

THE BIBLE TEACHING ABOUT SUBSTITUTION

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Ask any group of Christians, "Why did Jesus die on His cross?" and they will tell you, "He died as our Substitute." And that's 100% true. But what does it mean? How does that truth make any difference in the way we live?

We say, "He died instead of us," and that's true; He did. If you had been drafted in the American Civil War of 1861-65, you could hire a substitute to take your place and die instead of you; now you can enjoy life while he suffers and his loved ones mourn. "My substitute has taken my place!" It's a vicarious substitution. And you can think of the sacrifice of Christ in that same way. He died instead of you.

IT'S TRUE—"Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3), "the just for the unjust" (1 Peter 3:18). "The chastisement of our peace was upon him, . . . and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5, 6).

But is the popular Evangelical idea of "substitution" what the Bible teaches? Did Christ obey "instead" of us so that we need not obey? Did He die "instead" of us so that we do not die to sin? Did He deny self "instead" of us so that we can indulge self? Did He keep the commandments "instead" of us so that we can transgress them? Did He keep the Sabbath "instead" of us so we can "find our own pleasure" seven days a week? Did He go to heaven "instead" of us so we will never get there?

He is indeed our Divine Substitute, but not in the popular understanding that divorces Him from intimate fellowship with us. In the American Civil War it was possible to pay \$300 to the government and have a "substitute" go and fight and die in your place while you stayed home and made money. That is not the biblical idea of Christ our Substitute.

It is interesting that the word "vicarious" appears nowhere in the Bible, nor did Ellen White use it in any of her books. The Bible does not teach a *vicarious* substitution, but a *shared* substitution. There is a big difference! The former is the evangelical idea, the latter is the 1888 message idea. There has been much confusion and even misrepresentation on the part of sincere people.

For ages, millions have died trusting in Christ as their Substitute. For the most part, their idea of substitution has been "vicarious." Christ stands in place of them, instead of them, as an insurance company stands instead of you, in place of you, when you suffer a loss.

Or, as a lawyer who stands before the judge in place of you, instead of you, in a court case. Now, in this Day of Atonement, God's idea of substitution is a clearer one, a "shared" one. It's not that "vicarious" substitution in any sense is wrong; but the closer God's people come to the Savior, the clearer is their vision of His substitution.

The Bible goes far deeper: Christ's sacrifice is also a shared substitution. "I am crucified with Christ," says Galatians 2:20. "We were baptized into Jesus Christ, . . . baptized into His death, . . . buried with Him by baptism into death, . . . planted together with Him in the likeness of His death, . . . our old man [the love of self] crucified with Him, . . . dead with Christ." If all this is true, then "we shall also live with Him" (Rom. 6:3-8). But only IF.

For example, in the Day of Atonement they "sing as it were a new song before the throne," a song that no other group in history could sing (Rev. 14:1-5). This indicates a new experience in relating to Christ, a new and dearer understanding of Him. Further, they "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth," indicating a new experience that means a closer identity with Him as the crucified One and as their High Priest.

It can't be a righteousness by works experience that is "new," for legalism can never inspire a body of God's people to follow Christ so closely in His closing High Priestly ministry. It must be a righteousness by faith experience that is "new." The goal is changed from merely preparing a body of people to die and then come up in the first resurrection (a wonderful goal that requires the miracle of regeneration). But the "new song" that is sung prepares a body of people for translation at the second coming of Jesus. Thus it closes His ministry as High Priest, and inaugurates what leads to His coronation as King of kings.

How do these people identify so closely with "the Lamb"? It's not a fanatical "me-first-to-be-among-the-144,000" idea. Personal reward is the last thing on their minds. By mature faith they "grow up into Him," "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:15, 13). Identifying with Him.

The Bible talks about the “great controversy between Christ and Satan.” This conflict leads up to the final Battle of Armageddon.

On its outcome hangs the destiny of this planet. The victory of Christ over Satan in Gethsemane and on His cross exposed Satan’s true character to the unfallen universe so that “the great dragon . . . was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him,” says John. “And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, . . . and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ” (Rev. 12:9, 10). In other words, so far as heaven is concerned, Christ has won the great war.

But as to the inhabitants of this planet, “the great controversy” goes on until “our brethren” can be described, “they overcame him [the dragon] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony” (vss. 10, 11). This is not an “insurance policy” kind of relationship with the Lamb—you pay your premium (“I accept Christ!”), and now He “covers” for you in a “vicarious substitution” way, as the insurance company “covers” your loss if your house burns down. You don’t trouble your head—they “cover” for you.

Revelation pictures “our brethren” in a far more intimate relationship with the Lamb than the popular egocentric concern, “I’m okay, I’m covered, I’m saved! I’ll sit back, relax, and ‘occupy until [He] comes.’” The sanctuary service which illustrates this “great controversy” tells us that now is the cosmic Day of Atonement-time for total experiential one-ness with Christ “through faith.” His people become “partakers of the divine nature,” they experience “I am crucified with Christ,” they “comprehend” the grand dimensions of His love *agape*, they “overcome even as [Christ] overcame,” they “grow up into Him” “unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” It’s as a bride intimately “at one-ment” with her husband. They sense the heart-burden that Jesus carries. This is more than “vicarious substitution.” It’s realizing a “shared substitution,” an intimate one-ness with the Lamb through faith. Do you see this as “Good News”?

That last meal that Jesus ate with His disciples (“the Lord’s Supper,” to many) illustrates the idea of “substitution” that the New Testament teaches (yes, and the Old Testament, too), a shared experience with Him.

Jesus did not say to his disciples, I am eating this Bread instead of you, nor did He say, I am drinking from this cup instead

of you. He ate with them, He drank with them; they ate and drank with Him. Using the clearest illustration possible of intimate oneness He represented His believers as “drinking My blood, eating My body.”

You are branches and I am the Vine (Jn. 15:4, 5). “Abide in Me, and I in you,” He pleads. Jesus says, “Abide in Me” (John 15:4). That means, Stay where He has put you. He took the initiative to place you in Himself; He holds you in His hand (John 10:28, 29). Don’t jump out of His hand into the dark world!

“Ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you” (John 14:20). In sending the Holy Spirit to dwell with those who believe in Him, Jesus represents Himself as not leaving them orphans, “I will come to you” (John 14:18). Open your heart, receive His Spirit; you receive Him.

“Take, eat,” He says in that last supper; “this is My body which is broken for you.” And then in the same way, “He took the cup, when He had supped,” and said, “Drink ye all, of it, for this is the blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt. 26:26-28, 1 Cor. 11:23-26). The idea again is intimate *one-ness*.

Jesus does not want us to think of Him as separate from us, doing everything “instead of us,” while we look on in childish wonder, uncomprehending. He did indeed die instead of us, He died our second death so we don’t have to die our own second death—that is all true; but it is only part of the truth He obviously wants us to understand and experience. He wants intimate oneness with us where we enter into His feelings and His experience as a branch enters into the life processes of the Vine.

And then coming down to the last days of history just before Christ’s return, Revelation introduces us to a oneness with Him even more intimate, even closer to our human understanding. We see how He wants us to sense an even deeper identification with Himself—a Bride’s nearness to her Husband. Here is a shared experience with Him, one in which human pride can have no place. When “I am crucified with Christ” all my “glory” (yes, even pastoral!) is laid in the dust forever.

One is the kindergarten, flower-girl-at-the-wedding idea of substitution—very, very true; but the other is the bride “growing up unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13), prepared to stand with Him side by side in the “marriage of the Lamb.” It’s a time for divine-human intimacy never before realized by the body of His church.