

Did Jesus Suffer Spiritual Contamination on the Cross?

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Matthew 27:46 records the words of Jesus while He was hanging on the cross: "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What are the implications behind Jesus' question and why did the Father's separate Himself from the Son while He was bearing the sins of the world? Some suggest and teach that Jesus became spiritually defiled and corrupt, while passing through the realm of spiritual death or separation from God, as He hung on the cross bearing the sins of mankind. For this reason, the Father had to turn away from His Son and forsake Him. Is this what really happened when Jesus was on the cross? Did Jesus actually become defiled with the sins of other sinners? What are the theological repercussions if Jesus became spiritually corrupted and defiled when the sins of the world were transferred to Him? Let's investigate this matter and find out what God's Word teaches.

Of course, it's not my intent in this study to divide the sacrificial death of Christ into a spiritual and physical matter, since the two work harmoniously together and reveal what it means to experience spiritual separation from God. My goal is to make some clarifying points about Christ's death in relationship to His spiritual essence, nature, or being. As always, we must be careful we do not emphasize one truth at the expense of another. My goal is never to do this. When studying this great topic, I revert back to Romans 11:33!

Jesus Is the Same

The word "forsaken" (Matt. 27:46) indicates that the Father separated Himself from His Son while He was bearing the sins of the world. But what kind of separation was it? One thing is certain; this was not a separation from the Father because Christ's very essence or inner nature and being (His spirit) had become defiled and corrupted by sin. This is because Jesus cannot change in His inner being and character and cease from being the eternal, unchanging, and holy God. Hebrews 13:8 declares that "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever."

“Yesterday, today, forever, Jesus is the same.
All may change, but Jesus never! Glory to His Name!
Glory to His Name! Glory to His Name!
All may change, but Jesus never! Glory to His Name!”

In regards to His eternal being and essential character, Jesus can never change. Therefore, the separation that Jesus experienced from the Father had nothing to do with an internal change in Christ’s perfection and holiness. It was not a separation caused by Jesus’ inner defilement. The separation that Jesus experienced with the Father while hanging on the cross was a *relational* separation – not a separation based upon Christ’s own spiritual defilement. This separation occurred because Christ’s was bearing the judicial (legal) judgment for sin and sinners. It was a filial or personal separation that Jesus sensed when His communion and fellowship was broken from the Father. When Christ was forsaken by the Father this separation was not due to any change in Christ’s spiritual nature, His internal essence, being, or substance. Christ did NOT in any sense or degree cease to exist as the unchangeable and immutable God. While on the cross He continued to be coequal in respect to the triune nature of God (1 John 5:7) sharing God’s unchanging nature of impeccable purity and holiness with the Father (Isaiah 6:1-5).

“Holy, Holy, Holy! Tho the darkness hide Thee,
Tho the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see,
Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee.
Perfect in power, in love and purity!”

A Lamb Without Blemish!

We must understand that Jesus in those dark hours, when He bore the sins and judgment of the world, did not become a sinful sacrifice. Our sins were laid *on* Him but not *in* Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21 declares, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” This expression “made to be sin” means that Jesus became our sacrifice for sin in a *judicial* way – not in a *literal* way. This means that God’s judgment and justice was placed on Christ instead of sinners. Sin and the judgment of God was *legally* transferred to Christ as He hung on the cross allowing Him to suffer in our place. However, Jesus did not become sinful in His internal being or nature while hanging

on the cross, since He is God. Jesus was “made” or became the sinner’s sacrifice and was judged in the sinner’s place but He was not *literally* “made” sin in His inner being and nature. The Scriptures never once speak of Christ experiencing defilement while hanging on the cross. It’s erroneous to conclude that Jesus changed His internal being or nature as God while hanging on the cross and asserting that He did speaks volumes against the nature of Christ’s death on the sinner’s behalf.

When Jesus hung on the cross, He was the “Lamb without blemish and without spot” from start to finish (1 Pet. 1:19). He was “a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling saviour” (Eph. 5:2). Hebrews 9:14 says, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God.” Jesus suffered “as the “righteous servant” (Isa. 53:10-11).

“Guilty vile and helpless we,
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full atonement! Can it be?
Hallelujah, what a Savior!”

A Sinful or Sinner’s Sacrifice

On the cross the Father was pleased with His son but He was not pleased with the sin that was legally transferred to His Son!

Psalm 22:24 prophetically reveals this about Jesus upon the cross:

“For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.”

This reminds us that the Father did not despise or forsake the actual person of the Son when He became the sin offering or sin bearer of the world. This means that Christ continued to share with the Father the same, unchangeable existence and nature of God. The reason the Father turned His eyes away from the Son was because Jesus became the legal sin offering that was bearing the awful weight of sin. We must remember that sin was NOT imputed to Christ’s *spirit* (spiritual nature) but to Christ’s *account* in a legal sense. This means that Jesus remained holy in His inner being and nature and this is why the Father could accept His Son’s sacrifice as sufficient payment for our sins (“the propitiation for our sins” - 1

John 2:1-2). God was satisfied with the sacrifice of Christ because He was without sin and bore the penalty of sinners.

On the cross Jesus became a substitutionary sacrifice (not a sinful sacrifice) for our sins bearing the judicial punishment for these sins. Jesus died as our Substitute but this does not mean He became a sinner to qualify as our Substitute. *Jesus was the sinner's sacrifice but He was not a sinful sacrifice.* To conclude that Jesus actually became sinful in His inner being or nature and that He died spiritually while hanging on the cross, divides the Godhead and has serious repercussions for our salvation. How can a sinful sacrifice save us? How can one sinner save another sinner? How could Jesus die spiritually and become part of the sinful depravity within the human race if He was the eternal and unchanging God?

Hebrews 2:14

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.”

Yes, Jesus “took part of the same” but this is not referring to Christ becoming an actual sinner while hanging on the cross, but being supernaturally, virgin-born into Adam’s race, as the God-man, so He might die the sinner’s death, satisfy the justice of God, and destroy the authority that the devil had to keep men in the realm of spiritual death for their sin (Rev. 1:18). This is why we glory in the cross!

“In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o’er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.”

Spiritual or Physical Death

Jesus did not die spiritually in reference to His unchanging nature and eternal being and character as God when He was on the cross. First, if Jesus died in the realm of His own spirit, it would mean that sin was transferred to the realm of His spirit and that He became a sinner like you and me. It would mean that a sinful man would be trying to save sinful men instead of God saving man! Second, it would also mean that God could never be satisfied with His Son’s sacrifice

because it became spiritually defiled, unholy, and blemished. It would mean that God could not accept the sacrifice of His Son as sufficient payment for our sins.

We must remember that God can only accept a perfect sacrifice, not a spiritually deficient and defiled sacrifice. This concept of sacrificial purity was prefigured in all the Old Testament sacrifices (Exodus 12:5; Malachi 1:8) and was carried through to Christ's final sacrifice (1 Peter 1:18-19). Third, if Jesus died spiritually, it would indicate that He became lost and needed to be born again (John 3:3) and saved by His own sacrifice! Fourth, it would actually mean that Jesus would become a lost sinner instead of a holy Savior!

No, the inner nature and very essence of Christ's being can NEVER change. Malachi 3:6 states: "For I *am* the Lord, I change not." Jesus did NOT change on the cross in His essential being or nature. He remained undefiled (Heb. 7:26). There is a vast difference between a *sin offering* and a *sinful offering*. Jesus could become a sin offering (Isa. 53:10) without receiving a sinful nature. If Jesus became literal sin upon the cross, then God Himself became sinful in His nature, being, and existence.

Ontologically (relating to His physical being or existence) Jesus died upon the cross, but He did not die spiritually in the sense that His inner being was defiled and corrupted with sin. Our dreadful sins were transferred upon a sinless Christ so that we, the lost sinners, could be saved spiritually. We are the sinners (Eph. 2:1-2) – not Christ! 1 Peter 3:18 reminds us: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh (not the spirit), but quickened by the Spirit."

1 Peter 4:1 also states:

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh (not His spirit), arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin."

Our sins were transferred upon Christ without polluting His eternal and unblemished spirit. This means that Christ experienced physical death on the cross as a result of God's wrath and judgment being poured upon His beloved Son (Matt. 3:17).

The payment for sin was not based upon Christ sharing in man's actual sinfulness and depravity within His inner being. In His suffering Christ experienced spiritual *separation* from God but not spiritual *defilement* before God. Our sins were laid upon Him (Isa. 53:6) judicially but they did not become part of Christ's nature and being. Christ bore man's sins but He did not take on man's sinfulness. The Bible is clear on this matter. Christ experienced the *effects* of spiritual death on the cross but not a change in His inner, spiritual, and flawless *essence* or nature, while hanging on the cross.

Hebrews 10:10

"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ (not the defiled spirit of Jesus Christ) once for all."

1 Peter 2:24 also declares:

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body (not in his spirit) on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."

William MacDonald concurs:

"We must beware of any idea that on the cross of Calvary the Lord Jesus Christ actually became *sinful* in Himself. Such an idea is false. Our sins were placed *on* Him, but they were not *in* Him. What happened is that God made Him to be a sin-offering on our behalf. Trusting in Him, we are reckoned righteous by God. The claims of the law have been fully satisfied by our Substitute."

Christ suffering, His shed blood and sacrificial physical death was the sufficient payment that satisfied the Father, so the human race might be ransomed and redeemed from the penalty and power of their sins. Of course, this does not mean that Jesus did not experience the *effects* of spiritual death in His physical and emotional suffering, while hanging on the cross. He experienced our judgment and hell in every way - physically, emotionally, relationally, mentally, and spiritually. It was a terrible, dreadful, and agonizing ordeal for the Son of God.

"Upon a life I did not live,
Upon a death I did not die,
Another's life, Another's death,
I stake my whole eternity."

Separation and Hell

The truth is this; Jesus was not separated from the Father because He became sinful in His inner being and nature while hanging on the cross. A thousand times no! The Father had to separate Himself from the Son because the sins of the entire world were laid upon Jesus in a *legal* or *judicial* sense. Jesus was judicially, legally, physically, relationally, and spiritually judged on the cross. His body not only experienced intense pain and physical needs, such as thirst and hunger, the realm of His spirit and soul also suffered emotionally and painfully, as He experienced abandonment, loneliness, and separation from the Father. All of these various aspects of suffering include separation from God which is essentially a spiritual judgment (“the wages of sin is death” - Rom. 6:23).

Jesus experienced a slow death that resulted in both physical pain as well as mental and emotional anguish. Jesus experienced pain, thirst, and the emotional and mental stress of abandonment while hanging on the cross. All of these things represent spiritual separation from God in hell (Luke 16). In other words, Jesus experienced the penalty that was related to being spiritually lost and separated from God, while the wages of our own sins were judicially assigned to Him. He experienced the *spiritual* aspects of being separated from God which would include the physical aspects of pain and agony and also the mental and emotional pains associated with separation from God.

Of course, it’s one thing for Christ to experience the *effects* of being separated from God, while hanging on the cross and incurring God’s wrath, but quite another to claim that Christ experienced actual spiritual defilement and death in relation to His own spirit. In short, Jesus could not inherit a sinful nature or become defiled by sin in any manner, while hanging on the cross, since He is God and cannot change in His purity and person.

If Jesus died spiritually on the cross, in relation to His eternal existence as God, changing His impeccable nature as God, then we are all going to hell! The Bible teaches that Jesus died and suffered separation from God, but sin was not transferred to His impeccable nature. The payment for sin speaks of the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross which is rooted in His spiritual separation from the Father (1 Pet. 2:24). While Christ suffered on the cross He passed through the pangs of separation from God which were essentially the *effects* of spiritual death (physical, emotional anguish, thirst, loneliness, etc.). In those dark and lonely

hours Jesus passed through the realm of spiritual death by experiencing separation and punishment from God, which is the penalty for our sins. "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). What a wonderful Savior! Christ experienced separation from God on our behalf. He passed through the physical and spiritual anguish of what it means to be spiritually lost, without God, and without salvation or eternal life. To be specific, Jesus suffered hell in our place and this can be defined as:

- ✓ Separation from God = hell
- ✓ Punishment and Pain = hell
- ✓ Thirst = hell
- ✓ Mental and Emotional Stress = hell
- ✓ Loneliness = hell
- ✓ Abandonment = hell
- ✓ Wrath of God = hell.

Christ experienced all of these things for us on the cross. He took our hell so we don't have to go to hell! My sin demanded hell and on Him the judgment fell. Jesus suffered the physical, mental, and emotional pangs of spiritual death while hanging on the cross without His spirit (inner nature or being) becoming polluted or contaminated by sin. Once again, Christ experienced the *effects* which are related to spiritual death (physical, mental, and emotional aspects of separation from God), while hanging on the cross, but not a change in His eternal *essence* (His nature and moral likeness as God). Christ remained without sin on the cross (His eternal spirit was not polluted with sin) even when our sins were poured upon Him.

Thomas Watson said:

"God cannot have more holiness, because He is perfectly holy; so He cannot have less holiness, because He is unchangeably holy."

It is best to conclude that our salvation is based upon the substitutionary and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:3) which means that Jesus suffered the exacting penalty for our sins (experiencing spiritual separation from the Father's presence) and then died in answer to God's requirement for sin. As our substitute, He died in our place ("the ungodly" - Rom. 5:8), which means He bore the penalty or wages for our sins (Rom. 6:23). This means He passed through the *experience*

of spiritual death, which is separation from God, suffering physically and spiritually in relation to His soul and spirit, and then died on the cross in fulfillment of God's age-old requirement for sin (Gen. 3:21). We must remember that physical death was always viewed as part of the substitution and was necessary and important to God.

The physical death of an animal on the behalf of its offerer (Lev. 3:1-2) painted the enduring picture and principle that sacrificial death was necessary to meet God's requirement for sin. If there was no death then no offering could be made. The offering included physical death and this type of death taught that the animal would take the place of the offerer and experience God's wrath in the sinner's place. The same was true of Christ (Heb. 7:27; 9:14). Christ's physical death means that He had taken the place of the sinner and died, indicating that the full measure and weight of God's wrath was carried out on Him, while hanging on the cross. Christ died for me. This simply means Christ passed through God's judgment on the cross, a judgment that included physical, mental, emotional, and relational separation from the Father, which ended in death. The sacrifice was not complete without Christ's physical death. God also demanded physical death. This was witnessed throughout history with the brazen altar, the deaths of millions of animals, the sprinkling of the blood. The need for physical death culminated with the everlasting covenant and the shed blood of Jesus Christ (Matt. 26:28) when He died on the cross and "tasted death for every man" (Heb. 2:9).

Of course, the Bible passages that speak of the death of Jesus Christ are a reference to His physical death (Isa. 53:12, 1 Cor. 15:3, Rom. 5:6, 8; 8:34; 14:9; etc.). Most expositors of the Bible have consistently taken these references to mean Christ's physical death on the cross. However, Christ's physical death on the cross portrays and presupposes that the ransom was paid in full measure, while He was hanging on the cross, a ransom that consisted of a time of spiritual separation from the Father's presence. It was a time of intense physical and emotional suffering, which ultimately ended with Christ's physical death, completing the duration of time when Christ was bearing the weight of sin's debt and penalty (Heb. 10:14).

Heaven sings, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!" The word "slain" speaks of physical death and includes the message and meaning of the sacrificial death that Jesus passed through, while experiencing separation from God on the cross. Jesus

suffered the pangs of spiritual separation from God which came to an end with His own physical death, fully meeting God's requirement for sin. The death of the Lamb speaks of the total sacrifice of the Lamb which was made for sin and the sinner in every conceivable way – physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually (1 Peter 1:18-19). The physical death of Jesus Christ means that the final demand for sin was met, which included not only intense physical punishment but also the spiritual anguish of being separated from God. It means that Jesus paid the sinner's fine in total, experiencing the effects of spiritual separation from God, while hanging on the cross, which included not only physical punishment for sin but great emotional loneliness, distress, and anguish related to being separated from the Father.

“Precious Lamb of Glory
Love's most wondrous story.
Heart of God's redemption of man.
Worship the Lamb of Glory!”

“Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3). Blessed noontide truth! For the sake of emphasis and without trying to be redundant, this means Christ shed His blood and physically died for us proving He had taken the sinner's place and paid the sinner's fine (the judgment of God). His physical dying and ultimate death on the cross reassure us that He passed through the full measure of God's judgment and wrath. Christ died for us by experiencing spiritual separation from God in every conceivable way, while remaining holy in His inner being and nature. Christ died a sacrificial death for us which means that He was treated as if He were the sinner, bearing Himself the wrath against sin that we deserved, putting Himself in our place as our Substitute.

In summary, Christ's physical death (“Christ died for us”) teaches the entire lesson of substitution, how Christ was separated from the Father's presence, experiencing both physical agonies and emotional anguish on the cross. Yes, Christ did pass through the realm of spiritual death in His experience but not in relation to His inner essence of being or eternal nature and moral likeness to God. The spiritual separation that Christ encountered from the Father while hanging on the cross had nothing to do with defiling His inner spirit or being.

Christ dying on the cross was the proof that sin's penalty was *being* paid and His actual death (Heb. 2:9) proves that it was *fully, finally, and forever* paid. It's the physical death of Christ that tells the old, old, story of substitution and all that was involved with it, both physical suffering and spiritual anguish, while Christ was separated from the Father. Christ's words ("It is finished" - John 19:30) were spoken in anticipation of His physical death and bringing an end to the payment for sin (Heb. 10:26). These words of victory ("It is finished") convey that the final demand for sin was met. They instruct us that Jesus paid the sinner's fine in total, as He experienced both the physical pain and suffering and spiritual anguish (mental and emotional agony, loneliness, dread and fear) of being separated from God the Father, while hanging on the cross. In paying sin's debt, Jesus suffered in every way, experiencing the full weight of what the sinner should have experienced, and then expired. It truly was finished!

"Dying for me, dying for me,
There on the cross He was dying for me;
Now in His death my redemption I see,
All because Jesus was dying for me."

A Scandalous Cross

To be sure, Jesus did experience a spiritual death or separation from the Father when hanging on the cross, but He did not experience spiritual corruption in His inner being, since the eternal God can never change (Mal. 3:6). If Christ became spiritually corrupt or defiled with sin in His inner nature and being, then He could not be God, since God never changes in relationship to His person. God could not cease from being pure and holy (Isa. 6:1-3). Furthermore, Jesus could not provide us with salvation since God demands a perfect sacrifice (not a sinful sacrifice). If Christ *literally* became sinful or *spiritually polluted and defiled* by our sins when hanging on the cross, then the whole plan of salvation is debunked or exposed as false. If Jesus died spiritually in relation to His eternal being and nature, changing His impeccable nature as God, then we are all going to hell! The Bible teaches that He passed through the experience of spiritual death; however, during this time sin was not literally transferred to His nature.

We must once again remember that Christ experienced the *effects* of spiritual death on the cross but He did not experience any change in relation to His inner, spiritual *essence*, or moral nature and likeness as God. Christ's spirit never died

and became separated from the Father because of the corruption and contamination of sin, since sin was only transferred to Him judicially. Christ's spirit did not become like our own human spirit, which is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), since this would change His eternal nature and character as God.

The necessary payment for sin included Christ's spiritual purity (1 Pet. 1:19; Heb. 9:14) which directly coincides with His deity (John 1:1). Christ's perfect deity must be maintained for our salvation to be effective. In fact, Christ's *purity* in His death is as important as Christ's *bodily* resurrection from the grave (1 Cor. 15). If we take away these foundational truths which are related to the Gospel (Christ's impeccability in death and resurrection) the whole plan of salvation becomes scandalous. The scandal of the cross would include a Christ that ceased from being God, a Christ that became another sinner in Adam's race, a spiritually defiled and dead Christ that needed to be born again, a Savior who needs a Savior, and sinners who have no hope. Thank God it's not true!

But others have created a scandal around the cross by undermining Christ's person, purity and precious sacrifice as the sufficient payment for our sins. Some would-be preachers claim Jesus died spiritually by incurring a sin nature, that He was overtaken by Satan, became lost, and needed to reborn again in order to redeem us.

Kenneth Hagin said:

"He (Jesus) tasted spiritual death for every man. And His spirit and inner man went to hell in my place. Can't you see that? Physical death wouldn't remove your sins. He tasted death for every man. He's talking about tasting spiritual death."

Kenneth Copeland made this outlandish claim:

"Since Jesus was made to be sin, He had to pay the penalty for sin. He had to die spiritually, which took him into the regions of the damned, before He could redeem us."

Paul Billheimer adds:

"It was not sufficient for Christ to offer up only His physical life on the cross. His pure spirit had to 'descend' into hell...The Father turned Him over, not only to the agony and death of Calvary, but to the satanic torturers of His pure spirit as part of the just dessert of the sin of all the race. As long as Christ was the 'essence of

sin' he was at Satan's mercy in that place of torment. While Christ identified with sin, Satan and the hosts of hell ruled over Him as over any lost sinner. During the seemingly endless age in the nether abyss of death, Satan did with Him as he would, and all hell was in carnival."

Benny Hinn also supposedly received some revelation on the rebirth of Jesus while in hell: "My, you know, whoosh! The Holy Ghost is just showing me some stuff. I'm getting dizzy! I'm telling you the truth-it's just heavy on me now...Do you know what the word begotten means: It means to be reborn. Do you want another shocker? Have you been begotten? So was He (Christ). You say, "What are you talking about?" ... He was reborn. He had to be reborn. If He was not reborn I could not be reborn. Jesus was born again."

These are blasphemous statements that undermine both the person and work of Jesus Christ. They scandalize the cross instead of causing us to glory in the cross. The payment that was necessary so we might be redeemed to God was the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:10) – not His alleged rebirth in hell. When Jesus died on the cross He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). This means He was not lost, damned, and reborn again. The sacrifice was all that God required for our redemption. Jesus did not have to pass through anything else to secure our redemption. Jesus paid it all on the cross!

"Jesus paid it all
All to Him I owe,
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow."

Once again, Christ passed through the experiential *pangs* of spiritual death, suffering the physical, mental, and emotional aspects related to spiritual death, while hanging on the cross as our sinless Substitute. However, Jesus did not become *defiled* by spiritual death or separation from God and change who He was – the eternal, immutable, and unchanging God. The Bible teaches that God NEVER changes in respect to His character and person (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Isaiah 46:9-11; Ezekiel 24:14; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). This means Jesus could not become defiled on the cross with our sins since He is God and never changes (Hebrews 13:8).

To state it simply, Jesus bore our sin and hell as the substitutionary sacrifice; however, Jesus could NEVER become spiritually defiled and dead in His inner spirit while hanging on the cross. Christ could NEVER change His existence and nature as the everlasting God (Ps. 90:2; Heb. 1:8). Therefore, Christ did not pass through spiritual death in His inner being and nature on the cross, but He experienced the *results* or *effects* of spiritual death or separation from God (pain, agony, thirst, loneliness, abandonment, mental anguish, dread, a broken spirit) while taking our place on the cross. He experienced the physical punishment and judgment associated with our sins as well as the emotional sorrow of being separated from God.

“Was it for crimes that I have done,
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! Grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!”

A Time of Darkness

Matthew 27:45

“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.”

The wonder of the ages is what Christ experienced while hanging on the cross during these three dreadful hours. He cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). On the cross Jesus did experience a personal separation from the Father. Jesus for three hours ceased to know the intimacy of fellowship He previously had with His heavenly Father, just as a child can cease for a time to have intimate, normal, loving fellowship with his human father. At the end of this period of darkness, Jesus spoke about the separation from the Father, which He had experienced, or encountered, during the hours of blackness. Jesus cried out in anguish because of this heart wrenching separation He had experienced from His heavenly Father.

“None of the ransomed ever knew,
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through,
Ere He found that sheep that was lost.”

For the very first time, Jesus sensed a separation from the Father that was eternally shared within the triune makeup and relationship of the Godhead. Of course, it would be the only time in all of eternity that this separation would be experienced. We must also note that this is the only time we have recorded in Scripture that Jesus did not address God as Father (“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”). This is because His relationship with the Father was momentarily strained and removed. However, it’s theologically important to understand that Christ’s being and nature as the eternal and unchanging God did not change in any way (Malachi 3:6). Nevertheless, the feeling of being alone and abandoned was the greatest agony that Christ faced on the cross. There was darkness around, darkness within, but worst of all, there was darkness above, seeing that the Father’s face was hid from Him. It was a time of physical darkness in the land but it was a dark and dreadful time for the Son. He was all alone!

“Alone alone, He bore it all alone.
He suffered, bled and died, alone, alone.”

In this time of darkness Jesus could feel the awful separation that occurred between Himself and the Father. Jesus felt that He was pushed away from the Father into a desolate and dark forest. It was the black midnight of the Son’s separation. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

The Cup

Because the Son had taken sin upon Himself, the Father turned His back on His Son and Jesus felt a separation from the Father’s intimate communion and fellowship. This is the real “cup” that Jesus asked to be removed from him while He was in the garden (Matt. 26:39). In Luke 22:41-42 we read: “And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” It was not Christ’s physical suffering that loomed over His soul, but His mental anguish and suffering of heart that He would encounter, when being separated from the Father’s fellowship. Christ’s greatest agony was not physical, it was rather the agony of His soul, as He contemplated separation from His Father while bearing the sins of the world.

“Death and the curse were in that cup,
O Christ, 'twas full for Thee;
But Thou hast drained the last dark dregs,
'Tis empty now for me.”

This mystery of the Father’s separation from the Son is so great and impossible to fully comprehend that it is not surprising that Martin Luther is said to have gone into seclusion for a long time trying to understand it, and came away as confused, as when he began. In some way, and by some means, in the secrets of divine sovereignty and omniscience, the God-Man (Jesus Christ) was separated from God the Father for a brief time at Calvary, as the furious wrath of the Father was poured out on the sinless Son, who in matchless grace became the sinner’s sacrifice (not sinful sacrifice) when tasting death for every man (Heb. 2:9). In those hours of darkness, Jesus sensed a real separation from the Father, which he had never previously known nor would ever know again. The Father turned His face from His beloved Son (John 3:16) while Jesus was being judged for our sins. A mysterious and yet very real separation occurred between the members of the Godhead in those three long hours while Jesus was being legally judged for our sins.

Can we fully understand the Son’s feelings at this time? Will we ever grasp what the Son went through when the perfect Father forsook the perfect Son because of the transfer of sin to His account? We will never begin to understand the depths of woe and sorrow the Son passed through. How awful the torment must have been for the Son to know that the Father had turned away from Him!

“The scourge, the thorns, the deep disgrace,
These Thou couldst bear nor once repine;
But when Jehovah veiled His face,
Unutterable pangs were Thine.”

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Once again, the darkness over the land tells the never-ending story of how God the Father could not look upon the Son in those hours when He judicially or legally bore the sinful weight of humanity (Hab. 1:13). The darkness told the dreadful story of how the Son was separated from the Father’s fellowship and intimate communion. The Father withdrew communion from the Son and Jesus sensed a separation from the Father He had never experienced in eternity past. Christ in those hours of

darkness was experiencing the total abandonment and crushing despair from being separated from the Father, as God poured His divine justice and wrath on Him as the sin-bearer. Think of it, when God, as the Judge, poured our sins upon His Son, He had to look away and temporarily withdraw His fellowship from the Son, while Christ as the sinless Substitute judicially bore the dreadful penalty for all sinners of all times.

Dr. Lehman Strauss has wisely observed:

“God will never forsake you if you trust His Son whom He forsook for you.”

The Orphan’s Cry

Psalm 22:1-3

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.”

It was this cry of lost communion with the Father that Mrs. Browning so beautifully called “Immanuel’s Orphaned Cry.” Deserted! Forsaken! What a tragic word! This was a cry of anguish and deep emotion. It was the moan of a broken heart. It was a heartfelt cry that shows how the soul of Jesus was intensely sorrowful as He experienced this separation from the Father. The Father had forsaken the Son because of the sin that that was judicially placed upon Him and charged to His account.

Dr. Herbert Lockyer said it best:

“The face of the Father then has turned not so much away from Christ as from what He was bearing, namely, the load of the world’s sin, which load ultimately broke His loving, compassionate heart. He was there on the plane of sinners with mountains upon mountains of guilt encircling Him, thus the Father hid His face from such a horrible load, seeing that He was of purer eyes than to behold evil.”

Dr. Lockyer is correct when observing that the Father’s separation from the Son had nothing to do with the Son becoming sinful and corrupt in His nature. This is because God could not separate from His own eternal nature, personal being, and existence. We must remember that Jesus Christ shared God’s eternal and

unchanging nature and existence for He was “the express image of his person” (Heb. 1:3) even while He hung on the cross. This means that Jesus could not become spiritually defiled in His inner being and nature while hanging on the cross. In short, the eternal, holy, and unchanging God could not sever Himself from His own eternal and unchanging Godlike nature which was also present in Jesus, since He shared God’s spotless and unchanging purity (John 1:18; 10:30). God cannot divide Himself in relationship to His own eternal existence and nature which is something that Jesus eternally shares with the Father within the Godhead.

This means that in those hours of darkness Adam’s sins swept between the righteous Son and Father and Immanuel’s orphaned cry was heard, “My God, I am forsaken!” In these lonely hours, Jesus was forsaken *relationally* because our sins were placed upon Him, while at the same time Jesus remained the same *ontologically* (in relation to His spiritual nature and being). This simply means that Jesus did not change in relationship to His eternal nature and existence as God which consists of His absolute purity and holiness. Jesus Christ as God remained internally and impeccably the same while bearing the sins of the world on the cross (John 1:29). This is because God cannot destroy His own person and purity within the Trinitarian oneness of His own existence.

For three dreadful hours the fellowship and communion was broken between the Godhead. This is because God the Father could not look upon His Son, while hanging on the cross, as He bore our sins and judgment. Jesus Christ as the Son of God went through excruciating physical and outward pain on the cross but He also experienced great emotional and inward pain knowing the Father had forsaken Him.

“O help me understand, Lord!
Help me to take it in,
What it meant for Thee
Thou Holy One, to bear away my sin.”

As already mentioned, the mystery of this separation is far too deep, even for the most mature believer to fathom. But God has revealed this truth to us, so we might accept and understand it, as the Spirit gives us illumination about “the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). Nowhere in Scripture can we behold the reality of Jesus’ sacrificial death and the anguish of His separation from His Father more

clearly and penetratingly than in these words – “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.”

“Yea, once Immanuel’s orphaned cry,
His universe hath shaken,
It went up single,
My God, I am forsaken.
It went up from the holy lips,
Amid His lost creation;
That of the lost, no son should use,
These words of desolation.”

Christ suffered with great anguish, not merely from the lacerations on His back, or the thorns that still pierced His head, or the nails that held Him to the cross, but from the painful loss of fellowship with His heavenly Father, which was the time Christ’s became the sin-bearer for the lost human race.

A.J. Gossip once said:

“Get the people in the sight of Calvary. Pause there... hushed and reverent; enable them to look, to see it, make it real to them, not just an old tale that has lost its wonder and its stab, but a tremendous awful fact.”

In Remembrance of Me

Today we can look back to the cross and remember the great agonies that Christ passed through for each one of us. Have you recently reviewed the old, old, story of what Christ has done for you? Have you in recent days reflected upon the passion, orphan cry, and death of our blessed Lord? Let us never forget the terrible ordeal Jesus passed through for each one of us. This is why Jesus instituted a supper, which causes His children and followers to reflect upon the death and passion He demonstrated for each one of us, while suffering the agonies of the cross. Jesus said, “This do in remembrance of me” (1 Cor. 11:24-25). Let us never forget!

“I saw One hanging on a tree,
In agony and blood;
He fixed His languid eyes on me,
As near His cross I stood.

Oh, can it be, upon a tree
The Saviour died for me?
My soul is thrilled,
My heart is filled,
To think He died for me!"