

Doctrinal Study #5

Substitution

Isaiah 53:1-12

From before the creation of the world it was God's purpose to send His Son into the world so that He might display the infinite grace of God through His death. From the time of the fall of man all sinful creation had looked forward to the coming of the Redeemer. Since the death of Christ all look back to that event which is the pivotal point in divine history. **The cross becomes the focal point of attention of both heaven and earth.** As we see the Lord Jesus lifted up to die, we might well ask ourselves the question, "Why?"

As we continue our study of doctrine, tonight, we are going to look at the doctrine of substitution. Although this word is nowhere to be found in the Bible, there are a great many passages of scripture that point to this great truth. In fact, there is no more precious doctrine to which the child of God can give his attention than the doctrine of *substitution*. **The necessity for substitution arises out of the righteous and holy demands of a righteous and holy God that sinners should be punished for their sins.** At the time God created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, a restriction was placed on His creatures. In Genesis 2:16-17 God said, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it; for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die." **A death penalty was affixed to this restriction laid down by God.** In Ezekiel 18:4 the Prophet announced divine judgment, "...the soul that sins, it shall die." The New Testament echoes those same words in Romans 6:23, "...the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

It was a well-known principle revealed throughout the Word of God, that a holy and righteous God must execute the sentence that he had decreed upon sin. When Adam sinned and entailed the whole of humanity in his sin, and when by imputation the sin of Adam was charged to the account of humanity, it was necessary that God judge sin and that sinners be punished because of their transgressions. Yet our God is not only holy, righteous, just, faithful, and true; He is also a God of infinite patience, compassion, long-suffering, mercy, and grace. **He is not a God who delights in the death of the wicked, but a God who delights in bestowing grace upon those who deserve only judgment and wrath.** It is as though a *conflict* arose within the very nature of God. Paul addresses that conflict which poses the world's greatest riddle in Romans chapter 3 when he talks about how God could be just, on the one hand, and the Justifier of the sinner, on the other. How could God be faithful and true to Himself, His Word, and His character, and execute a just judgment on sin, and at the same time redeem those who were sinners?

Ladies and gentlemen, always remember this – God is never caught off guard, therefore, He had a plan there whereby He could indeed be just, and at the same time the Justifier of the one who does no more than to believe. This plan is known as the doctrine of substitution. This doctrine presents one of the greatest truths in all of Scripture. In other words, God’s plan was for someone who was not a sinner, to take our place. For someone who owed *nothing* to pay *everything* that *we* might have life and have it more abundantly. So tonight, we are going to consider the doctrine of substitution.

First of all, I want to share with you the biblical concept of a substitute. In the original text, the writers of the New Testament use a preposition which conveys to us the idea that one does something for another’s good, or in another’s behalf. When Jesus Christ is presented as the *Substitute*, in this sense, He is offering Himself for *our* benefit; He is performing an act for *our* good; He is doing something on *our* behalf. Luke 22:19-20 says that Christ “took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave unto them saying, This is my body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament (or covenant) in my blood, which is shed for you.” When Christ said, “...is given *for* you,” and “...is shed *for* you,” He was saying literally, “Here is a body which is given on your behalf, for your benefit, and here is blood which is shed for your good.” At the time of the institution of the Lord’s Supper, Christ was presenting the doctrine of substitution.

We have that same expression in John 10:15, when Jesus said, “As the Father knows me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.” **When Christ said that He, as the Shepherd, laid down His life, it was not for His benefit but for our benefit.** It was not for the good that He could derive from the sacrifice, but for the good that could come to sinners through the sacrifice. Therefore, He says, “...I lay down my life for the sheep.” This is what Paul was saying in Romans 5:8 when he says, “But God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” **The same word occurs again.** Christ died on *our* behalf, for *our* benefit, so that good might come to *us* through His death. He endured the *pain*, the *shame*, the *suffering*, and the *agony*. The benefit us for us!

Listen to how it is explained in Galatians 3:13, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree.” **Jesus Christ was cursed, not because he deserved a curse from God, for there was no sin in Him; the curse of God could not come upon Him for His own transgressions.** Because He assumed a curse that was not His own, but a curse that was *ours*, the *benefit* and the *blessing* of redemption and salvation came to us through Him.

Paul put it this way in 1 Timothy 2:6, Christ "...gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." **The ransom has to do with the payment of a redemption price to set sinners free.** Christ paid the price, not for the benefit that would come to Him through the purchase and possession of redeemed sinners; but Christ paid redemption's price for the benefit of those who were in bondage to sin. Therefore, the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ in His death had but one thought, and that was to provide for our good, for our benefit, and for our blessing.

As Jesus taught in Matthew 20:28 He used a different preposition, the preposition of direct substitution, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give his life as a ransom for many." The Greek reads something like this, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life instead of many having to give their lives." That is exactly what He said in John 10:10 when He said, "I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly."

From the earliest chapters in the Old Testament it was promised that a Deliverer and Redeemer would come. When God called Abraham, God revealed to Abraham that the Blessor would come from Abraham's seed. When the New Testament opened, Jesus Christ appeared as the seed of Abraham. **His physical lineage is traced in the first chapter of Matthew, and the third chapter of Luke, to show that Jesus Christ is the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, and the Son of Adam.** Jesus Christ, by His physical birth of the Virgin Mary, is a Man among men. Through the virgin birth He possessed a full and complete humanity. **This full and complete humanity was inseparably united with undiminished deity when Christ was born into this world.** His identification with men is emphasized in Hebrews 2:14, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil," In other words, Christ came to break the power of Satan over sinners, and to deliver men from the *realm* of Satan and the *reign* of death. In order to be the Redeemer and the Deliverer, it was necessary for the Deliverer to partake of flesh and blood; that is, the One who gave Himself for men must be a man so that He could represent men.

If Christ was to give His life as a ransom for the sins of men, it was necessary for Him to possess full, complete, undiminished humanity. Hebrews 2:16-17 says, "For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

The record of the life of Christ reads like the record of a man: He became tired; He hungered; He thirsted; He knew sorrow; He knew rejection; He knew what it was to be spit on and cursed; He suffered the indignities that a nation could heap on Him. The Bible says in Hebrews that He “was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.” It is a great biblical fact – Jesus Christ *identified Himself with men.*

And that leads us to the next great truth: **although Christ was identified with men, He was separated from men.** Hebrews 7:23-27 says, “Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He (Christ), because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.” **The Bible is simply teaching us that if Jesus Christ were only a man, if Christ were born of a “son of Adam,” then, He is not an acceptable substitute.** If He were born a “son of Adam,” He too would be under the wrath of God. But the Bible very clearly teaches that Christ was separate from sinners because there was no sin found in Him, as seen in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “...(God) has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sins; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

This truth was so clearly anticipated by the Prophet Isaiah centuries before the Lord Jesus gave Himself as a substitute in death. Isaiah 53:4-6 says, “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah pictured One who would come as his substitute, and as ours, upon whom would receive the wrath of God so that God would be just in punishing sin, and the Justifier of all who will accept Jesus Christ’s payment as their payment to God.

The doctrine of substitution had its first demonstration in the Garden of Eden when after Adam sinned, God slew a lamb, and the skin of a lamb covered Adam’s nakedness, and the blood of a lamb covered Adam’s sin. In God’s provision of a lamb He portrayed the way by which He would make a final dealing with sin for all who would come under the blood of the Lamb of God. The lamb was Adam’s substitute in the sentence of death. **Abel’s lamb anticipated the coming of God’s Lamb.** Every lamb offered on Jewish altars in

obedience to the Law of Moses anticipated the coming of God's Lamb. It was not until John the Baptist could point to the Lord in John 1:29 and say, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," that God's acceptable sacrifice came among men. When Jesus Christ went to the cross, He went in order that He might fulfill God's eternal purpose of punishing sin, and yet might provide a basis by which sinners might be acceptable to God through His *substitution*.

The Romans prepared three crosses for three criminals. On two of the crosses thieves were to hang; the middle cross was prepared for a notorious criminal by the name of Barabbas who had been guilty of treason against the Romans Empire. Yet Barabbas never found his way to that cross which had been prepared for him. **The sentence had been passed; and the Roman court had found him guilty; but the Jewish religious leadership convinced the people to ask for Barabbas to go free, while demanding that Jesus be crucified in his place.** And in its truest sense Christ died in Barabbas' stead. Barabbas went away a free man, not because he was innocent, but because Another took his place.

Child of God, each of us can look back to that hill outside the walls of Jerusalem, and as we look up to the One hanging on that middle cross, we can truly say, "That is the cross prepared for me, but I can go free because He gave Himself for my benefit; He gave Himself in my place. He is my substitute."

And that, my friend, is the *doctrine of substitution*.