

Question: Did God divide Himself when Jesus came to earth? If not, then how can God forsake Himself on the cross?

Answer: God did NOT divide Himself when Jesus came to earth. During Jesus' earthly ministry, He continually acknowledged that He and the Father were "one" (e.g., John 17:11, 21). If this was not the case, God is not God. I say this because if the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) failed to be one for even a nanosecond, God is not eternal. If God is not eternal, He is not God. Yet, the explicit testimony of Scripture is that God is eternal (e.g., Isa 9:6; 1 Tim 1:17).

So what happened on the cross? God forsook Jesus (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34). The question is, to what degree? First, it is important to note that this is the only time Jesus does not address God as "Father." In His first utterance from the cross, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). In the seventh and last utterance He said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (23:46). So in the opening and closing words it was "Father," but in the central utterance, the fourth, it was "My God, My God."

It will help to consider the usage of the terms in Jesus' language elsewhere when He speaks to God. Jesus speaks of God as "Father" in the Gospels about 170 times. New Testament scholar S. Lewis Johnson has noted, "Palestinian Judaism was very reluctant to speak of God as Father in the time of our Lord. In fact, no one has produced to date a single instance in which God is addressed as 'my Father' by an individual person." Jesus, however, spoke of God as "My Father." He used the words almost unanimously in His prayers—to be exact, twenty-one times. There is only one instance in which Jesus addressed a prayer to God and failed to use the term "My Father." That occasion, of course, is the fourth utterance from the cross. Why? There can be only one explanation: He regarded His relationship to God at this precise moment as being a *judicial* one, not a *paternal* one. In other words, He saw Himself primarily as a man before God, not as the eternal Son before His Father.

Second, it must not be overlooked that Jesus addressed His God as "*My God, My God*" (italics mine). It was a cry of distress but not of distrust. Christ was speaking from the viewpoint of His human nature in His prophetic cry, addressing His Father as His God, but the pronoun "my" seems to refer to both natures or His whole person. Christ was being judicially forsaken because He was bearing the sin of the world. It was not simply the divine nature forsaking the human nature as some have held.

God abandoned Jesus in the judicial sense that He focused His wrath on the Son (cf. Mark 14:36). Jesus bore God's curse and His judgment for sin (cf. Deut 21:22-23; Isa 53:5-6; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). God, who cannot look on sin (Hab 1:13), turned His back, so to speak, on Jesus who bore that sin in His own body on the cross. Jesus experienced separation from God when He took the place of sinners and bore the guilt of the world's sins (Mark 10:45; Rom 5:8; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:18). Even though the physical sufferings that Jesus experienced were great, the spiritual agony that He underwent as the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world was infinitely greater.

Finally, Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1. That is why He expressed His agony of separation as a question. Jesus was not asking God for an answer. As Jesus used this verse, it expressed an affirmation of His relationship to God and an acknowledgment that God had abandoned Him.

Summary: Because God is holy (Ps 22:3) He cannot overlook sin. On the contrary, He must punish it. The Lord Jesus had no sin of His own, but He took the sins of the world upon Himself. Paul writes, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). When God looked down and saw our sins upon the sinless substitute, He withdrew from Christ. It was this separation that Jesus sensed and was the most agonizing element of the cross. God had to disassociate Himself from Jesus because He bore the full weight of the sins of the world.