

## SOTERIOLOGY (37)

Because God has a character that is perfectly holy, His justice can never be altered, softened or modified in any way. Any rebellion, sin or trespass against God demands punishment. His pure justice cannot ever overlook the failure. But on the other hand, His pure love, grace and mercy desires to forgive, restore and maintain fellowship with the sinner. It is precisely at this point where the vicarious suffering of Jesus Christ becomes so critical. Christ, in connection with the eternal plan of God, conceived, agreed upon and carried out by all three members of the Godhead, stepped into history as the ONLY substitute who could take the place of and bear the penalty of sinful men and meet all the divine demands of justice while still providing forgiveness, restoration and fellowship between God and sinful men.

From man's perspective, there are only two possible options for satisfying the payment for his sin, which the holy justice of God demands.

A. He must satisfy God's demands personally.

When a sinner chooses to reject Jesus Christ and refuses to rely totally on Christ to satisfy all righteous demands of God, he chooses to face God personally for his own sin. Such a decision will ALWAYS result in eternal damnation. In light of the fact that God Himself has provided a sacrifice for sinful men, it is quite evident that God is not about to accept any personal human attempt to atone for one's own sin.

B. He must satisfy God's demands vicariously.

When a sinner chooses to accept Jesus Christ by placing total faith in Him for salvation, he chooses to allow the official Son of God to completely represent him. He allows Christ to make the full payment to God for his sin, including the complete bearing of the penalty he deserves. Such a decision ALWAYS results in eternal salvation.

Personal satisfaction is the way of works. Vicarious satisfaction is the way of faith. Personal satisfaction represents all that man can do for himself. Vicarious satisfaction represents all that God has accomplished for man. Personal satisfaction is the way of eternal death. Vicarious satisfaction is the way of eternal life.

In order for a vicar to be able to act as an official representative for man and be totally acceptable to God, God must appoint Him. It is His holiness that has been violated, it is His wrath that needs to be appeased, it is only His grace, love and mercy that can save. Therefore, in order for a vicar to be able to accomplish all of this work, He must be appointed by God.

Obviously the one who God appointed is Jesus Christ! There is no other person who could vicariously meet all of the demands. Dr. Berkhof says, "...God appointed a vicar in Jesus Christ to take man's place and this vicar atoned for sin and obtained an eternal redemption for man" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 375).

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In order for the vicarious sacrifice to be legal, the one who is judge and the one who made the Law and upholds the Law must fully authorize, permit and accept the vicarious substitute. Therefore, to be a vicar, who can take the place of man, one must be fully authorized by God Himself.

There is much biblical evidence for the vicarious work of Jesus Christ:

1) Old Testament sacrifices illustrate the vicarious work of Christ.

There can be no doubt that the O.T. sacrifices were pictures of THE ultimate sacrifice that God would supply (Heb. 10:1-10). Dr. Berkhof does a good job of discussing the O.T. sacrifice:

“The Old Testament teaches us to regard the sacrifices that were brought upon the altar as vicarious. When the Israelite brought a sacrifice to the Lord, he had to lay his hand on the head of the sacrifice and confess his sin. This action symbolized the transfer of sin to the offering and rendered it fit to atone for the sin of the offerer (Lev. 1:4). Cave and others regard this action merely as a symbol of dedication. But this does not explain how the laying on of hands made the sacrifice fit to make atonement for sin. Neither is it in harmony with what we are taught respecting the laying on of hands in the case of the scapegoat in Leviticus 16:20-22. After the laying on of hands, death was vicariously inflicted on the sacrifice. The significance of this is clearly indicated in the classical passage that is found in Leviticus 17:11: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life.” Says Dr. Voss, “The sacrificial animal in its death takes the place of the death due the offerer. It is forfeit for forfeit. The sacrifices so brought were pre-figurations of the one great sacrifice of Jesus Christ” (*Ibid.*, p. 377).

Clearly the O.T. sacrificial system illustrates the concept of a vicar and of the concept of vicarious suffering.

2) Direct statements clearly teach the vicarious work of Christ.

There are many passages in Scripture that clearly teach us that our sins were laid upon Jesus Christ and that He bore them on our behalf. Both the O.T. and the N.T. make these statements.

1. Isaiah 53:6 - “...the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”
2. Isaiah 53:12 - “...He Himself bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors.”
3. John 1:29 - “...Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”
4. II Cor. 5:21 - “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

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5. Gal. 3:13 - “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us...”
6. Heb. 9:28 - “...so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many...”
7. I Peter 2:24 - “...and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”

These are just a few of the passages that clearly establish Christ’s work was vicarious in nature. He was the official designated, divine agent of God who took the place of sinful men, acting in their behalf as their substitute. The Bible is very clear on this point.

3) Prepositional - uses clearly establish the vicarious work of Jesus Christ.

As we have already observed, the prepositions “anti” and “hyper” (pp. 30-31) demand that Christ’s work be viewed as substitutionary and vicarious. Anything less than this interpretation is a failure to “rightly divide the Word of Truth.”

When we consider the complete magnitude of being able to be a God-appointed vicar, one must quickly admit that the ONLY one person who could possibly fulfill such a role is Jesus Christ.

It is hard to conceive that anyone would have the audacity to dare suggest that he was God’s vicar, but that is exactly, as Mr. Miles says, “...the awful assertion by the Romanist today that the pope is the vicar of Christ” (John Miles, *Doctrine—Second Semester*, p. 12).

Any person who claims he can vicariously stand as a substitute between a Holy God and sinful man and has been divinely appointed to be the link between heaven and earth, is a liar, a heretic and a tool of Satan. There is only one Vicar, Jesus Christ. He is the ONLY substitute who God will accept. Through Christ’s vicarious work, every believer is a holy priest unto God (I Pet. 2:9). It is true that God does give various gifts to the Church. It is also true that leaders are to be esteemed highly for their work for the Lord (I Thess. 5:12-13). But anyone who would dare suggest that he is a vicar appointed by God is the spirit of Antichrist.

The vicarious work of Jesus Christ is totally unique. It is also evident that the concept of His vicarious work emphatically testifies that Christ’s sacrifice was substitutionary in its nature.

**(Defense #3)** - The mediatorial work testifies of the substitutionary nature of Christ’s sacrifice.

Generally speaking, a mediator is one who acts as an arbitrator or umpire between at least two disputing parties. He acts as an intermediary in order to bring some peaceful settlement or resolution to the dispute. Such a concept, when applied to Jesus Christ, is completely biblical and theologically accurate, for that is precisely what the Scriptures reveal concerning His work.

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Perhaps no passage more succinctly illustrates the need of a mediator between God and man than Job 9:32-33. Dr. Chafer's discussion of this text is worthy of consideration: "The separation between the righteous God and sinful Job is recognized when Job said, 'For He is not a man, as I am, that I should answer Him, and we should come together in judgment,' and the case was even more hopeless since no 'daysman' existed 'that might lay his hand upon us both.' The English term 'daysman' means 'arbitrator' or 'umpire.' The thought in Job's mind is of an established and accepted mediator between God and man. Job's conception, which pictures this intermediate agent as having the right to lay his hand on each party, is exceedingly clear reaching, as it does, far beyond the range of conditions which might arise between men. The laying on of the hand, which Job visualizes, speaks of inherent equality between the daysman and the one on whom the hand is placed. Since Job indicated that the estranged parties are God and himself, the placing of the daysman's hand upon God requires that the daysman shall be equal with God, and the placing of the daysman's hand on Job requires that the daysman shall stand, also, on the same level with Job, having the inherent right which belongs to a fellow man—a representative of actual kin. Thus, in terms which breathe more of the wisdom and purpose of God than is common to man, Job has declared the fundamental features which of necessity are found in the anthropic Mediator" (Vol. 3, p. 61).

Dr. Chafer goes on to say, "Sin caused an estrangement between God and man, and since all have sinned, the need is universal. That God is offended by sin need be not argued. It is less recognized, however, that sin has hardened the heart of man, befogged his mind, and caused him to be full of unreason and prejudice. When Adam and Eve sinned, they hid, not from each other, but from God" (*Ibid.*, p. 61).

There is no question that a mediator is needed in order to intervene and bring a peace settlement between these two opposing parties. The mediator must be able to meet all of the demands of God in order to bring peace between a Holy God and sinful men. There is only one who can represent sinful man and negotiate a peace agreement and that is Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul wrote: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all..." (I Tim. 2:5-6).

It is quite evident from this mediatorial concept that in order for Christ to work out a peaceful settlement between a Holy God, who had been grossly offended by sinful man, His substitutionary work was demanded. To have any chance of having God work out a peace agreement, He had to approach Him, having fully satisfied all of God's demands, which included suffering the full scope of the wrath of God. Jesus Christ did that on Calvary; therefore, He can represent sinful man to God and is fully capable of negotiating a peace settlement. When a person believes on Jesus Christ, His mediatorial work automatically and instantly is in full operation for the one who believed, and he has peace with God forever (Rom. 5:1).

**(Defense #4)** - The explicit statements that Christ died for men's sins testifies of the substitutionary nature of Christ's sacrifice.

As we have already observed in our study of prepositions, there are many passages that clearly teach that Jesus Christ died for the sins of men.

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Such passages as I Cor. 15:3, II Cor. 5:21 or I Pet. 2:24 cannot be any clearer. Jesus Christ died for the sins of men, and it is this one thought, perhaps as no other thought in the entire Bible, that has caused men to place their faith in Jesus Christ and be reconciled to God.

The fact that sinful man can have all of his sins forgiven by the Holy God has caused millions of troubled and burdened hearts to come to Christ. When they do they discover their sins are forgiven, their burdens are lifted and their guilt is taken away. Scores of people throughout hundreds of years have found eternal relief in knowing Jesus Christ took their sins away.

Men may attempt to deny that Christ was a substitute for man, but every attempt is clearly refuted from the teachings of the Word of God. There is absolutely no doubt that Jesus Christ died for the sins of humanity. He was a priceless sacrifice who took man's place and penalty. He died as a substitute and the fact that men can have sins forgiven in Him is absolute proof.

With such clear evidence regarding the fact that Jesus Christ died as a substitute for sinners, it would seem impossible to offer any objection to this precious doctrine; yet there are those who do. As we shall see, their objections are feeble and unsubstantiated. It is my full conviction that any attempt to deny the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ, no matter how scholarly or sincere it may appear, is a full-fledged work of Satan attempting to blind the minds of men from the revealed truth of God (II Cor. 11:3-15; II Pet. 2:1).

The following are some of the objections that heretical theologians have offered in an attempt to deny the substitutionary nature of Christ's work:

**1)** Some have denied Christ's substitutionary work because they say it was entirely unnecessary.

The reasoning goes something like this: Since one man can forgive another for some transgression without demanding a satisfactory substitutionary payment, certainly God, who is our perfect example, can and will freely forgive. This objection leans very strongly on the love side of God.

Such an objection may be easily refuted in many ways:

1. God's attributes cannot be divided. God's love cannot ever be separated from God's justice. God's grace cannot be separated from God's righteousness. God, because of His perfect nature and indivisible character, cannot ever overlook sin. If He could, there would be a flaw in His character.

2. God's personality cannot ever be brought down to the level of man's personality. The truth is there are times when people who are right with God should not overlook sin until it has been faced and repented of (i.e. Matt. 18:15-17; I Cor. 5:11). Our tendency to overlook sin or forget about it does not necessarily speak highly of us. Naturally, sinful man will have a tendency to want to overlook the sinful failures of another sinful man because both are in the same situation and both are sinners.

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God, however, is perfectly holy and He cannot ever be brought down to a level of viewing sin as we view sin. God's way of thinking cannot ever be brought down to our way of thinking.

3. God's Word is violated. Quite simply, this objection denies the entire Word of God which clearly teaches, right from Genesis throughout both the O.T. and the N.T. that there must be a sacrifice for sin. To deny the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ is to deny the revelation of God.

4. God's office demands judgment. God is the judge. That office demands judgment. In the human realm, a private citizen may choose to forget about a transgression; however, if the transgression is brought before a judge in a court of law, it cannot be forgotten, it must legally be resolved. God is the supreme judge. He cannot ever more or less function in this capacity, therefore, every sin is legally brought before Him. As Judge, He must make a judicial decision, namely, all are guilty. But as Judge, He also has authority to determine the legal method of resolving the transgression, namely, the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ.

5. God's Word does not teach the free forgiveness between men. Again, it may be pointed out that according to the Word of God, there are times when free forgiveness is a clear violation of the Word of God. For example, the challenge of Matt. 18:15-20 clearly demands repentance before forgiveness. I Corinthians 5 clearly demands excommunication if there is no repentance. Revelation 2:18-23 clearly teaches that the judgment of Jesus Christ will come against a church that overlooks sin. These passages certainly do not teach a free forgiveness.

6. Christ's death is meaningless. If Christ's death is not a substitute for sinners, then it is on the same level as any death of any person. If His death were totally unnecessary, why does the Son of God, who has never sinned so as to deserve the death penalty, have to die? Without Christ being our substitute, His death means nothing.

Obviously Christ's substitutionary work was necessary and, in fact, is the critical issue of N.T. salvation.

2) Some have denied Christ's substitutionary work by saying that it demeans the character of God.

The reasoning goes something like this: Since Jesus Christ was completely innocent, it demeans the character of God to make an innocent person take the punishment of those who are guilty. Those who hold to this view say that God becomes a stern, unjust being who demands the blood sacrifice of one innocent in order to appease His wrath. This, they say, violates the love, grace and justice of God, thus demeaning His character.

Such an objection is filled with many flaws:

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1. God did not make Jesus Christ become our sacrifice; Christ voluntarily offered Himself as a substitute. God did not force the innocent to take the punishment of the guilty.
2. God would have been perfectly just had He allowed all sinners to pay for their own sins. It certainly cannot be a stern, unloving God who Himself provides a method of salvation. The fact that He did provide a substitute demonstrates in incomparable level of grace and mercy.
3. God's character would have truly been demeaned had not Christ's death been a substitute for sinners. Dr. Chafer, in quoting Henry Rogers, explains: "And remember, that if you insist on the injustice of God's inflicting suffering on Christ for the sins of others, you cannot escape similar difficulty, and greater in degree, on your own system; for, can it be less unjust to inflict such sufferings on Christ for no sins at all? If it be unjust to accept Him as a sacrifice for the guilty, how much more unjust must it be to insist on the sacrifice for nothing, and when the victim thrice implored in agony, that if it were possible, the cup might pass from Him" (Vol. 3, p. 66).

If Christ's death isn't a substitute for sinners, God's character is truly demeaned for Christ suffered for nothing.

4. Christ's death for sinners enhances God's character. The death of Jesus Christ is the greatest statement of the love, grace and mercy of God that will ever be displayed. Without such a Divine substitute for sinners, we would never begin to fathom the depth of the riches, wisdom and love of God. The substitutionary work of Christ enhances every attribute of God. It testifies of His justice, His holiness, His righteousness, His omniscience, His love, His grace, His mercy and His wisdom. Christ's substitutionary work does anything but demean God's character; it establishes and enhances it. This objection is one of pure folly.

**3)** Some have denied Christ's substitutionary work by saying it is impossible and illegal for God to transfer His wrath and His punishment to Jesus Christ.

The reasoning goes something like this: It is not judicially proper to transfer guilt and penalty to another person; in fact, such an action is impossible and illegal.

Again, this objection contains several flaws:

1. The impossibility and the illegality, by all rights, should be God loving and caring for any human being. Since all have sinned and willingly rebelled against God, what really seems impossible is that any man could be eternally saved from his sin. Logically speaking, it is not the transfer of wrath that seems so impossible and illegal; it is the transfer of righteousness.
2. Those that adhere to this objection attempt to equate God's justice with man's justice. In other words, they would contend that since it is impossible and illegal for men to vindicate their anger on some innocent person, it must be the same for God. The anger and wrath of a Holy God against sin cannot ever be brought down to a level of the anger and wrath of sinful men against sin. At best, men still see and feel through sinful eyes and hearts.