

The Errors of Tony Jones

By Dan Jensen (2022)

Preliminary Remarks

I want to begin by saying that I know that I use some strong language in this essay at times. I understand that in many wings of the church today, including the vast majority of my old denomination, this approach to theology is seen as unbiblical; unloving; lacking in winsomeness; and is both unethical and unprofessional. All I can say is that I strongly disagree. I believe that a modern ethic of “tolerance” is being imposed upon the Scriptures with the approach to theology advocated by those enumerated above. Throughout the Bible and throughout church history (especially the Reformers), we often see something quite different. Anyone who knows me can testify that I am always kind, friendly, and winsome in all of my personal interactions. In fact, many believers that I am most close with often say that one of the few criticisms they have of me is that they believe I can be too soft at times in my teaching. I use no profanity in this essay and I do not say anything simply for effect. Every strong word is used because I believe it is necessary to fully make the point. Tony is a heretic and he is a leader in his movement, a movement that fervently rails against the true church. Therefore, I stand by my approach and everything I write in this essay.

Next, it is important to understand that this essay is not intended to provide full reviews of all of Tony’s books. It is only intended to detail his many errors. Therefore, I will not be providing full chapter reviews or directly quoting from him. If the reader wishes to read this essay and largely take my word on things, that’s fine. However, if anyone wishes to really test out what I am saying, he or she will need to actually read the books I reference, as well as my book *A False Kind of Christianity* (the serious reader can skip my testimony if he or she is solely attempting to test my assertions in this essay). I

provide an extensive bibliography at the end of my book with many resources that will be pertinent to much of what I say in this essay. That book can be found on my website.

I will provide some documentation of what I say in this essay at times, especially Scripture references, but for the most part the reader is referred to my book and especially the bibliography at the end of the book. If the reader desires that I specifically document something for him or her, as in me guiding them to the exact right place in the resources I provide in my book, or the exact right place where Tony asserts something in the chapter I reference from him, the reader can make that request by emailing me (my email is provided on my website) and I will gladly comply. I will also not be engaging directly with any of Tony's speaking engagements (although I will allude to them, especially *American Gospel 2*) as almost all of his errors found in those engagements are reiterated at one point or another in the books I will be focusing upon in this essay. I do recommend to the serious reader that she or he watch the above documentary though.

Tony's Books

Below is a list of all of Tony's books that I could find, in the order of year of publication. Tony did not write all of these works; for some he only contributed to them. *Cancer and Theology* is not listed on his website (Google "Tony Jones Theologian" and his website comes right up; He's the "Reverend Hunter"). I found it on Amazon and so I asked Tony if he had written any works beyond what I had found. He emailed me back saying that he had and asked me why I was asking the question. I told him it was so that I could read them and asked if he could send me the titles. He never responded to that email. It should be noted that some of these works were previously published under different titles. It should also be noted that I have abbreviated the titles and the full titles can be found on his website other than *Cancer and Theology*. *Cancer and Theology* is the full title of that work and can be found on Amazon as stated above.

List of Tony's Books

- 1.) Postmodern Youth Ministry (2001)
- 2.) Soul Shaper (2003)
- 3.) The Sacred Way (2005)
- 4.) Divine Intervention (2006)
- 5.) You Converted Me (2006)
- 6.) The Most Difficult Journey You'll Ever Make (2006)
- 7.) An Emergent Manifesto (2007)
- 8.) Brother Lawrence (2007)
- 9.) The New Christians (2008; 2019)
- 10.) Ask, Seek, Knock (2008)
- 11.) Didache (2009)
- 12.) The Church is Flat (2011)
- 13.) A Better Atonement (2012)
- 14.) Questions that Haunt (2013)
- 15.) Phyllis Tickle (2014)
- 16.) Cancer and Theology (2014)
- 17.) Did God Kill Jesus? (2015)

Overview

I will not be focusing on all of these works in this essay for the sake of brevity. Most of his works before #12 are not terribly unorthodox. One can still find a lot that is questionable in them, but Tony was far more sound back in those days as was the Emergent movement as a whole. Although it should be noted that Tony did make his infamous statement about Scripture using the most heinous explicative in the English language in a blog post in 2007. He fully admits to this statement on pages 30-31 of *Did God Kill Jesus?*¹ Despite being one of the most insidiously blasphemous statements I've ever seen made by any professing "Christian" theologian, I am sure at the time Tony

¹ Tony Jones, *Did God Kill Jesus?: Searching for Love in History's Most Famous Execution* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 30-31.

would have attempted to put a more orthodox spin on it. The seeds of Tony's later heresies are plainly evident in #9 (the 2008 edition), but even here one could strain his words in an orthodox direction for the most part.

There is a lot that is wrong in my estimation, some of which is heretical, in #12, especially towards the latter part of the work. With that said, this is overall a good work. This is not surprising as this work grew out of Tony's PhD dissertation. Therefore, he was obviously guarded from the sloppiness that is so characteristic of his scholarship in his other works. Although, even in this work he on occasion still makes some pretty striking errors of fact. This work is primarily a sociological study with theological implications. The chapters where he examines certain churches are well done from a sociological perspective. #15 was edited by Tony and it is mostly him and others praising Tickle. There is a lot that is objectionable throughout this work, including the portions contributed by Tony, but the work is not terribly theological. #16 also has much that is objectionable, but Tony only contributed to the work and did not author the full work.

For all of these reasons, I will only be honing in on #'s 13, 14, and 17 in this essay. These works are Tony's most theological works by far, and I have seen nothing from him wherein he repudiates anything from these works. These works are littered with heresy and errors, including many overt errors of basic fact. If you see chapters skipped, this is not an accident. It only indicates that I did not see enough to warrant serious comment. Having said that, it in no way means that I agree with everything said in the skipped chapter.

#'s 13, 14, and 17

#13 (*A Better Atonement*)²

² Jones, *A Better Atonement: Beyond the Depraved Doctrine of Original Sin* (Minneapolis: The JoPa Group, 2012).

Part 1:

Man - Tony claims the doctrine of original sin never played much of a role in medieval theology and that Eastern Orthodoxy (EO from here forward) rejects it altogether. Neither of these contentions are true. Tony admits that Augustine was the first to fully systematize the doctrine. But Augustine was the preeminent theologian in the West throughout the Middle Ages. That alone disproves his contention. The doctrine can be found in all of the major Western theologians throughout this era. And Tony repeatedly and overtly misrepresents EO on this point in this work and elsewhere. EO has never entirely denied the doctrine. It is true that different language has been used, but EO has always maintained that we inherited corruption from our first parents. If one wishes to argue that this is all that Tony is driving at, that isn't the case. Tony often says that EO only believes that we inherited death from Adam. And this is not true.

My Intuitions - Tony does not deny human sin, but he does clearly deny that we are inherently evil. There is no way to reconcile this with Scripture (Gen 3; 6:5; Ps 51:5; 58:3; Jer 17:9; Matt 7:11; 15-20; 12:33-35; John 3:19-21; 6:43-44; 15:5; Rom 3:10-18; 5:7:14-25; 8:7-8; 1 Cor 2:14; 2 Cor 4:3-4; Eph 2:1-3).

Augustine's Addendum - Tony states that the followers of Pelagius are the Semi-Pelagians. This is not true; Semi-Pelagians have repudiated Pelagius throughout church history. It was considered overt history in the West to embrace Pelagius. Tony again misrepresents the EO position as saying that our inheritance from Adam is only death. In the EO conception, death includes our moral corruption, like a disease. He basically engages in bait and switch. He says emphatically that he doesn't believe humans are inherently sinful and then only seeks to refute the specific Western doctrine of original sin. He makes zero effort to prove his extremely heretical doctrine that humans are not inherently sinful and acts like simply disproving the Western doctrine (which he doesn't do anyway) also proves his heretical doctrine. It does not (even if he did disprove it). Even if the fully Western doctrine is wrong, all true Christians have believed that we are inherently sinful as a result of Adam's fall. He also makes a big

deal about the fact that Jesus nowhere gives a fully orbed doctrine of original sin. This proves nothing. The notion that Jesus says nothing that has any bearing on the doctrine is ridiculous. Jesus is quite clear that we are sinful by nature (see the above verses).

Part 1 Interlude:

Tony implies the resurrection of Christ is an optional doctrine because he accepts more liberal “Christians” who reject the doctrine as his brothers and sisters in Christ. Elsewhere in his works he implies that the early Creeds provide boundaries. I guess not if a “Christian” can reject the doctrine of Christ’s resurrection. Now to be fair, Tony probably only means that they provide guardrails as far as correct belief. If this is the case, it effectively places the early Creeds above Scripture in authority because it is rather evident that Tony does not believe that the Bible provides these guardrails in any concrete fashion. More will be said about this approach to the early Creeds down the line.

Tony states that he is fully in line with Chalcedon; he is not (see the section below where I detail all the ways Tony materially denies many core elements of the major early Creeds).

Tony claims that the penal substitution theory of the atonement (PSA from here forward) makes the resurrection of Christ superfluous. He defends this by saying that the theory renders Christ’s resurrection just another miracle and sign of Christ’s divinity and nothing more. This is a blatant straw man. This has never been the doctrine of Historic Protestantism. Orthodox Protestants have always maintained that the resurrection of Christ is qualitatively different from all of the other miracles of Christ. They have always asserted that it is the vindication of His work on the cross. It is the Father’s stamp of approval upon that work. This is why the resurrection of Christ can be said to defeat sin; death; Satan; all the enemies of God; etc. And for all of these reasons it can be said to bring about our justification because apart from it the work of the cross would not be

accepted at the bar of God, and it is that work that is the negative side of the coin as far as the grounds for our justification.

Tony claims that in the crucifixion, the eternal relationality of the Trinity was shattered and that God literally died. This is palpable heresy and more will be said about these egregious errors as we proceed.

Part 2:

Tony routinely pounds home the notion that the doctrines of wrath and justice are absent or are at least mostly absent in EO. This is not true.

Tony discusses how Driscoll at one time clearly believed in a very literal understanding of God's wrath. He asserts the same in regard to Piper. I think he accurately represents Driscoll, but not Piper. But even with Driscoll, Tony makes no attempt to deal with the many, many texts on God's wrath in the Bible. This theme, highly minimizing the wrath of God, can be found throughout Tony's later works and speaking engagements (to be fair, Tony does say in *American Gospel 2* that he believes God had wrath at one time). There is no possible way to reconcile his doctrine with the Bible.

The doctrine of the wrath of God is central to the overarching biblical message and of the gospel itself. We are ultimately saved from the wrath of God by the cross of Jesus Christ. The Koine Greek word for *wrath* is *orge*. It means wrath, anger, indignation, or vengeance. It is translated this way throughout every major English translation. The word is used 36 times in the New Testament (NT from here forward). There is not a single instance where the context indicates a clear exception to this basic definition. 29 of these instances are used specifically of the wrath of God. The overwhelming vast majority of these seem to be referring to the final and eternal wrath of God against unbelievers. Jesus uses the term 3 times to speak of the wrath of God (Mark 3:5; Luke

21:23; and John 3:36). In John 3:36, He specifically uses it to talk about the final and eternal wrath of God towards unbelievers.³

Further, Jesus repeatedly refers to the concept of the wrath of God throughout the Gospels, even when He is not using the specific term. This is most seen in the way Jesus talks about hell:

- 1.) Jesus talked about hell more than any other biblical figure.
- 2.) He made it clear that hell is a place: He specifically calls hell *that place* (Matt 24:51 and 25:30). He says hell was *prepared* for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41). He says people will be *thrown* or *cast into* hell (twice in Matt 5:29-30; 8:11-12; 13:41-42; 49-50; twice in 18:8-9; 25:30; twice in Mark 9:45-47; and Luke 12:5). He says God will destroy both body and soul *in* hell (Matt 10:28).
- 3.) He is plain that hell is a place apart from God's eventual kingdom on earth (Matt 6:10; 13:24-30; 36-43; 47-50; and 25:31-46).
- 4.) He is plain that most will end up there (Matt 7:13-14 and Luke 13:22-30).
- 5.) He is clear that hell will be an absolutely awful place (see list below). Even if many of these descriptions are interpreted figuratively (and I strongly believe many of them should be interpreted figuratively [see below]), the obvious import of Jesus' words is that hell is a horrific reality.
 - a. He repeatedly uses the language of fire to describe hell (Matt 5:22; 13:42; 50; twice in 18:8-9; 25:41; and twice in Mark 9:43-48).
 - b. He describes it as a place of destruction and perishing (Matt 7:13; 10:28; and John 3:16).
 - c. He describes it as a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:12; 13:42; 50; and 24:51).
 - d. He describes it as a place of darkness (Matt 8:12).
 - e. He describes it as a place of hypocrites (Matt 23:15 and 24:51).
 - f. He describes it as a place of condemnation (Matt 12:32; 25:31-46; John 3:16-18; 36; and 5:28-29).

³ *Bible Hub*, s.v. "orge," accessed Dec 30, 2021, <http://biblehub.com/greek/3709.htm>.

- g. Finally, He describes it as a place of eternal punishment (Matt 12:32; 18:8; 25:31-46; and Mark 9:43-48).

Paul uses the term *orge* 5 times in Romans, all in reference to God, before he even gets to his core gospel presentation at the end of Romans 3 and throughout Romans 4.⁴ Paul also teaches the reality and eternity of hell as well (Rom 9 [especially v. 22]; and 2 Thess 1 [especially v. 9]).

I have already explained in another work why I believe that most of the graphic imagery of hell found throughout the NT should be interpreted figuratively (the final book of my “basics” series; page 15). Many will respond to this by saying that if that imagery can be taken figuratively, why can’t hell itself or at least its eternity be taken figuratively as well? To the first point, all of the imagery can be taken figuratively without hindering any of the above texts at all. However, to explain away the fact that hell is a real place of judgment for unbelievers is to make nonsense of all of the above passages. Yes, Jesus is using hyperbole in regard to not taking vows, for example, but that in no way changes the basic import of those texts, namely that rash and irreverent vows are entirely impermissible (and even holy vows should be taken rarely). Seeing the use of hyperbole in the Bible is a most acceptable hermeneutical principle, but it is not to be abused. It cannot be used to completely explain a text away. As to the second point, we will discuss this next.

The evidence in favor of the eternity of hell is simply too strong to dismiss in any fashion. It is so strong that to deny it is to fall into heresy. *Aionios* is used 70 times in the NT. There is not a single instance of these 70 that demands the interpretation of less than eternal. The word is contrasted with *proskairos*⁵ (which means temporal) in 2 Cor 4:18. It is used 54 times to describe eternal life and eternal life is undoubtedly eternal in the NT (John 3:16; 10:27-30; Rom 2:7; 6:23; 1 Cor 9:25; and Rev 21:3-4; *aionios* is used in each of these texts except for 1 Cor 9:25 and Rev 21:3-4). And it is used 7

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Bible Hub*, s.v. “proskairos,” accessed Sep 1, 2022, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4340.htm>.

times to refer to hell (Matt 18:8; 25:41; 25:46; Mark 3:29; 2 Thess 1:9; Heb 6:2; Jude 1:7).⁶ Therefore, it matters not one iota how the word may have been used in extra-biblical contexts, in the NT the word must be interpreted as referring to eternity. Further, any other interpretation makes utter rubbish of Matt 25:46. The eternity of hell is further supported by the fact that the Bible also uses the word for unquenchable (*asbestos*)⁷ to describe it (Matt 3:12; Mark 9:43; Luke 3:17). The word means inextinguishable or unquenchable. All of this evidence disallows any figurative interpretations of the eternity of hell.

Finally, the fact that the cross of Christ saves us from this wrath of God is taught all over the Bible: Isa 53; Mark 10:32-34 and 45; John 3:16; John 10; Rom 3-4 [especially 4:15]; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:10-14; Eph 1:7; Col 2:13-14; 1 Cor 2:2. All are under the wrath of God (Rom 1-6; Eph 2) and this wrath will culminate in hell as we have seen. Based on the texts above, it is quite plain that we will only be freed from this wrath based upon the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. This work can only be apprehended by saving faith (Matt 9:1-6; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 7:48-50; John 1:12-13; 3; 6:28-29; 35-40; Acts 10; 15-16; Rom 3-6; Gal 1-3; and Eph 2).

Moving on from the wrath of God, Tony claims that one can hold to any view of the atonement and not be considered a heretic because a complete doctrine is not spelled out in any of the early Creeds. This is ridiculous. I thoroughly address the argument that the only doctrines that are binding upon Christians are those that are made explicit in the early Creeds in my book.⁸ And the notion that because the early church did not bring up the atonement in any creedal debates, must be because it was seen as unimportant, is entirely false. It was not brought up because it was not particularly controversial at that time. The ransom theory was for the most part tacitly accepted. That in no way means the leaders of the church thought it unimportant. And the Nicene Creed clearly has a basic doctrine of the atonement, even if it is not very developed. If someone had

⁶ *Bible Hub*, s.v. "aionios," accessed Sep 1, 2022, <https://biblehub.com/greek/166.htm>.

⁷ *Bible Hub*, s.v. "asbestos," accessed Sep 1, 2022, <https://biblehub.com/greek/762.htm>.

⁸ Dan Jensen, *A False Kind of Christianity: A Conservative Evangelical Refutation of Progressive Christianity* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017), 237-238; 254-264; 281.

said that the atonement has nothing to do with sin; or that sin doesn't even exist as in forms of Buddhism; or the atonement brings us into oneness like in the New Age; all such views would have been roundly condemned by the formulators of the Creed. And all people who say such things today are overtly contradicting the Creed.

Tony states that the first 7 Ecumenical Councils are ultimately authoritative. Who says? Is Tony EO? This is a bizarre statement. Historic Protestants, especially Calvin and the Puritans, overtly rejected the 7th Council. And why stop at 7? Rome says emphatically that we should not. And Tony himself materially rejects clear elements from the early Creeds (at times explicitly rejecting explicit statements from Chalcedon). So he does not hold to this view consistently (see the section below on the early Creeds).

Endnote #3:

In endnote #3, Tony attempts to make the case that the 5 *solas* of the Reformation are logically incoherent. He tries to do this by stating that since *sola* means *alone*, there can't be five of them otherwise they would clearly not be alone. I know Tony often got mad at me in my debate for calling out his obvious ignorance regarding historical theology, but I'm sorry, it is impossible to read his works and watch his speaking engagements and come away with any other conclusion. And this is a classic example of this. This argument reflects such a level of ignorance from a historical theology vantage point, it cannot but leave the student of historical theology utterly aghast. There is no nicer way to put it. And Tony attempted to lecture me about the spirit of Protestantism in our debate, and yet he not only rejects these core tenets of the Reformation, he plainly doesn't even understand them.

Each of the *solas* are pointing to a truth that stands alone in a distinct manner from all of the rest of the *solas*. If I go to a restaurant and say that I want a lemonade to drink, and the waiter asks me if I want ice and I say, "No, I'll just have the lemonade alone," I am in no way contradicting myself if he later asks me if I want ice cream on my pie and I say, "No, I'll have the pie alone." Ice cream is generally not served in lemonade, and ice is

usually not served on pie. I'm saying I want my lemonade alone in a very different way than I want my pie alone. I'm asking for two *solas*: my lemonade alone and my pie alone. But the fact that I am asking for two *solas* in no way means that I am being logically incoherent simply because the word *sola* means *alone*. I will not go through each of the *solas* here as that can be researched on your own if you are not familiar with these doctrines. But let's look at two really quickly to make the point.

The first *sola* is *sola scriptura*. It means that the Bible is the church's sole rule of faith. The "alone" here refers to the Bible being alone in this regard apart from church tradition, other books, and alleged oral revelations. It stands alone from those things. The second *sola* is *sola fide*. It means that we are saved by faith alone. The "alone" here refers to saving faith being alone in this regard apart from all other works. Both *solas* are referring to two distinct doctrines, although they are closely related, as are all five of the *solas*. And this principle does not solely apply to the five *solas*. These doctrines became a package deal because they were all being used to repudiate Rome. But we can also speak of God alone being God. This truth was not part of the five *solas* because Rome agrees with us on that doctrine. And the truth that God alone is to be worshiped does not mean we can never use the word "alone" to refer to anything else. If I am running to the gas station and my daughter asks me if my son is going with me and I say, "No, I'm going alone," I'm not in any way contradicting the truth that God alone is the one true God. How someone of Tony's caliber doesn't understand these basic concepts is quite remarkable. Tony doesn't have to agree with the doctrines, but to so badly misunderstand them is something I have never seen from even the most unsophisticated internet Catholic apologist.

Finally, I wish to say that Tony also sounds rather snarky in this endnote. And this is something that comes across all the time in his writings and speaking engagements. And it came across in our debate as well. He often comes across as rather arrogant, sarcastic, and/or snarky. Now I am not against sarcasm or really sharp critique at times, I use these tactics on occasion in my writing and speaking opportunities, and I don't see anything unbiblical about it. But I am honest about my approach. Tony and the

Progressive Christian movement (PC from here forward) on the other hand, incessantly chastise their opponents for the use of these tactics even though they engage in these very tactics all the time (and I would argue with an unbiblical frequency). This is yet another example of PC hypocrisy.

#14 (*Questions that Haunt Christianity*)⁹

Chapter 1:

Tony claims that the concept of perfection started with Plato. This is incorrect. Every culture has had a basic concept of perfection. It is true that Plato was one of the first (possibly the first) to give it a systematic and elaborate treatment, but that is a far cry from the notion that the concept was invented by him. Tony then makes the blasphemous statement that the Bible does not attribute ultimate perfection to Yahweh, thus he denies the absolute perfection of God. It is true that when the Bible often ascribes perfection to God it uses terms that generally do not carry the full import of perfection in the philosophical/theological sense. However, Scripture is quite clear that all people have a basic understanding of the attributes of God (Rom 1:18-20), and which attribute could be more fundamental than that God is infinite perfection without any flaws whatsoever? This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the Bible never attributes any flaws to God. It is even further supported by the fact that the Bible does clearly attribute moral perfection to God (Mark 10:17-18; 1 John 1:5; and 4:8). But if God is morally perfect only, being imperfect ontologically more broadly, then clearly He would have no business creating anything. It would be the height of cruelty to create a world that God could not contain. Therefore, such a God, being morally perfect, would refrain from creating. We know that God has created and thus He must be ontologically perfect.

⁹ Jones, *Questions that Haunt Christianity*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: The JoPa Group, 2013). If you are wondering why I didn't include any further volumes on my list of Tony's books, I don't think another volume was ever published. If any further volumes were published, I am unaware of them.

Tony claims that Plato was baptized into Christianity by Augustine and Aquinas. This is also incorrect. Plato was discussed heavily by the Church Fathers well before Augustine. And Aquinas primarily relied on Aristotle, not Plato. Tony is heavily reliant on the false notion that Christianity, especially Western Christianity, is beset by an over-reliance on Plato. This canard is repeated by almost every leader from every pseudo-Christian movement other than Rome and EO. It honestly gets so old after a while. Plato was hardly some proto-orthodox Christian. Christian theologians from the earliest days have repudiated all sorts of doctrines from the great philosopher. And where certain concepts from Scripture are in line with Plato, this only shows what a great thinker he was. And what educated person denies the brilliance of Plato? This tactic is merely a convenient way of not having to make a defense for one's position.

Tony claims that Adam and Eve felt pain before the fall and that the Garden of Eden before the fall was full of dirt and worms and rotting fruit. There is zero evidence of this in the Bible (there was probably dirt and worms, but not in a fallen sense), and the Genesis narrative certainly seems to teach otherwise on a plain reading of the text. Even if one wishes to adopt theistic evolution, largely interpreting the first 3 chapters of Genesis figuratively, there is no reason to adopt these notions. God could have allowed humankind to evolve physically to the point of Adam and Eve, and then put souls within them from conception, separated them and put them in the Garden of Eden (that could have been created directly by the hand of God), and protected them and the Garden from all outer harm. I'm not saying any Christian should adopt such a position. As a passionate advocate of the young earth view, I would strenuously urge all Christians to avoid pushing what seems to me to be such a strained view upon Scripture. With that said, I don't believe such a view would be fully heretical. I know that many true Christians, especially many of my fellow young earthers, disagree with me here. If anyone would like me to defend my view on this point, make the request by emailing me.

Tony also goes on to claim that there was no ontological change in Adam and Eve whatsoever post-fall. We have already seen in light of original sin why this is heresy.

Chapter 2:

Tony misrepresents cessationism by saying that cessationists assert that the gifts of the Spirit ended with the apostolic age. Cessationism only teaches that the revelatory and sign gifts ceased.

Tony openly questions the full goodness of God and says that God is arbitrary. This is a blatant denial of the moral perfection of God and is thus heretical.

Chapter 4:

Tony claims that Jesus and Paul saw the Old Testament (OT from here forward) as important and quoted it often. They did not merely quote it as important, but as entirely authoritative. I thoroughly defend this in my book.¹⁰

Tony claims that demon possession was probably schizophrenia. Demon possession is seen all over the Gospels and Jesus plainly believed in it (Mark 1:21-28 as one key example). And in Mark 1:34 demon possession is clearly distinguished from diseases in general. The Bible clearly recognizes the difference between epilepsy and demon possession (Matt 4:24), therefore there is no reason to assume it does not recognize the distinction between mental illness and demon possession. This is in fact confirmed by Mark 3:20-21. Tony and other Liberal Protestants (LP from here forward) can argue all they want that this language only reflects the erroneous and primitive beliefs of “Jesus” and “his” culture at the time, but there are two fatal flaws in this argumentation. First, this is the accommodation view of inspiration and it renders all theology impossible. This is because future discoveries could eliminate even the belief in any “god.” There is no end to the “progression” or “development” that can take place with this theory. Second, this view of demons was not the universal view of the Jews at the time of Christ. The Sadducees did not hold to it and Tony’s view is far more in line with

¹⁰ Jensen, 222-245.

them than it is with Jesus. The historic church has always recognized the reality of Satan and the demons, and the reality of demon possession at least at the time the Bible was being penned. Hence, Tony's view is heretical.

Tony clearly embraces Panentheism and Relativism (it should be said that Tony distances himself from radical relativism in *The Church is Flat*). Tony claims that "god" embraces all of creation, and thus must embrace evil itself. He says that all dichotomies collapse in "god." This Postmodern Relativism is entirely self-refuting and has been debunked countless times. I address it in my book.¹¹ Further, there is no way to reconcile it with the constant flow of absolute claims made from beginning to end in the Bible. And Panentheism is entirely antithetical to Scripture (Job 38-41; Isa 40:6-8; Isa 51:12-13; Rom 1; 9; Heb 1; 1 Pet 1:22-25). These views are undoubtedly heretical.

Chapter 5:

Tony states that he is inclined to believe that "god" is temporal and material, before and after creation. He says that it's never been the orthodox Christian position to say that "god" is immaterial mind, but rather "god" is in some paradoxical sense part of creation because He is in relationship to creation. The statement about God being an immaterial mind is a straw man and is terribly misleading. The transcendence of God is reiterated again and again in Scripture. It is especially taught in Romans 1:24-25 and 1 Timothy 6:13-16. Tony's position is again shown to be heretical.

Chapter 6:

Tony claims that he has a classical conception of "god" in the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition. This is very inconsistent with his critique that the church is far too Platonic. Further, he defines this as "god" can do anything. This is voluntarism. Both Plato and Aristotle were not voluntarists. And voluntarism was not fully developed until Scotus and

¹¹ Ibid., 116-121.

Ockham, especially the latter. The church had previously leaned in an intellectualist/essentialist direction.

Despite what Tony states throughout his writings and speaking engagements, voluntarism was never the standard majority position throughout church history. It has always been a minority position. The vast majority of orthodox theologians through the ages are or were essentialists. And as we will see, Tony asserts that it was the view of Aquinas, but it certainly was not. It is true that Luther leaned in a voluntarist direction, and that most of the earliest orthodox Confessional Lutherans were voluntarists. As much as we should disagree strenuously with these great Christians from the past, they were guarded from a lot of heresy because they said that God has chosen to freely bind Himself to Scripture. Therefore, they said that even though God can technically change, for example, God never will change because He has chosen never to change and has revealed this to us in His word. But, Tony has no such guardrails because of his view of Scripture. Hence, almost anything goes as long as it fits with his subjective standard of beauty (something that will be detailed later in this essay). This is why, as we will see later in this essay, Tony says that “god” may indeed change. Such a posture represents an undeniable repudiation of Scripture (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Mal 3:6; Heb 1:10-12; 13:8; and Jam 1:17). Hence, Tony’s particular voluntarism is heretical.

Chapter 7:

Tony is very confused about the Trinity, especially the way he uses the terms *essence* and *substance*. In the Greek East, the church primarily used *ousia* to describe the essence of God, while in the Latin West *essentia* was used. In Greek, *hypostasis* was primarily used for person, while in Latin there was confusion until the scholastic theologians coined the term *subsistentia*. Before then, most Latin writers used *substantia* for essence and *persona* for person. However, some writers used the former term for both, and because the latter term was often seen as imprecise, the term *subsistentia* was adopted. In English theology, essence and substance are generally used interchangeably, thus the confusion in Tony’s language.

Tony also denies the existence of the human soul. He seems to think that the orthodox position is that the deity of Christ indwelt His humanity through the human soul of Christ, which certainly sounds Apollinarian. I'm not saying Tony adopts Apollinarianism; how could he when he denies the existence of the soul? I'm saying that he certainly sounds confused on the doctrine of the incarnation, a confusion we will see again and again as we proceed in this essay.

Tony states that he is a materialist "Christian" theologian. He claims our minds can be distributed beyond our brains as we give information from our minds to others, but this is a very confused understanding of mind. When we tell others about what is in our mind, we are not diffusing our minds, we are only giving people information about our minds. This certainly gives people a glimpse into our minds, but our minds are not thereby being diffused. He says that "Jesus" was one with the mind of "god." He seems to be saying that the mind of "god" was entirely diffused into "Jesus" and this somehow makes "Jesus" "god." This is not a true union or incarnation and is an outright denial of Chalcedon if I am understanding him correctly here.

He also seems to deny the intermediate state by saying that our minds live on after our deaths because of the diffusion spoken of above. But he says that this will only be in a hazy fashion and will always be diminishing over time.

I really don't think so, but I'll concede that I may not be fully understanding Tony's doctrine of the incarnation as he is terribly confusing on this point. But, he is explicit in his denial of the human soul. And that is a blatant denial of Scripture and Chalcedon (Matt 10:28; Luke 23:46; 2 Cor 5:1-9; 2 Cor 12:1-6; 1 Thess 4:13-17; James 2:26; regarding Chalcedon, see the section below on the Creeds).

Chapter 9:

Tony claims that “Jesus’s” miracles were not intended to reveal “his” deity, but were signs of the coming kingdom of peace and healing. But, Jesus’ miracles did both (Matt 11:1-6). The two cannot be separated.

Tony claims that “god” had to experience death as the key part of our salvation to identify with us. The notion that the divine nature of Christ literally died fundamentally denies a number of key attributes of God (the perfection of God; the immutability of God; the invincibility of God; and the immortality of God). I have already defended the perfection of God and the immutability of God. The invincibility of God is clearly seen in many passages (Gen 50:19-21; Ps 33:8-11; 135:6; Prov 21:1; Isa 10:5-17; 14:27; 41:21-23; 45:9; 46:9-10; Ez 14:9; Dan 4:34-35; Matt 19:26; Acts 2:22-23; 4:27-28; Rom 9; Eph 1; 2 Thess 2:11; and Rev 17 [especially verse 17]). And the immortality of God is plainly implied by all of these attributes and is explicitly taught in 1 Timothy 6:13-16. Tony has embraced all-out heresy. As far as the arguments that the Scriptures are not uniform on the doctrine of God’s attributes, I address this in my book.¹²

Wrath is again categorically excluded from the atonement in Tony’s mind. As seen above, this also is heretical.

Chapter 10:

Tony again reiterates his contention that Aristotle was a voluntarist, and now he throws Aquinas into the mix as well. Neither were voluntarists and the latter is well-known for rejecting that very position. I prove this in my opening statement of our debate.

Tony accuses Reformed theology of making nonsense statements because of our belief in the inherent necessity of the atonement. He doesn’t understand the sovereignty of God: saying that God can do whatever He wants does not in any way contradict the teaching that God is constrained by His own internal character. God does not want to do the things He cannot do, so He is not limited in any fashion. Tony, throughout his works

¹² Jensen, 149-150.

and speaking engagements (especially *American Gospel 2*), erects the straw man that our position makes God beholden to some force or standard above Himself. No one is saying this. God's own internal character renders Him entirely without any sinful desires, which certainly includes any desires to engage in absurdities. If God is love (not only that He has love or is greatly loving, but literally *is* love), as Tony often recognizes and emphasizes throughout his works and speaking engagements, then obviously God is incapable of hate. Yet, Tony says that "god" can do anything. Thus, "god" can hate if "he" so chooses. Such a conception contradicts the clear biblical teaching that God is love and is morally perfect.

And even if we are contradicting ourselves, so what? I thought all dichotomies are swallowed up in "god." And within his own paradigm, "god" could have changed "himself" such that now there are certain things "god" cannot do. Further, the Bible itself is quite clear that there are indeed many things God cannot do. We have already seen that God cannot change, He cannot be defeated, and He cannot die. Further, God cannot sin (Hab 1:13), and He cannot lie (Heb 6:18; also implied by the fact that God cannot sin; also implied by the fact that God is the truth [John 14:6]). Tony believes in a radically libertarian view of free will for both "god" and humans, and uses this to defend his many absurdities.

Chapter 12:

Tony basically asserts that "god" created us evil and our environment evil. He attributes this view to Irenaeus, but he's not right about Irenaeus. Irenaeus was not saying that Adam and Eve were evil or that their environment was evil, but that they were immature because they were imperfect. But by *imperfect*, he did not mean evil or sinful, but that they were relatively perfect as only God is absolutely perfect.

Chapter 13:

Tony questions whether or not “god” intervenes in “his” creation. This is an astonishing assertion. We have already seen that God not only intervenes, but is in total control of His creation at all times.

Chapter 14:

Tony says that we should reject Gnosticism primarily because it so strongly deviates from the Judaism from which Christianity sprung, and yet Tony and PC radically deviate from that Judaism as well, as has been seen throughout this essay and as I show throughout my book.

Chapter 15:

Tony is very vague on the eternal state. He is open to universalism and overtly denies eternal torment. As we have seen, this is a repudiation of the biblical teaching on these points.

Chapter 16:

Tony denies the existence of demons. As we have seen, this is heretical.

Chapter 17:

Tony says that talk of heaven and hell is entirely speculation. Regarding hell, we have already seen that this is a heretical position. It is also heretical in regard to heaven (Isa 6; Matt 6:9; Luke 23:39-43; 2 Cor 12:1-6; 1 Thess 4:13-17; 2 Cor 5:1-9). This is also an overt denial of the authority of the Nicene Creed (see the section below on the Creeds).

Chapter 18:

Tony claims the only thing that is required to be a “Christian” is to confess that Jesus is Lord. There is no possible way to reconcile this with Scripture (I thoroughly dismantle any notion along these lines in my book).¹³

Chapter 19:

Tony reiterates his contention that all heaven/hell talk is pure speculation.

Tony adopts a very skeptical view of the faith and basically says that if we are wrong, no big deal. Paul taught otherwise (1 Cor 15:19).

Chapter 20:

Tony states that circumcision is barbaric. This directly impugns the character of God and therefore must be considered blasphemous and heretical by all true Christians.

Chapter 21:

Tony denies Foundationalism. While I strongly embrace foundationalist principles, one does not need to agree with me to be an orthodox Christian. With that said, Tony denies it in favor of total moral relativism, and that is indeed heretical as we have seen. He seeks to defend this by pointing to Quine, who says that human reasoning works like a web and not in a bottom-up kind of way (he also gives an extremely lame defense in *The New Christians*). Quine is certainly correct that humans receive information in a more web-like fashion. But, when we seek to test our beliefs in a robust fashion, this can and should be done in a bottom-up manner. I defend this in my book.¹⁴

#17 (*Did God Kill Jesus?*)

¹³ Jensen, 254-264.

¹⁴ Jensen, 97-124.

Chapter 1:

Tony rightly attacks pop-Evangelicalism in regard to its popular presentation of the atonement wherein the sweet “Jesus” appeases “his” vengeful “father” on our behalf. The major problem is that Tony over and over and over again in his writings and speaking engagements acts like this view is synonymous with the Historic Protestant position on PSA. This is not the case. Listen to what Berkhof has to say on this point:

It is sometimes represented as if the moving cause of the atonement lay in the sympathetic love of Christ for sinners. He was so good and loving that the very idea that sinners would be hopelessly lost, was abhorrent to Him. Therefore He offered Himself as a victim in their stead, paid the penalty by laying down His life for transgressors, and thus pacified an angry God. In some cases this view prompts men to laud Christ for His supreme self-sacrifice, but at the same time, to blame God for demanding and accepting such a price. In others it simply causes men to overlook God, and to sing the praises of Christ in unqualified terms. Such a representation is certainly all wrong, and often gives the opponents of the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement occasion to say that this doctrine presupposes a schism in the trinitarian life of God. On this view Christ apparently receives His due, but God is robbed of His honour. According to Scripture the moving cause of the atonement is found in the good pleasure of God to save sinners by a substitutionary atonement. Christ Himself is the fruit of this good pleasure of God....

The question may be raised, whether this good pleasure of God is to be regarded as an arbitrary will, or as a will that is rooted in the very nature of God and is in harmony with the divine perfections. It has been represented by Duns Scotus as if it were merely an arbitrary expression of the absolute sovereignty of God. But it is more in harmony with Scripture to say that the good pleasure of God to save sinners by a substitutionary atonement was founded in the love and justice of God. It was the love of God that provided a way of escape for lost sinners, John

3:16. And it was the justice of God which required that this way should be of such a nature as to meet the demands of the law, in order that God “might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus,” Rom. 3:26....

It is necessary to avoid all one-sidedness in this respect. If we represent the atonement as founded only in the righteousness and justice of God, we fail to do justice to the love of God as a moving cause of the atonement, and afford a pretext to those enemies of the satisfaction theory of the atonement who like to represent it as implying that God is a vindictive being, who is concerned only about His own honour. If, on the other hand, we consider the atonement purely as an expression of the love of God, we fail to do justice to the righteousness and veracity of God, and we reduce the sufferings and the death of Christ to an unexplained enigma. The fact that God gave up His only begotten Son to bitter sufferings and to a shameful death cannot be explained on the principle of His love only.¹⁵

Berkhof is not an anomaly here; he represents the thinking of all sound Traditional Evangelical theologians on this point.

With all that laid out, God does have wrath towards unbelievers and fear can be used in a biblically faithful manner to get our attention. And Jesus' blood is certainly on our hands and we are guilty before God and this should be a central part of any gospel presentation. Tony makes the common error of conflating the satisfaction theory of Anselm with PSA, and also makes the common error of acting like this theory was invented a thousand years ago and has no connection to the previous thousand years of church history. Anselm certainly brought about key development, but it is an absolute myth that the ransom theory did not contain the core elements of holiness; justice; wrath; satisfaction; and substitution. Listen to this quote from Augustine, a well-known advocate of the ransom theory:

¹⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, combined ed. with new preface (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 367-368.

So sin means a bad action deserving punishment, and death the consequence for sin. Christ has no sin, but He bore for our sakes sin in the sense of death as brought on human nature by sin. By Christ's taking our sin in this sense, its condemnation is our deliverance, while to remain in subjection to sin is to be condemned.¹⁶

Chapter 2:

Tony rightly makes the point that the Father and the Son are one, and so if Jesus voluntarily laid down His life (Mark 10 and John 10), then the Father must have been one in this as well. This has always been a core principle of PSA and therefore his comments here once again show his ignorance of historical theology. Tony claims that PSA would have been confounding to a second or third century Christian; this is highly misleading as we have seen. He claims that the early church had no definitive view of the atonement and no early Creed lays out a specific theory, therefore no one view can be considered heretical when it comes to the atonement. This again, is highly misleading. It assumes that church history alone is the arbiter of orthodoxy; it is not. Further, I agree that PSA should not be absolutely equated with orthodoxy. But what all true Christians have agreed upon is that the death of Christ saves us from the wrath of God. Yes, the mechanisms as to how that exactly worked have been debated. But that central truth has always been there and is presented in all the early Creeds. And it is this point that PC proponents most go after and call cosmic child abuse. Tony and many other PC advocates act like it is only PSA that presents the wrath of God element and this is not true.

Tony claims that the Gospel authors understood the atonement as the fulfillment of Passover, the author of Hebrews as a fulfillment of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), and

¹⁶ Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon* 14.3, in Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, 1st series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), quoted in Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004), 253.

Paul mixes them both up, which is allegedly bad. All of the sacrificial types are best fully explained by PSA.

Chapter 3:

Tony uses the common PC tactic that we should judge doctrine by its fruit from Matthew 7. There are multiple problems with this interpretation. Jesus is not saying judge doctrine, but judge prophets by their lifestyle. Further, the fruit of one's life is not judged by arbitrary Postmodern standards, but by following God's commands (John 15:9-10). The fact that PC so routinely engages in this type of eisegesis shows how heretical the movement truly is.

Tony claims that the early church was not known for being judgmental, but was known for how loving it was, so much so that the Roman Empire thought it was a sex cult. This entirely misses the point. Rome did not think the early church was so loving, they misinterpreted the early Christian movement in countless ways as do most people today. One of these ways was the usage of the phrase "brothers and sisters in Christ." Rome also thought that both Jews and Christians were far too narrow because of their strict Monotheism, and even called them "Atheists" based on this understanding. This says a lot about how we are often accused of being too narrow today.

Tony talks a lot about the diversity of the Bible and the diversity of interpretations of it today and throughout history. This proves nothing. People misinterpret documents all the time for their own ends. Many liberal Muslims twist the Koran in all sorts of ways. Sufi Muslims have bizarre interpretations of the Koran. None of this makes the Koran unclear. It is certainly wrong, but overall it is a fairly clear document. I was once witnessing to an LDS person and I was explaining to him all the historical problems with the Book of Mormon. He responded by telling me that he had no problem interpreting the document figuratively. I had to show him that the Book of Mormon itself does not give us that option and neither does the history of his church. Both the Book of Mormon and the legion of documents from his church's history are abundantly clear that the

Book of Mormon is to be read as a true account of history. He still wouldn't budge. But his intransigent stance in no way changes the perspicuity of the documents just cited. The same is true with the Bible.

Tony claims that "Jesus" is the ultimate revelation, but he doesn't believe much of what Jesus says (heaven; hell; the soul; the demons; to name a few as we have seen), especially Jesus' view of the Bible. Tony claims that the beauty of one's life is the ultimate test for doctrine, and this really is his ultimate hermeneutical grid. The problem is that my brother's life is beautiful. He is a decorated war hero, and he is a wonderful brother; son; friend; husband; and father. But, he's an Atheist. Thus, Tony's view is entirely subjective and that really is the point as it allows him to assert whatever he wants. Further, Tony and PC in general love to slander God's true church, both today and throughout its history, making the claim that it is not all that beautiful and therefore we should reject much of what it teaches. But, I have already answered this ploy in my book.¹⁷

Chapter 5:

Tony claims that Adam and Eve did not repent. It is plainly implied by Genesis that they did. He also says that no instructions were given to Cain and Abel regarding their offerings. Tony is making the mistake of assuming that because the Bible does not explicitly record something, this means that it never happened. Often things are implied. He constantly reads into the text what is not there. He says that both Cain and Abel brought sacrifices to "god" in a spirit of thanksgiving because after all they were "offerings." This is eisegesis and impugns the character of God, something Tony routinely seems to have no problem doing (remember "god" is arbitrary and can do absolutely anything, including rank absurdities). Cain was clearly going through the motions. It was technically an offering, but that doesn't mean he was truly thankful in his heart. The narrative clearly implies otherwise. And it is not inexplicable why God honored Abel's sacrifice, the text specifically says that Abel brought the best. Tony

¹⁷ Jensen, 172-173.

blasphemously says that arguably it was “god” who incited the murder of Abel because “he” chose Abel over Cain. And Tony also blasphemously impugns the character of God again in his overview of the Abraham/Isaac sacrifice story. He is truly a heretic.

Chapter 6:

Tony claims that child sacrifice is never condemned in the Bible because there are no explicit texts to that effect. This is such nonsense. The Bible condemns murder, praises having children (which is rooted in the creation command to have children), and nowhere commands child sacrifice (Abraham was a very unique situation). And it does, as Tony recognizes, vehemently condemn the practice of sacrificing them to other gods. Hence, the practice is condemned by OT law. And who was more kind to children than Jesus Himself? The idea that He would ever be ambiguous about child sacrifice is ridiculous. Now to be fair, I am sure Tony would agree with me regarding Jesus. He would argue that “Jesus” and the Bible are not the same thing. Such argumentation though, would be based on his extremely faulty view of inspiration that I refuted in my book.¹⁸ I am not implying that Jesus and the Bible are the same thing, they certainly are not. But they are always in line with each other because ultimately, Jesus as God inspired the Bible through His Spirit. Jesus would condemn child sacrifice, as I am sure Tony would concur, and therefore the Bible condemns it as well.

Tony claims that the OT has no doctrine of inherent sin, sin is only an action or inaction. We have already seen that this is not the case.

Chapter 7:

Tony claims that “Jesus” threw a fit in the temple when “he” overturned the tables. He often speaks irreverently like this, even about Jesus.

¹⁸ Jensen, 222-245.

Tony claims that no religion has been more violent in squashing dissenting voices than Christianity. This isn't true. The church has certainly had its moments, but a cursory reading of the history of Rome (the empire); Islam; the Aztecs; and Communism (as just a few examples); more than proves the point.

Tony repeatedly says that the Gospel authors are relatively silent about who's guilty for "Jesus's" death. This is ridiculous. While they do not explicitly say so, it is quite clear from the narrative that the Jewish leaders at that time were primarily responsible for Jesus' death. And Luke clearly had no problem pinning the blame on these Jewish leaders (Acts 3:15). This is in no way a justification for anti-semitism. If not for God's gracious hand, none of us would have been any different than these leaders. And it was these leaders, and not the general Jewish populace, that was primarily responsible. This does not mean that the Jews in general bore no responsibility for rejecting their Messiah. They certainly did. But it was the leadership that riled them up and had such a tyrannical grip on the people. Again though, the Bible is clear that no other people group would have been any different had God chosen them as His particular ethnic people.

Tony claims the Gospels have no clear theology on why "Jesus" died, but Paul allegedly does and his view is often not consonant with the Gospels (an odd thing to say if the Gospel authors had no concrete theology on this point). None of this is true.

Chapter 8:

Tony defines sin as frailty. We have already seen that this Pelagian tendency in Tony and the PC movement in general is decidedly heretical.

Tony adopts the view of NT Wright concerning Romans 3. Even if the narrative in question is referring to the mercy seat and not directly to the concept of God's wrath being appeased, there is still no question that Paul is presenting the doctrine that the cross saves us from the wrath of God (see the discussion on wrath above).

Tony claims that Paul in Romans 7-8 teaches that the cross was not about appeasing a wrathful “god,” but about conquering sin, which is endemic to humanity. But the idea that Romans 7-8 can be divorced from all that has preceded it is not tenable. Tony specifically says that Paul is saying “Jesus” did not die because we sinned, we are not the problem. Tony says “Christ” died because of the sin problem within us. Tony removes our guilt and God’s wrath towards that guilt, which utterly turns Romans on its head.

Tony makes the erroneous and nonsensical statement that the Gospel authors are almost completely uninterested in the meaning of the death of “Christ,” while Paul is almost entirely uninterested in the meaning of the life of “Christ.” Yet, Tony himself admits that the most time is spent in each Gospel on the death of Christ! Clearly they were focused on Christ’s death and therefore would of course be very interested in its meaning, but it was not their purpose to expound on that because Paul had already done so. And Paul did not need to overly focus upon the miracles of Christ because those would have already been thoroughly embedded in the consciousness of the church through oral tradition.

Tony points to Wright as making the point that in Paul’s thought the death of Christ is multi-faceted and is not only about substitution. This is such a complete misnomer as all orthodox theologians have always asserted the multifaceted nature of the atonement, including all advocates of PSA. This canard needs to stop.

Tony claims that the Gospels saw the cross solely through the lens of Passover, but this is not the case (Mark 10:45).

Chapter 9:

Tony constantly tries to create a gulf between Passover and the Day of Atonement, saying one is about deliverance and one is about payment of sin. But both are types of

Christ and the blood of Christ delivers us from the wrath of God *precisely* because it pays for our sins.

Tony claims that 1 Peter contradicts Hebrews; as usual PC advocates can find contradictions anywhere.

Tony again takes the position that sin is somehow distinct from humans. Tony says we inherit it and it besets us in frailty in some way, and that “god” directly vanquishes sin itself. He makes it sound like sin is a force and we are the innocent victims of it. His entire conception of sin is removed from any notion of God’s wrath towards us because of the sin within us. According to Tony, the sin within us is not really our fault. This is not the biblical doctrine.

Tony says that Revelation never refers to the sinfulness of humankind other than the opening line, which he implies was probably added later. This is nuts. He states that in Revelation the problem is not sin, but evil. Good grief; please read the entire book carefully. He says that Jesus’ death in Revelation frees us from the powers of evil and death. Correct, but it does so by paying for our sins!

Chapter 10:

This chapter does a better job of highlighting the differences between the satisfaction model and PSA, but Tony still basically equates them.

Chapter 11:

Tony claims that inherited guilt is nowhere to be found in Genesis 3, but he ignores the end of the chapter where that very notion is clearly propounded.

Tony greatly exaggerates the Neoplatonic influence upon Augustine. He makes it sound like Calvin’s doctrine of original sin was stronger than that of Luther; this is incorrect

(read *Bondage of the Will*). He says that Calvin taught original sin expunged the image of God in man; Calvin teaches no such thing. Tony states that Calvinists value the doctrine of the sovereignty of God more than any other; this is false and is a complete straw man. His representation of Calvinists on the sovereignty of God is entirely superficial. He again says that the EO view is that we only inherit death from Adam and not sinfulness; this again, is incorrect. The EO view is that we inherit both sinfulness and death, but not guilt. Tony is literally a walking robot of misrepresentations.

Chapter 12:

Tony's radical voluntarism comes through loud and clear once again with his straw man that PSA makes God subservient to justice that is above Him. God is His own justice. Tony is oblivious to classical Christian theism on the attributes of God.

Tony once again attacks pop-Evangelical, post-revivalist misunderstandings and misrepresentations of PSA as if they are the actual tenets of PSA. God is not disappointed in a literal sense, but is so anthropomorphically.

Tony claims that the advocates of PSA push violence because they support war, the death penalty, and torture. This is a monumental stretch and is overtly slanderous. We support just war in certain circumstances, the death penalty for murder (and some of us for a very limited number of other very heinous crimes, such as child rape), and only some support certain forms of torture and are very careful to articulate what they mean by that. Tony repeatedly chastises proponents of PSA in this chapter for cheapening and even implicitly questioning the love of God, but he openly questions the goodness of God in *Questions that Haunt*, as we have seen. The goodness of God flows from the love of God, so his entire system is woefully confused.

Tony misrepresents the Puritans. He has next to no knowledge of church history, especially historical theology.

Tony is highly critical of the fact that PSA does in fact teach that God ultimately saves us from Himself. But tribal leaders for centuries engaged in such practices. They upheld the laws of the tribe as that was the right thing to do and was in keeping with their inner sense of justice, but they would often pay the fee for a villager or would grant grace knowing that it would incur the wrath of the tribe or village. The analogy is not perfect as the laws of the tribe did not solely flow from the tribal leader. But, in the final analysis the villagers were often saved from the tribal leader by the tribal leader. God demands justice, and if He chooses to satisfy that justice Himself out of love, He is free to do so.

Chapter 13:

Tony implies that God having wrath makes Him a monster, and that the ransom theory does not do this. The problem is that at the root of the ransom theory is the wrath of God, as we have seen in Augustine. And who is he to say if “god” is a monster or not? According to his radical voluntarism, “god” can be a monster if “he” so chooses. So, from his paradigm he cannot refute PSA on those grounds even if it were true that PSA turns “god” into a monster.

Tony implies that PSA makes the Son and Spirit junior partners in the atonement and the resurrection of Christ an afterthought. The endless straw man arguments. We have already addressed this argument in regard to the resurrection of Christ. And how on earth PSA renders the Son a junior partner when He is the one paying for our sins on the cross is utterly beyond me. A thorough understanding of pneumatology also renders this accusation vacuous in regard to the Spirit.

Tony is highly skeptical of the spiritual realm, basically rejecting it because our world has allegedly moved beyond it. There is no way to reconcile such a stance with the biblical witness.

Tony states that in the ransom or victory model, Satan is equal to God; this is a gross misrepresentation of that position.

Tony claims that Satan at best plays a very minor role in the biblical drama. This is indefensible (Gen 3; Job 1; the temptation of Christ; the Lord's Prayer; the possession of Judas; the entire Book of Revelation; as a few examples).

Chapter 14:

Tony states that Abelard established Nominalism, which reigned throughout the Scholastic era. This is highly simplified and misleading. Whether or not Aquinas was a full-blown Nominalist is hotly debated. And Scotus was certainly no Nominalist.

Tony seems to equate the influence theory with the example theory. He recognizes that the theory of Abelard cannot be captured merely by calling it the example theory, but he doesn't seem to realize that the actual example theory was a real theory that came later.

Tony claims that Augustine was a proponent of the influence theory (or magnet theory as Tony calls it). This again, is highly, highly misleading. Augustine's view was highly multifaceted. Tony regularly accuses the orthodox of not being multifaceted enough, and yet he will turn around and critique the view of an orthodox theologian based upon only one facet of his position. Tony definitely conflates influence with example in his discussion on Socinus.

Tony often talks in his writings and speaking engagements about what modern people think; like; want; or are attracted to. But people today cannot be so flattened out any more than at any other time in history. Further, people like all sorts of things for all sorts of emotional reasons. What matters is what is actually true.

Chapter 15:

Tony claims that some Church Fathers believed that Jesus' divine nature left His human nature at the cross, but this was the view of certain heretics, especially the Adoptionists, and not the orthodox. Once again, Tony shows his ignorance of historical theology.

Chapter 17:

Tony states that the doctrine of Purgatory has been recently abandoned by the Catholic Church. Oh... my... WOW.... Tony literally can't help himself with his sloppiness. There has certainly been a shift in emphasis in Rome on this point, and many elements have been better clarified, but Purgatory remains a cardinal doctrine of the faith for Catholics. He then goes on to misrepresent the Catholic doctrine further by saying Purgatory was the mythical place Christians went to in order to work off their lesser sins.

Tony claims that "Jesus's" bones were broken on the cross in direct contradiction to the Bible.

Chapter 18:

Tony claims the doctrine of the Trinity states that God has always existed in three parts or persons. This is Partialism; how on earth does he not know this? See my essay on my website: "3 Key Examples of Tony's Misrepresentations." In it I make it clear why this is such a serious blunder on his part.

Tony basically makes it sound like "the father" and "the son" are two separate beings (Tritheism). He says that "Jesus" had autonomy from "the father" and "the father" basically backed off out of love so that "Jesus" could have this autonomy. Part of this autonomy was letting "his" "son" die without intervening in order to give "the son" "his" freedom. Tony pushes the biblical analogy of Father and Son way too far and makes it sound like a parent-child relationship where the parent frees the child at adulthood. This is radically unbiblical and ahistorical. Key passages in this regard are: John 5:19-47; 6:38; 8:28-29; 54; 10:17-18; Isaiah 53; John 3:16; and 2 Corinthians 5:20-21. Tony

made it out like I was misrepresenting him on this point in our debate. I have a full discussion of this in my full review of our debate, which is up on my website.

Chapter 19:

Tony claims that only the Nestorians or Church of the East don't accept Chalcedon today; this ignores Oriental Orthodoxy, among other groups. See the essay referenced above on the 3 key examples for a fuller discussion on this gross historical error.

This chapter is an absolute smorgasbord of heresy. Tony implies that people were saved apart from the cross. He says that "god" learned. He says that it's possible "god" didn't expect what would happen on the cross. He explicitly says "god" changed. He talks about how the OT allegedly seems to imply "god" often changed "his" mind. The first point is rank Pelagianism and is a denial of the entire NT. The second and third points represent a denial of the omniscience of God. This is heresy (Ps 147:5; 139:4; John 13:1-20; 1 John 3:20). The following points all deny the immutability of God and we have seen that this is heretical.

Tony says that "Jesus" did not require people to convert to "him" or pledge "him" fealty, and that "he" placed no preconditions on "his" disciples. This is wildly incorrect (Mark 1:14-15; 16-20; Matt 10:37-39; 16:5-12; Luke 13:1-5; John 3:16; 8:24; 31-32).

Tony states that "god" experienced Atheism on the cross. This is yet another example of Tony denying the unity of God, something that is counter to the Bible from beginning to end.

Chapter 20:

Tony states plainly that "god" did not kill "Jesus;" this is so unbelievably misleading. God did not directly kill Jesus or murder Him. But God did ultimately cause the death of

Christ to atone for our sins. To deny this is heresy and this is precisely what Tony and the PC movement have done. Tony further goes on to state unequivocally that “god” did not require the blood sacrifice of an innocent victim in order to atone for human sin. This is a denial of the entire biblical witness as well as two thousand years of church history. While all of the particulars of PSA were not fully hammered out until the Reformation, all orthodox theologians asserted that God required the blood sacrifice of His innocent Son to atone for our sins. Now, before the Reformation the majority view of orthodox theologians was that the sacrifice of Christ was not absolutely necessary for God to forgive our sins. They asserted that God ordained this as the fitting way to demonstrate His holiness and justice. But that is not what Tony and PC are teaching.

Tony again shows that he doesn't really see sin as guilt, but only as an ailment or disease and makes it sound like we aren't really culpable for it. He basically says that “Jesus” died for our sins because in “Jesus,” we see “him” overcome sin by rising from the dead and since we too will rise from the dead, we can overcome sin with this hope. The cross is ultimately about “god's” solidarity with us; through it we are never alone. This is a denial of Scripture. As we have seen, to in any way divorce the cross from the wrath of God is to cause the work of Christ to fall apart.

Chapter 21:

Tony talks a lot about how Bonhoeffer said that we should live as if “god” did not exist. This is blasphemous, but at least Tony does accurately represent the fact that Bonhoeffer is on his side, and not ours. I've grown so tired of the way in which my community has consistently misrepresented Bonhoeffer because he makes for such a great story. This is dishonesty and it needs to stop. In line with Bonhoeffer, Tony talks about the powerlessness and weakness of “god.” Again, these are heretical positions as we have seen.

Chapter 22:

Tony accurately makes the point that Jesus was marginalized and therefore we must also identify with the marginalized. This is true, but this is always presented with the implication that the only way to identify with the marginalized is to do so according to PC principles. Essentially, if we don't do it their way, we are not actually identifying with the marginalized.

Despite what Tony says, there is strong biblical precedent for political Christianity (Ps 33:12; Prov 14:34; 29:2; Isa 60:12). Now he is correct, and I made this point in our debate, this is never to degenerate into blind loyalty to any one party.

Chapter 23:

Tony claims that Jews substitute "*Jehovah*" for "*Yahweh*" when speaking the name of "god" aloud. This is incorrect and is yet another example of Tony's penchant for errors of basic fact. They use the terms *Adonai* or *Hashem* ("The Name").

Tony and the Early Creeds

Overview

It is very common for PC advocates to insist that they are not heretics because they adhere to the early Creeds. One also finds this approach to orthodoxy within much of the true church today, which is terribly unfortunate and problematic, something I have already detailed. Because of this approach to orthodoxy, many within the true church will strenuously disagree with PC, but will still say that we must accept them as our brothers and sisters in Christ. In this section, I wish to show why this is not the case at all. Now even if I were convinced that most of PC accepts the early Creeds materially, that would still not be enough for me to accept them as part of the true church.

Scripture, and not the Creeds, is the ultimate arbiter of orthodoxy, as I have already made clear. With that said, it is contrary to fact that most of PC fully adopts the early Creeds. This is because most (though certainly not all as in Borg, Crossan, and Spong)

accept the Creeds formally, but reject large portions of them materially. And that is certainly the case with Tony.

Before moving forward, it needs to be said that I will only be examining the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian Definition. This is because many in PC do not recognize the Athanasian Creed, even though many would not materially deny much of the theology contained within it. Many within PC only formally recognize the first two of these three Creeds. Others, while recognizing the first of these three, say that only the second is the standard for orthodoxy across the universal church.

Both the LDS church and the Jehovah's Witnesses could easily adopt the Apostles' Creed formally. This is because there is very little in that Creed that explicitly contradicts the theology of either of these false religions. And yet it is quite clear given the historical background of the Creed, that both of these religions do reject most of what is said in the Creed materially. Words can be ripped from their context and entirely divorced from their historical background. And that is the only way to make this Creed fit with either of those false religions.

The same basic principle applies to PC and all stripes of LP. No one is denying that many within PC, and LP more generally, formally adopt these three Creeds. But they interpret these Creeds, as they do the Bible, in ways that are at odds with the content of these Creeds from a historical vantage point. Below, I will point out all the ways that Tony materially denies large portions of these Creeds. I will quote a portion of the Creed in question, and then comment upon why Tony's theology represents a material denial of this portion of the Creed. All of these Creeds have been abbreviated in the headings below.

Apostles

"... [T]he Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth."

In the early church, God was robustly distinguished from His creation. The transcendence of God was the doctrine of the early church. And this statement reflects that belief. Therefore, the Creed implicitly denies all forms of Pantheism and Panentheism. We have seen that Tony embraces the latter and therefore he is not in line with this Creed at this point. Also, the vast majority of PC proponents gush over Richard Rohr, who is one of the most thoroughgoing Panentheists on the planet today. Hence, the PC movement as a whole also rejects this key tenet from the Apostles' Creed.

The term *almighty* was also used to designate God in all of His traditional attributes. As we have seen, Tony denies a number of these traditional attributes.

“... [C]onceived by the Holy Spirit... I believe in the Holy Spirit[.]”

As a “Christian” materialist, Tony by definition cannot believe in the Holy *Spirit*. Tony can argue all he wants that he merely has a different interpretation of that term than I do, but the early church certainly interpreted the term as referring to actual spirit.

Nicene

“... [T]he Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.”

All that was said above under the first quoted clause of the Apostles' Creed applies here.

“... God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made; of the same essence of the Father.”

It is very common for PC defenders to act like they are at liberty to pour into the term “*God*” content and meanings as they please. This is not so. The great men who penned this Creed plainly meant to convey that the God who is described here is the

unchangeable God of the OT, and that Jesus is this God along with His Father. But PC theologians often mock the God of the OT or say that He has changed from that epoch (as in the case of Tony). This is an overt material denial of this crucial section of the Creed.

Further, this section cannot be interpreted from a historical perspective as allowing for Partialism. We have seen that Tony makes light of this heresy, and therefore at the least Tony cannot give a hearty approbation to this section of the Creed.

“Through Him all things were made.”

All that was said in the first paragraph under the first quoted section of the Apostles’ Creed above applies here.

“... [H]e came down from heaven[.]”

As we have seen, Tony states that all talk of heaven and hell is mere speculation. Clearly the authors of this Creed disagreed.

“... [I]ncarnate by the Holy Spirit... we believe in the Holy Spirit[.]”

All that was said about the Spirit under the previous section applies here.

“... [A]ccording to the Scriptures.... He spoke through the prophets.”

These two statements reflect the belief of the early church in the full inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. This doctrine is universally denied or severely compromised by all stripes of LP in strong contradistinction to the historic church. Tony implicitly denies inerrancy throughout his works and he passionately denied it in our debate.

“He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.”

From a historical perspective, there is no way to reconcile this statement with any form of Partialism. Hence, what was said earlier in this essay about Partialism fully applies here as well.

Chalcedon

“... [O]f a reasonable soul and body[.]”

As we have seen, Tony denies the existence of the human soul, even going so far as to call himself a “Christian” materialist. This not only denies the souls of humans, but it denies the soul of Christ and thus His full humanity. It is a plain repudiation of this section of this Creed.

“... [A]s the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning Him”

This is an assertion of the full inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. Therefore, everything that was said in the previous section on this point applies here.

Summary of Tony’s Theology

Below is a basic summary of the theology of Tony based on all that we have seen.

Revelation and Scripture

“Jesus” is the center of revelation. It is unclear to me if Tony believes “Jesus” “himself” erred, but Tony clearly denies inerrancy. Because “god” changes, we can never be too dogmatic about anything in the Bible. Further, foundationalism is a myth, there is no concrete objective meaning behind the text. Thus, deconstruction is necessary. This is

why hermeneutics is primarily an art and not a science. The key to interpretation is beauty and what passes the smell test as to being beautiful or not. This ultimately is Tony's foundation for his thought and theology. He is not in his mind a hardline relativist and admits that Postmodernism can go too far, although he says that all dichotomies collapse in "god." He seems to adopt the early Creeds as a basis for historic orthodoxy, but materially denies many of the doctrines contained within them.

"God"

Tony adopts extreme voluntarism. He also denies many of the core attributes of God (the perfection of God; the goodness of God; the immutability of God; the wrath of God [says God probably had wrath at one time]; the incorporeality of God; the simplicity of God; the unity of God; the immortality of God; and the omniscience of God).

Tony embraces Panentheism. He says that "god" voluntarily limited "himself" with creation and became attached to creation in some sense. "God" embraces all of creation and therefore all dichotomies collapse in "god." "God" is in some paradoxical sense part of creation because "he" is in relationship with creation.

For Tony there was no real fall. The creation is ontologically basically the same today as it was at creation. He wholly embraces the secular theory of evolution, with most of its implications.

Tony does not believe in demons, and is unsure about Satan. If Satan does exist, he is not a very important part of the biblical drama. He says that demon possession was schizophrenia.

Tony believes in miracles, but is very skeptical of the supernatural, and he basically denies the providence of "god."

Tony sort of embraces "the Trinity," but makes light of Partialism.

Humankind

Tony adopts LGBT+ theology. This was made clear in our debate. He denies the human soul and says that he is a “Christian” materialist. He strongly rejects original sin. He describes our sinfulness as merely frailty, resulting from the fact that we are mortal and fallible. Sin is not really our fault, but is something that besets us from within. He does say we have a proclivity to sin, but lightens this as much as possible. He says that there was no ontological change in humankind as a result of the fall. Tony holds to a radical view of human freedom.

“Christ”

Tony sounds very, very Nestorian throughout his writings. This was confirmed in our debate. He says that the miracles of “Christ” were not intended to reveal “his” deity, but were only signs of the coming kingdom of peace and healing. But he does clearly believe in the physical resurrection. It is hard to say what he believes about the ascension.

Salvation

Tony is very opaque when it comes to this doctrine. There is no clear statement regarding justification by faith alone, although he did affirm it in our debate. Having said that, he does not have a historic understanding of the doctrine as he says in *American Gospel 2* that the gospel cannot be summarized in any fashion. He seems to deny the intermediate state by saying that any statements on heaven or hell are purely speculative. He basically holds to a revised version of the influence theory of the atonement.

Church

Tony Adopts a very simplified relational ecclesiology that is heavily reliant on Postmodern concerns. He is generally opposed to the institutional and governmental aspects of the church.

End Times

He seems to believe in the final resurrection and our being with “god” forever on the new earth. But, he seems to lean in a universalist direction.

“Christian” Ethics

Mostly adopts leftist ethics, but it is hard to say if he is fully pro-choice or not.

List of Tony’s Heresies

Below is a list of Tony’s heresies.

- 1.) Denies Inerrancy
- 2.) Denies Almost any Objectivity to Hermeneutics
- 3.) Adopts Extreme Voluntarism
- 4.) Denies Fundamental Attributes of God (Incorporeality; Eternality; Perfection; Goodness; Immutability; Wrath; Simplicity; Unity; Immortality; and Omniscience)
- 5.) Embraces Panentheism
- 6.) Denies the Fall
- 7.) Almost Fully Embraces Secular Evolution
- 8.) Makes Light of Partialism
- 9.) Denies the Human Soul
- 10.) Denies Immutable Gender
- 11.) Denies Original Sin
- 12.) Sounds Very Nestorian
- 13.) Functionally Denies Justification by Faith Alone

- 14.) Seems to Deny the Intermediate State
- 15.) Embraces a Revised Influence Theory of the Atonement
- 16.) Adopts LGBT+ Theology

List of Tony's Blatant Errors of Fact, Misrepresentations, and Straw Man Arguments

Below is a list of Tony's blatant errors of fact, misrepresentations, and straw man arguments. Much of what I have said in this essay is my interpretation of the data. This does not mean that I am uncertain regarding many of my conclusions. I am certain regarding many of them. However, not all scholars would agree with all of my conclusions. For example, many would not hold to my definition of *heresy*, and therefore would not agree with my list above. With the list below, the overwhelming vast majority of scholars would agree with each of these points, and with some of these points, not a single credible scholar would disagree with me (#'s 3; 5; 8; 22-25).

- 1.) Says that Plato invented the idea of perfection.
- 2.) Says that Plato was baptized into the church by Augustine and Aquinas.
- 3.) Says that cessationism teaches that the gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased with the Apostolic Age.
- 4.) Says that voluntarism is the classical Platonic-Aristotelian position.
- 5.) Says that Aquinas was a voluntarist.
- 6.) Seems to say that the traditional position of the church was that the deity of "Christ" became the soul of "Christ." But this is Apollinarianism.
- 7.) Consistently misrepresents essentialism.
- 8.) Consistently misrepresents EO on original sin.
- 9.) Misrepresents the Reformed doctrine of total depravity.
- 10.) Says that Irenaeus taught that God created us and our environment evil.
- 11.) Says that no religion has been more violent in squashing dissenting voices than Christianity.
- 12.) Makes it out like PSA advocates don't recognize the multifaceted nature of the atonement.

- 13.) Says that the Book of Revelation never refers to the sinfulness of humankind other than the opening line, which was allegedly probably added later.
- 14.) Says Calvinists value the sovereignty of God above all other doctrines.
- 15.) Says that the advocates of PSA support violence because they support war, the death penalty, and torture.
- 16.) Says that the ransom theory does not include the wrath of God.
- 17.) Says that PSA makes the Son and the Spirit junior partners in the atonement, and the resurrection an afterthought.
- 18.) Says that in the ransom theory, Satan is equal to God.
- 19.) Says that Satan plays at best a minimal role in the biblical drama.
- 20.) Says Nominalism reigned throughout the Medieval Era.
- 21.) Says that some Church Fathers believed that “Jesus’s” divine nature left “him” at the cross.
- 22.) Says Purgatory has been abandoned by the Catholic Church.
- 23.) Implies that the historic doctrine of the Trinity allows for Partialism.
- 24.) Says that only the Church of the East does not accept Chalcedon today.
- 25.) Says that Jews substitute “*Jehovah*” for “*Yahweh*” when speaking the name of “god” aloud.

Concluding Thoughts

Tony may indeed be a good guy overall. I’m inclined to believe that he is, although I do admit that I lost a lot of respect for him after our debate and the events that took place after the debate. With that made clear, Tony is unquestionably heretical and a very sloppy theologian.