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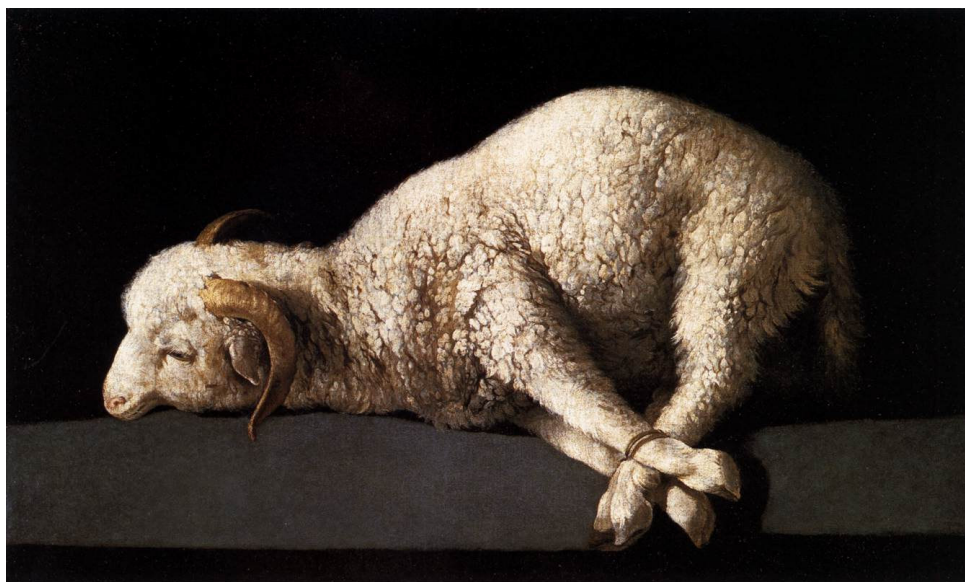
[Pure Church by Thabiti Anyabwile \(https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile)

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE FATHER TO FORSAKE THE SON? (PART 3)

April 4, 2012

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Once again we hear the scream: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

Once again we ask ourselves, *What can this mean?*

It means the Father allowed the Son to suffer social abandonment (<http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/02/why-did-the-father-forsake-the-son-part-1/>). It means the Father allowed the Son to suffer emotional desertion (<http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/03/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-2/>). And, yet, it means more.

3. The Father Allowed the Son to Suffer Spiritual Wrath

This is the deepest, darkest part of Jesus’ suffering. Social abandonment was horrible but came from outside. Emotional desertion was painful but only inside Jesus. This spiritual forsakenness, spiritual wrath from the Father, occurs deep down in the very godhead itself. We dare not speculate lest we blaspheme. But something was torn in the very fabric of the relationship between Father and Son.

To get a sense of this, we must remember what the relationship between Father and Son had been from eternity past. The opening words of the apostle John’s Gospel tell us. John 1:1-2 (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%201:1-2>)—*“In the beginning was the word, and*

the word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” For all eternity, Jesus lived with the Father. And not just with the Father. The Greek word *pros*, translated “with”, can have the sense of “to” or “toward.” In other words, the Word, Jesus, was with God, turned toward Him in face-to-face fellowship. That’s all the Lord Jesus had ever known—the loving, approving, shining face of His Father.

And to be turned face-to-face with God the Father is the Bible’s idea of the highest possible or imaginable blessing and happiness. This is why God teaches Moses to bless the Israelites in [Numbers 6:24-26](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Numbers%206.24-26) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Numbers%206.24-26>)—

24 *“The LORD bless you*

and keep you;

25 *the LORD make his face shine upon you*

and be gracious to you;

26 *the LORD turn his face toward you*

and give you peace.”

To see the face of God became the highest aspiration and hope among the holy and righteous. [1 Chronicles 16:10-11](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Chronicles%2016.10-11) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Chronicles%2016.10-11>) exhorts the faithful with these words—*“Glory in His name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice; Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always.”* The psalms repeatedly include that last exhortation—“Seek His face always!” That became the highest and happiest ambition of man.

And conversely, having the Lord turn His face away became the deepest fear and dread. So David brings together that high and holy aspiration with that deep and fearful dread when he writes in [Psalm 27:8-9](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Psalm%2027.8-9) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Psalm%2027.8-9>)—*“My heart says of you, ‘Seek His face!’ Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O my Savior.”*

The words of Psalm 27 could have easily been spoken by our Incarnate Lord at Golgotha. For in His earthly life and ministry, the Lord Jesus continually sought the Father’s face. He sought to live in a way that earned the Father’s approval and favor. And He did—perfectly.

But on that dark mid-day on Golgotha, when the sun refused to shine, the unimaginable and indescribable happened. That beautiful, shining, loving face of the Father withdrew into the dark, frowning, punishing face of wrath. He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us ([2 Cor. 5:21](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor.%205.21) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor.%205.21>)). The Son of God himself “bore our sins in His body on the tree” ([1 Pet. 2:24](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet.%202.24) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet.%202.24>)). He became accursed for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree” ([Gal. 3:13](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal.%203.13) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal.%203.13>)). And when our sins were laid upon Him, then Jesus felt the full horrible truth of Habbakuk 1:13—that God the Father’s *“eyes are too pure to look on evil; He cannot tolerate wrong.”*

At 3 o'clock that dark Friday afternoon, the Father turned His face away and the ancient, eternal fellowship between Father and Son was broken as divine wrath rained down like a million Sodom's and Gomorrah's. In the terror and agony of it all, Jesus cried, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"

"[T]his was his chief conflict, and harder than all the other tortures.... For not only did he offer his body as the price of our reconciliation with God, but in his soul also he endured the punishments due to us. ... Nothing is more dreadful than to feel that God, whose wrath is worse than all deaths, is the Judge. ... [H]e maintained a struggle with the sorrows of death, as if an offended God had thrown him into a whirlpool of afflictions."^[1] ([file:///C:/Users/Thabiti/Documents/Sermons/Topical%20Series/The%20Cross%20&%20the%20Resurrection/Why%20Have%20You%20Forsaken%20Me%20\(Matt%20%2027.45-46\).docx#_ftn1](file:///C:/Users/Thabiti/Documents/Sermons/Topical%20Series/The%20Cross%20&%20the%20Resurrection/Why%20Have%20You%20Forsaken%20Me%20(Matt%20%2027.45-46).docx#_ftn1))

In Jerusalem that day hung a picture of Hell as the Son of God was cut off socially from everyone, deserted emotionally on the cross, and separated spiritually from the eternal Father with whom He had always lived face-to-face. That's hell.

Sinner, that's our place! That's the horror that awaits everyone who dies in their sin not repenting from sin and trusting in Jesus alone to save them *from* the wrath of God and *for* the worship of God. It's not pretty. It's dark and horrifying and unimaginable. Even the God-man cried out and died!

Here's what we must remember and treasure: Jesus willingly suffers this so sinners may escape it. Jesus' abandonment means the sinners adoption. He takes our place on the cross so we can take His place in the kingdom. Because He was abandoned socially, we may be children in the household of God. Because He was deserted emotionally, we become whole again—renewed in the image of God. Because He suffered spiritual separation, we may be spiritually united to Him through faith so that we will never be separated from God's love. Because He was forsaken, we are forgiven. Now *He* says to *us*, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

It is finished! Sinner, our salvation has been completed. We need only to turn from sin and trust in Jesus.

And if you need evidence to sustain your trust, remember this: The Father went back for the body. He raised Jesus from the grave alive and ruling in glory. Three days later the Father reclaimed a resurrected and living Son! Jesus was not *finally* forsaken and neither is anyone who trusts in Him.

^[1] ([file:///C:/Users/Thabiti/Documents/Sermons/Topical%20Series/The%20Cross%20&%20the%20Resurrection/Why%20Have%20You%20Forsaken%20Me%20\(Matt%20%2027.45-46\).docx#_ftnref1](file:///C:/Users/Thabiti/Documents/Sermons/Topical%20Series/The%20Cross%20&%20the%20Resurrection/Why%20Have%20You%20Forsaken%20Me%20(Matt%20%2027.45-46).docx#_ftnref1)) John Calvin, Commentary, p. 318-9.

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COMMENTS:

19 THOUGHTS ON "WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE FATHER TO FORSAKE THE SON? (PART 3)"

1. **John (<http://www.redeemedrambling.blogspot.com/>)** says:

April 4, 2012 at 10:48 am (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8440>)

This has been a great series, brother!

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8440#respond\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8440#respond)

2. **Femi** says:

April 4, 2012 at 10:59 am (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8441>)

Thank you so much for this! Reading the three posts were physically, emotionally and spiritually captivating. It's heart wrenching thinking of His all encompassing forsakenness, yet thoroughly satisfying knowing that my faith and hope are rooted in both the justice and love of God.

God bless!

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8441#respond\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8441#respond)

3. **Lonnie** says:

April 4, 2012 at 12:50 pm (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8443>)

Thank you, Thabiti.

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8443#respond\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8443#respond)

4. **Bryan Cross** (<http://www.calledtocommunion.com>) says:

April 4, 2012 at 1:05 pm (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8444>)

Thabiti,

This response (<http://www.calledtocommunion.com/2010/04/catholic-and-reformed-conceptions-of-the-atonement/#comment-29569>) (i.e. comment #62) to your post argues that your position (as you have described it above) logically entails either tritheism or Arianism. Where, exactly, in your opinion, does the argument go wrong?

In the peace of Christ,

– Bryan

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&repytocom=8444#respond\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&repytocom=8444#respond)

1. **Thabiti Anyabwile** says:

[April 4, 2012 at 1:59 pm \(https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8445\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8445)

Hi Bryan,

When you ask, “Where, exactly, in your opinion, does the argument go wrong?” I’m not certain whether you’re asking me about my argument or the comment’s argument. Let me assume you mean the argument in comment #62.

From what I can tell, there’s nothing exegetical in his comments. There’s no biblical scaffolding. He assumes a contradiction between the doctrines of Christ being eternally God and Christ propitiating the Father’s wrath. But that’s precisely what the Scripture teach us.

Christ is eternally the Son of God ([John 1:1-3 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%201:1-3\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%201:1-3); [17:1-5 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2017:1-5\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2017:1-5), for example). And Jesus propitiates the Father’s wrath by His sacrifice on the cross ([Rom. 3:25 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom.%203:25\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom.%203:25); [Heb. 2:17 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb.%202:17\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb.%202:17); [1 John 4:10 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20John%204:10\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20John%204:10)). So, without any sense of contradiction whatever—either in terms of tritheism or Arianism—the Bible plainly teaches us the eternity of God the Son and the propitiating work of the Son on the cross. All my post attempts to say is that for Christ to suffer the wrath of God on our behalf we must then assume a change in His communion (not His nature) with the Father during His suffering. What else can the Scripture mean when it tells us Jesus “rescues us from the coming wrath” or that He was “pierced... crushed... punished... and striped” ([1 Thes. 1:10 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thes.%201:10\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thes.%201:10); [Is. 53 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Is.%2053\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Is.%2053))?

Skimming some of the comments in the post, it assumes some people have difficulty holding those two truths together. But it appears to me to be the plain sense of the scripture. We can (and should!) come to the creeds for help. But I would have liked to hear the person leaving the comment wrestle with the biblical text even as they sought light from the creeds and theological tradition.

Incidentally, it was convenient to omit the Calvin quote in his quotation of my post. If we're going to have this discussion on theological rather than exegetical ground, at least quote allow me to pull in one of the greatest theological minds in the history of the Church! 😊

T-

[Reply \(/thabitiyanabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8445#respond\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitiyanabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8445#respond)

5. **Bryan Cross** (<http://www.calledtocommunion.com>) says:

April 4, 2012 at 3:54 pm (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitiyanabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8446>)

Thabiti,

Thanks for your reply. Yes, I was referring to the argument in comment #62.

The Catholic understanding of 'hilasterion' is different from the Reformed way of interpreting that term. In the Catholic tradition, Christ made satisfaction for our sins in this way: in His act of love (in self-giving obedience and self-sacrifice, even to the point of death) through His human nature, Christ offered something more pleasing to the Father than all our sins are displeasing. So the crucifixion wasn't the Father 'getting His wrath out of His system' on His innocent and beloved Son. Instead, Christ's gift (in His humanity) to the Father, outweighed in its goodness all the evil of all our sins. And thereby He (i.e. Christ) in His human nature merited grace from God for our salvation, by which we are saved from the wrath (i.e. from being sent to hell) of God on Judgment Day were we to have remained in our sins. This way of understanding Christ's work makes sense of the Scriptures to which you refer.

So from a Catholic point of view, we don't have to choose between (a) tritheism / Arianism, (b) denying any Scripture passages about Christ saving us from the wrath of God, and (c) denying tritheism and Arianism while holding a position which entails tritheism or Arianism. We're not bound by *the plain sense* of Scripture (which is different depending on what the interpreter brings to Scripture), but instead by the Scripture-as-interpreted-according-to-the-Tradition. And in that tradition, God eternally, necessarily and unceasingly loves His only begotten Son, and that love is the Holy Spirit. Were the love between the Father and the Son to be lost or broken, the Holy Spirit would cease to exist.

In the peace of Christ,

– Bryan

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8446#respond\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8446#respond)

1. **Thabiti Anyabwile** says:

April 4, 2012 at 4:48 pm (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8447>)

Hi Bryan,

Thanks for the comments and thoughts. I want to be sure I'm following you correctly. You're saying:

1. There is a difference in Catholic and Reformed views of the atonement.
2. In your understanding of the Catholic tradition (described in your first full paragraph), five things are important to note:
 - a. Christ's sacrifice is fundamentally an act of love pleasing to the Father,
 - b. Christ's sacrifice is *not* a propitiation of God's wrath,
 - c. Christ's sacrifice was offered in his humanity,
 - d. In his humanity, Christ "merited grace from God", and
 - e. We are saved by the store of Christ's "merited grace".

Is that a fair Cliff Note's version of what you're saying re: Christ's atonement?

In your second paragraph you conclude that the Catholic view avoids the theological pitfalls you believe inherent in a Reformed understanding. Your authority for this conclusion and your position is not Scripture but the Tradition. Am I understanding you fairly so far?

T-

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8447#respond\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8447#respond)

6. **Bryan Cross** (<http://www.calledtocommunion.com>) says:

April 5, 2012 at 6:16 am (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8449>)

Thabiti,

1. Yes, there is a difference between the Catholic and Reformed views of the atonement.

2a. Yes, in the Catholic understanding, Christ's sacrifice is an act of self-sacrificial love for the Father, in obedience to the Father, for the sins of the world, and is well-pleasing to the Father.

2b. No, in Catholic doctrine Christ's sacrifice **does** propitiate God's wrath, but not in the way the Reformed tradition proposes. In the Reformed tradition, God the Father pours out all His wrath for all the sins of all the elect, on Christ on the cross. The wrath of the Father is propitiated by the full venting of this wrath by the Father onto the Son. In the Catholic tradition, by contrast, the wrath of God for man's sins is propitiated not by God pouring out any wrath on His beloved Son, but by the Son (in His human nature) offering to the Father an offering more pleasing than all our sins are displeasing, suffering the effects of the fall, namely, the curse which man incurred for sin, i.e. suffering and death (i.e. the separation of body and soul). Christ propitiates by giving (in His human nature) a positive gift to the Father, not by being the object of God's wrath.

2c. Yes. Christ is a divine Person with a human nature, so both His divine will and His human will concurred in making this sacrifice. And Christ's sacrifice was especially pleasing to the Father because the One who made it is His only begotten Son; Christ's divinity, not merely His innocence, makes His sacrifice of supreme value. But Christ's divine will cannot merit, because there is only one divine will, and there is no one higher from whom to merit. Only Christ's human will could merit. And only in His human nature could He represent us, and be our high priest, offering Himself to the Father for the sins of the whole world. So, yes, His sacrifice was offered in His human nature; that's what He offered to the Father, even to the point of separation of body and soul.

2d. Yes, Christ by His great gift to the Father merited in His human nature superabundant grace from the Father for our salvation.

2e. Yes, we are saved by the grace that Christ merited for us in His Passion and death.

Regarding Scripture, I didn't say that the Catholic authority is "not Scripture but the Tradition." It is Scripture, but as illuminated by and informed by Tradition. So, practically, there is a difference here between the way Reformed persons use Scripture, and the Catholic approach to Scripture. The Reformed approach generally starts with exegesis, and uses the result of exegesis to critically evaluate tradition. The Catholic approach starts with (or is fundamentally guided by) what the tradition has handed down regarding how to understand the passage in Scripture, and exegesis works to illumine Scripture within that tradition-informed understanding of Scripture. (This relation of Scripture and Tradition is explained in paragraphs 7-10 of *Dei Verbum* (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.)

A blessed Triduum to you.

In the peace of Christ,

– Bryan

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8449#respond\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8449#respond)

1. **Thabiti Anyabwile** says:

April 6, 2012 at 12:09 pm (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8460>)

Hi Bryan,

I pray you're well today, friend, and rejoicing in the hope of Christ's death and Resurrection. He is alive! Praise God!

Thanks for the thoughtful reply. With the hopes of avoiding a replay of the Reformation on this comment thread :-), let me risk over-simplification by giving a few short responses and then we can move on.

1. We obviously are not going to be agreed on the age-old argument re: authority. Suffice it to say that it is the word of God that creates God's people and our duty to humble ourselves under the word which is able to save us ([James 1:21 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%201.21\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%201.21)). You write eloquently about the Catholic Tradition but without even a supporting reference to biblical texts. I think that's telling. And I think that's where your position, though true in many regards, suffers an inadequacy (which I'll suggest in a moment). So, I continue to take my stand with Luther:

“Unless I am convinced by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments that I am in error—for popes and councils have often erred and contradicted themselves—I cannot withdraw, for I am subject the Scriptures I have quoted; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. It is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against one's conscience. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. So help me God. Amen.”

We invariably elevate human reason and theology above the text of Scripture if we do not begin and end our “theologizing” with exegesis of the text. What are we really saying when we say, as you write, *“The Catholic approach starts with (or is fundamentally guided by) what the tradition has handed down regarding how to understand the passage in Scripture, and exegesis works to illumine Scripture within that tradition-informed understanding of Scripture”*? We're effectively saying God wasn't clear in His word and the more reliable point of departure is not God's word but man's tradition. That's abhorrent to the Scripture itself, where we're told we should learn “not to go beyond what is written.” Tradition has its place, but it is neither the starting or the decisive place.

The Bible itself is.

2. I don't have any difficulty with the important distinctions regarding Christ's death in His humanity but His continuing life in His deity. Just as He is eternally the Son before the Incarnation, He continues to be eternally God the Son throughout His death. It was necessary that He take on our nature in order to be our Great High Priest ([Heb. 2:14-15](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb.%202.14-15) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb.%202.14-15>), [17](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb.%202.17) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb.%202.17>)). But He never ceases to be God, the Second Person of the Trinity.

3. We can agree that Christ's sacrifice is an act of love, but that's not an argument against Jesus satisfying the Father's wrath. This is the heart of our disagreement regarding the atonement. One must allow that the atonement is discussed using a range of motifs (victor, sacrifice, example, etc.). But the heart of the Gospel is Christ's sacrifice as penal substitution, which sacrifice propitiates the wrath of God. We have to affirm *both* the love that motivated the sacrifice and the effects of the sacrifice re: the Father's wrath being turned away.

The Bible teaches us that Christ offers himself *in love* as a sacrifice and that the Father loves Him for that sacrifice. Consider, for example, [John 10:17](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2010.17) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2010.17>)—"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again." Repeatedly we're told the Father loves the Son (for ex, [John 3:35](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%203.35) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%203.35>); [5:20](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%205.20) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%205.20>); [15:9-10](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2015.9-10) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2015.9-10>); [17:24](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2017.24) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2017.24>); [2 Pet. 1:17](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Pet.%201.17) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Pet.%201.17>); etc). But we're also told that the Son loves the Father, with the expression of that love being His obedience to the Father's will ([John 14:31](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2014.31) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2014.31>)). So, we may confidently say there exists a mutual communion of love between the Father and the Son, and we may say that the Father loves the Son *precisely because* He sacrifices himself.

But we must say more than this because the Bible says more than this. We must also maintain that the Son's sacrifice *propitiates* the Father's wrath. That's repeatedly taught in Scripture. First, it's clear that sinners apart from Christ face God's wrath ([John 3:36](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%203.36) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%203.36>); [Rom. 1:18](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom.%201.18) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom.%201.18>); [Eph. 5:6](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%205.6) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%205.6>); [Col. 2:5-6](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col.%202.5-6) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col.%202.5-6>)). As sinners, we were "children of wrath" ([Eph. 2:3](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%202.3) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%202.3>)). Yet, "Jesus... rescues us from the coming wrath" ([1 Th. 1:10](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Th.%201.10) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Th.%201.10>)). How does He do that? By assuaging the Father's wrath in His atoning sacrifice. Texts like [John 3:36](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%203.36) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%203.36>) make very little sense if we're not to understand that the Father's wrath was satisfied by Christ. In fact, the Father's own righteousness is bound up with whether Christ endures the punishment we deserve, especially those whose sins had not yet been punished because of the Father's perseverance. See [Romans 3:25-26](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Romans%203.25-26) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Romans%203.25-26>). "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" ([Rom. 5:9](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom.%205.9) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom.%205.9>)).

So, not only does the Father and Son act in holy love toward one another. But the Son, as an act of love for the glory and righteousness of the Father, and as an act of love for the redeemed, offers himself to absorb the Father's holy wrath on our behalf. It's not a matter of one or the other for both are plainly taught in Scripture. Here's the question: Can we accept, as the Bible teaches, that the Father can both *love* His Son and simultaneously *satisfy His wrath upon the Son*? All God's perfections hold together perfectly—His love embraces His wrath and His wrath delights in His love—and that “conjunction of diverse excellencies” (as Edwards put it) is revealed most supremely in the Cross of our Lord. I think your blog post and comment miss this because you're essentially expounding a tradition rather than the biblical text.

As I skimmed the comments in your original post and even points in your post itself, it seemed some folks were motivated to accept your emphasis on “self-sacrificing love” because they're squeamish regarding the wrath of God. That's unfortunate because it positions people to deny what's clearly taught in Scripture. Better to yield our emotions to the truth of God's word than to have our emotions drive us to faulty theological conclusions. We must keep in mind that God's wrath is in no way mingled with sin or unrighteous anger the way human wrath is ([Jam. 1:19 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jam.%201.19\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jam.%201.19), for ex.). His wrath is perfectly righteous, perfectly just, perfectly holy, and even perfectly loving. If we would avoid pejorative and provocative notions like “cosmic child abuse” and remember the character of God, we'll be helped to hold together the diverse excellencies of our God and King, forever praised! We'll also be helped to avoid tragic mistakes like leaving Gospel-preaching and Gospel-practicing churches for the errors of Roman Catholicism.

The Lord bless you this Resurrection season,
Thabiti

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8460#respond\)](http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8460#respond)

7. Pingback: [Friday's Five to Live By | Biblical Counseling Coalition Blogs \(http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2012/04/06/friday-%e2%80%99s-five-to-live-by-37/\)](http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2012/04/06/friday-%e2%80%99s-five-to-live-by-37/)

8. **jeff weaver** says:

[April 6, 2012 at 7:59 am \(https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8453\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8453)

Thabiti,

Thank you for leading us into deep waters of thought. Several brothers and sisters and I have been struggling with what you articulate well for us in saying “his communion, not his nature, changes with the Father during his suffering.”

How can we withstand a possible Muslim claim that this breaks the Trinitarian nature? thanks for your help!

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8453#respond\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8453#respond)

1. **Thabiti Anyabwile** says:

April 6, 2012 at 8:51 am (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8454>)

Hi Jeff,

Thanks for the encouragement, brother, and for dropping by with comment. Good question.

The Muslim claim is an ontological one; namely, God exists in a radical oneness with no persons or partners in himself.

To say that the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, voluntarily endured the Father's on our behalf is not an ontological claim but a relational and economical claim. We're simply saying that the Persons of the Trinity are real Persons with differing roles in accomplishing our salvation (think [Eph. 1](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%201) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%201>), for example). That they have differing roles in accomplishing our salvation, including the death of Christ in his humanity, does not therefore entail a change in the ontological nature of God.

Again, I want to be humble before the mystery. We dare not say too much lest we blaspheme. But we must maintain that Jesus' death was a real death, His suffering a real suffering, and that the worst part of that suffering had to do with His propitiation of the Father's wrath. Does that make sense?

Grateful for your labors in the Lord,
T-

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8454#respond\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8454#respond)

1. **jeff weaver** says:

April 6, 2012 at 9:59 am (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8455>)

I really appreciate your quick response and helpful articulation. We definitely get and agree with the distinct persons and actions, and that does not hinder the ontological oneness.

In part 1/2 of this series, the human nature of Christ experiences separation from God, which allows the unity amongst the God-head to remain intact, spiritually. Our concern/question, is that if there is a spiritual separation, does any unity remain intact? Does that then, even if for a short period of time, mean that Jesus was 'less than one with God'? I know there is mystery there for sure, but do we have any scriptural or theological insight resolve some of that tension? Thanks again!

[Reply \(/thabitiianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8455#respond\)](http://thabitiianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8455#respond)

9. **Bryan Cross** (<http://www.calledtocommunion.com>) says:

April 6, 2012 at 10:27 am (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitiianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8457>)

Jeff,

In the Catholic tradition, the Logos is the Father's perfect self-understanding, the Father's perfect Concept (eternally generated in the bosom of the Father), and in this way the perfect image of the Father. (See St. Augustine's De Trinitate, and questions 34-35 of part 1 of St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica.) Thabiti's claim that "the ancient, eternal fellowship between Father and Son was broken" entails, given this Catholic understanding of the relation of the Logos to the Father, that the Father hated His own self-understanding, His own perfect Concept of Himself. And that entails that for some time (as if God is in time), God lost His own self-understanding, and ceased to know who He is, because He turned His back on what He saw when He looked inside Himself. From a Catholic point of view, that's blasphemous. God cannot possibly God hate Himself, or hate His own self-understanding, or hate the perfect image of Himself, or fail to know Himself. It treats the relation of the Logos to the Father as something *extrinsic* to the Father, and hence entails polytheism or Arianism.

In the Catholic tradition there was no rupture in the Trinity on Good Friday, no separation of the Father and the Logos, no hatred or wrath of the Father toward His own eternal Word. That's not even possible. Nothing can rupture the perfect, immutable, and necessary community of the Persons of the Godhead. In the Catholic tradition, the meaning of the "why have you forsaken me" refers to the loss of spiritual consolation in His *human soul*, not a breakdown in relations in the Godhead between the Persons of the Trinity.

In the peace of Christ,

– Bryan

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&repytocom=8457#respond\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&repytocom=8457#respond)

1. **Thabiti Anyabwile** says:

April 6, 2012 at 2:56 pm (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8462>)

Jeff and Bryan,

Thanks for the interaction. Jeff, I don't think there is biblical warrant even for a moment to argue that an actual ontological separation occurred between the Father and the Son. I don't think we can speak of Jesus ever being "less than one with God." He was one with God from eternity ([John 1:1-3](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%201:1-3) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%201:1-3>)), one with God in redemption ([John 10:10](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2010:10) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2010:10>), [17-18](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2010:17-18) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2010:17-18>), [28-30](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2010:28-30) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2010:28-30>)), and continues to be one with God throughout glory ([John 17:1-5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2017:1-5) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2017:1-5>)). Even in His suffering, you'll recall that the Savior proclaims "Into your hands I commit my spirit" ([Luke 23:46](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2023:46) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2023:46>)). Save hands indeed.

I think you have to avoid ontological categories altogether. Instead, I think we have to understand this in terms of the fellowship between the Persons. "Forsakenness" is one way to understand wrath. This post construes such forsakenness as a *relational* withdrawing of the Father's approving presence. We can't even talk of His withdrawal in any absolute terms because even if we go down to Sheol He is there ([Ps. 139:7-8](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps.%20139:7-8) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps.%20139:7-8>)). This has to do with communion, not with ontological existence. There's no reason, biblical or otherwise, to think that just as the Father shows His love to the Son that He can't also show His justice and wrath to the Son when the Son takes upon himself our sin. That's the logic of the gospel ([2 Cor. 5:21](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor.%205:21) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor.%205:21>)). But I want to keep stressing, that's a *relational* dynamic, not an alteration in the being of God. I hope I'm stating this clearly???

Bryan, I've done my best to understand you on your own terms and to react to what you are actually saying rather than supply a "Reformed" "take" on your comments. I'd really like to ask the same of you if we're to continue this conversation.

I don't think I've ever heard anyone say—and I certainly have not said—that the Father *hates* the Son. My previous comment goes to great length to establish the opposite from the Scripture. Nor do I think that God forsaking the Son as He did on the Cross entails divine self-hatred or God hating His own "self-understanding." Forgetting for a moment the contestable nature of those terms, it seems to me that your "God hates the Son" and "this is polytheism or Arianism" objections is simply a red herring. No one

is saying that.

Never mind a “Catholic point of view,” to argue from *any* point of view that Christ either “began” or “ceased” to be God is blasphemy! He is eternally God the Son. There is no division within the Godhead between the Persons. That, indeed, would be polytheism. But that’s not what I’m arguing here or anywhere. Ontologically, there exists One God in Three Persons, each Person is fully God, and there is One God—from eternity to eternity.

Bryan, you appear to flatten this ontological truth into something that forbids differing roles in the economy of redemption. The Father elects and sends the Son ([Eph. 1:3-6 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%201.3-6\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%201.3-6)), the Son voluntarily and lovingly obeys the Father and gives Himself in our place ([Eph. 1:7-12 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%201.7-12\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%201.7-12)), and God the Holy Spirit regenerates and seals the elect in faith until the salvation that has begun is complete ([Eph. 1:13-14 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%201.13-14\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%201.13-14)). The differing roles in our salvation are all there in one sentence! The Son’s role in salvation necessitates that He become the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The Lamb makes atonement for our sin, suffering in our place, making us pleasing in the Father’s sight by the removal of our guilt and the imputation of His righteousness. All of that necessitates the Father judging the Son in our place—it necessitates His wrath be displayed on the Son so the “objects of mercy” are saved ([Rom. 9:22-24 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom.%209.22-24\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom.%209.22-24)). While the Son’s role requires that He become sin for us and that He bear our penalty on the tree, it does not therefore follow that either the Father hates the Son or that they cease to be One God. “Catholic theology” may hold that view, but the Bible doesn’t.

I don’t mind you commenting here, friend, but I’d appreciate your not misrepresenting what I’m attempting to say—however inarticulate or crude.

In Christ Jesus the Resurrected Lord,
T-

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8462#respond\)](http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8462#respond)

10. **Bryan Cross** (<http://www.calledto communion.com>) says:

April 7, 2012 at 2:43 pm (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8465>)

Hello Thabiti,

I replied in [comment #69 \(http://www.calledto communion.com/2010/04/catholic-and-reformed-conceptions-of-the-atonement](http://www.calledto communion.com/2010/04/catholic-and-reformed-conceptions-of-the-atonement)

[/#comment-29636](#)) of the other thread. May God bless your Easter celebration this weekend.

In the peace of Christ,

– Bryan

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8465#respond\)](#)

1. **Thabiti Anyabwile** says:

April 7, 2012 at 2:48 pm (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-8466>)

Hi Bryan,

Happy Easter to you as well. Happy to have you have the last word. Thanks for the exchange. It's been beneficial. Grace and peace,

T-

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=8466#respond\)](#)

11. **MAVincent (<http://www.victoryefc.com>)** says:

February 22, 2016 at 3:27 pm (<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-142596>)

Wow, a seminary class in the comments. Thanks for a mature and interesting discussion on a paramount topic. I wish all could handle these important and deep issues so well.

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&replytocom=142596#respond\)](#)

12. **Sandra** says:

[August 30, 2016 at 2:25 pm \(https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-171168\)](https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/#comment-171168)

I know this article was written years ago but I'd like to point out that the Bible never stated that the Father "turned His face away." This is from a song called "How Great the Father's Love for Us." The [Habakkuk 1:13](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Habakkuk%201.13) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Habakkuk%201.13>) verse needs to be read in the context you stated about God's approval: it's that God can't look upon sin with approval, not that God can't actually look upon sin; obviously, God sees everything.

Psalm 22 that begins with the words Jesus spoke on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and continues with Messianic scriptures, specifically states in verse 24, "For He has not despised or detested the torment of the afflicted.

HE DID NOT HIDE HIS FACE FROM HIM

but listened when he cried to Him for help." (Emphasis mine)

Jesus stated that His Father is with Him always. God never took His spiritual eyes off His Son for one moment. He will never leave us nor forsake us— and not Jesus either.

[Reply \(/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&repytocom=171168#respond\)](/thabitianyabwile/2012/04/04/what-does-it-mean-for-the-father-to-forsake-the-son-part-3/?comments&repytocom=171168#respond)

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THABITI ANYABWILE

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