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The Abandonment

on the Cross and Communion with the Father

The Bosom of the Father

From time to time questions arise concerning the abandonment of Christ on the cross and how this bears upon the Son's communion with the Father. The question bears upon the relationship of the Persons of the Godhead. Now, there are several things that we must bear in mind concerning the light Scripture sheds on this.

The first point to bear in mind is that God never ceases to be God. The intra-Trinitarian relationship does not change. From everlasting to everlasting, He is God. The relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has always been, and always will be; and uninterruptedly so. The abandonment on the cross did not change it. The abandonment did not mean that one divine Person in the Godhead abandoned another divine person in the Godhead so as to break up the Trinity. In John 1:18 we read: "No one has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared [him]."

"In the bosom" tells the place where the only-begotten Son dwells. It is His eternal, never-interrupted dwelling place. It never has, and never will, change. It was never interrupted; no, not even during the three hours of darkness at Calvary. The "bosom of the Father" is, of course, a figure of speech; but, oh, what fullness of meaning this conveys to us concerning that inexpressible relationship. Love never had a beginning. Love always existed in the Godhead in reciprocity. That is where love comes from. And the Son has divine competency to reveal that love that is in the Father's bosom. But though the Son came here in flesh, He never left that

bosom. He came from that bosom to make known what is in that bosom which He never left. And He is **full** of grace and truth, and of His **fullness** have we all received (John 1:14, 16). Think of the only-begotten Son filling that infinite bosom with the plenitude of His own fullness, with the glory and value of His own Person. And this did not cease to be true during the three hours of darkness on the cross.

Here are some helpful comments:

Here we get Christ {John 1:18}¹ as the only-begotten Son. It is not, He was in the bosom of the Father, as though He had left it, but, “is in the bosom of the Father.” There He is even when upon earth, and even upon the cross it was true. He was always in the nearness of intimacy indicated by the expression “is in the bosom of the Father.” On the cross He was, of course, not enjoying this relationship, but bearing wrath. The expression, “from the bosom of the Father,” is rather inexact, for Christ never left the bosom of the Father. The passage, “Son of man which is in heaven” connects the manhood with the divinity; the Son was in heaven, and that Son was a man upon the earth, therefore might it be said, “Son of man in heaven.”

On the cross, Christ was under wrath, and therefore – although He was then doing something on account of which the Father would in a very especial sense love Him – yet then He could not be enjoying the relationship between Him and His Father. In one sense, the Father never loved the Son so much as when He was upon the cross. This was what was in the Father’s mind, not what was in Christ’s, who could not be enjoying His relationship and drinking the cup of wrath at the same time. He gave Himself up to drink this cup. On the cross He was entirely occupied in bearing the wrath: it required a divine person to apprehend infinitely what the wrath of God was. I apprehend that at that time Christ was fully occupied with what He was bearing – infinite pain – which He infinitely realized. God was to be glorified on account of sin, and only such a One as He could do it. Still **it is a very deep mystery**, and it becomes us to be very careful in speaking about it. We find, however, that the time Christ was upon the cross was most distinctly clouded. There is a period before the three hours of darkness and a period afterwards, when Christ on the cross uses the term “Father.” He does not use it during the three hours of darkness: during this time He appears to be entirely occupied with God – bearing wrath; everything is shut out but what was passing between Him and God. It is exceedingly terrible, the three hours of darkness.

¹ {Things bracketed thus have been added by the editor}.

It is this terrible character of bearing wrath which makes it so dreadful to think, that {it is alleged} in His life Christ was bearing wrath. Christ sympathizes with the judgment He was bearing, that was right. See Psalm 22. Christ really bore this wrath {in the three hours of darkness} before His death, and when it was all done He gave up His life. After the bitter cry – My God, why hast thou forsaken me? – we see Him calmly giving up His spirit to His Father. The depth of death, looked at as the wages of sin, had been gone through during the hours of darkness.

We see first, all man’s wickedness in His crucifixion fully brought out; then the darkness – darkness and wrath – God forsaking Him. Afterwards, having borne this wrath, He comes out and occupies Himself in fulfilling the rest of the Scripture which had to be fulfilled in His death. The expression, “It is finished,” shows it, that just then He was departing because everything was done. ² It was a most blessed time for Him, for the bitterness of death was past – He was going to Paradise. He must actually die in order that the blood and water might come out for us. We never could enter into what Christ entered into upon the cross, therefore it was that He went through it for us. We have no revelation of what He passed through during the three hours of darkness: we could not understand it, it was between Him and God alone.

In John’s Gospel we never get Jesus dying, as it were, but simply going out of the world to His Father. In John we get a divine person acting for us; in the other gospels, a man suffering for us. ³

Glory Meeting Glory

Let us ever keep before us the great fact that every word, way and work of the Lord Jesus had a divine spring. This is so because of the union in Him of the human and divine – two natures, one Person. His death was a human death, but it was not a death accomplished in independence of deity. The accomplishment of that death had a divine spring, which imparted to that death all the value of His Person. So was

² {A number of things are stated anticipatively in John’s gospel, a notable one appearing in John 17:4. In keeping with this, we take “It is finished” to be anticipative also. He must necessarily say that before the death and blood-shedding – but the work included the death and blood-shedding.}

³ The Girdle of Truth 7:374-378.

it with the atoning sufferings and the abandonment. It was as man He bore this, but not as man apart from deity. The value of His infinite Person imparted infinite value to the sufferings and abandonment. The stream of blood and water from His side has all the value of His death in it; and the death has in it all the value of His atoning sufferings and abandonment during the three hours of darkness. It is all one great whole having the infinite value of His Person. This is typified in Leviticus 16, where the cloud of incense rose up from the incense upon the coals of fire from the altar before Jehovah – and that cloud of the incense covered the mercy-seat which was upon the testimony (Lev. 16:12, 13).

There was another cloud present upon that occasion: “for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat” (Lev. 16:2). This is the Shekinah of glory bespeaking all the glory of God. What could possibly meet that glory? One has well said that righteousness can meet the claims of righteousness, but only a cloud could meet a cloud! And here two clouds met. One cloud was brought before the other. The cloud brought into the sanctuary rose up from the incense upon the burning coals. It signifies the glory of our Beloved coming up from the burning coals of Calvary before the God of glory. The rising up of His glory, so to speak, before the Shekinah of glory, and what answers to the blood sprinkled on and before the mercy-seat, **all took place on the cross.** The evil notion that the blood was taken to heaven to make propitiation there, among other things separates the cloud of the incense from the blood. The work entailed the three hours of suffering, the voluntary death, and the blood-shedding (accompanied by the water of cleansing). The blood has all the value of this work comprehended in its value – which necessarily contains the value and glory of His Person. The blood rent the veil, so to speak. The rending of the veil, consequent upon the finishing of that work of infinite value to God, was the response of the Shekinah of glory, for God was infinitely glorified. Glory had met glory. “I have glorified thee on the earth, I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it” (John 17:5). The abandonment, then, experienced as Man, had a divine spring in it and had all the value and glory of His Person before God.

Addressing God During the Three Hours of Darkness

The other point that guides in this matter is that it was only during the three hours of darkness that Christ addressed God as “God.” During His life before the cross He

always addressed Him as “Father” ⁴ and, note well, He also did so during the first three hours on the cross. Moreover, having come through the three hours of darkness, He again addressed Him as “Father.” Thus we have guidance by His using Father or God, and by the three hours of darkness:

- It marks off the three hours in a special way. It is only during those three hours of darkness that He cried, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” These are the hours of the atoning sufferings, sufferings that had all the value of who He was. Infinite in value and glory, this He imparted to the work wrought on Calvary; because, every human word, work, and way of the Lord Jesus had a divine spring in it, and to these was imparted all of the value and glory of who He is – because He is God and man united in one Person.
- During these three hours Christ was abandoned as the sin-bearer. After the three hours He again addressed the Father, into whose hands He commended His spirit.

The question is, then, what is meant by the cry of being forsaken? What does it mean that He was forsaken?

We never find such a thought in Scripture as the Father’s wrath being on the Son of His love. The great force to me of Psalm 22 is this: that the Son of man did not forsake, or forget to vindicate God’s (Elohim’s) glory, just when God, on account of His taking upon Him our judgment – made sin for us – forsook Him. The scene was in no sense one of enjoying anything, as far as the Lord Jesus was concerned, but not to forsake God, when God for our sakes had to forsake Him, proved that He was God and that the everlasting springs were in Himself. He knew who He was, and knew that none but Himself, **as Man**, ⁵ could go through what He had undertaken to pass through. He was still “the only-begotten which is in the bosom of the Father.” Therefore it could not be said that “the face of the Father, as the Father, was hidden from His own Son.” ⁶

Now I believe that there never was a time when the Father’s complacency in the Son was so great as at that solemn moment; but that is not the communion of

⁴ See Collected Writings of J. N. Darby 7:201.

⁵ {Boldface emphasis is added throughout by the editor.}

⁶ G. V. Wigram in Words of Faith, 1883, p. 73.

complacency. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” is not the enjoyment of communion.⁷

Never was the unfathomable love for God and man so proved in Him as when thus bearing our judgment at God’s hand on the cross; but for that very reason it could not be a time of Christ’s enjoying the communion of His love and delight as ever before and since. This was the necessary change then. ⁸

...surely never so the object of God’s love as when drinking the cup, for He could say, “therefore doth my Father love me,” a word that belongs only to a divine Person, but **in His own soul** tasting all its bitterness undiminished by any consolation, or it would not have been absolute and complete, yet showing His perfectness as to the state of His own heart in the words “my God.” ⁹

He lived in the perfect relationship in which He was, and says, “my Father”; but on the cross, when drinking the cup of wrath, He says, “my God.” That was His perfectness; **it was not the expression of His full relationship**, but it was the expression of infinite suffering of infinite claim. ¹⁰

...He walks in this path of obedience to obey to the end, finding that He could not be heard until the cup, of which He had a holy fear, had been drunk; that cup that He was going to drink, in **being abandoned of God in His soul**, then heard, doubtless, and glorified, but after having experienced to the end what it was not to be heard. ¹¹

I believe Jesus’s soul passed into peace at the end of the three hours of darkness, that He might give up His own spirit (i.e., His human spirit) – which no one took from Him – to God His Father. He delivered it up, as is stated in John 19:30; He commended it into His Father’s hands (Luke 23:46). His soul, while living, had gone

⁷ Collected Writings of J. N. Darby 7:202 note.

⁸ The Bible Treasury, New Series 4:272.

⁹ Collected Writings of J. N. Darby 23:249.

¹⁰ J. N. Darby, Notes and Jottings, p. 242.

¹¹ Collected Writings of J. N. Darby 33:225.

morally through all the full depth of the unfathomable suffering of the atoning work, and He gave up His spirit Himself to God His Father. ¹²

The Cry of the Son of Man

Yes, God was there, not the approver of what was good only, but the Judge of all evil laid upon that blessed head. It was God forsaking the faithful obedient Servant; yet it was His God: this would – could – never be given up; for, on the contrary, He even then firmly holds to it, “My God, my God”; yet He has to add now, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” It was the Son of the Father, **but as Son of man necessarily that He so cried out**, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Then, and then only, did God desert His unswerving Servant, the man Christ Jesus. Nevertheless we bow before the mystery of mysteries in His person – God manifested in flesh. Had He not been man, of what avail for us? Had He not been God, all must have failed to give to His suffering for sins the infinite worth of Himself. This is atonement. And atonement has two parts in character and range. It is expiation before God; it is also substitution for our sins (Lev. 16:7-10; Jehovah’s lot and the people’s lot), though the latter part be not so much the subject of the psalmist here {Psa. 22}, and I do not therefore dwell on it now. The ground, the most important part, of the atonement – though all be of the deepest moment – is Jehovah’s lot.

Here then we have God in His majesty and righteous judgment of evil – God in the display of His moral being dealing with sin, where alone it could be dealt with to bring out blessing and glory, in the Person of His own Son; One who could when forsaken of God, reach the lowest, but morally highest, point of glorifying God, made sin for us on the cross. It was the very perfection of His bearing sin that He should not be heard. There was the sharpest pain and anguish and bitterness of rejection; and did He not feel it? Did the glory of His Person render Him incapable of suffering? The idea denies His humanity. Rather was His deity that which made Him endure and feel it most, and as none other could. “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me; the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my

¹² Collected Writings of J. N. Darby 15:75n. The Lord Jesus died as an act of His own will (John 10:18). He gave up His life voluntarily.

feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O Jehovah: O my strength, haste thee help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog” (Psa. 22:14-20).

Nevertheless the Lord Jesus perfectly vindicated God who forsook Him there and then. Others had cried, and there was not one who had not been delivered; but it was His not to be. For the suffering must go to the uttermost, and sin be righteously atoned for, and this too not by power but by suffering.

But what is this that breaks on our ears, when the last drop in the cup is drained? “Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee,” says the Saviour. He says, now He is risen from the dead, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren.” He had declared it: such was His ministry here below, but now on an entirely new ground. Death and death alone disposed of sin; death, but His death alone, could dispose of sin, so that the sinner could bow to God’s righteousness about it, and be brought without sin into the presence of God. And this is what God Himself declares.

The Bible Treasury, New Series 8:114

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