

The Church of the Servant King
Soteriology Series

SO_5_What Christ Accomplished in His Death-Part 6 – Substitution & Vicarious Sacrifice

Introduction, Definition & Description

So vital is the doctrine of Christ's substitution and vicarious sacrifice that Lewis S. Chafer has stated "the theme of the sufferings of Christ in death is the ground of all right doctrine and the central fact in this cosmic universe. It exceeds the importance of the material universe – in so far as the universe provides a sphere wherein evil may be tested, judged, and banished forever."¹ In this statement, Chafer acknowledges the vital connection and inter-relationship between the necessity for the substitutionary death of Christ and the Angelic Conflict.

Substitution and vicarious sacrifice refer to the fact that the nature of Jesus Christ's death on the Cross was in our stead (substitution) and in our place (vicarious). His death was not merely on our behalf, but Jesus died in place of us. In other words, had Jesus not suffered a spiritual death on the Cross as payment for our sins, our spiritual death (eternal separation from God) would be assured and would be an inescapable reality.²

The substitutionary death of Jesus Christ was necessary for two primary reasons: 1) God's righteousness had to be satisfied (propitiated) and 2) fallen mankind is obligated to God by virtue of mankind's relationship to the federal head of the human race (i.e. Adam) and fallen mankind's personal sins which originate from the fallen nature. The provision of a substitute for fallen mankind Who was God Himself incarnate is the greatest act of God's mercy and love that all of the created universe could have ever witnessed. Mercy is not to be confused with the act of forgiveness. Mercy is the provision by means of the substitutionary death of Christ.

To contend that God could save one sinner from the judgment of one sin by the exercise of mercy, is to accuse God of the greatest folly that could be known in the universe; for if one sin could be cured by mercy alone the principle would be established by which all sin could be cured and the sacrificial, vicarious death of Christ could be rendered wholly unnecessary. When Christ died at the hand of His Father as an offering for sin, it is evident – except God be deemed the example of infinite foolishness, if not infinite wickedness – that here was no other way by which sinners could be saved. The Bible teaches without deviation that Christ by His death met the demands of justice in behalf of the sinner ...and those who will come unto God by Him are saved without the slightest infringement upon divine holiness.³

Thus, God in His mercy provided a substitute (Himself in the incarnate form of His Son). In making this vicarious provision God demonstrated His love for the entirety of the human race (Jn 3:16). By providing Jesus as the substitute, we have the potential for eternal life instead of eternal separation (death) from God. When accepted by faith, Jesus as our substitute is the gracious alternative to a life of human effort that will never satisfy God's righteousness (Eph 2:8-9).

¹ Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, Texas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), Volume III, 55.

² Underlying a fuller understanding of this statement is a presumption that the reader of these notes is familiar with the distinction between what was accomplished in Jesus' physical death and His spiritual death on the Cross. This subject has been the basis of previous lessons in the series entitled "The Person and Work of Christ."

³ Chafer, 58.

Verses Which Teach Substitution

Some Bible verses use the preposition ἄντι (*anti*) and others use the preposition ὑπὲρ (*hyper*) in phrases that describe the substitutionary work of Christ on the Cross. The former carries a connotation of *equivalence*, whereas the latter carries the idea of *on one's behalf*. Thus, ὑπὲρ (*hyper*) is broader in scope (i.e. on one's behalf) and in some instances means no more than a benefit provided. However, "the reasonable attitude is to allow ὑπὲρ its full latitude to the extent that when, according to the context, it seems to express actual substitution, to give it the same force as ἄντι ."⁴

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, *might taste death for [ὑπὲρ] everyone.* (Heb 2:9)

Who gave Himself for [ὑπὲρ] us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people...(Tit 2:14)

Who gave Himself a ransom for [ὑπὲρ] all, to be testified in due time. (1 Tim 2:6)

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, *having become a curse for [ὑπὲρ] us...*(Gal 3:13)

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is *given for [ὑπὲρ] you*; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed *for [ὑπὲρ] you.*" (Luke 22:19-20)

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered *for [ὑπὲρ] us*, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps. (1 Pe 2:21)

For Christ also suffered once for [ὑπὲρ] sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit. (1 Pe 3:18)

Therefore, since Christ suffered for [ὑπὲρ] us in the flesh ... (1 Pe 4:1)

But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for [ὑπὲρ] us. (Rom 5:8)

As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for [ὑπὲρ] he sheep (Jn 5:15)

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for [ἄντι] many. (Matt 20:28)

Who gave Himself a ransom [ἄντι] for all, to be testified in due time. (1 Tim 2:6)

Substitutionary Death is More Than an Example

In the Sixteenth Century, a heresy arose known as Socinianism (after its founders). Among other things, this view held that the new covenant of which Jesus spoke involved an absolute forgiveness rather than a substitutionary sacrifice. The real value of the death of Jesus

⁴ Ibid., 57.

was in the example which it supplies to us, i.e. epitomizing the type of dedication that we are to practice. The resurrection was viewed as important because it was the confirmation of what he taught. This view had ties to another heresy, i.e. Pelagianism in the Fifth Century. Pelagianism viewed man as basically good, thus capable of satisfying God's righteousness. Both views basically denied that God was a God of justice, therefore God would not demand satisfaction of His righteousness.

We will study more about these heresies in the future when we examine Satan's attacks upon the essential doctrines surrounding the meaning of Christ's death when we conclude this section of lessons.