

Opposing Calvin’s Inconsistency On The Cross, The Father’s Anger Toward The Son, And The Heart Of The Gospel - - - by Joseph Randall

John Calvin is one of God’s wonderful gifts to the Church. I have learned so much from him, and I continue to learn how to faithfully preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified from Calvin to this day. So I somewhat tremble to disagree with him – especially about something as central to the Christian faith as the heart of the Gospel: penal substitution.

Recently, a statement about penal substitution in Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* and affirmed by Calvin has caused me great concern because I strongly disagree with what they wrote, and I think they unwittingly undermined the Biblical doctrine of penal substitution. Calvin did not deny penal substitution, but he was inconsistent with this particular statement and his inconstancy on this point has influenced other pastors and theologians, like Bavinck, to be inconsistent as well.

Expounding on Jesus’ being forsaken on the cross, Bavinck wrote (and cited Calvin):

“In the cry of Jesus we are dealing not with a subjective but with an objective God-forsakenness: He did not feel alone but had in fact been forsaken by God. His feeling was not an illusion, not based on a false view of his situation, but corresponded with reality. On the other hand, **this must not be understood in the sense that the Father was personally angry with Christ.** Calvin puts it very correctly: ‘**Yet we do not suggest that God was ever inimical or angry toward him.** How could he be angry toward his beloved Son, ‘in whom his heart reposed’? (cf. Matt. 3:17). How could Christ by his intercession appease the Father towards others, if he were himself hateful to God? This is what we are saying: he bore the weight of divine severity, since he was ‘stricken and afflicted’ [cf. Isa. 53:5] by God’s hand, and experienced all the signs of a wrathful and avenging God.’”¹

It was unbiblical for Bavinck to write that the Father was not personally angry with Christ on the cross. It was unbiblical for Calvin to write that God was not inimical (hostile; hurtful) or angry toward Christ on the cross. To deny the Father’s real, true, personal anger toward the Son on the cross is to deny penal substitution and to deny the heart of the Gospel. In the remainder of this article, I want to show:

1. How both Bavinck and Calvin contradicted themselves in the very context of making these false statements (which shows they did not deny the Gospel or penal substitution)
2. How God’s Word and Reformed Confessions disagree with their false statements
3. How Calvin himself denied his false statement throughout his sermons and commentaries
4. And finally, how I totally agree with what both Bavinck and Calvin were trying to guard and preserve: the fact that the Father never stopped loving the Son while He was on the cross and that

1 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 389. John Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi.11.

the ontological Trinity remained intact – the intratrinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son was never broken apart – Amen! I totally agree!

1. Bavinck and Calvin contradicted themselves in the very context of making these false statements (which shows they did not deny the Gospel or penal substitution)

Bavinck clearly stated that the forsakeness of the Son was not subjective, but objective. Jesus didn't just feel forsaken. He was really and truly forsaken by His Father. Furthermore, Bavinck stated: "He became for us sin and a curse (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13)"² It is a contradiction to say that Jesus was objectively forsaken by His Father, made sin, and made a curse and yet the Father was not angry with the Son. To be forsaken by God means God is angry: "Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them" (Deuteronomy 31:17).³ To be made sin means God is angry because His anger burns hot toward sin and sinners: "I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin that you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke him to anger." (Deuteronomy 9:18). To be made a curse by God means God is angry because the curse is receiving the condemnation of infinite damnation where God's anger is poured out in full force: "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Matthew 25:41). It is a contradiction to say that the forsaken One Who was made sin and cursed by God did not receive and feel the full brunt of the anger and wrath of God that unrepentant sinners themselves deserve.

Calvin contradicted himself as well. He clearly stated that Christ "bore the weight of divine severity, since he was 'stricken and afflicted' [cf. Isa. 53:5] by God's hand, and experienced all the signs of a wrathful and avenging God." This means the Father is angry with His Son. It is impossible to truly and really experience "all the signs of a wrathful and avenging God" and not to experience the personal anger of God. One of the signs of a wrathful and avenging God is His very personal anger.

Both Calvin and Bavinck affirm penal substitution, but their statements about the Father not being angry with the Son on the cross are a serious inconsistency and can cause great confusion.

2. God's Word and the Westminster Confession disagree with their false statements

Beloved, if the Father was not, in any sense, angry with His Son on that cross, then He is still angry with you, me, and with all His people. It is impossible to read what Scripture says Jesus endured on the cross and conclude that the Father was not angry with the Son in some sense.

The Son was stricken and smitten by the Father (Isaiah 53:4)

2 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 389.

3 The Old Testament understanding of being forsaken is quite radical: "They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged." Isaiah 1:4; "Whereas you have been forsaken and hated . . ." Isaiah 60:15; "I have forsaken my house; I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies. My heritage has become to me like a lion in the forest; she has lifted up her voice against me; therefore I hate her." Jeremiah 12:7-8; "Why do you forget us forever, why do you forsake us for so many days? Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old – unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us." Lamentations 5:20-22

The Son was crushed by the Father – and it pleased Him to do it (Isaiah 53:10)
The Son was made a curse by the Father (Galatians 3:13)
The Son was cursed by the Father (Galatians 3:13)
The Son was condemned by the Father (Romans 8:3)
The Son was a propitiation for sinners (He absorbed the wrath of the Father – that’s what propitiation means) (Romans 3:25; 1 John 4:10)
The Son drank the cup of God’s infinite wrath (Matthew 26:39-44)

After all of this powerful, penetrating, and provocative language about the agonies of what our Savior endured – then to say: “But the Father wasn’t angry with His Son” is to utterly castrate all the Biblical language of all of its deep, horrific meaning. I can almost hear Jesus crying out: “Oh yes My Father was angry with Me! My Father was most certainly angry with Me because I took your sin upon Myself! Don’t diminish what I suffered for your sake and for the glory of My Father!” If the Father wasn’t angry with the Son on the cross because of my sins, then He is still angry with me, I am still in my sins, and I am going to hell.

There was a curse that Jesus really endured: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Galatians 3:13). After warning God’s people about all of the horrible curses they would face for disobeying God’s commandments and turning away from Him to worship other gods, the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write these frightening words: “Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, bringing upon it all the curses written in this book, and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as they are this day.” (Deuteronomy 29:27-28). On the cross, Jesus was made sin – He was made our commandment breaking and idolatry – and therefore the anger of the LORD burned hot against Jesus in fury and great wrath, just like it did against the covenant breaking Israelites. He took all the curses that Israel and all sinners deserve so that all who repent and believe in Christ might be redeemed!

There was a cup that Jesus really drank. And that cup is clearly defined in the Old Testament. It is the cup of the Father’s infinite wrath toward the wicked: “Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering” (Isaiah 51:17). Jesus really did drink that cup to the dregs. And Him doing so is my only hope. This is why Jesus prayed not once, not twice, but three times for the Father to please take the cup away. He knew that He would face and endure the infinite wrath of His Father and truly be forsaken by God. There is mystery here, but we must affirm this truth or we lose the Gospel.

The Westminster Larger Catechism states that Jesus had to be God to “keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God” (WLC 38). And part of Christ’s humiliation was that He “felt and borne the weight of God’s wrath” (WLC 49). The Heidelberg Catechism states: “. . . during his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race.” (HC 37). It is impossible to bear the infinite wrath of God and not receive and feel God’s anger. You can’t bear the weight of God’s wrath and God not be angry with you. That’s what bearing the wrath of God means. Sustaining in body and soul the wrath of God against sin is to truly receive and to really feel God’s anger.

To believe in penal substitution, you actually have to believe in penal substitution. You have to believe in the “penal” part: the punishment. And you have to believe in the “substitution” part: Jesus really took my place. What’s the “penal” part? It’s the punishment sinners deserve for their sins. What is that? It’s the real, true, personal, and infinite anger, fury, and wrath of God directed toward sinners. That’s what “penal” means in penal substitution. That’s what it means to be stricken and smitten by God; crushed by God; made a curse by God; to drink the cup of God’s anger; and to be forsaken by God. What’s the “substitution” part? It means that on the cross, Jesus Himself really, truly, fully, and personally took the equivalent of THAT punishment on Himself instead of me taking that punishment on myself in hell forever. Jesus did this because the Father made Jesus, Who knew no sin, to be sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). Hugh Martin masterfully described what the imputation of our sin to Christ entailed:

“The Father lays upon Him the iniquities of all whom He has given to Him: imputes to Him the guilt of all who shall be redeemed: makes Him who knew no sin to be sin for us: numbers Him among transgressors, as bearing in His own person the sins of many; and looks upon Him as lying under the imputation of all their countless transgressions. It is unto this that Jesus says, ‘Your will be done.’ He assumes, therefore, at His Father’s will, the sins which He is to bear in His own body on the tree; and the baptism of blood in His agony which follows is the sign and seal of the covenant, which thus by imputation makes Him out to be the chief and the most heavy laden of transgressors! Can there be any difficulty now in understanding generally what the nature and emphasis of His sorrow must have been? Think of Jesus coming into this terrible position towards the judge of all – towards His Father and His God – towards Him whose approbation and pleasure in Him were the light and joy of his life unspeakable! Think of Him consenting to have all the sins of myriads imputed to Him by his Father: to underlie, that is, the imputation, in his Father’s judgment, of every kind and degree and amount of moral evil – every species and circumstance and combination of vile iniquity! . . . God made him to be sin. God imputed to him – the Father whom he infinitely loved – the judge whom he infinitely revered as one who could not do but what is right – reckoned him among transgressors.”⁴

There really was an imputation of the sins of God’s elect to Jesus. It was not a legal fiction. And the anger directed toward Jesus was no legal fiction either. The Father didn’t punish disembodied sin – He punished the God-Man! Jesus suffered the punishment I deserve for my sins so that I might become the righteousness of God in Him. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

THAT’S penal substitution. THAT’S the heart of the Gospel. There’s no hope of salvation without it. To diminish this in any way diminishes the sufferings of Christ, the excellencies of Christ, the glory of Christ, and the justice and love of God.

3. Calvin himself denied his false statement throughout his sermons and commentaries

Some think Dr. R.C. Sproul was wrong or went too far in his doctrine of penal substitution when he described the cross this way: “It was as if there was a cry from heaven, as if Jesus heard the words ‘God damn you,’ because that’s what it meant to be cursed and under the anathema of the Father.”⁵

4 Hugh Martin, *The Shadow Of Calvary*, (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1983), 37-39.

5 R.C. Sproul, “Forsaken – Jesus Became A Curse,” <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/forsaken-jesus-became-curse/>

But Calvin used the exact same language as Dr. Sproul to describe what Jesus endured on the cross. To “curse” and to “damn” mean the exact same thing. Calvin used these words interchangeably: “Then are we all undone and damned as in respect of the Law, there is no more remedy, Cursed shall he be which does not all those things.”⁶ Listen to how Calvin, in his R.C. Sproul-like way, described the death of Christ:

“Not only the body of Christ was given as the price of our redemption, but there was another, greater, and more excellent ransom, for He suffered in his soul the dreadful torments of a damned and lost man.”⁷

“For inasmuch as we see that the Son of God . . . was pronounced accursed by God’s own mouth”⁸

“. . . the son of God was fain [pleased] to suffer our curse, and to endure that death which is so slanderous before men, yea and to be cursed of God’s own mouth”⁹

“How does the inheritance of heaven belong to us, except in that He was made a curse for our sakes, and He was cursed not only before men, but from the mouth of God His Father?”¹⁰

“He there perishing on the cross, He is cursed both by God and by men. For this sentence of the law had been pronounced by the mouth of God”¹¹

Calvin was unashamed to proclaim that on the cross, Jesus received the same horrors that unrepentant sinners should receive in hell and that Jesus faced the frightful reality of having God stand against Him as Judge and was even beaten by His own Father for our sake and received the worst torments that could ever exist:

“And how is it that we are raised through Him, unless in that He descended to the depths of hell, that is, that He sustained the horrors which were upon us, because of our sins, and by which we might have been crushed? For God always had to be our Judge; and there is nothing more frightful that that God should be against us! Jesus Christ had to go that far as our security, and as the One Who should pay instead of us, and to let Himself be beaten on account of our condemnation to absolve us from it.”¹²

Accessed 19 June 2019.

6 John Calvin, On Wednesday, the first of January 1556 The 124th Sermon which is the fifth upon the one and twentieth Chapter, <https://www.monergism.com/sermons-deuteronomy-ebook> Accessed 24 June 2019.

7 John Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi.10. Though this is not from his sermons or commentaries – it makes the point well.

8 John Calvin, *Sermons On Galatians*, (Audubon, New Jersey: Old Path Publications, 1995), 295-296.

9 John Calvin, *Sermons On Galatians*, (Audubon, New Jersey: Old Path Publications, 1995), 713.

10 John Calvin, *The Gospel According To Isaiah: Seven Sermons on Isaiah 53 Concerning The Passion And Death Of Christ*, Trans. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 16.

11 John Calvin, Sixth Sermon on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/calvin_36sermons.html#sermon08 Accessed 24 June 2019.

12 John Calvin, *The Gospel According To Isaiah: Seven Sermons on Isaiah 53 Concerning The Passion And Death Of Christ*, Trans. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 16.

“our Lord Jesus Christ was beaten and struck by the hand of God, in order that we might be acquitted.”¹³

“. . . He was struck and beaten by the hand of God, that He suffered the horrible anguishes of His judgment, that in His body He bore the most dreadful torments that could be; and beyond that, He was vilified by men, as if He had not been worthy to share even the rank of the worst scoundrels! This, this is how the Son of God was afflicted . . . Now, we are spared! Behold Jesus Christ, the Only Son of God, Who is imprisoned, and we are delivered! He is condemned and we are absolved. He is exposed to all outrages, and we are established in honor! He has descended into the depths of hell, and the Kingdom of heaven is open to us!”¹⁴

Calvin used shocking language like Jesus being made “detestable” and even “hated” for the sake of sinners on that cross:

“He was willing to be as it were cursed and detestable for our sakes, in order that we might find favor before God and that we might be acceptable to Him.”¹⁵

“. . . the One who is the head of angels, to whom belongs all glory, majesty and authority, hung on a tree and was cursed and hated for our sakes?”¹⁶

When describing the cross, Calvin even plainly wrote that Jesus had to face God as an angry judge:

“Thus, ‘he was wounded for our transgressions,’ (Isaiah 53:5,) and had to deal with God as an angry judge. This is the foolishness of the cross, (1 Corinthians 1:18,) and the admiration of angels, (1 Peter 1:12,) which not only exceeds, but swallows up, all the wisdom of the world.”¹⁷

Calvin clearly believed that Jesus received the exact same equivalent punishment that unrepentant sinners should receive in hell forever – which includes the severe vengeance and anger of His Father:

“If Christ had died only a bodily death, it would have been ineffectual. No – it was expedient at the same time for him to undergo the severity of God’s vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment. For this reason, he must also grapple hand to hand with the armies of hell and the dread of everlasting death. A little while ago we referred to the prophet’s statement that ‘the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him,’ ‘he was wounded for our transgressions’ by the Father, ‘he was bruised for our infirmities’ [Isaiah 53:5 p.]. By these words he means that

13 John Calvin, Third Sermon on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/calvin_36sermons.html#sermon05 Accessed 24 June 2019.

14 John Calvin, *The Gospel According To Isaiah: Seven Sermons on Isaiah 53 Concerning The Passion And Death Of Christ*, Trans. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 87.

15 John Calvin, Sixth Sermon on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/calvin_36sermons.html#sermon08 Accessed 24 June 2019.

16 John Calvin, On Glorifying Only in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/calvin_36sermons.html#sermon22 Accessed 24 June 2019.

17 John Calvin, Commentary On Galatians, Galatians 3:13, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom41.iii.v.iii.html> Accessed 19 June 2019.

Christ was put in place of evildoers as surety and pledge – submitting himself even as the accused – to bear and suffer all the punishments that they ought to have sustained. All – with this one exception: ‘He could not be held by the pangs of death’ [Acts 2:24 p.]. No wonder, then, if he is said to have descended into hell, for he suffered the death that, God in his wrath had inflicted upon the wicked!”¹⁸

“He bore the punishment which we would have had to endure, if He had not offered this atonement.”¹⁹

At the end of this article in an appendix, I list many more examples from Calvin’s sermons and commentaries that reveal what Calvin truly believed Jesus endured on the cross for sinners, and his statements there are in direct contrast to his statement about the Father not being angry with His Son on the cross.

4. I totally agree with what both Bavinck and Calvin were trying to guard and preserve: the fact that the Father never stopped loving the Son while He was on the cross and that the ontological Trinity remained intact – the intratrinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son was never broken apart

What Bavinck and Calvin were seeking to protect and preserve is the fact that the Father never stopped loving the Son while He was on that cross. I totally and absolutely agree with this. I agree with Calvin when he preached:

“For God is not satisfied only to have sent His Son and to have exposed Him to death; to have struck Him in His wrath, though He loved Him as His only Son – for though He apparently willed to cast Him down and employ extreme severity against Him, yet He always was the Well-beloved Son, as we have said”²⁰

Where Calvin and Bavinck were inconsistent is in thinking that God the Father cannot be both angry and loving toward the Son at the same time. John Murray is very helpful here:

“The difficulty for many, some kindly disposed to the doctrine of propitiation and some hostile, is: How could Jesus be uniquely and immutably loved of the Father, and at the same time be the object of his wrath? The answer resides in the same principle, that love and wrath are not contradictory, that love in its intensest exercise can coexist with the exercise and infliction of wrath. In the case of Christ’s vicarious undertaking, however, we must go further. It is only because of the unique relation that the Father sustained to his own Son, and the unique love of the Father to the Son arising from this relation and inseparable from it, that the Son incarnate could be the object of such wrath. The wrath vicariously borne was unique, it was incomparable and without parallel. We have the index to this in Psalm 22 and 69, in the record of Gethsemane’s agony, and in the dereliction of Calvary. Who could be equal to such an ordeal?

18 John Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi.10. I realize this is not from Calvin’s sermons or commentaries, but it highlights Calvin’s commitment to show how Jesus endured God’s wrath on the cross, even in the *Institutes* where he made the false statement that the Father was not angry with the Son on the cross.

19 John Calvin, *Commentary On The Book Of Isaiah*, Isaiah 53:8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 121.

20 John Calvin, *The Gospel According To Isaiah: Seven Sermons On Isaiah 53 Concerning The Passion And Death Of Christ*, Trans. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 63.

None but the Son of God in his unchanged identity as the Son, and in the embrace of that love of which Jesus spoke when he said, ‘The Father loveth the Son,’ a love also presupposed in the cry of dereliction, ‘My God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ But we have to take another step. Jesus spoke of the love of the Father constrained by the faithful discharge of the commission given him (John 10:17, 18). We cannot dissociate the death of Christ from its propitiatory implications. And so we must say that this love of the Father was at no point more intensely in exercise than when the Son was actively drinking the cup of unrelieved damnation, than when he was enduring as a substitute the full toll of the Father’s wrath. All of this is implicit in the saying of Romans 8:32, that the Father did not spare his own Son. And what perverse myopia afflicts the minds of men when they try to rob the unspeakable spectacles of Gethsemane and Calvary of that which is the only explanation! As we rob this unexampled ordeal of its meaning, we deprive ourselves of what brings us to the summit of amazement. What love for men that the Father should execute upon his own Son the full toll of holy wrath, so that we should never taste it! This was John’s amazement when he wrote: ‘This is love, not that we loved God, but that he love us, and sent his son the propitiation for our sins’ (1 John 4:10).”²¹

Calvin also understood that God’s love and hatred toward the elect could coexist at the same time:

“The fact that we were reconciled through Christ’s death must not be understood as if his Son reconciled us to him that he might now begin to love those whom he had hated. Rather, we have already been reconciled to him who loves us, with whom we were enemies on account of sin. The apostle will testify whether I am speaking the truth: ‘God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us’ [Romans 5:8]. Therefore, he loved us even when we practiced enmity toward him and committed wickedness. Thus in a marvelous and divine way he loved us even when he hated us. For he hated us for what we were that he had not made; yet because our wickedness had not entirely consumed his handiwork, he knew how, at the same time, to hate in each one of us what we had made, and to love what he had made. These are Augustine’s words.”²²

If God’s love and hatred could coexist toward the elect at the same time, then certainly His love and anger toward the Son could coexist at the same time as well. I agree with Calvin and Bavinck that the Father never stopped loving the Son when He was on the cross. But it seems more Biblical to me to say that the Father, at the same time, both loved the Son and was angry with the Son on the cross because our sins were imputed to Him.

This love/anger apparent paradox is the same way God relates to the elect before they are converted as well: God hates the wicked and His anger burns hot toward them (Psalm 5:5; 11:5), and yet He has loved the elect with an everlasting love. We were loved and under God’s wrath at the same time because we were once children of wrath like the rest of mankind (Ephesians 2:3).

Furthermore, I agree with Calvin and Bavinck that the ontological Trinity was never broken asunder: in the intratrinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son there could never be

21 John Murray, *Collected Writings Of John Murray*, Vol. 2, “The Atonement,” (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1977), 146-147.

22 John Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi.3-4.

anger expressed toward one another. But in the historical relationship between the Father and the incarnate Son, the Father was clearly angry with the Son on the cross because the Son was made sin for the sake of sinners and bore the wrath of God.²³ Kent Hughes makes this abundantly clear in his sermon on Jesus being forsaken by His Father on the cross:

“Because he became sin for us, he had to undergo the cosmic trauma of separation from God who is ‘light, and in him is no darkness at all’ (1 John 1:5). In the dark of the cross’s night, Jesus was *alone*. His separation was not just *felt*; it was *real* [emphasis his]. The ontological unity of the Trinity was not broken, but the separation of the Son from the Father and Spirit was fact. This was possible because of the authenticity of the Incarnation. God’s holy nature demanded separation as the Son became sin. Not even the most evil man, including Nero or Hitler, has ever known in this life the horror of being completely cut off from God. But Christ knew it.”²⁴

Hughes cites C.E.B. Cranfield on this point as well: “It is, of course, theologically important to maintain the paradox that, while this God-forsakenness was utterly real, the unity of the Blessed Trinity was even then unbroken.”²⁵

I completely agree with Hughes, Cranfield, and Calvin on this point: the Trinity remained intact. But this does not negate the fact that the Son was really and truly separated from the Father and that the Father was angry with the Son because of our sins imputed to Him. There is great mystery here, but we must affirm both Biblical truths.

Conclusion

Right now in the life of our church, I’m preaching a short series on the imprecatory Psalms and other “curse” prayers in the Bible. What has moved my heart the most during this series is reading these Psalms and curses and realizing that Jesus Christ took all of these horrific curses of God on Himself in my place on the cross. Calvin would heartily agree:

“This, then, is what we must bear in mind, that the Son of God in crying out ‘Father, if it be possible, let this drink be removed from me’ considers not only what He had to suffer in His body, nor the disgrace of men, nor leaving the earth (for that was easy enough for Him), but He considers that He is before God and before His judicial throne to answer for all our sins, to see there all the curses of God which are ready to fall upon us. For even if there be only a single sinner, what would the wrath of God be? When it is said that God is against us, that He wants to display His power to destroy us, alas! where are we then? Now it was necessary for Jesus Christ to fight not only against such a terror but against all the cruelties one could inflict. When, then, we see that God summons all those who have deserved eternal damnation and who are guilty of sin and that He is there to pronounce sentence such as they have deserved, who would not conceive in full measure all the deaths, doubts and terrors which could be in each one? And what a depth will there be in that! Now it was necessary that our Lord Jesus Christ by Himself without aid sustained such a burden.”²⁶

23 Dr. David Vandrunen, my Systematic Theology Professor at Westminster Seminary California, helped me understand this concept more clearly. I am deeply grateful for his assistance in writing this article.

24 R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant And Savior*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 393.

25 C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According To St. Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 459.

Preaching on one of the most shocking imprecatory Psalms, Dr. Ligon Duncan says about Psalm 109: “Have you ever thought that Jesus stood under this curse? That He bore this curse from His Father? And He bore it on our behalf that we might not bear it ourselves . . . Just remember that He alone, of all the people who will dwell in the presence of God forever, knows what it is like to receive this curse, and He took that in your place so that you might never receive it.”²⁷

Jesus Christ bore the curse that we deserve. He took upon Himself the anger and fury of God so that we might never face it. Beloved, this is the heart of the Gospel – this is penal substitution. We must never deny this or speak or write in such a way that diminishes the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ. The redemption of sinners through Jesus’ bearing the curse and anger of His Father on the cross is what John Calvin preached and taught over and over again. His short statements in the Institutes about the Father not being angry with the Son on the cross are unbiblical and an inconsistency in Calvin’s writings. Praise God that Jesus did take all of God’s anger and imprecations upon Himself so that we might be forever blessed! There’s no hope without it!

The Cross Of Jesus Christ Is The Greatest Imprecation
Where The Sinless Son Of God Was Our Full Propitiation
And Every Curse Of God Fell On Him In Cruel Damnation
There He Was Made Sin Which God Hates With Indignation
And Took All God’s Full Anger So That We Might Have Salvation
Yet He’s God’s Beloved Son Who’s Named LORD In Exaltation
The Holy Perfect God-Man Was Raised For Our Justification
He Took Our Imprecation
Withstood Every Temptation
Condemned Our Condemnation
Conquered Death For Every Nation
And Now There’s Only Celebration
In Him Who Is Our Preoccupation, Infatuation, and Holy Fascination!

That’s my King! Do you know Him?!

²⁸

Appendix Of Calvin Quotations On The Cross And God’s Anger

“. . . He was esteemed as the greatest evildoer in the world”²⁹

“Now, especially, the Prophet speaks thus as if Jesus Christ had been totally annihilated; he did not wish to express only a common death, but one which was to exterminate Him, in such wise that it was as if the memory of Him had been fully abolished and erased. For though all men

26 John Calvin, First Sermon on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/calvin_36sermons.html#sermon03 Accessed 19 June 2019.

27 Dr. Ligon Duncan, “O God Speak Up!” Sermon preached June 8, 2011. <https://ligonduncan.com/o-god-speak-up-436/> Accessed 23 June 2019.

28 Dr. S.M. Lockridge has been an inspiration to me for many years. I highly encourage you to listen to his poem, “That’s My King!” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUDgBNhKBME> Accessed 23 June 2019.

29 John Calvin, *The Gospel According To Isaiah: Seven Sermons On Isaiah 53 Concerning The Passion And Death Of Christ*, Trans. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 74.

have to die and by this means they are cut off from the land of the living, yet something special is seen here in our Lord Jesus Christ, that his death was to alienate Him from the rank of men. For there was shame – as we have said – there was the curse of God; and then there was also the gulf of hell”³⁰

“So then, our Lord Jesus Christ was called ‘sin-offering,’ from the fact that He suffered our curse, in order that we might be blessed by God His Father . . . He so cared for our salvation that He was willing to descend to the depths of horror to sustain all our curse.”³¹

“Seeing then that our Lord Jesus Christ spared not himself, but abased himself so far as to suffer so slanderous, yea and cursed a death, and afterward also the pains of Hell, howbeit but for a while, to the end to set us free and clear, and to purchase us grace before the judgment seat of God his father”³²

“He had no horror at death, therefore, simply as a passage out of the world, but because he had before his eyes the dreadful tribunal of God, and the Judge himself armed with inconceivable vengeance; and because our sins, the load of which was laid upon him, pressed him down with their enormous weight. There is no reason to wonder, therefore, if the dreadful abyss of destruction tormented him grievously with fear and anguish.”³³

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried. Though in the cry which Christ uttered a power more than human was manifested, yet it was unquestionably drawn from him by intensity of sorrow. And certainly this was his chief conflict, and harder than all the other tortures, that in his anguish he was so far from being soothed by the assistance or favor of his Father, that he felt himself to be in some measure estranged from him. 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; and thus he became, as Isaiah speaks, a man of sorrows, (53:3). Those interpreters are widely mistaken who, laying aside this part of redemption, attended solely to the outward punishment of the flesh; for in order that Christ might satisfy for us, it was necessary that he should be placed as a guilty person at the judgment-seat of God. Now nothing is more dreadful than to feel that God, whose wrath is worse than all deaths, is the Judge. When this temptation was presented to Christ, as if, having God opposed to him, he were already devoted to destruction, he was seized with horror, which would have been sufficient to swallow up a hundred times all the men in the world; but by the amazing power of the Spirit he achieved the victory. Nor is it by hypocrisy, or by assuming a character, that he complains of having been forsaken by the Father. Some allege that he employed this language in compliance with the opinion of the people, but this is an absurd mode of evading the difficulty; for the inward sadness of his soul was so powerful and violent, that it forced him to break out into a cry. Nor did the redemption which he accomplished consist solely in what was exhibited to the eye, (as I stated a little ago,) but having undertaken to be our surety, he resolved actually to undergo in our room the judgment of God . . . In short, during this fearful torture his faith remained uninjured, so that, while he complained of being forsaken, he still relied on the aid of God as at hand . . . No one who considers that Christ undertook the office of

30 Ibid, 78.

31 Ibid, 89-91.

32 John Calvin, *Sermons On Galatians*, (Audubon, New Jersey: Old Path Publications, 1995), 297.

33 John Calvin, *Commentary On The Harmony Of The Gospels*, Vol. 3., Matthew 26:37, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom33.ii.xxx.html> Accessed 19 June 2019.

Mediator on the condition of suffering our condemnation, both in his body and in his soul, will think it strange that he maintained a struggle with the sorrows of death, as if an offended God had thrown him into a whirlpool of afflictions.”³⁴

“He willed that His Son be plunged into complete confusion and that He be put even below all the malefactors of the world, as He was crucified between two robbers, as we shall see later. That, then, is what we have to observe when it is here said that Barabbas had to be set free and Jesus Christ put there, as it were, the most detestable man in the world.”³⁵

“In this way, then, it is said that our Lord Jesus was spited, mocked, and blasphemed by all, even by the malefactors. For when He was identified with two robbers, it is in order to aggravate all the more the shame of His death. It is true that this was the place where they were accustomed to executing evil-doers. All the same, they are not satisfied with such a shame. But He had to be considered worse and more detestable than all the robbers in the world, when they put one on each of His two sides, to say that He is the chief of them all.”³⁶

“They did not wish to spare Him, and He was even set in the midst of the robbers to be held, as it were, the most detestable, to be reputed the principal one among wicked men and criminals.”³⁷

“And that is why it is here narrated to us that not only our Lord Jesus Christ has been willing to suffer death and has offered Himself as a sacrifice to pacify the wrath of God His Father, but in order that He might be truly and wholly our pledge, He did not refuse to bear the agonies which are prepared for all those whose consciences rebuke them and who feel themselves guilty of eternal death and damnation before God.”³⁸

“How, then, did he come? In weakness; indeed, not only so, but he was accursed. If this had not been the case, our burdens would have crushed us and all would have perished in the abyss. When we understand that the Son of God, the Lamb without blemish, the mirror and fountain of all righteousness, that this One was cursed for us, should we not be horrified at the thought of all our sins and engulfed in despair until God rescues us in his grace and infinite mercy?”³⁹

“It is said that He is the Lamb of God without spot. Since He is the Lamb of God, He must be condemned for the sacrifice. The word ‘Lamb’ implies that He is to be offered. And what does the Law pronounce of sacrifices? That they stand for sins and curses. That is why it is said that our Lord Jesus was accursed for our sakes, that is, that He received the curse which was due to

34 John Calvin, *Commentary On The Harmony Of The Gospels*, Vol. 3., Matthew 27:46, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom33.ii.xlii.html> Accessed 19 June 2019.

35 John Calvin, Fifth Sermon on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/calvin_36sermons.html#sermon07 Accessed 19 June 2019.

36 John Calvin, Sixth Sermon on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/calvin_36sermons.html#sermon08 Accessed 19 June 2019.

37 John Calvin, Eighth Sermon on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/calvin_36sermons.html#sermon10 Accessed 19 June 2019.

38 John Calvin, First Sermon on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/calvin_36sermons.html#sermon03 Accessed 19 June 2019.

39 John Calvin, When Curse Becomes Blessing, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/calvin_36sermons.html#sermon15 Accessed 19 June 2019.

our sins. This, then, is the quality and condition under which He is condemned, since God appointed Him as a lamb which must be offered in sacrifice.”⁴⁰

“It is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree. Now, Christ hung upon the cross, therefore he fell under that curse. But it is certain that he did not suffer that punishment on his own account. It follows, therefore, either that he was crucified in vain, or that our curse was laid upon him, in order that we might be delivered from it. Now, he does not say that Christ was cursed, but, which is still more, that he was a curse, - intimating, that the curse ‘of all men was laid upon him’ (Isaiah 53:6.) If any man think this language harsh, let him be ashamed of the cross of Christ, in the confession of which we glory. It was not unknown to God what death his own Son would die, when he pronounced the law, ‘He that is hanged is accursed of God.’” (Deuteronomy 21:23.).⁴¹

“Let us assure ourselves that God meant to show us to our faces, that he laid upon him the curse due to us, so as the thing which we had deserved was laid upon the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴²

40 John Calvin, Fifth Sermon on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin/calvin_36sermons.html#sermon07 Accessed 19 June 2019.

41 John Calvin, Commentary On Galatians, Galatians 3:13, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom41.iii.v.iii.html> Accessed 19 June 2019.

42 John Calvin, On Wednesday, the first of January 1556 The 124th Sermon which is the fifth upon the one and twentieth Chapter, <https://www.monergism.com/sermons-deuteronomy-ebook> Accessed 20 June 2019.