

Theology for Troubled Believers: *A Lenten Journey*

3. The Divine Sacrifices

Sunday, April 3, 2011
10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor
Presenter: David Monyak

St. John in the Wilderness

■ **March 13 and March 20: The Nature of God.**

- *Topics:* Introduction to Theology. The Holy One of Israel. The Maker of Heaven and Earth. The Limits of Science. What is Meant by “God”

■ **March 27: Suffering**

- *Topics:* Nature as a Witness and Innocent Suffering. Innocent Suffering and Life Beyond Death. Suffering from Nature and Extreme Human Cruelty.

■ **April 3: The Divine Sacrifices.**

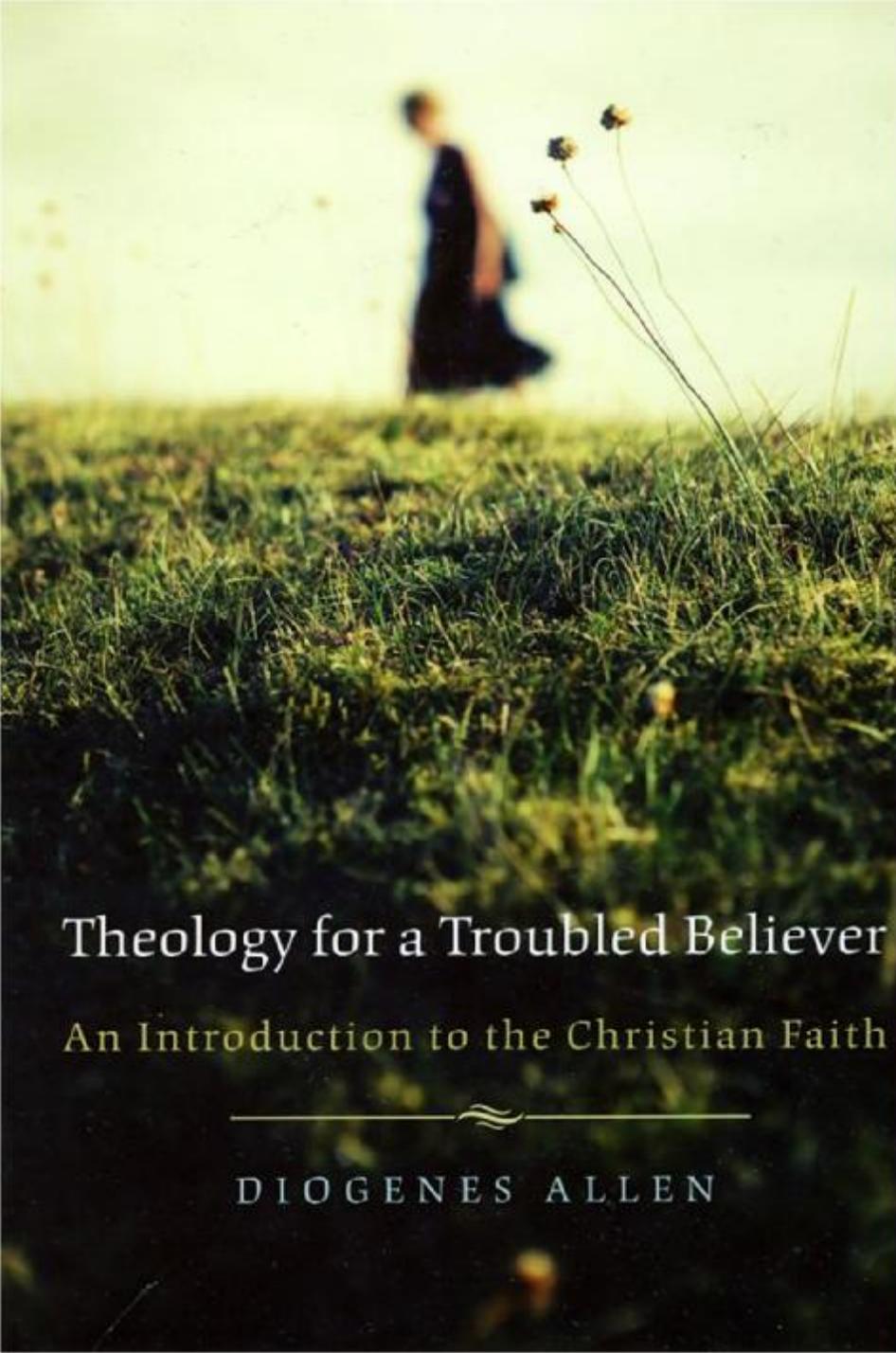
- *Topics:* The Sacrifice in Creation. Incarnation as Sacrifice. The Temptations in the Wilderness. The Sacrifice of the Cross.

■ **April 10: The New Life in God.**

- *Topics:* The Resurrection of Jesus and Eternal Life. Jesus as Lord and Jesus as Servant. Revelation and Faith.

■ **April 17: Responding to God.**

- *Topics:* The Holy Spirit, the Church, and the Sacraments. Sin, Evil, and Hope for the Future.



Theology for a Troubled Believer

An Introduction to the Christian Faith

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DIOGENES ALLEN

Reference

- **Theology for a Troubled Believer. An Introduction to the Christian Faith.** Diogenes Allen, 2010. Chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12

"Theology for a Troubled Believer is one of the richest expressions of theology in years. Allen invites the nonspecialist into the worlds of philosophy, literature, and Scripture in ways rarely made so accessible and compelling at the same time. A very wise work."

—**W. Mark Richardson**, Professor of Systematic Theology,
The General Theological Seminary, New York

"In this powerful book, Allen brings a lifetime of philosophical and theological reflection to the task of explaining how contemporary Christians can fully embrace their faith without compromising their reason and ably addresses the concerns of committed Christians as they strive to make sense of their faith in a complicated and frequently hostile world."

—**William Greenway**, Associate Professor of Philosophical Theology,
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

■ **Theology for a Troubled Believer. An Introduction to the Christian Faith.**

Diogenes Allen, 2010

Praise to you, saving sacrifice, offered on the wood of the cross for me and for all mankind. Praise to the noble and precious blood, flowing from the wounds of my crucified Lord Jesus Christ and washing away the sins of the whole world. Remember, Lord, your creature, whom you have redeemed with your blood. I repent my sins, and I long to put right what I have done. Merciful Father, take away all my offenses and sins; purify me in body and soul, and make me worthy to taste the holy of holies.

Ambrose, Bishop of Milan,
Doctor of the Church, c.339-397
Feast Day: December 7

This week:

The Divine Sacrifices

The Sacrifice in Creation

Incarnation as Sacrifice

**The Temptations in the
Wilderness**

The Sacrifice of the Cross

A photograph of a person walking through a field of tall grass and dandelions. The person is out of focus, wearing a dark dress. The background is a bright, hazy sky. The text "The Sacrifice in Creation" is overlaid in a large, bold, purple font.

The Sacrifice in Creation

Sacrifice in Creation

Creation Reveals the Power of God

- Creation Reveals the Power of God. *For example:*
 - Our galaxy consists of one hundred billion stars
 - Yet our galaxy is only one of billions of galaxies
 - The complexity of the universe, unveiled by thousands gifted minds over the centuries, can only add to our wonder at God's almighty power.

Sacrifice in Creation

Creation Requires More Than Power

- But it takes more than sheer power to create.
- Dorothy Sayers and Iris Murdoch, both creative writers, have claimed that the creation of characters for a story requires some renunciation on the part of their creator:
 - Writers must restrain their own personalities to create a personality that is not their own.
 - In order that something may exist beyond and apart from themselves, good writers are required to hold back and to renounce something of their own selves.

Sacrifice in Creation

Creation Requires Sacrifice

- In the same way, when God creates, God brings into existence a universe that is not part of God.
- This requires an act of profound renunciation, of sacrifice, for God is creating real beings, with their own active natures, not just imaginary ones.

Sacrifice in Creation

Creation Requires Sacrifice

- In creating, God must also renounce God's status as the only reality.
- God, who filled all reality, chose out of love to “pull Godself back,” to limit Godself, and to make from nothing utterly new realities that are not God or part of God.
- By allowing creatures to be themselves, active according to the natures God gives, God has limited Godself:
 - For there to be free creatures, God must limit the way God exercises God's power, or they cease to be free creatures.
 - Similarly, God must limit Godself in the treatment of nonfree creatures, so that they operate according to their created natures.

Sacrifice in Creation

Self-Sacrificing Love

- God's action in creation is an act of **perfect, self-sacrificing love**, because God lacks nothing, needs nothing:
 - Precisely because God does *not* need us, nor any other creature, God's freely chosen creative action is an act of **perfect love**.
 - Precisely because God's life is *complete* in the inner life of Father, Son, and Spirit, God's **self-giving love** in creating others is an action that is **wholly gracious**.

Sacrifice in Creation

The Inner Life of God: The Trinity

- The “movement” in God’s inner life:
 - the “begetting” of the Son by the Father, and
 - the “giving” of the Holy Spirit as the act of mutual love of the Father and the Son,
- can help us gain some understanding of:
 - why God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
 - The fullness and completeness of God’s life, enabling God freely to create, and to love with a pure or perfect love

Sacrifice in Creation

The Inner Life of God: The Trinity

- **Bonaventure** (1217-74) in his *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity* gives the most helpful and useful understanding of it.
- According to Plato, **good** is by its nature “**self-diffusive**” (diffusing, spreading, sharing, giving, expressing itself).
- God is the *highest* or *perfect* good, and therefore, God must be the *most* self-diffusive being, giving or “diffusing” God’s self fully.

Sacrifice in Creation

The Inner Life of God: The Trinity

- What can be the perfect or full self-diffusion or expression of God?
 - It cannot be the created universe, for the universe is a creature and thus limited.
- The only possible perfect or full self-diffusion of God *is* God:
 - The **Son** is one “radiance” of God’s diffusing of God’s self.
 - The **Spirit** is another “radiance” of God’s diffusing of God’s self

Sacrifice in Creation

The Inner Life of God: The Trinity

- Aristotle had said there are only three ways things can happen: by accident, by nature, and by will.
- God's diffusion of Godself *by nature* is the **Son** who, as the perfect diffusion of the Father, is himself God.
- God's diffusion of Godself *by will* is the **Holy Spirit** who, as the perfect diffusion of God the Father and Son, is also God.
- Since one diffusion is *by nature*, and the other *by will*, the Son and the Spirit are *distinct*.
- God does not act by accident; hence there is only **Father, Son and Spirit**.

Sacrifice in Creation

The Inner Life of God: The Trinity

- The **Son** and **Spirit** are the self-diffusions of the **Father**, and they in turn, as divine goodness and greatness, *return* themselves fully to the Father.
- This eternal and never-ending self-diffusion and return is the divine life; this is the living God
- This inner life of God, **Father**, **Son**, and **Holy Spirit**, is infinitely *full* and *complete*. God lacks nothing, needs nothing. God *freely* creates out of a **perfect self-sacrificing love**.

A photograph of a person walking through a field of tall grass and dandelions. The person is in the background, slightly out of focus, wearing a dark dress. The foreground is filled with green grass and several dandelion stalks with their heads. The text "Incarnation as Sacrifice" is overlaid in a large, bold, purple font in the center of the image.

Incarnation as Sacrifice

Incarnation as Sacrifice

A Far Inferior Level of Being

- To become a human being is degrading for God.
- It means changing from one level of being to another, far inferior level of being.
- It is perfectly all right to be a human being, but for God to become a human being is a deep reduction in God's status.
 - It is actually an infinite step downward.
 - God's being is infinite, and for God to become a human being is for God to become profoundly, abysmally limited.

Incarnation as Sacrifice

A Far Inferior Level of Being

- In the **incarnation** – by becoming a human being – God the Son is subject to the laws of nature:
 - God incarnate must eat, get tired, sleep, and be vulnerable to injury and death.
- Paul in Philippians 2:
 - ... **Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God** [preexistent and divine], **did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited** [never relinquished], **but emptied himself** [the extreme limit of self-denial], **taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.**

Incarnation as Sacrifice

God the Son Becoming a Human Being

- Throughout Jewish history there was a yearning for God to be near and present.
- The surprise in Jesus is that the nearness of God is Jesus himself: for Jesus is the **incarnation**, the embodiment of God as a human being

Incarnation as Sacrifice

God the Son Becoming a Human Being

- Kierkegaard (1813-1855), in his difficult book *Philosophical Fragments*, gives us an analogy about what it means for God the Son to become a human being.
- Kierkegaard tells a story of a king who fell in love with a humble maiden.
- He is a very unusual king, one who wishes in no way to embarrass or offend the humble maiden.

Incarnation as Sacrifice

God the Son Becoming a Human Being

- If the king goes to her cottage to announce his love in all his kingly glory, he would utterly overwhelm the girl.
- Furthermore, even if the maid manages to rise to the occasion and responds to his love, it will never be wholly clear to the king whether it is he or the external glory of his power and majesty she loves.
- One possible solution: the king could disguise himself as a beggar.
- But a new problem would then arise. If king actually succeeds in winning the girl's love disguised as a beggar, she would not really love *him*:
 - He is a king, but she would love a beggar.

Incarnation as Sacrifice

God the Son Becoming a Human Being

- No solution can be found in “reversing the procedure,” and elevating the maiden:
 - For this would suggest that as a humble maiden, she is not good enough to be loved by the king, but it is precisely as a humble maiden that the king loves her.
- The only solution possible if a happy love between the king and the maiden is ever to be achieved is:
 - *for the king to actually become a beggar, and not merely pretend to be a beggar,*
 - *and as a beggar seek to win the maiden’s love.*

Incarnation as Sacrifice

Fully God and Fully Human

- The Son of God incarnate continues to be the Son of God.
- A simple analogy from plane geometry can help us understand how Jesus can be fully divine and fully human.
- Imagine a flat surface, a plane, and assume that everything we can experience is on that plane—the “human plane.”

Incarnation as Sacrifice

Fully God and Fully Human

- Imagine now a “plane” of a divine reality.
- We could have no experience of divine reality unless the plane of divine reality touched or intersected our own human plane.
 - Most of it would still not be on our plane, only that small part of it that crossed or intersected the human plane.
 - Most of the divine reality would remain outside and still be unknown.

Incarnation as Sacrifice

Fully God and Fully Human

- The place of intersection of two planes is a straight line, simultaneously part of both planes.
- Jesus, the Son incarnate, is both on the *human plane* and part of it, but also on the *divine plane* and part of the divine plane, extending to all infinity.

A photograph of a person in a dark dress walking through a field of tall grass and dandelions. The person is out of focus, and the background is a bright, hazy sky. The text "The Temptations in the Wilderness" is overlaid in a large, bold, purple font.

The Temptations in the Wilderness

Temptations in the Wilderness

A New Path to the Father

- As a human being, the Son of God must face the same temptations as we face if he is to lead us from where we are onto a path that leads into his Father's kingdom.
- Right after his baptism by John, before he begins his public ministry, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where he is tempted for forty days and nights.
 - Note it is God's Spirit that leads him.
 - The number **forty** is sign or symbol of a decisive change, for Jesus' temptations are:
 - A struggle in which a new path to the Father is being created for us to follow.
 - A hinge on which a turn is made into a new future for us all.

Temptations in the Wilderness

The First Temptation

- Exposed to terrible hunger, his body giving him no rest, Jesus looks at the smooth stones that lie at his feet and notices how they look something like the smooth loaves just out of a baker's oven.
- It strikes him: **“Turn these stones into bread.”** (Matthew 4:3)

Temptations in the Wilderness

The First Temptation

- It is a personal temptation:
 - To avoid the pains of a bodily life,
 - To avoid suffering as a being who must eat, be vulnerable to starvation, be in need of material goods and therefore tempted to become greedy, covetous, and envious.
- Hebrews 2:18: **“For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.”**
(RSV).

Temptations in the Wilderness

The First Temptation

- It is also a temptation to change his mission:
 - Jesus can change his mission to the world to be a mission to satisfy people's bodily needs.
 - He can try to make sure everyone has food, clothing, and shelter; that everyone's physical needs and desires are fully satisfied.
- His Father faced this decision when he made the universe:
 - He could have protected us from all shortages, from being vulnerable to starvation.
 - But his Father chose *not* to govern the world or *overrule* people's actions, including those that lead to hunger.
- Now Jesus faces the decision the Father made at creation to allow this. He has to ratify or to reject his Father's decision by deciding what his mission is to be.

Temptations in the Wilderness

The First Temptation

- Jesus faces it by quoting the Old Testament:
“One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4; compare Deuteronomy. 8:3)

Temptations in the Wilderness

The Second Temptation

- The devil takes Jesus to Jerusalem and sets him on the pinnacle of the temple (perhaps in a vision).
 - There was a Jewish tradition that the Messiah, when he comes, will appear on a pinnacle of the temple.
- **“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone’”**
(Matthew. 4:6; compare Psalm 91:11-12).

Temptations in the Wilderness

The Second Temptation

- This may in part have been a personal temptation to test Jesus' confidence in his mission and his Father's care.
- It is also another temptation to change his mission:
 - When God created the universe, God had to decide whether there were to be creatures who were not only spirits—able to choose their destiny—but who were also “spiritual animals,” creatures liable to harm and destruction.
 - God decided to make creatures who were spiritual animals, creatures whose situation would be one in which we would have to find God, learn to trust God and love God, while we are exposed to injury and destruction.

Temptations in the Wilderness

The Second Temptation

- Jesus is faced with the task of convincing other people who he is. He has to do something or give us something that we can recognize as coming from God.
 - A non-coercive way of doing so is through a “**sign**” = deeds that reveal God to people who have spiritual discernment.
- To appear at the pinnacle of the temple as the Messiah, jump, and be miraculously saved by angels could be very convincing.
 - But it would not be a sign. It would require no spiritual insight to be understood.
 - And it would feed an incorrect expectation about what God does for us: worship me and you will be protected from danger.
 - It would negate the decision made at creation: that we will be spiritual animals, creatures whose situation is one in which we would have to find God, learn to trust God and love God, while we are exposed to injury and destruction.

Temptations in the Wilderness

The Second Temptation

- Jesus answers: “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’”

Temptations in the Wilderness

The Third Temptation

- When Satan shows Jesus the kingdoms of this world and their glory, he offers him success and all the prestige, deference, and acclaim that goes with success.
- Jesus is not immune from feeling the lowliness of his position. In Matthew 8:20, he complains:
 - **“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head”**
- Nonetheless, the main attractiveness of Satan’s offer is not the prestige that goes with success, but success itself.

Temptations in the Wilderness

The Third Temptation

- When the Father created the universe and decided to make spirits who could be like himself—creative, with imagination, capable of moral insight, and of spontaneous devotion—God faced a dilemma.
- God faced the problem of allowing people *freedom*, or using God's power in such a way as to *compel* them to recognize God's sovereignty.
- For the greatest and first commandment of the universe is that only God is to be worshiped; only God is the foundation and fountain of life.

Temptations in the Wilderness

The Third Temptation

- How is that commandment to be kept?
 - By *force*? By *punishment* when we do not turn to God, so that it becomes obvious that it *pays* to worship God?
 - Or by God's restricting Godself, by pulling back on the exercise of his power, by limiting Godself, and letting us seek God because of our hunger, because we have learned to love God?
- To chose the latter is a terrible choice because it means exposing creatures to awful suffering—to all the ills and torments and ravages that our history and life are full of. It is to expose us to evil, to rampant and hidden evil that can destroy us utterly.
- At creation, our Father chose the latter.

Temptations in the Wilderness

The Third Temptation

- Jesus in the wilderness now faces the temptation to accept or to deny his Father's choice.
- He could use his power and impose himself on people. Through sheer force he could stop people's suffering, stop their wandering in darkness, end the terrible beastliness and destruction that plagues us.
- In the end, Jesus does not try to use force any more than his Father does in order to get his way.

Temptations in the Wilderness

The Third Temptation

- As a consequence:
 - He suffers in **sorrow at the failure of many to follow the path he opens up: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!”** (Matt. 23:37 RSV).
 - He renounces the social prestige that goes with its successful use of power and might”
 - He has no place to lay his head.
 - He bears the contempt of his detractors who jeer at him as the mere son of a carpenter.
 - The third consequence becomes apparent near the end of his life: his lack of social position and renunciation of physical might make it possible for others to use force against him.

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera in a field of tall grass and dandelions. The person is wearing a dark, sleeveless top and dark pants. The background is a bright, hazy sky. The text "The Sacrifice of the Cross" is overlaid in a bold, purple font, centered in the middle of the image.

The Sacrifice of the Cross

Sacrifice of the Cross

The Temptation on the Cross

- To open access for us to the Father, Jesus endured a final and decisive trial or temptation on the cross.
- There he experienced the full force of the *effects of sin and evil* without losing confidence in the love of his Father.
- This endurance of Jesus on the cross is a *victory over the power of sin, evil, and death*,
- It forms the core of the Christian faith.

Sacrifice of the Cross

Atonement Theories

- That Jesus is our Savior is never a matter of dispute.
- There are however several theological speculations of *how* Jesus' death on the cross makes our salvation possible: “**Atonement theories.**”
- “**Atonement**” or “**at—one—ment**” = how *sinful* human beings can be made one (be united) in fellowship with God, who is *holy*.
- The church has never designated any of these theological theory as definitive, or the orthodox doctrine, or dogma.

Sacrifice of the Cross

A Ransom to the Devil

- Mark 10:45 speaks of the Son of Man giving his life as a ransom for many.
- This is the basis for the theory that Jesus' death was a ransom paid to the devil, under whose power we had fallen by sin and evil.
- This theory has never satisfactorily explained how Satan had a right to possess us in the first place, nor how the ransom was paid.

Sacrifice of the Cross

Theory of Recapitulation

- Paul drew a contrast between Adam as the old Adam and Christ as the new Adam.
- Adam had failed to live the life God intended, resulting in our being sinful and subject to death.
- Jesus is the new Adam, who by his incarnation passed through (“recapitulated”) all the stages of life from birth to death, thereby sanctifying them, making them holy.
 - Jesus as the new Adam thus “generates” a new humanity.

Sacrifice of the Cross

Satisfaction = Substitutionary Theories

- Anselm, in *Why God Became Man*, 1097, fathered what are now called “**satisfaction theories**” or “**substitutionary theories.**”
 - This line of thinking became the most widely used way to discuss our redemption by Christ in the Western Church
- We have incurred a debt to God by our sin that we cannot repay. Only God can pay it.
- Jesus pays our debt (“substituting” for us) by becoming both God and man in the incarnation and by suffering death on our behalf.
- Jesus by his death thus renders “satisfaction” to his Father.

Sacrifice of the Cross

Satisfaction = Substitutionary Theories

- Problem with **satisfaction = substitutionary theories**: they raise profound moral problems:
 - Where is the justice of substituting a sinless victim for a sinful one, as the means of dealing with the latter's sin?
 - And what are we to make of the depiction of God as fundamentally wrathful [toward us] and determined [even required by justice] to exact punishment?

Sacrifice of the Cross

Abelard's Theory

- Abelard (d. 1142) claims that Christ saves us by *inspiring us* to live in accord to God's will by his *example*.
- The vast majority of theologians have felt that, in spite of its element of truth, this theory by itself is not able to do full justice to the biblical witness.

Sacrifice of the Cross

The Father and The Son

- Allen suggest that understanding the relationship of the **Father** and the **Son** is critical to understanding as much as we can of the significance of the crucifixion of Jesus.
- The **Father**, **Son**, and **Spirit** are *one God* through their love for one another before the foundation of the world.
 - The **Son** is the full and perfect expression of the Father's being and, as the full and perfect expression of the Father, the Son is also divine.
 - The **Holy Spirit** is the full and perfect expression of the Father and Son and, as their full and perfect expression, the Holy Spirit is divine.

Sacrifice of the Cross

A “Distance” Between Father and Son

- The **Son**, when he became incarnate, became “separated” by a “distance” from the **Father**.
- “Distance” here is a metaphor, contrasting what is subject to the power of created forces (**The Son**) to what is not (**The Father**).

Sacrifice of the Cross

A “Distance” Between Father and Son

- *Through* the **Father**, Jesus can command nature, for example, when he stilled the stormy sea and walked on water.
- But as himself, **Jesus** is subject to the forces of gravity, to the need to eat, and to death.
- So the **Father** and **incarnate Son** are “separated” by the “distance” of the created world.
- Although “separated” from the **Father** in the sense of being subject to the forces of creation, the incarnate **Son** is still *in communion* with the **Father**.

Sacrifice of the Cross

Loss of Communion with the Father

- The **crucifixion** introduces *another* way the Father and the Son are separated.
- On the cross the Son incarnate is not only separated from the Father by the “distance” of being subject to the forces of creation, but the Son incarnate is also “afflicted” so that *communion* between the Son and the Father is threatened.
 - “Affliction” = a particular kind of suffering, involving physical pain, social humiliation, and despair.

Sacrifice of the Cross

Loss of Communion with the Father

- At Gethsemane Jesus begins to sense the impending loss of communion with his Father.
 - His disciples tell us he is in terrible agony, agitated and trembling.
 - Jesus prays “**My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me**” (Matthew 26:39b).
- On the cross, Jesus experiences the full force of sin and evil – which is *complete* separation from the Father, the *complete* loss of communion with the Father.
- Jesus is filled with an emptiness that causes him to cry out “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**” (Matthew 27:46b).

Sacrifice of the Cross

Loss of Communion with the Father

- Paul tried to explain this when he wrote: “**He made him to be sin who knew no sin**” (2 Cor. 5:21):
 - Jesus was *without sin*, but on the cross he experiences the *fullest possible effect* of sin and evil: the *complete* absence of the Father, the *complete* loss of communion with the Father.
 - No human sinner has ever suffered *complete* separation and *complete* loss of communion with God.
- Jesus successfully endures the *complete* absence of the Father, longing for the presence of the Father to his death.

Sacrifice of the Cross

The Victory Over Sin and Evil

- Although separated by an infinite distance, the love of the Son for the Father and the Father for the Son is able to span the “*infinite distance*” between *holiness* and *sin*:
 - This is the *victory* over sin and evil: the effects of sin and evil could not destroy Jesus’ love and trust of the Father.
- Our salvation in some way seems to depend on the fact that on the cross, the fullest experience of the worse possible *effect* of sin and evil – the *complete* absence of communion with God – was taken up for eternity into the inner life of God.



Next Time (April 10):
The New Life in God.

Topics: The Resurrection of Jesus and Eternal Life. Jesus as Lord and Jesus as Servant. Revelation and Faith.