

Did the Father Abandon Jesus on the Cross?

by Maurice Barnett

The theological doctrine that the Father abandoned Jesus while on the cross is based on the following:

First, the *imputation theory* that all of man's sins were *transferred* to Jesus while He was on the Cross; God was so enraged against sin that when Jesus became sin-laden on the Cross, the Father could not bear to look upon Him and thus turned away from Him. This, supposedly, was one of the penalties that Jesus had to take on Himself as result of being our sin-bearer. Of course, imputation is not true to begin with and so everything based on it is also false. Their reasoning on this is circular. They try to prove the imputation of sins is true from the cry of Jesus on the Cross, "why hast thou forsaken me." They then claim that this is the meaning of the cry because our sins were imputed to Christ. They attempt to prove one thing by asserting the other. In all this is the conclusion that God must have abandoned Jesus on the Cross because of the imputation of sins.

Second, it is based on the theory that Jesus was just a man on the cross and in order to redeem mankind had to experience everything that man experiences which includes spiritual death. So, Jesus died spiritually when God turned away from Him and is the reason for the cry of Jesus. The reasoning again is circular. They try to prove Jesus died spiritually because His cry is the evidence of the withdrawal of the Father and then assert that the cry meant the withdrawal by the Father because He had to die spiritually. They attempt to "prove" one thing by the other.

However, there is absolutely no evidence anywhere, in Old or New Testaments that has the slightest implication that God withdrew from Jesus at any time, including the cross. There is no Bible teaching that there was any imputation of sin. To the contrary, Jesus *specifically* denies that the Father would withdraw from Him while on the cross. In addition, attaching such a meaning to the cry of Jesus is the very opposite of what Jesus said His time on the Cross was *intended* to show. **This can be proven from Scripture.**

(1) **John 8:28-29.** Jesus first tells the Jews that when He is "*lifted up*" that "*He that sent me is with me; he hath not left me alone.*" Keep in mind that His audience in the Temple area where this took place was Jews other than His disciples; His disciples were not even present. His audience included Scribes and Pharisees, some of whom would be instrumental in killing Him. Further on in the chapter, Jesus told them they were of their father the devil, among other things. They tried to kill him right then. They were included in the "ye" in the statement "when ye have lifted up." That is followed with the "*then shall ye know that I am,*" the "ye" meaning the Jews to whom He was speaking.

The verb in the first part, "he that sent me *is* with me," is Present Active Indicative in Greek, which means the action is continuous; **the Father would be continually**

with Jesus. He had already stated this in verse 16, “*and I am not alone but I and the Father that sent me.*” In verse 16 as well, the verb is Present Active Indicative meaning that I am never alone. It is continuous, without break. Jesus adds to that the statement in verse 29 by saying the same thing a little differently - “*he hath not left me alone.*” The verb here is Aorist. It means “not at one time has he ever left me alone.” He says the same thing three ways to emphasize His point. This is a denial of any desertion by the Father. So, while He was lifted up on the cross, the Father was continuously with Him just as He had always been with Him.

(2) **John 16:32.** Jesus tells His disciples that the time was there when they would be scattered and would leave Him alone. That happened when the mob took Jesus in the garden and the disciples remained scattered, left Him alone, until after His resurrection. Jesus then says, “*yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*” This is all during the time the disciples were scattered, from the garden to the resurrection. The verb in “*I am not alone*” is Present Active Indicative. Continuous action, just as in **John 8:16, 29.** The verb in “*the Father is with me*” is Present Active Indicative. Continuous action, just as in **John 8:16, 29.** Jesus, again, says it two ways to make sure it was understood. Notice it -

“*He that sent me is with me; he hath not left me alone.*” - **John 8**

“*Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*” - **John 16**

Both passages are referring to the same period of time, the time of the Cross when He would be lifted up and His disciples would leave Him alone. Through that period there was no time when the Father was not with Jesus. Jesus denies a desertion by the Father.

(3) **John 8:28.** Jesus said to the Jews, “*When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am (he).*” There is no “he” in the original text. “I am” is a declaration of His being God, verses 24, 58. This is a fact that ties Him with **Exodus 3:14, Isaiah 48:12-19** and other passages that identify Him with Jehovah God.

Now, the question is, what was there about the scene of the cross that would convince the Scribes and Pharisees, those who would put Him to death, that He was God? They were convinced that He was not God as their comments in **Matthew 27** show. The Roman Centurion concluded out of his pagan superstition that He was the Son of God because of the earthquake. But, that would not convince the Jews who thought the miracles they saw performed were done by the devil. An earthquake would not convince them of anything but that a natural phenomenon had occurred.

If the cry of Jesus, “*why hast thou forsaken me*” means that God had truly forsaken Him, then it would only *confirm* to the Jews what they already believed. Why would Jesus cry out a statement that would indicate the *opposite* of what He said would happen when He was lifted up? His time on the cross was to prove to the Jews that He was God, not the opposite. ***The cry of Jesus that quoted Psalm 22:1 was the specific reason Jesus said that when He was lifted up that they would know that He was God.*** If anything would convince the Jews, it would be Scripture. Here is a quotation from Oliver Buswell in his *Systematic Theology*, page 68. At least on this point, he is correct.

“On the affirmative side we can definitely point out that in New Testament times for one to cite the opening words of an Old Testament passage such as Psalm 22 was equivalent to citing the entire passage. We can be sure that these words of Jesus would have been understood by His disciples as equivalent to His saying, ‘Remember the 22nd Psalm.’ Christ’s enemies had just quoted another saying from this Psalm in taunting

Him, “He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Matthew 27:43; quoting Psalm 22:8). This fact would give added weight to Jesus’ citing this Psalm.”

Since the Jews already referred to Psalm 22:8 to throw at Jesus to show God had deserted Him, then they must have been right, if God *had* deserted Him. Then are we to believe that Jesus quoted verse one of Psalm 22 in order to confirm to the Jews that God had indeed deserted Him and He must not be God just as they supposed? But, *Jesus said that His time on the cross would prove He was God*. Now, who was right in this, the Jews or Jesus? It is a terrible mistake to take the sole piece of evidence of Jesus’ Godhood to the Jews and turn it into a confirmation to the Jews of their unbelief.

Jesus quoted the opening lines of Psalm 22 to get them to look at the entire chapter. If the Jews would only stop to look at all of Psalm 22, they would be looking at the scene spread before them in detail and see themselves like looking in a mirror. Psalm 22 pictures what the Jews *thought* about Jesus, as they *thought* that God had deserted Him but actually had not; the Jews were wrong. They would see the piercing of His hands and feet and casting lots over His garments and other things specifically detailed by prophecy. Psalm 22 is a powerful evidence and vindication of the Godhood of Jesus and was the evidence to them that when He was lifted up that they would know He was God.

Now, the question to my brethren who have been greatly influenced by Calvinist ideas is - where is your evidence that God withdrew from Jesus on the cross? I have the evidence that God did not do so ☞