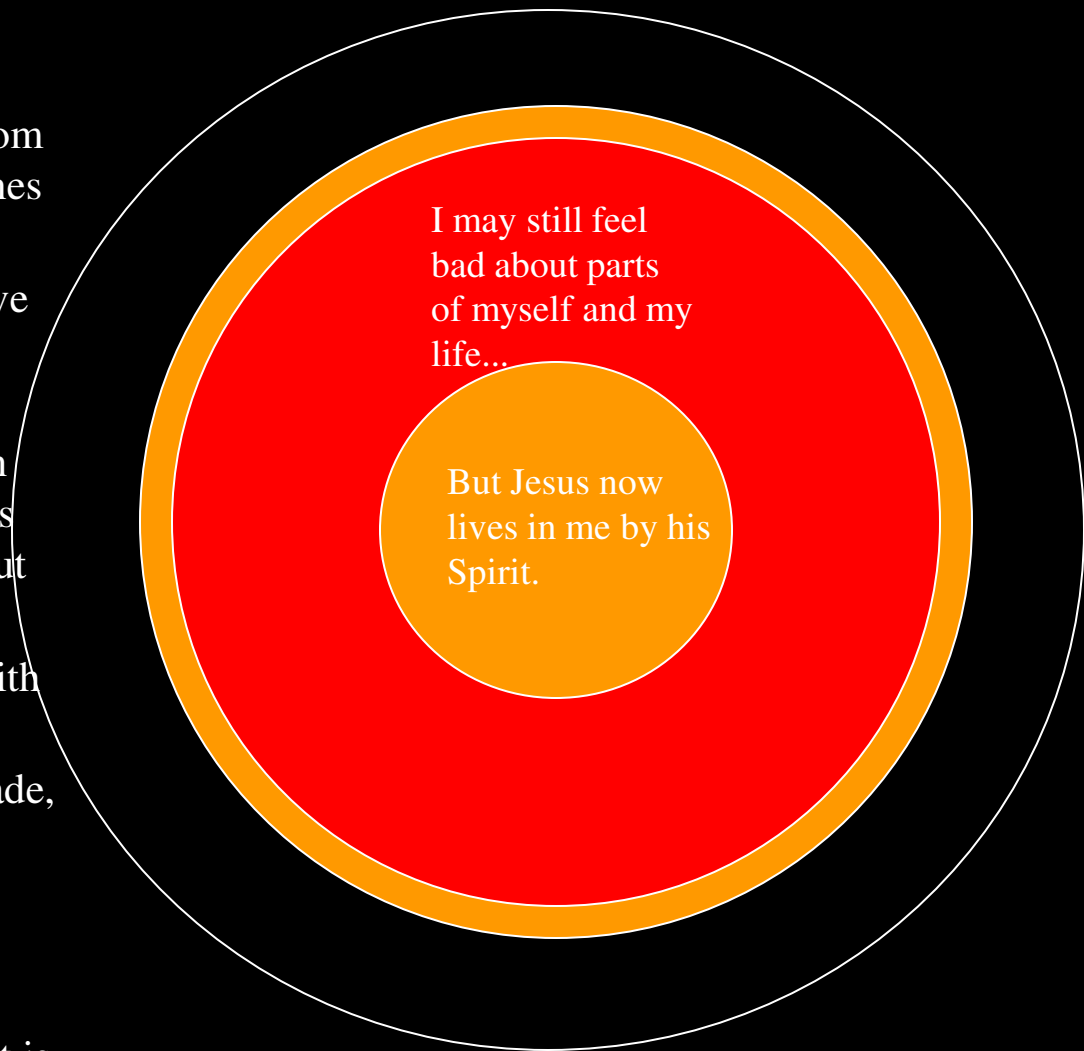
- *The Father's Image is Troubling*
 - The Father never seems to lose His angry Judge demeanor. How is God really a loving Father?
- *Intimacy is Not Organically Promoted or Modeled*
 - We still feel distant from God, and are ambivalent about whether He is still angry with us. Does God really yearn for intimacy with us?
- *Motivation for Obedience is Poor*
 - “Debt-forgiveness” from White America becomes “debt-obligation” in Asian-America. This makes Asian-Americans, more so than their White American counterparts, want to repay the debt because of their cultural familiarity with this motivational language.
 - “Don’t you know how much Jesus suffered for you?”
 - “Don’t you get how much God gave up for you?”

What Shame-Based People Need to Know: Union With Jesus

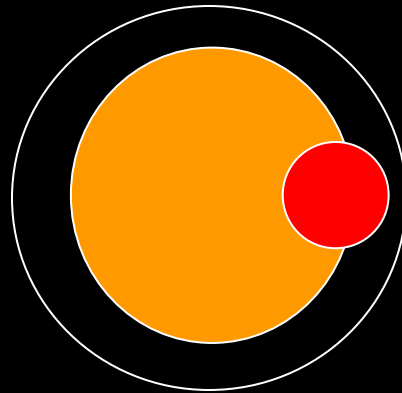
- Medical-ontological, relational understanding of salvation. Saved from human evil for life within God.
- Our sinful core identity died with Jesus at the Cross; it got what it deserved. It's not that Jesus just took the penalty for us and made us guilt-debtors to him.
- God is love, in His Triune nature. Therefore, once your parents conceived you, He *had* to love you.
- The Cross – Resurrection motivates further obedience in us because we become part of God's new humanity, and now the Christian life about being consistent with who we already are in Jesus: God's children.
- Separation vs. intimate union with God are organic and must be discussed as part of the saving event. The Holy Spirit fits organically into the model.

How Jesus Heals Shame Based People

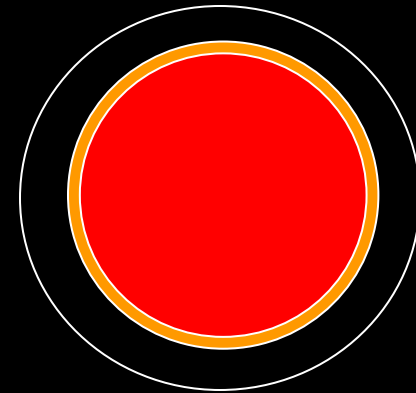
- I now have relational stability with Jesus, to help me handle the relational instability I feel everywhere else.
- I now have Jesus as a refuge from the world of criticism that defines me as a failure.
- I have a purpose, to let Jesus live his life out through me, not to protect myself
- I am 'in Christ.' Jesus is now in me, and defines who I am. He is at the core of me, and pushes out the negative part.
- I will definitely still struggle with sin, as Paul did in Romans 7.
- But now I can let go of my façade, because I know I don't have to manufacture my own acceptability.
- Like Paul, I can say, "I myself (the true me)...serve God. That is who I am." (Rom.7:25)



Ministry in the 21st Century



Guilt-Based Person



Shame Based Person

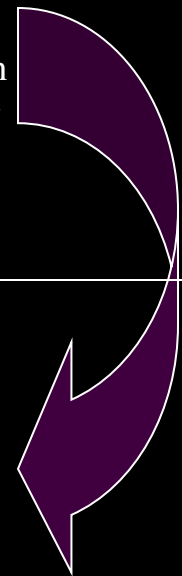
Jesus died
instead of you

Jesus died, and you
with him, to
transform you into a
new creation

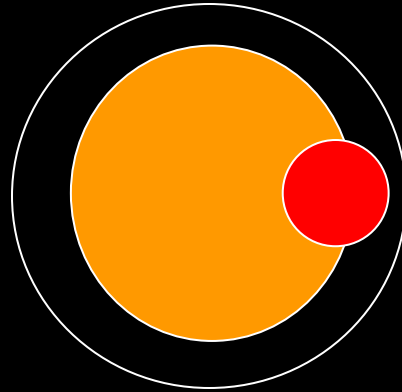
-

+

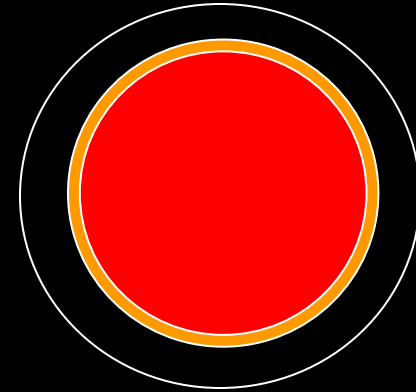
I am recovering theology
from Classical and Eastern
Orthodox traditions, along
with White American
Christian counselors.



Ministry in the 21st Century



Guilt-Based Person



Shame Based Person

Jesus died
instead of you

White Protestants moving towards shame-based culture, (1) by painfully realizing that White American history is filled with injustice, and (2) because of the instability of the White family.

Cultural shift

Jesus died, and you
with him, to
transform you into a
new creation

-

+

Ministry

More Resources for Exploring Medical Substitution

- See the resources collected at

The Anástasis Center for Christian Education and Ministry:

- www.anastasiscenter.org/atonement.htm and
- www.healingatonement.org

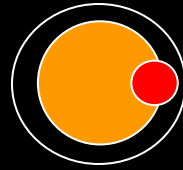
- Contact: Mako Nagasawa,
mako.nagasawa@gmail.com

An intriguing thought:

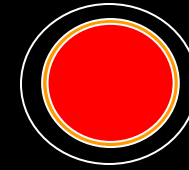
Is the secular 'guilt-based' persona a transitional phase of western (post-Christian) history? Are we all going to be more 'shame-based' because of relational instability left in the wake of relativism?

**The Puzzling Direction of Some
White Postmodern Evangelical
Churches**

Some Ministry to Postmodern White America



Guilt-Based Person



Shame Based Person

Jesus died
instead of you

+

ALL OBJECTIVE

-

Jesus died, and
you with him, for
you to rise with
his new humanity

-

OBJECTIVE &
SUBJECTIVE

+

ALL SUBJECTIVE

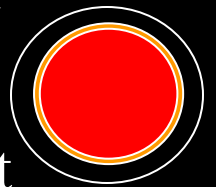
NO decisive
point of
transformation

Some White Protestants are moving to a totally existential spirituality by emphasizing 'following Jesus' over 'being in Jesus,' by emphasizing 'experiencing the Spirit' over 'committing to Jesus as Lord,' or by having an undisciplined preference for the Synoptic Gospels over John and Paul. Many white churches are also dropping the 'in Christ' language because they want to emphasize 'movement over position' or at best, 'ongoing transformations.'



Questions

- Backing off too far from the ‘in Christ’ emphasis leads to ‘experiencing Jesus’ without a lordship commitment. This is attractive because Jesus is presented without much authority. Ministers can also speak of Jesus suggestively and without much authority.
- However, this treats ‘postmodern’ people as if their only problem were their distrust of authority. Postmodernism is equally (if not more so) a crisis of lacking inner substance. Virtually all ethnic groups in the U.S. are now shame based (because of relational instability, failure, or heavy criticism), and need a new core identity.
- Problem: To address identity issues, someone has to get up and say, “This is who you are.” So speaking about identity requires us to speak with authority. The retreat from appropriate authority by white postmodern Christians will probably leave unresolved holes in those communities.



Questions

- The 'union with Jesus' model enables identity obligation language to be used (e.g. you have to be consistent with who you are in Jesus, Rom.6:1-11), which is powerful language. But White Americans seem averse to using any kind of obligation language. I believe this is an accommodation to White American culture, a bias towards the perceived needs of White American culture.
- 'Following Jesus' is often viewed as an effective motivation for certain activities. But the 'in Christ' language seems to have been deeply vital to Christians in intense ministry situations long term (e.g. Mother Teresa, Hudson Taylor). Does the loss of the 'in Christ' language lead to ethical (lifestyle) mediocrity in the long term? Both in terms of (1) directing Christians into intense commitments and (2) sustaining them there?

Questions

- The 'in Christ' language is important in the New Testament for establishing a corporate identity to effectively deal with the challenge of multi-ethnicity and multi-nationality.
- Backing away from this language seems to be backing off from dealing with racial, ethnic, and nationalistic issues, or at least to be setting one up for difficulty in those discussions. What major teaching can be substituted to simultaneously challenge other sources of corporate identity and also establish a Christian one?
- Thus, 'being in Christ' is increasingly recognized as vital in enduring hardships in racial reconciliation. What can replace it for whites who will have a hard time dealing with angry ethnic minorities?

Questions

- Some argue that we can choose the Gospels over Paul's Epistles to do this. But doesn't Jesus refer to being 'in him' a lot in John's Gospel? Thus, does 'being in Christ' really come from Paul and not Jesus?
- Is it true that we can neatly divide the Synoptic Gospels from John and Paul over questions of 'following Jesus' vs. 'being in Christ?'
- Wouldn't the other Gospel writers concur that the Cross and Resurrection is the decisive turning point of our personal experience?

Appendix A

Pastoral Contexts of Key
'Union with Christ' Scriptures

Ministry Needs Addressed by the 'Union with Christ' Concept

- (EV) Evangelism as the necessity of being united with Christ by the Spirit
- (H) Healing for individuals in Christ by the Spirit
- (EM) Empowerment for individuals to live as Christians
- (LE) Identity in Christ causing a challenging realignment of lifestyle and ethics
- (MS) Procedural guidance for creating ministry structures
- (C) Call to the new creation community, Christ's body
- (CE) Corporate ethics as Christ's body
- (CV) Corporate vision for the political role of the multi-ethnic and multi-national body of Christ
- (IM) Helpful images and metaphors for understanding the 'in Christ' concept

Pastoral Contexts of Key Scriptures

- We have died and risen with Jesus
 - *Romans 6:1-11*: Paul argues that the first reason not to sin is because that is no longer who we are. We have a new identity in Jesus and are free from sin. This is the basis for understanding the Cross as creating identity-obligation (I must be who I am) rather than debt-obligation (I have to pay God back). Though Paul will later appeal to our self-interest (6:19-23), identity transformation takes first place in his logical argumentation. (H, EM, LE)
 - *Galatians 2:20*: Paul's famous saying making his union with Christ the basis for his freedom from the Mosaic Law and its curse. Excellent for dealing with guilt and shame. (H, EM, LE)
 - *Philippians 3:7-12*: An aggressive, practical statement about how the Cross-Resurrection pattern defines our life in an ongoing way. Our identity in Christ means that everything else takes second priority. (LE)
 - *Colossians 2:12-13*: The cosmic dimension of rising with Jesus in his new life. We are freed from the powers of the rulers and authorities, the old spiritual-political order. Because the church is a multi-national family, Colossians (and Ephesians) is foundational for understanding spiritual warfare as requiring an argument against nationalism, patriotism, and social exclusivism. (C, CE, CV)

Pastoral Contexts of Key Scriptures

- We are in Jesus by the Spirit

- *John 14:8-21*: John defines Jesus as the only way to God as Father because he is the only person who has a Father-Child relationship with God. Everyone else must therefore enter into Jesus by the Spirit to experience God as Father. People have no ability to experience God as Father outside of Jesus. One implication for evangelism is there must be a point of decision and commitment that places one 'in Christ' by faith and by the Spirit; the gradual model is misleading. In spite of some people's not knowing when they accepted Christ, nevertheless from God's perspective there was a point in time. In spite of postmodern approaches to ministry that emphasize 'experiencing the Spirit' apart from making a commitment to Jesus, nevertheless not making a commitment to Jesus withholds the full blessing of the Spirit to people. John also argues that interior knowledge of God is real knowledge, which challenges postmodern theories of knowledge. (EV, H)
- *John 15:1-9*: The vine and branches is a very helpful image for understanding our being in Christ by the Spirit. Particularly challenging is the statement, "Apart from me you can do nothing" of eternal significance. This makes it imperative for teachers to communicate the truth about living in the Spirit and being in Christ. (EV, H, EM, LE, IM)

Pastoral Contexts of Key Scriptures

- We are in Jesus by the Spirit

- *Ephesians 1:1-14*: Paul uses adoption in Christ to describe our spiritual identity, agreeing with John that the only way to experience God as Father is by being in Jesus. The Cross was the point of the adoption and the Spirit seals us into Christ. Our identity in Christ means that we have a responsibility to reflect the character of God's family, holy and blameless, as embodied by God's Son (Eph.1:4). (EV, H, EM, LE, C)
- *Ephesians 2:11-22, John 17:20-26*: To be 'in Christ' means that are in one body. We are God's new temple, another helpful image. We are reconciled and must demonstrate reconciliation and unity with each other. This has huge implications for Jew-Gentile relations and for racism/nationalism today. Inclusion of Jesus' sayings about who is his true mother and brother and sister further suggests that we demonstrate a higher family loyalty to the multi-national and multi-ethnic church than our loyalty to our nation or ethnic group of origin, not in the sense of severing ties, but in mediating conflicts between groups and being on guard against ethnocentrism and prejudice. Paul's monetary collection probably should be interpreted as a demonstration of this corporate 'in Christ' identity across Jew-Gentile borders. A Christian position against war can be easily developed from this foundation. (EV, H, C, CE, CV, IM)

Pastoral Contexts of Key Scriptures

- We are in Jesus by the Spirit
 - *Romans 8:1*: A familiar principle that imposes a limitation on preachers: There is no condemnation for those in Christ. Asian and Asian American preachers in particular must now refrain from using guilt and shame producing techniques and seek new, more humble, ways of appealing to their audience. They must refrain from the debt-obligation view of the Cross, and resist the notion that God puts us in His debt so that we would perpetually feel like we need to repay Him. The fact that a Christian audience is in Christ means that preachers must think through their tones of authority and manner of address. The act of preaching itself must produce healing and positive identity definition and reinforcement. (MS, EV, H)
 - *1 Corinthians 12ff., Ephesians 4:1-16, Romans 12:1-8*: The distribution of spiritual gifts by individual implies that a healthy ministry strategy must allow for bottoms-up creation of ministry structures rather than simply a tops-down imposing of structures. Additionally, that all of us are in Christ means that no gift or ability must be allowed to influence how each individual Christian gets treated. (MS, C, CE, IM)
 - These two principles directly resulting from the ‘in Christ’ concept require a thorough reevaluation of cultural assumptions about authority carried into ministry. Authority is not wrong per se, but must be constantly monitored.

Pastoral Contexts of Key Scriptures

- Jesus lives within us by the Spirit
 - *John 4:1-42 and 7:38-39*: An invaluable portrait of how Jesus meets our deepest longings and breaks us out of cycles of relational dysfunction and codependence by placing his Spirit in us. Essential passage for healing the individual. (EV, H, EM, IM)
 - *Romans 8:9-11*: Paul defines a Christian as someone in whom the Spirit of Christ lives, and gives us hope for overcoming personal sinful habits. (H, EM, LE)
 - *1 Corinthians 6:18-20*: We are individually God's temple because God's Spirit lives in us, which gives us an ethical imperative on how we use our bodies sexually. (EM, LE, IM)
 - *2 Corinthians 4-5*: The best definition of new covenant ministry. Jesus will bring us through experiences of dying and rising in ministry for others. The jars of clay with treasure within is a powerful image for Jesus being in us. We do not minister out of our own strength, but Jesus'. Being a new creation in Christ is very healing and drives evangelism. (EV, H, EM, LE, IM)
 - *Ephesians 3:14-19*: Paul prays for us to deepen our experience of Jesus within us because the only way to resist personal prejudice and systemic racism and actualize this reconciliation into one body is by being empowered by Jesus within. Essential passage for healing the church body. (EM, LE, CE)