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Can God Be Said to Separate from God

Reflections The Passion, Cross and Resurrection 16 April 2016

[Psalm 22:1](#)

[Matthew 27:46](#)

[John 14:7](#)

[John 10:30](#)

[John 14:11](#)

Many good Christian preachers have taught that Jesus was separated from the Father on the Cross. They argue that, when Jesus took the sin of the human race upon Himself, a separation occurred between Him and God the Father that had never happened before; and they explain His cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" — a quotation by Jesus from Psalm 22:1 — as arising from His experiencing a brokenness in His relationship with God the Father. They further assert that God the Father placed the sins of the world upon God the Son, and, because of this, 'turned away' from Him — a line of reasoning that comes near to making God unjust, and borders on blasphemy. Critics of a different stripe would go further still, and say that Jesus was merely an ordinary human being, perhaps a good teacher, but nothing beyond that.

I fail to see any reason to agree with either those preachers or those critics, who, to my mind, are simply toeing a line that explains away a profound happening — one of the mysteries of God — merely to bring about a swift closure to the matter. Having said that, let me confess that I do not claim to know the answer myself, but can only offer a different perspective; for the mystery is so great and unfathomable that Martin Luther is said to have gone into seclusion for a long time, in an attempt to understand it, and to have come away as confused as when he began.

I want to argue that two aspects of the matter have not received their due consideration: on the one hand, the dual nature of Jesus, as a perfect human being and as fully divine; and, on the other, the doctrine of the Trinity. We see how He endured every emotion common to a normal human being throughout His ministry, and especially during His final hours, beginning in the garden of Gethsemane. He was no magician, no trickster, no mere actor upon a stage; He went through

the agony of His impending suffering and horrific death so intensely that the Bible tells us His sweat was like drops of blood — He was, indeed, suffering from a condition common to those under trauma and extreme stress, medically known as hematohidrosis. The impact of His once-for-all sacrifice would have lost its significance, had He invoked His divine nature to sustain Him through it all. I see no reason why He should not have felt forsaken. The question we all ask of God, when we face situations that seem impossible, 'Why me, God?', is, in effect, the same as asking, 'Why have you forsaken me, God?' It was natural for Jesus to have uttered those words, suffering as He did in His human nature.

One thing is certain: we have no capacity to appreciate the utterly horrific experience of having the sins of the world laid upon Him, as He hung in excruciating pain upon the Cross. The physical pain was immense; the spiritual and emotional pain must have been greater still. It would have been entirely natural for Him to have said what He said, under such circumstances — imagine what the critics would have said, had Jesus hung upon the Cross laughing and joking. He remained in His human nature, and endured every part of it.

By the same token, His death had to be real, or else His resurrection could not have been real; in His divine nature, as God, He could not have died a true death, and so He remained, throughout, in His human nature. Because Jesus was quoting Psalm 22, there could have been little doubt in the minds of those standing by as to what He meant. They had been taunting Him over His claim to be the Son of God, and an appeal for divine help would have been expected from Him; their remark, "This man calleth for Elias," was no mere guess as to what He had said, but simply a further extension of their cruel and cynical mockery.

We need to remember that whoever sees Jesus sees God, or the very essence of God (John 14:7). Jesus, God the Son, cannot be separated from God the Father; He said, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). It is with this vital verse in mind that we should examine His cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The Trinity is a mystery to us, in its very formulation; and even among Christians there are those who understand Christianity as a kind of polytheism, with three divine entities — God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost — existing separately. Jesus made it abundantly plain that there is but one God, when He said, "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me" (John 14:11). They are inseparable, and function in unison, in thought and in work; they are of one substance. We seem to see them as three entities only because of God's manifestations under differing

circumstances, and because of our own limited perception and understanding of God. Christianity, by every measure, is a monotheistic faith; there could never have been any situation in which the entities of the Trinity could have been separated. God cannot separate from Himself. Amen.

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