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Abstract: The cross of Christ is a scandal, a mystery, and for Christians, an object of wonder. Even today, after millennia of reflection upon the crucifixion, theologians and pastors still probe the atonement, debating and discussing numerous elements of the cross-work of Christ: how wrath is borne, whether sin is forgiven, and what precisely transpires when the Son cries out that he is “forsaken” of the Father. This article will argue not that the crucifixion involved the “breaking” of the Trinity, for this is metaphysically and ontologically impossible, nor that the Father “hated” the Son at Calvary. This article contends amidst a range of views that there is nonetheless real interruption of communion between the Father and Son during his agonizing cross-work. Because the Father “crushes” the Son under the weight of his wrath against sin, we know divine rescue and forgiveness, learning from the atonement of Christ the distinctive beauty of biblical love, a love foreshadowed in the Day of Atonement in older times. This article is thus an exercise in threefold theological construction: it is a work of exegetical theology unto biblical theology unto the overarching synthetic conclusions of systematic theology.

Key Words: atonement, wrath, cross of Christ, forsaken, justice of God, holiness, righteousness, Day of Atonement

The cross of Christ is a scandal, a mystery, and for Christians, an object of wonder. Even today, after millennia of reflection upon the crucifixion, theologians and pastors still probe the atonement, debating and discussing numerous elements of the cross-work of Christ: how wrath is borne, whether sin is forgiven, and what precisely transpires when the Son cries out that he is “forsaken” of the Father. While this moment is wrapped in the mists of Trinitarian personal relations, it is the argument of this author that the bearing of divine wrath by Christ entails that something unique unfolds at Calvary in the relationship between the Father and the Son.

This article will argue not that the crucifixion involved the “breaking” of the Trinity, for this is metaphysically and ontologically impossible, nor that the Father “hated” the Son at Calvary. These points stated, this article contends amidst a range of views that there is nonetheless real interruption of communion between the Father and Son during his agonizing cross-work. Because the Father “crushes” the Son

under the weight of his wrath against sin, we know divine rescue and forgiveness, learning from the atonement of Christ the distinctive beauty of biblical love, a love foreshadowed in the Day of Atonement in older times. The cross emerges from this study not merely as a means by which God can love sinners, but as the center of a divine grand strategy to overcome perfect justice in order to communicate perfect love.

In order to make this case, this paper will delve into the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament. To understand New Testament atonement, that is, we do well to understand Old Testament atonement. This accords with a broader inerrantist (and sufficientist) evangelical method.¹ Our first reference in any biblical doctrine is not philosophical discussion, cultural backgrounds, or extra-textual sources, nor is it an appeal to human reason and standards of human wisdom. That which *first* frames our understanding of the atonement of the new covenant is the atonement ceremony of the old covenant. Accordingly, in the first section of this paper, we chart this course. We make three points from the Day of Atonement, chronicled in Leviticus 16-17. We then offer three systematic considerations that help us understand the ultimate Day of Atonement, mysterious and wondrous and terrible as the crucifixion of Christ is.

The Day of Atonement as the Background of New Testament Atonement

I. The Context of the Day of Atonement

Leviticus 16:1 shows that the ceremony to unfold is not structured to make abstract atonement. This day is *לִפְנֵי יְהוָה*, “before the Lord” (v. 1).² So too will the Lord appear in the cloud above the mercy seat (v. 2). The context of the Day of Atonement removes any doubt from the modern reader’s mind that this ceremony is disconnected from divine prerogatives. Instead, God himself is overseeing this day. Nadab and Abihu made the terrible mistake of thinking that their offerings would pass muster, but it would not. This is because every sacrifice was before the Lord. Though a formal ceremony, atonement in biblical terms is inescapably personal, and God is the party who must be propitiated by it, lest just judgment flow from heaven itself.

Unlike the unrighteous “worship” of Nadab and Abihu, the Day must be conducted according to God’s decree. Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach note that “God’s wrath must be overcome in order to draw near to him . . . only by performing the sacrifices in the correct manner is this possible.”³ Instead of “strange fire” (Lev 10:1), which represents all our efforts to improve on God’s appointed worship, the Lord frames

1. If “sufficientist” is not a technical theological term, it ought to be.

2. The ESV is used throughout this article, as it is here.

3. Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 47.

the Day that will display covenant love. Love, we learn here, is no saccharine affair; it is not a mere sentiment, and it is anything but an affirmation of human identity in self-chosen form. Love entails death, this text teaches us. In order for God to draw near to his people, blood must flow.

But God does draw near: “I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat,” so it is truly God, not man, who presides over this holy ceremony (v. 2). Aaron, the high priest, is an attendant unto the divine at this righteous event. Clothed in simple garb, he must cleanse himself to the utmost in order to perform his duty (vv. 3-5).⁴ This is because of the high stakes of this ceremony; it is also because the Lord is present at this ceremony. As Wenham says,

On this one day the high priest enters the “other world,” into the very presence of God. He must therefore dress as befits the occasion. Among his fellow men his dignity as the great mediator between man and God is unsurpassed, and his splendid clothes draw attention to the glory of his office. But in the presence of God even the high priest is stripped of all honor: he becomes simply the servant of the King of kings, whose true status is portrayed in the simplicity of his dress.⁵

See verses 6-10:

[6] “Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. [7] Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. [8] And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. [9] And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, [10] but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

These are two uses of the aforementioned construction יְהוָה לִפְנֵי “before the Lord,” and two of לַיהוָה אֶחָד, “for the Lord,” language which shows us what we noted above: God is presiding over the Day of Atonement. He is the greater Abraham, and he is instituting the system that will lead to the death of the Greater Isaac.⁶ We could extract much from this passage alone, but must simply note the following before hastening along: whatever we make of this cultic event, it is God’s idea. God has

4. “Ezekiel (9:2–3, 11; 10:2, 6–7) and Daniel (10:5; 12:6–7) describe angels as dressed in linen, while Rev. 19:8 portrays the saints in heaven as wearing similar clothes.” Gordon J. Wenham, *Leviticus*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 230.

5. Wenham, *Leviticus*, 230.

6. Jeremy Treat cites work that allows this connection. See Jeremy Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 61–62. Treat leans on Dempster for this profitable—and necessary—linkage. See Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 85.

called for it. God structures it. It pleases God. It satisfies God. This is how God wants to deal with sin; it is his idea, not man's. In the discussion that follows, we must remember this—not only in Leviticus 16, but all of Scripture, and all of Christian doctrine, and all of Christian ministry. Atonement flows from this bloody stream.

II. The Effect of the Day of Atonement

After making atonement for himself through the killing of a bull (vv. 11-14), Aaron then cleanses the Holy Place (vv. 15-19). He kills a goat as a sin offering and sprinkles the blood on the mercy seat, enabling entrance into the holy of holies. The significance of this moment in the cultic calendar is great: a holy priest enters the holy place on behalf of the holy people in order to restore fellowship with the holy God.⁷ Yet though we learn a great deal from these preparations about the importance of absolute purity and holiness as the precedent for atonement, we have not yet reached the apex of the Day's events. Without the spotlessness (in relative terms) of the priest and the place, propitiation for sin will not occur. The people and the priest himself stand as "unclean" due to their "transgressions" and "sins" (v. 16).⁸ Blood cleanses and consecrates the setting of atonement (v. 19).

After this, Aaron brings before the people a live goat, and confesses over it "all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins" (v. 21). He transfers in symbolic terms this body of wickedness to the goat and sends it into the wilderness. The goat bears "all their iniquities on itself to a remote area," signifying the total transfer of unrighteousness to it.⁹ This act renders the people cleansed, righteous, holy, and atoned for (v. 22).¹⁰ The goat is sent to a land "cut off," a phrase with tremendous spiritual significance.¹¹ The place is not merely remote, in

7. Wenham makes clear that holiness is the chief category marker of this entire ceremony: "The uncleanness that affects every man and woman to a greater or lesser degree (see Lev. 11–15) pollutes the sanctuary. These atonement-day rituals make the impossible possible. By cleansing the sanctuary they permit the holy God to dwell among an unholy people (vv. 16-17; compare with Isa. 6:3ff.; Ps. 15; 24:3ff.)" Wenham, *Leviticus*, 236–7.

8. Sklar notes that the covering of sin extends to especially heinous sins: "included sins against the Lord for which sacrificial atonement was not normally an option, namely, sins of *rebellion* (*pēsa'*), a strong word used elsewhere to describe rebelling against a superior (Exod. 23:21) and thus well understood to refer to the 'high-handed' sin of Numbers 15:30-31." Jay Sklar, *Leviticus*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 212.

9. As will be obvious, the goat is not guilty; it is the people who are guilty, and so the scapegoat is bearing "their guilt," that is, the guilt of Israel. See J. Alan Groves, "Atonement in Isaiah 53," in Charles Evan Hill and Roger R. Nicole, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological & Practical Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 78.

10. The goat was sent out before all the people, as Sklar points out: "Unlike the rites within the Most Holy Place, this rite was performed in full view of all the Israelites, who could watch the goat – laden with their sin – disappear into the wilderness, never to return (cf. Ps. 103:12)." Sklar, *Leviticus*, 212. This is a representational atonement; the Day of Atonement is effectual for the community, but only the blood of Christ actually washes sinners clean. It is "impossible" for animal blood to cover the wicked (Heb 10:4).

11. As Sklar shows, "The word for 'cut off' (*gezera*) is built on a root used elsewhere to

other words; it is a place of cursing, for as Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach show, to be cut off “from the camp of Israel was to experience God’s punishment for sin.”¹²

Someone could respond to this presentation of old covenant atonement by noting that it seems rather fragmented compared to new covenant atonement. This is actually a crucial truth. In the old covenant, there are numerous bulls, several goats, and different chronological moments that together accomplish a provisional—and only a provisional—covering of Israel’s sin.¹³ We learn from Leviticus that the Day of Atonement includes numerous elements that is in aggregate one festival of sacrifice. John Stott notes of the sacrifices referenced above, for example, that “the two together are described ‘as a sin offering’ in the singular (v. 5).”¹⁴ Stott clarifies this typological reality: “The author of the letter to the Hebrews has no inhibitions about seeing Jesus both as ‘a merciful and faithful high priest’ (2:17) and as the two victims, the sacrificed goat whose blood was taken into the inner sanctuary (9:7, 12) and the scapegoat which carried away the people’s sins (9:28).”¹⁵

These cultic elements honor and satisfy the Lord, but also point ahead to the need for a sacrifice that brings complete and efficacious atonement. In the new covenant, there will not be several beings that spill blood; there will not be different points at which atonement occurs for one group or person but not others. One sacrifice, one act of bloodshed, will cover the guilty and assuage the Father’s wrath. We recall that the entire old covenant Day is “before the Lord”; so the new covenant Day will be “before the Lord,” and bring to completion the propitiatory worship that was begun in Israel’s time. The death of Christ will go up before the Lord as a *προσφορὰν καὶ θυσίαν τῷ Θεῷ εἰς ὁσμὴν εὐωδίας*, “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2). The new covenant sacrifice will unite all these creatures, all these elements, all these desperate needs, all this provision for distinct sins in just one act of one person, the God-man.

III. The Day of Atonement Points us to the Power of the Blood

Lest we misunderstand the ceremony and think that we may emphasize any one of the accomplishments entailed therein, Leviticus 17:10-12 draws our attention to the overarching agent of atonement: blood.

describe people being cut off from worship at the temple (2 Chr. 26:21, NASV), from life (Lam. 3:54), or from the Lord himself (Ps. 88:5).” Sklar, *Leviticus*, 212.

12. Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 49.

13. This can only be a provisional covering, for after all, a goat bears the people’s sin. But here we must point out that we should not trip over the identity of the sin-bearer, but rather see substitution highlighted in this passage. “The natural reading in this case is that the animal bears the sin and guilt of the people *in their place* and they are thereby released from this burden.” Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 50.

14. John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 144.

15. Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 144.

¹⁰ “If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. ¹¹ For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. ¹² Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.

What precisely is solved by this moment in Israel’s existence on an annual basis? It is this: the “souls” of the covenant people have atonement (v. 11). This is why the ceremony occurs. It is so that the people may live before the Lord and not die.¹⁶ But in order for this to happen, death must take place, blood must be shed, for it is the blood that makes atonement (v. 11).¹⁷ Blood in Israelite religion is holy; blood gives life; blood washes clean.¹⁸ Blood represents the very life of the animal, showing us that the Israelites need a substitute sacrifice for their failure to keep the law. Their failure, like the Day itself, is comprehensively *before the Lord*. Atonement must thus occur, for the law is broken and the people are unholy. One must stand in for the nation.

This tells us the following: 1) God is holy; 2) sin offends God directly; 3) if man is to live before God, sin must receive atonement; 4) atonement of the divinely-desired kind necessitates death; 5) death demands blood, the life of the sacrifice; 6) blood frees the soul as atonement comes to glorious completion.¹⁹

A Theology of Atonement Driven by the Day of Atonement

Thus far we have traced the workings of the levitical Day of Atonement. Our purpose was to better understand the cross of Christ, and the holy prerogatives behind it, through its thematic type. We may now transition to three observations for a broader

16. Emile Nicole comments helpfully on the connection between “ransoming” and purification: “in *kipper* rites, purification cannot be disconnected from compensation: through compensation given to God, purification and forgiveness were granted.” Nicole, *Glory of the Atonement*, 48.

17. “The poured-out life (Hebrew *dam*) of the sacrificial victim is substituted for the life of the worshipper.” Emile Nicole, “Atonement in the Pentateuch,” in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Charles Evan Hill and Roger R. Nicole (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 40.

18. See Sklar on this count: “In short, the animal’s lifeblood was accepted as the ransom payment in place of the offeror’s: it served as a mitigated penalty on the offeror’s behalf, graciously accepted by the Lord (the offended party), in this way rescuing the offeror (the offending party) from due punishment and restoring peace to the relationship between the sinner and the Lord.” Sklar, *Leviticus*, 220–21.

19. Wenham draws attention to the “ransom” language used in verse 11: “11c could be paraphrased ‘the blood ransoms at the price of life.’ In other words the ransom price for man’s life is not a monetary payment (as in Exod. 21:30) but the life of an animal represented by its blood splashed over the altar. Because animal blood atones for human sin in this way, it is sacred and ought not be consumed by man.” Wenham, *Leviticus*, 245.

theology of atonement and the God who makes atonement, the third of which constitutes the lengthiest discussion of this article.

I. The Day of Atonement is both a Joyful and Dreadful Day

It is a day on which God signals that he loves his covenant people, but also that the extension of his love requires the satisfaction of his perfect justice. It is thus a day of great rejoicing, but also the soberest possible recognition. Love is real; love is active, reaching down from heaven in terms that please God; but love is costly, very costly, and calls the people to realize just how unloveable they truly are. Stott says it well: “It cannot be emphasized too strongly that God’s love is the source, not the consequence, of the atonement.” He continues the point, a needed one: “If it is God’s wrath which needed to be propitiated, it is God’s love which did the propitiating.”²⁰ It is not that God’s character changes in the atonement, but rather that his dealings with us change. The atonement thus reveals both the dread nature of divine justice and the exalted character of divine love.

II. The Day of Atonement Satisfies the Wrath of God

We will learn this from other texts more explicitly, but here this truth is displayed implicitly. The very requirements of death in various forms and times on the Day of Atonement make painfully clear that this is not a ceremony in which God hands out favor like Halloween candy, but a day on which he calls his people to account. He holds them responsible, fully and terrifyingly responsible, for their sin. He demands the death of numerous animals; he sends the sin-bearer into the wilderness in order to have fellowship with his people.

We cannot underplay the deeply *personal* nature of the Day of Atonement. Our age will tempt us to do so, for it is an age that has not only lost sight of the rightness of retributive justice, but has lost sight of the God who has created the world and rules all things. In calling for atonement, God is not simply rebalancing the scales of justice; he is not disclosing an interest in arbitrary standards of right and wrong. The Day of Atonement is not upholding a law code in the sky; the Day of Atonement is satisfying God (in provisional but meaningful form). As some atonement theories comprehend, God’s honor has been besmirched by sin, yes. But more than this, God himself has been wronged, God himself has been blasphemed, God himself is rightly burning against sin.²¹

20. Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 174.

21. Roger Nicole makes this point in his discussion of expiation versus propitiation: “Yet sooner or later the question must arise: ‘Who requires expiation or purification, and why?’ If the answer be ‘God does, in the exercise of his righteousness,’ we are back to the traditional view, entirely consonant with the carefully avoided term ‘propitiation.’” Roger Nicole, “C. H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 17, no. 2 (1955): 149. There simply is no way to avoid the uncomfortable biblical reality that it is a holy personal God who judges

My remarks here speak to the idea of “reparative atonement.” This model was recently proposed by Joshua Farris and S. Mark Hamilton, who sum their view up as follows:

Christ bears or absorbs no penalty on this theory, thus it is not to be confused with penal substitution. Rather, the mechanism of atonement is the restoration of divine honor (i.e., a commercial framework, which highlights the King in relation to his kingdom) where the earth is conceived as God’s kingdom and wherein the moral law functions, not the assumption of a debt of punishment or chance for God to dole out his wrath on Christ for sin. On reparative substitution it is the love of Christ for his Father that is the primary motive in his making atonement. Through Christ’s death the [sic] God’s honor is publically restored. What does reparative substitution do then? It restores to God the glory that was taken from him, who, as the apostle says, graciously “passed over former sins,” the result of which was his willingness to be dishonored for a time. Then came the fullness of time. What does reparative substitution do for humanity? It defers divine retribution until all moral accounts will be settled. It fixes both the private and public problems that humanity faces for having transgressed God’s rectoral justice.²²

The proponents of this view are surely correct that God’s honor is besmirched by sin. We made just such an observation with regard to the Lord destroying Nadab and Abihu for their strange fire. Yet we cannot fail to observe that the Day of Atonement reveals much more than a God whose honor needs balm. As we have observed in several places, blood was required for sin. For the priest even to offer sacrifice, atonement for sin had to be made. Then, the scapegoat representatively received all the sin of the nation and was sent off into the darkness. This entails that God’s honor is restored in some form, yes, but much more that the burning anger of the Father against sin is assuaged and absorbed in full by the Son. Is divine honor addressed in the cross? It certainly is. But much more is transpiring, namely, in Christ’s death the demands of God’s holy justice are met by God’s holy love through the cursing of a spotless being. Through the cross, the wrath of God is satisfied; the people are shown to be washed and pardoned.

Yes, the Day of Atonement sets the terms for what follows, and shows us the categories of biblical salvation in its objective dimension: a wronged God who

sin, not an abstract standard. My thanks to Jeffery Moore for this citation and broader research assistance.

22. Joshua R. Farris and S. Mark Hamilton, “This is My Beloved Son, Whom I Hate? A Critique of the Christus Odium Variant of Penal Substitution,” *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* 3 no. 2 (2018), original article copy. This article was to form the basis of a 2019 ETS session with Tom McCall, Farris and Hamilton, Ryan Rippee, Derek Rishmawy, and me. In the actual session, discussion centered more in the dynamics of the Godhead in substitution, hence my more extended interaction with McCall to come (much as the thoughtful case by Farris and Hamilton deserves treatment).

demands perfect righteousness in order to enjoy covenant fellowship with his people. Until righteousness is proffered, until an acceptable sacrifice is presented, the wrath of God burns against the people. God is not only dishonored (as he surely is in extremity). No, the dishonoring of God entails the awakening of the just wrath of God. This is not a general wrath; it is a terrifyingly particular and precise wrath against individual evildoers. So it is that the people, led by the high priest, sacrifice animals because they have personally offended and wronged the personal covenant God of Israel.²³ But here we see the wonder of biblical atonement. The same God who is wrathful against sin is the God who sets up an entire system of atonement in order to mediate love to his covenant people.

These words bear on perpetual discussions about divine justice. Even today, long after being soundly refuted by the church fathers, we hear Marcionite theology promoted as a sound doctrine of God. We cannot fail to observe that a fuller reading of the Day of Atonement refutes Marcionite theology in deeply ironic terms.²⁴ The very Day that features the expression of divine justice is the Day that reveals the depths of divine love.²⁵ It is thus an error of the most profound kind to read the Day

23. As I have noted earlier, it is divine wrath that it is the ultimate “problem” in all this—not in an immoral sense, but in a logistical sense. How will wrath be overcome? Reparative atonement recognizes the prerogatives of a divine being, but concentrates them in the concept of honor. It thus shows a skewing toward categories that the human mind and heart can accept. But Scripture teaches us that divine wrath is our foremost problem. Because of sin, “the wrath of God is coming” (Col. 3:5–6). There is a future “day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed” (Rom. 2:5). See Jeffrey, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 296–300.

24. The irony goes deep here. Cutting out the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement may play well with our sanitized, justice-soft, God-distrusting age. But removing this doctrine, grounded in a major way in the old covenant Day of Atonement, from our theology ends up making divine love considerably less consequential. This is precisely the move that is made against PSA and its advocates; the cross, it seems, becomes far too bloody and wrath-involved. But the costly nature of the cross is exactly what shows just how deep divine love is. Factor such considerations in when you read Marcionlike presentations such as that found in Andy Stanley, *Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 161–63, 223.

25. As I have written previously, Stanley as one very prominent recent example contrasts theology proper—God himself—in the old covenant and new covenant. The Jewish God was “holy” and “separate” and “unapproachable” but the God of John was “love” (Stanley, *Irresistible*, 223). The old covenant God “reserved” his love “for his covenant people” unlike the new covenant God. The critique does not lessen in intensity as the book goes on. The Old Testament God “got so angry” that he drowned the Egyptians (251). He and his prophets demonstrated “righteous anger,” which “is a thing,” Stanley avows, only “as long as we hover over the Old Testament anyway” (251). Unlike the jealous and angry OT God and his wrathful people, “New covenant folks don’t get angry at lost things” (254). This polemic fails to see the point that we are at pains to stress here and throughout this article: it is precisely the holy “Jewish” God who meets the terms of his “righteous anger” by the sacrifice of the Son he loves. The fact that the Father loves the Son he lays on the altar makes the sacrifice infinitely more wondrous (and more mysterious to the natural human mind). For more critique of Stanley’s unbiblical framing, see Owen Strachan, “We Have No Divided God: A Review of ‘Irresistible’ by Andy Stanley,” Center for Public Theology, October 15, 2018, accessible at <https://cpt.mbts.edu/2018/10/15/we-have-no-divided-god-a-review-of-irresistible-by-andy-stanley/>.

of Atonement in Marcionite terms as a sign of the vindictive, bloodthirsty deity of the Old Testament.²⁶

Leviticus 16-17 show us that this God is perfectly holy, yes, but that this God has gone to great lengths to forgive, cleanse, and draw near to his people. He does not do so once; he does not do so every 500 years. He does so annually, repeatedly, over and over again. The Day of Atonement surely shapes our understanding of God's character, and definitely reveals the awful nature and terrible cost of sin. But to stop at this point, and to focus only on the conditions of theistic holiness, is to miss something very near to the entire point of this ceremony. The Day of Atonement is not ultimately a celebration of retribution. It is ultimately a celebration of salvation. Standing behind this salvation—and what a costly salvation it is—is love, everlasting love, love planned as an outpouring before the foundation of the world.

III. The Older Day of Atonement Informs the Greater Day of Atonement

Though God has been wronged, he makes an abundant way back into his favor. We have seen that on the Day of Atonement, this way comes through the sin offering of a spotless sacrifice and then the transfer of sin to a goat. This goat is set apart and then sent away. It is not received back into fellowship. It is not welcomed with loving affection. It is sent far from the covenant people, made a curse for them.

To make a final extended connection, if we are paying attention to the Day of Atonement, we gain needed perspective on the work of Christ. The Father does not hate his Son any more than he hates Aaron, the bulls, or the climactic goat. But he does hate sin. He hates it to the uttermost. Yet his is not a spasmodic hatred like ours.²⁷ He acts to meet the demands of his perfect justice by giving us the purifying grace and total righteousness of his Son.²⁸ To do so, he does not hate the Son; but he does, in loving us, place him on the altar, and the Son is slain for us. In terms that

26. Nor are we forced into a false choice between reparative atonement featuring the unbroken love of the Father and Son or penal substitutionary atonement. As we shall see, the cross of Christ is like the Day conducted in a grand campaign of love, and the Father does not cease to love the Son even as he does pour out his just wrath on the Son at Calvary, a sentence and punishment that leads to temporary interruption of fellowship or communion between the Father and the Son. False choices are a perennial problem in theology, and this is one we should avoid at all costs.

27. Stott's distinction of divine and human anger helps us understand how God can be angry in such a way that we should want him to be angry: "God's anger is absolutely pure, and uncontaminated by those elements which render human anger sinful. Human anger is usually arbitrary and uninhibited; divine anger is always principled and controlled. Our anger tends to be a spasmodic outburst, aroused by pique and seeking revenge; God's is a continuous, settled antagonism, aroused only by evil, and expressed in its condemnation." Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 105–6.

28. John Murray threads the needle nicely on this count: "The propitiation of the divine wrath, effected in the expiatory work of Christ, is the provision of God's eternal and unchangeable love, so that through the propitiation of his own wrath that love may realize its purpose in a way that is consonant with and to the glory of the dictates of his holiness." John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 31–32.

challenge human comprehension, this giving of the Son comes from the God—a giving unto death—who loves his obedient, self-sacrificing Son. This is a unique event, one without parallel in the annals of human history. In sending his Son to the cross, a sending that promises death, the Father expresses love of the deepest kind. This is Fatherly love for sinners, yes, but love as well for the submissive Son who dies. In John's Gospel, Jesus explicitly connects the Father's love and his death: *For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again* (John 10:17).

This means that, drawing from the Day of Atonement, the Father does require blood for a sin offering even as he sends the Son into the wilderness of death, a place where the Father does not go. He does pour out all his wrath on his Son, his only Son, until his bruised, broken, and bleeding Son hangs lifeless on a cross. This is not hatred, for hatred would entail the breaking of intratrinitarian love, but it is the accomplishment of a sentence of death.²⁹ This is, I believe, where we do well to locate the “dereliction” of the Son: the judicial sentence handed down by the Father against his Son on behalf of the covenant people of God. Forsakenness is not found in an aggrieved affection or a ruptured Godhead. Forsakenness is located first in the fact that at Calvary, the Father transfers the guilt of his people to Christ, the ultimate scapegoat, and thus pours out his wrath upon him.³⁰ Secondly, from this penal act comes real temporary interruption of fellowship or communion between the Father and Son. Even as he cries out about his forsakenness, the Son actually dies at the cross, the culmination of the sentence upon him.

This view is distinct from some evangelical accounts of the Son's forsakenness.³¹ Some, for example, emphasize the intensity of the Father's negative emotion toward Christ. Essentially, the Father hates sin, and since the Son bears sin, the Father hates Jesus at the cross.³² This argument is less a dogmatic argument than a textual one, for it intends to do justice to the full force of the language that issues from Jesus's lips.

29. As I will note below, Christ tells his disciples that the Father “loves” him expressly because he obediently submits to the Father's will and dies on the cross. The entire enterprise of the cross, then, is anchored in intratrinitarian love: “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again” (John 10:17).

30. The usage of legal language is vital to understanding this forsakenness. Herman Bavinck, for example, contrasts “subjective” and “objective” forsakenness, and notes that Christ redeemed us “from the curse of the law” in accomplishing this objective work. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ* 3, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 389, 392.

31. This includes what has been called *Christus Odium*, a curious title.

32. This is essentially where R. C. Sproul—a faithful and insightful exegete throughout his life and ministry—is: “Once Christ had . . . volunteered to be the Lamb of God, laden with our sin, then He became the most grotesque and vile thing on this planet. With the concentrated load of sin He carried, He became utterly repugnant to the Father. God poured out His wrath on this obscene thing. God made Christ accursed for the sin He bore. Herein was God's holy justice perfectly manifest. Yet it was done for us. He took what justice demanded for us.” R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1985), 158.

Those who make this argument tend to be strong advocates of penal substitutionary atonement. They generally emphasize that Christ as the sin-bearer is seen exclusively by the Father in those terms; therefore, as the Father's anger burns against sin, the Father's anger burns in a personal sense against Christ.³³

Other renderings go the opposite way. They portray Christ's cry of forsakenness in primary terms as, interestingly, a cry of affirmation of the Father's love (drawing on the broader context of Psalm 22). The argument here is a dogmatic one, for the Father—so the thinking goes—cannot break fellowship with his Son. Thus, at Calvary, when he cries out about forsakenness, the Son is not actually indicating that he and the Father are in any way cut off as he suffers and dies.³⁴ Instead, though he does indeed feel his life ebbing away, he voices Psalm 22, a citation that includes the full context of the Psalm (extending to the affirmation that “he has not hidden his face from him” in verse 24). In this way the Son signals that he and the Father are united and communing in his life as in his death.³⁵

What exactly this entails for penal substitutionary atonement is not clear; advocates of this view tend to be less clear about how exactly atonement covers sinners, and whether the Father is wrathful against sin at all.³⁶ The difficulty with what “forsakenness” means is, after all, traditionally connected for PSA advocates to the Son bearing the Father's wrath. But if the Son is not legally bearing the Father's wrath, it is not immediately necessary—so the argument seems to go—that the Father “forsake” the Son in some way, for there is nothing occurring in the life of the

33. See, for example, the comments of Herman Witsius: “Since there is an exchange of persons between Christ and believers, and since the guilt of our iniquities was laid upon him, the Father was offended and angry with him. Not that he was ever moved with any passion against him, which is repugnant in general to the perfection of the Divine nature, under whatever consideration: neither that he was by any means offended at him, much less abhorred him, so far as he was considered in himself, for so he was entirely free from all sin; but as considered in relation to us, seeing he was our surety, carrying our sins in his own body.” Witsius, *Conciliatory or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain*, trans. Thomas Bell (Glasgow: W. Lang, 1807), 46–47. My thanks to Joseph Randall for this citation, and for a stimulating discussion on the theme of this article.

34. For Tom McCall, “the cry of dereliction means that the Father abandoned the Son to this death at the hands of these sinful people, for us and our salvation.” Thomas H. McCall, *Forsaken: The Trinity and the Cross, and Why It Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 47.

35. This is an argument to weigh carefully. We surely do need to consider the context of biblical quotations and citations in interpreting them. However, if the broader context seems to reverse the point signaled in the actual quotation, we run into obvious difficulty, for we cannot thus read texts in their initial positive (or negative) sense. Carson comments here: “though OT texts are frequently cited with their full contexts in mind, they are never cited in such a way that the OT context effectively annuls what the text itself affirms. . . . It is better to take the words at face value: Jesus is conscious of being abandoned by his Father. For one who knew the intimacy of Matthew 11:27, such abandonment must have been agony.” D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew and Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 647.

36. This is where McCall is; he questions the idea of the wrath of the Father and of the wrath of God in several places in his book *Forsaken* (see 45–46, 80, 82–83).

Son at Calvary that requires the Father to turn his face away from the Son bearing sin in fulfillment of the Father's will.³⁷

One can hope that we can give an account of the cross based on the Day of Atonement that does justice to both Scripture and dogmatics. We need to handle with great care here, but knitting the typological Day and the anti-typological Day helps us make sense of the intratrinitarian dynamics of the cross. The scapegoat sent into the wilderness clearly bore the punishment of God for sin. The scapegoat thus suffered under a judicial sentence, a sentence that rendered it forensically guilty in place of the Israelite community. At the cross, so too did Christ suffer under a judicial sentence, albeit one inexpressibly worse than the prior one. The first scapegoat bore representative wrath for sin, but could not cleanse the guilty. Christ, however, bore the actual wrath of God and drank the cup for all God's elect. He became sin for us, not in an ontological sense—he remained himself—but in a judicial sense (2 Cor 5:21). He took our place. He carried our curse. He died under our legal sentence, the sentence we deserved but he did not.³⁸

This helps us navigate tricky waters. On the one hand, we face the issue of the Father possibly “hating” the Son in an emotional and affective way. On the other, we confront the possibility of only a supposed forsakenness, leaving us with a clouded vision of the cross. Again, we are in the realm of the high and the holy here, peering into things that are very nearly too great for us. Nonetheless I do think that we have a sensible way to frame the intratrinitarian dynamics of the cross. I am not personally convinced that the Father hates the Son at Calvary, nor do I find it optimal to say that the Father and Son are “estranged” (for this word could imply hostility of some kind). Christ cries out ἡλὶ ἡλὶ, “My God, my God” in voicing his dereliction, after all (Matthew 27:46). But we must also note that Jesus did not quote a Psalmic verse affirming his Father's immediate care for him as he died; rather, he cried out that he was σαβαχθάνι, interpreted by Matthew as ἐγκατέλιπες, “forsaken.”

Keeping each of these two sides in mind, I suggest we do best to locate Christ's “dereliction” primarily in the sentence under which he dies, a sentence that leads to his actual physical death; secondarily in the interruption of earthly communion

37. McCall, as one example, affirms propitiation but—citing T. F. Torrance—denies that God can be “acted upon” by any priestly human sacrifice (*Forsaken*, 110). In my reckoning, this confuses the very nature of propitiation, and removes the “before the Lord” context of the typical Day of Atonement and the anti-typical Day of Atonement.

38. John Gill directly connects the cry of forsakenness to this legal verdict: “Wherefore he made not this expostulation out of ignorance: he knew the reason of it, and that it was not out of personal disrespect to him, or for any sin of his own; or because he was not a righteous, but a wicked man, as the Jew blasphemously objects to him from hence; but because he stood in the legal place, and stead of sinners: nor was it out of impatience, that he so expressed himself; for he was entirely resigned to the will of God, and content to drink the whole of the bitter cup: nor out of despair; for he at the same time strongly claims and asserts his interest in God, and repeats it; but to show, that he bore all the griefs of his people, and this among the rest, divine desertion.” John Gill, “Matthew 27:46,” *Exposition of the Bible*, accessible at <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/matthew-27-46.html>.

(or fellowship) as Jesus hangs on Roman wood, interruption that culminates in the death of the man Christ Jesus.³⁹ If death is not an interruption of communion, after all, what is?⁴⁰ In this framing, the Father does not hate the Son, as we are at pains to say. The divine bond of the Trinity is not broken at Calvary. But the Father does genuinely judge the Son, and the Son's experience of his judgment is real, terrible, and unique. This is because the Son undergoes the fate of the guilty at the cross. For the first and only time in the life of the Godhead, the Son is unrighteous in forensic terms at the bar of God's justice, and the Son loses his life at Calvary. Not permitting this threefold recognition of forsakenness (judicial guilt leading into interruption of communion which culminates in physical death) in the doctrine of Christ means that we fail to do justice to the warp and woof of Scripture. Indeed, if we do not watch ourselves, the incarnation itself could seem to trouble a certain pristine metaphysics, one that is more analytic than biblical.

The "forsakenness" of the cross proceeds from the fact that the Son of God is judged guilty at Calvary. Like Abraham loading his son onto the altar, the Father sends his Son to the cross in place of the sinner. This corollary passage can inform our understanding of the sacrifice of the greater Isaac. Jesus takes on our judicial sentence; in the cosmic courtroom of God's justice, he is rendered condemned in our place. He has thus become the true and greater scapegoat. He is sent into the wilderness, sentenced to banishment, for us.

It seems clear in this instance that, even as the Son is upholding the universe per his unbroken and unbreakable divine nature, he is also taking on the full wrath of God, and is thus experiencing the interruption of the communion with the Father that he has enjoyed throughout his incarnation. This interruption, in fact, culminates in the tragedy of his death.⁴¹ While there is admittedly some mist that shrouds our finite human conception of this holy moment, we are not without resources. In my reckoning, we can make greater sense of the intratrinitarian dynamics of the cross by understanding Gethsemane better. Luke's Gospel tells us that before the cross, an angel strengthens Jesus after he prays to the Father in Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). This angel, we cannot help but infer, ministers to Christ due to the express command

39. On this point, McCall and I agree: "His Father did indeed leave him to die, and could have rescued him; Jesus could have been spared the terrible humiliation, agony and death. The Father could have done so, but he did not. Jesus was abandoned—the Father abandoned him to this death, at the hands of these sinful people, for us and our salvation." McCall, *Forsaken*, 44.

40. There is a lively and needful debate over what exactly "forsakenness" means, as is already clear. Leon Morris speaks without qualification of the interruption of communion as I have here: "When we put such passages of Scripture together, it seems that in the working out of salvation for sinners the hitherto unbroken communion between the Father and the Son was mysteriously broken." Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 721–22. Morris also uses the language of "abandonment."

41. John Owen suggests such an interpretation when he writes that the Son was "destitute of comfort so far as to cry, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Ps. xxii.1" Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 56–57

of the Father. So, it seems, that the Father aids Christ throughout the entirety of his earthly life—even in nightmarish Gethsemane—but does not extend such help to Jesus in his crucifixion. We know from the direct witness of the four Gospels that the Father does not explicitly answer Jesus’s cries with either speech or an angel at Calvary. On the cross, Jesus is dying as a curse; he is bearing the Father’s wrath; he is, spiritually speaking, walking in the shadowlands, cut off from the camp, and unto death he receives no known help from heaven (unlike his prior experience).⁴²

We are studying things that are nearly too great for us. To be quite honest, there is no precise analogy we may draw from our context to Christ’s cry of dereliction. This is a unique event, uniquely terrible in experience and uniquely wonderful in effect. The love of the Father for the Son, and the Son for the Father, is not beyond logic (as if it is illogical or insensible) but it is surely supralogical. It is beyond our facts and theorems. In this particular moment in the life of the Father and the Son, we witness a Father who sends his Son to the cross to die in our place, just as we witness a Son who cries out to his Father in agony. The Son trusts his Father and prays several times to his Father on the cross, showing that the Godhead is not severed. Yet the Son also hangs as a sin offering to the Father, his travail unrelieved and his cries not explicitly answered.⁴³ The lack of a response from the Father matters, because our first burden in building doctrine is to take the actual biblical data and work with it, not to conform it to any greater extrabiblical standard.⁴⁴ The speech we hear from Christ, and the lack of speech from the Father, thus must have first priority in shaping our conception of the “forsakenness” Jesus experiences at Calvary.

At this point we must observe that the Father not only *lets* his Son die; he *commissions* him to die, and orchestrates this death according to his sovereign “hand and plan” (Acts 2:23-24). This death is in direct fulfillment of Isaiah 53, at text that

42. Stephen Wellum affirms that the Godhead is fully intact at Calvary, but also that Christ’s bearing of sin causes a temporal change in personal relations: “As Jesus pays the ransom price needed to redeem us, he commits his spirit into the hands of his Father, as he deliberately dies, and with normal personal relations restored between the Father and Son—‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit’ (Luke 23:46).” Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior*, 5 Solas Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 208–9. Wellum’s nod to “normal personal relations” matches what I am articulating in this article. The “forsaking” of Christ entails not just his actual expiration, but comprehends the fullness of his agonized dying at Calvary.

43. While not embracing a “broken Trinity” perspective (like the mainstream of Reformed and evangelical commentators), Stott puts it as strongly as any: “So then an actual and dreadful separation took place between the Father and the Son; it was voluntarily accepted by both the Father and the Son; it was due to our sins and their just reward; and Jesus expressed this horror of great darkness, this God-forsakenness, by quoting the only verse of Scripture which accurately described it, and which he had perfectly fulfilled, namely, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 81.

44. We must first do business with the actual text before us. In this and all our theology, our method must be firstly exegetical. For systematic theology to have any weight, it must first be exegetical theology. This entails that the actual words and citations of a given text shape our theology, even as we necessarily read all Scripture as a whole. There is surely a cyclical reality in play here, but it must always be one that does business with the actual grammar and syntax of a given passage first.

tells us several vital truths about the Father and the suffering servant. The atonement sacrifice was “stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” (v. 4); “the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (v. 6); notably, “it was the will of the LORD to crush (כָּרַס) him; he has put him to grief” (v. 10). None of these formulations explicitly indicate that the Father despises the Son at the cross. But neither do these texts suggest that the Father held back his wrath from the Son. At the grammatical level, Motyer offers both “willed” and “delighted” as capturing the Father’s mindset in “crushing” the sacrifice: “Just as Cyrus ‘fulfilled all the Lord’s will and pleasure’ in the restoration of Jerusalem (44:28), so the heart of God is revealed in his delight, even at such cost, in finding and providing a guilt offering.”⁴⁵

The witness of Isaiah 53, a witness that syncs elegantly with Leviticus 16-17, is that God himself puts the suffering servant “to grief.” He not only grudgingly does so; he gladly sends the servant to die. Because God acts, laying all the sin of his people on the Son, the Son is crushed, left in grief, and smitten by God. These words come to fruition, painful fruition, at Calvary. The Son prays to the Father, but as one example, the “listen to my beloved Son” of the transfiguration does not occur in the crucifixion accounts of the Gospels. Instead, the Son is lifted up to die, and no intervention or strengthening word comes from the heavens. All this is because the Son has become a guilt offering and a scapegoat for us. His ontology is not changed; he dies as the Son. But he is reckoned unrighteous so that his church would be reckoned righteous.

This moment does not break intratrinitarian dogmatics, but it does definitely inform and stretch and shape them. Logic alone, reason alone, cannot guide us here. At Calvary, the greater Abraham does not attack the greater Isaac. He is not a deity enraged by his Son who demands his Son’s blood to placate his uncontrollable anger. The Son is loved by the Father expressly because he lays down his life in obedient submission. But in this episode the Father does something he has never done: he pours out all his just wrath against sin on Christ. He binds the greater Isaac, and he plucks no ram from the thicket. The greater Isaac suffers, and bleeds, and dies by the Father’s perfect will. This is because there is a greater plan at work, a plan orchestrated by the Father to make a people for himself by the blood of his Son and the agency of the Spirit. This sacrifice is called by Paul “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God,” revealing that the death of Christ pleased the Father (Eph 5:2).⁴⁶

45. J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 438.

46. The words of John Piper are helpful on this count: “This explains the paradox of the New Testament. On the one hand, the suffering of Christ is an outpouring of God’s wrath because of sin. But on the other hand, Christ’s suffering is a beautiful act of submission and obedience to the will of the Father. So Christ cried from the cross, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Matthew 27:46). And yet the Bible says that the suffering of Christ was a fragrance to God. ‘Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’ (Ephesians 5:2).” John Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ: Fifty Reasons Why He Came to Die* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 23.

The redemptive plan covered here will mean that the Father can justly give “every spiritual blessing” to his church (Eph 1:3).⁴⁷ This is how he will grant us an inheritance in the heavenly places (1:3-14).⁴⁸ Ephesians 1 is thus greatly important for our broader comprehension of the intratrinitarian love and redemptive love displayed at Calvary. Love, we learn, is not occasional or isolated; the greatest love there is flows from a grand campaign, a plot from before the ages, a rescue mission enacted before any human will or intuition existed.

But this love is not the love that we might expect of God. The love of God given to us is dependent upon the clearing of the Father’s wrath. It is not as if the Father is merely an aggrieved bystander here, and the Son shoulders the load of salvation in order to woo back the Father. No, three times in Ephesians 1 Paul zeroes in on the Father’s will as the impetus of our salvation, our blessing, our iron-clad eschatological hope (Eph 1:5, 9, 11).⁴⁹ Per verse 10, the Father’s “plan” proceeds according to his will, a will that Son and Spirit assent to, wholly affirm, and obey in the perfect pre-temporal expression of joyful submission. You could say it this way: before time itself, the Father game-plans to overcome his own perfectly just anger against sin. This, and no other, is the fullest expression of divine love for sinners, a love that takes shape in the Father’s will and plan before the foundation of the earth, a love that drive the Son to die for sinners in perfect obedience to the Father, a love that sends the Spirit into our hearts as the intrushing manifestation of divine possession.

Here we recall our earlier response to those who would argue that divine justice cancels divine love, and who would suggest that the existence of divine wrath in our theological categories crowds out room for genuine love. Love, we hear from many cultural angles today, has no contact at all with anger. One who is loving effectively cannot be angry. But in Scripture and scriptural theology (and any sound systematic theology built upon exegetical theology firstly and biblical theology secondly), the love of God solves the problem of the wrath of God. Love emerges in cosmically beautiful yet alien fashion, for the Father who loves his Son crushes his Son in order to love the elect chosen as a people unto himself. There is elegant symmetry between Testaments on this count; Scripture speaks with one voice here. Just as we observed

47. Thielman notes that the Father’s agency is in view in the early portions of this section of Ephesians. Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 37–39.

48. See Matthew Barrett here: “The incarnate Son voluntarily submits Himself to the preordained purpose of the Father, as evident in Jesus’s Gethsemane prayer, and the Father in turn approves the work of the propitiation that His Son accomplishes, most visibly manifested when He raises Him from the dead, thereby vindicating His Son and justifying His work of atonement (Rom. 4:25).” Barrett, “In Our Place: The Atonement,” in *High King of Heaven: Theological and Practical Perspectives on the Person and Work of Jesus*, ed. John A. MacArthur (Chicago: Moody, 2018), 134.

49. For more on this section in Ephesians and the Father’s saving will, see Ryan L. Rippee, *That God May Be All in All: A Paterology Demonstrating That the Father Is the Initiator of All Divine Activity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), 68, 129.

earlier that the Day of Atonement should best be understood as a work of love (that perfectly meets the terms of God's holiness), so we should understand the cross in still greater terms of a broader plan of divine kindness, affection of the strongest kind. Divine love meets the terms of divine justice. The cross is the greater Day of Atonement, the Day when this love is truly secured, for redemption of the elect is once and for all time accomplished.

How distinct such love is from worldly love, which is essentially uninhibited emotional affirmation of the other without any conditions.⁵⁰ Per the terms of the Creator-creature distinction, God's love is not our love (the natural man's love, that is).⁵¹ Just as God is altogether distinct from man, separated by an infinite ontological gap, so God's love is altogether distinct from man's love. It is not as if the Father's love shown in Christ's death and secured by the Spirit is just like human love, but with a redemptive twist. The Father's love *is* love, and though humanity assumes we love in the same way, we do not.⁵²

This discussion of the finer points of the cross thus has direct bearing on our evangelism, apologetics, and discipleship. If those outside the church (or even those inside it) protest that love by definition should not include such realities as Fatherly crushing of the Son, wrath, and intratrinitarian forsaking of any kind, we must respectfully counter that love has no ultimate definition outside of biblical categories. Love is what God says it is; love is what the Godhead gives us, the three persons working jointly to fulfill the Father's perfect plan. Love that is weak is man-defined love, often emotionally grounded; love that is strong, infinitely strong, does not dissipate under even the worst circumstances, judicial sentencing of the Son that leaves the Son guilty on behalf of sinners. Intratrinitarian love does not barely endure during the atonement; the expansive love of the Godhead is *defined* by the holding together of divine love even through the worst possible event, an event in which one member of the Trinity puts another to grief as the three members work together to fulfill the Father's will (see Eph 1:5, 9, 11 once more).⁵³

50. Love per the older film *Love Story* means "never having to say you're sorry" (so you're good just the way you are); love in modern pop music form means "I'd never ask you to change" per Bruno Mars and "I can't change" (and am loved for it) per Macklemore. These citations—no doubt unanticipated by some scholars—give us a passing sense of our culture's definition of love as affirmation, positively, and the absence of any change agenda, negatively. Biblical love, suffice it to say, is altogether different.

51. On this essential doctrine, taught from the Bible's first chapter by the fact of divine creation, see Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 197–57.

52. This is true even as an unsaved father's love for his child is nonetheless, per God's common grace, actual love. It is not, however, ultimate love; it is not the love we desperately, the love that forgives and cleanses the guilty.

53. On the matter of inseparable operations, see Augustine: "just as Father and Son and Holy Spirit are inseparable, so they work inseparably" (*De Trinitate*, 1991, 1.7). This does not in any way indicate or necessitate a blurring of personal relations and roles, whether before the earth's foundation or after it, but it does mean that the three persons of the Godhead—our theological

This is high and holy territory. There is no human corollary here; this is a unique moment that must define human understanding of God, not vice versa. The Father who wishes to exalt his Son is the Father who designs a plan that features exaltation by crucifixion. This is how the Father ultimately shows his Son to be the only being worthy of his exaltation: he sends him as a sacrifice and a scapegoat for the elect. The Son obediently washing the church clean renders him the indisputable Alpha and Omega, the one who not only creates the heavens but creates a new humanity. The Father loves the Son in exalting him, an end obtained by his holy immolation under Fatherly condemnation of a judicial kind. The Son loves the Father in obeying him, an end obtained in peak form by the willingness to bleed to the last drop. Thus we may say that the Father's exaltational love for his Son means that he sends his Son into the darkest darkness, a darkness unrelieved by immediate Fatherly help, and that the Son's love for the Father means that he willingly goes there.

To bring all the threads of this lengthy discussion together, the Father loves the Son but crushes him, loves the Son but makes him a sin offering, loves the Son but finds him judicially guilty on behalf of the church. The stakes are high on all counts here. To lose sight of the Father's love for the Son at Calvary means that we lose sight of the essential nature of the Father-Son relationship, a love that predates all time and history and never blinks out. But to lose sight of the Father's judging and crushing of the Son at Calvary per explicit biblical witness (Isa 52:10) means that we lose sight of the awful uniqueness of Jesus's death. At Calvary, under divine sentencing, he prayed to the Father, confessed his forsakenness, committed himself into the Father's hands, and expired.⁵⁴

Conclusion

At Calvary, Jesus cries out that he is forsaken by the Father. We have made the case for understanding this forsakenness in a threefold sense. Firstly, his forsakenness is located in the Father's transfer of his people's guilt to Christ, the ultimate scapegoat.

⁵⁵ Secondly, from this penal act comes real temporary interruption of fellowship

term for the three divine persons is after all *Trinity*, signaling unified threeness—shares perfect unity, a unity that manifests in the perfect execution of the will of God.

54. B. B. Warfield focuses in his commentary on this scene on the Son's "desolation" almost unto "despair" (and calls Christ's cry one of "desertion"), but notes this above all: "If he cried out in his agony for deliverance, it was always the cry of a child to a Father whom he trusts with all and always, and with the explicit condition, Howbeit, not what I will but what Thou wilt. If the sense of desolation invades his soul, he yet confidently commends his departing spirit into his Father's hands (Lk. xxiii. 46)." Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1906), 33.

55. The usage of legal language is vital to understanding this forsakenness. Herman Bavinck, for example, contrasts "subjective" and "objective" forsakenness, and notes that Christ redeemed us "from the curse of the law" in accomplishing this objective work. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 3:389, 392.

or communion between the Father and Son, for the Father cannot look upon evil (Hab 1:13). Thirdly, the man Christ Jesus dies at the cross, the culmination of the sentence upon him. At no point in the making and execution of this redemptive plan, though, were the Father and Son hatefully opposed to one another. The work that accomplished redemption was one work, and it was driven by the otherworldly wisdom and insight of the first person of the Godhead, and it was secured by the obedient sacrifice of the second person, who offered his life in the power of the third person (Heb 9:14).

We have heard it said that in the atonement, mercy and justice kiss. This is true, and it is similarly true that at the atonement, uninterrupted Fatherly love and judicial Fatherly condemnation meet. Indeed, this is love of a most transcendently unique character, love of the most costly kind—love that means that the Father does not rush to the aid of his beloved, but that he crushes him, lays all our iniquities on him, and allows his blood to flow without interruption. The Father loves the Son even in sending him to the cross, but in this instance and this instance alone in history, the well-loved Son must bear the terrible weight of the Father's justice. Never before and never since has this occurred; truly, the Son was given as a substitutionary sacrifice for us, placed as in the ancient Day "on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life."

Owen Strachan: *It Was the Will of the Father to Crush Him*