

Major Bible Themes

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CHAPTER VIII

GOD THE SON: HIS SUBSTITUTIONARY DEATH

Whether in Bible doctrine or in common speech, the word substitution means the replacement of one person or thing for another. Though not a Bible word, its specific meaning when related to the Scriptures is concerning the work of Christ on the cross, and by it is indicated the fact that those unmeasured, righteous judgments of God against the sinner because of his sin were borne by Christ substituting in the sinner's room and stead. The result of this substitution is itself as simple and definite as the transaction -- the Saviour has already borne the divine judgments against the sinner to the full satisfaction of God. There is therefore nothing left for the sinner to do or for him to persuade God to do; but he is asked to believe this good news, relating it to his own sin, and thereby claim his personal Saviour.

The word substitution fails to represent all that is accomplished in the death of Christ. In fact there is no all-inclusive term. By popular usage, the word atonement has been pressed into this service; but the word atonement:, which does not once appear in the original text of the New Testament, means, as used in the Old Testament, only to cover sin. However, the word atonement does clearly indicate the divine method of dealing with sin before the cross. In the Old

Testament, while requiring no more than a symbolic animal sacrifice for the remission of sins (Lit. toleration, Rom. 3:25), and winking at sin (Lit. to overlook and not punish, Acts 17:30), God was acting in perfect righteousness since He was awaiting the coming of His own Lamb who would in no way pass over or cover sin, but who would take it away for ever (John 1:29).

In attempting to consider the full value of the death of Christ we should distinguish:

1. That the death of Christ assures us of the love of God toward the sinner (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 3:16; 4:9); added to this, there is, naturally, a reflex influence or moral appeal through this truth upon the life of the one who really receives it (2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Pet. 2:21-24); but this appeal concerning the manner of daily life is never addressed to the unsaved.

2. The death of Christ is said to be a redemption or ransom paid to the holy demands of God for the sinner and to free the sinner from just condemnation. It is significant that the one discriminating word for, meaning "instead of," or "as a price paid for," is used in every passage wherein this aspect of truth appears (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6).

In like manner, the death of Christ was a necessary penalty which He bore for the sinner (Rom. 4:25; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13; Heb. 9:28).

So, also, the death of Christ was an offering for sin, not as the animal offerings of the Old Testament which could only cover sin in the sense of delaying the time of righteous judgment; but as taking it to Himself, bearing it, and bearing it away forever (John 1:29; Isa. 53:7-12; 1 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 9:12, 22, 26; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19).

3. The death of Christ is represented on His part as an act of obedience to the law which sinners have broken; which act is acceptable to God in their stead (Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:8; Rom. 5:19; 10:4).

4. The death of Christ was a priestly mediation by which the world was reconciled unto God. Reconciliation results when enmity is removed, and, while it is never implied that the world's enmity toward God is removed, it is declared that the judicial state of the world is so altered before God by the death of Christ that He is said to have reconciled the world unto Himself. So complete and far-reaching is this provision that it is added in the Scriptures that He is not now imputing their trespasses unto them (2 Cor. 5:18, 19; Eph. 2:16; Col. 2:20).

5. The death of Christ removed all moral hindrances in the mind of God to the saving of sinners. By that death God is propitiated and thus declared to be righteous when He, (1) anticipating the value of the sacrifice of His Son, passes over the sins of His people who lived before the cross (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:15, R.V.), and (2) to be just at the present time when He justifies those who do no more than believe in Jesus (Rom. 3:26). This aspect of the death of Christ is to be distinguished from all others because of its effect upon God. Since, in that death, His infinite love and power are released from restraint by the accomplishment of every judgment which His righteousness could demand against the sinner, God is more advantaged by the death of Christ than all the world combined.

6. Christ, in His death, became the Substitute bearing the penalty belonging to the sinner (Lev. 16:21; Luke 22:37; Isa. 53:6; John 10:11; Rom. 5:6-8; 1 Pet. 3:18; Matt. 20:28). This fact is the

ground of assurance for all who would come unto God for salvation. It presents something for every individual to believe concerning his own relation to God on the question of his own sin. A general belief that Christ died for the whole world is not sufficient; a personal conviction that one's own sin has been perfectly borne by Christ the Substitute is required -- a belief which results in a sense of relief, joy, and appreciation (Rom. 15:13; Heb. 9:14; 10:2). Salvation is a mighty work of God which is wrought instantly for the one who believes on Christ.

7. The death of Christ is often misinterpreted. Every Christian will do well to understand thoroughly the fallacy of those misstatements which are so general today:

a. It is claimed that the doctrine of substitution is immoral on the ground that God could not in righteousness lay the sins of the guilty on an innocent victim. This statement might be considered if it could be proved that Christ was an unwilling victim; but the Scriptures present Him as being in fullest sympathy with His Father's will and actuated by the same infinite love (Heb. 10:7; John 13:1). Likewise, in the inscrutable mystery of the Godhead, it was God Himself who was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). So far from the death of Christ being an immoral imposition, it was God Himself, the righteous Judge in infinite love and sacrifice, bearing the full penalty that His own holiness required of the sinner.

b. It is claimed that Christ died as a martyr and that the value of His death is seen in the example He presented of courage and loyalty to His convictions even unto death. The sufficient answer to this error is that, since He was God's provided Lamb, no man took His life from Him (John 10:18; Psa. 22:15; Acts 2:23).

c. It is claimed that Christ died to create a moral effect which is that, since the cross displays the divine estimate of sin, men who consider the cross will be constrained to turn from lives of sin. This theory, which has no foundation in the Scriptures, assumes that God is now seeking the reformation of men; while, in reality, the cross is the ground of regeneration.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of substitution when related to the death of Christ?
2. If this work of Christ's is already accomplished, what obligation now rests on the sinner?
3. What is the Bible meaning of the word atonement, and what relation does atonement sustain to the sacrifice of Christ?
4. a. What assurance is given the sinner by the death of Christ?
 - b. Is there any appeal by the cross to the unsaved as to conduct?
5. a. Describe the death of Christ as a ransom.
 - b. To whom was the ransom paid?
 - c. Describe that death as a necessary penalty.
 - d. Describe that death as an offering for sin.

6. Describe Christ's death as an act of obedience.
7. a. Describe Christ's death as a priestly mediation.
 - b. Who was reconciled, and to what extent, in the death of Christ?
 - c. Why is God not now imputing sin unto sinners?
8. What effect did the death of Christ have upon God in respect both to the sins before the cross and the sins after the cross?
9. In view of Christ's substitution for sinners, what became of the necessary divine penalty imposed on men because of sin?
10. In the light of Satan's purposes, is it reasonable to expect that the doctrine of saving grace through the cross will be misunderstood by the unsaved?
11. What answer should be given to one who claims that the doctrine of Christ's substitution is immoral?
12. What answer should be given to one who claims that Christ died as a martyr?
13. What answer should be given to one who claims that Christ's death was only to produce a moral influence on men?
14. What answer do you give when the Word of God states that Christ died as a substitute for you?