

# Salvation: God's Love Forever

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, April 21, 2013

## The Vital Doctrine of "Substitution"

In our last study, we considered some of the various 'theories' of the atonement. We concluded by saying that of all the different theories, the 'penal-substitutionary' theory was the only one that could fully explain how Jesus' death relates to our need. In this morning's study, we'll look a little closer at the doctrine of Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross for us; and show why so much of the doctrine of our salvation depends on it.<sup>1</sup>

### I. WHAT IS MEANT BY 'PENAL-SUBSTITUTION'.

- A. You might remember from our previous study that all the different theories of the atonement sought--in some way or other--to answer the important question, "How does Jesus' death relate to my sin in such a way as to save me?" We found that most of the different theories failed to answer the question sufficiently--some saying that Jesus' death only somehow freed us from Satan's clutches; others that it only provided us an example to follow; and others that it only somehow appeased God. In most of those theories, a genuine connection between Jesus' death and our sin remained unexplained or unestablished. It was only the 'penal-substitutionary' theory that could explain how Jesus' death was directly and completely connected to our need. In that theory of the atonement, Jesus' death was said to be 'vicarious'--that is, as a true Substitute who died on our behalf. It was 'penal' in that He--as our sinless Substitute--actually bore on the cross in His Person the penalty for our sin (i.e., death) that we ourselves should have suffered before God.
- B. Some have objected to the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus because it seems contrary to the idea of God's justice. In Ezekiel 18:4, God said, "The soul who sins shall die."<sup>2</sup> But with Jesus presented as our Substitute, it seems as if God violates His own principle in causing His innocent Son to suffer for sins that He Himself did not commit. But it must be remembered that Jesus' death for us was not an afterthought. It was a sacrifice established before we had ever sinned. Jesus is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). And since those who suffer for their sins are described as "not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 17:8), it seems reasonable to believe that those who *are* saved from God's wrath by Jesus' death *were* written in the Book of Life for atonement when God's eternal purpose for His Son was established. God's conformity to His own principle of justice is in perfect keeping with His own eternal purpose through Christ. What's more, it needs to be remembered that Jesus offered Himself *willingly* to suffer as our Substitute in the payment of a debt that we could not possibly pay. It was the work of Christ--and indeed the whole triune Godhead--that was spoken of through Isaiah: "I looked, but there was no one to help, and I wondered that there was no one to uphold; therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me; and My own fury, it sustained Me" (Isaiah 63:5).

### II. WHAT THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT JESUS AS OUR SUBSTITUTE.

- A. In the Old Testament, the ministry of Jesus as our Substitute is pictured for us in the sacrifices that God ordained through the Levitical priesthood in the tabernacle. In particular, in Leviticus 1:3-4, instructions were given

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concerning someone who brought a burnt offering: “If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord. Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.” Hebrews 10:4-7 (quoting from Psalm 40:6-8) tells us this about Jesus, “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, “Behold, I have come-- in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God.”’” In Isaiah 53:4, we’re told prophetically of Jesus’ substitutionary death for us; saying, “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . .”; and in verse 6, that “the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”.

- B. In the New Testament, we’re taught clearly that Jesus died on the cross specifically to pay the penalty for our sins as our Substitute. In Mark 10:45, Jesus Himself said, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” In Romans 5:8, we’re told that “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that “He [i.e., God the Father] made Him who knew no sin [i.e., Jesus the Son] to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” In Galatians 3:13, we’re told that “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.” In 1 Timothy 2:6, Jesus is described as He “who gave Himself a ransom for all;” and in Titus 2:14 as He “who gave Himself for us.” And in 1 Peter 3:18, we’re told, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.”

### III. KEY DOCTRINES OF SALVATION THAT DEPEND ON THE IDEA THAT JESUS SERVED AS OUR TRUE ‘SUBSTITUTE’.

- A. Our “redemption” from sin depends on it. To “redeem” us, in the sense that the Bible speaks of redemption, is to pay the price for our freedom--to “pay our ransom”, as it were. But just as in the case of paying someone’s ransom, there needs to be an established connection between the price paid and the person being redeemed. Only the doctrine of Jesus’ vicarious death on our behalf can establish that direct connection. No other theory of the atonement but this one can fully account for what it says in Revelation 5:9 concerning our Lord Jesus, “For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation . . .”
- B. Our “reconciliation” to God depends on it. To be “reconciled” to God means that the sin that caused enmity between God and ourselves has been removed; and that we are now free to enter into a personal relationship with Him. But unless it is truly the barrier of our own sins that is actually removed, God’s reconciliation with us cannot occur. Simply the fact of Jesus ‘dying’ cannot remove that barrier. Only if His death is truly on our behalf can it remove the barrier for us. And only this doctrine can show Jesus death to be that which removes *our* sin; so that as Romans 5:10 says, “when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son . . .”
- C. The “propitiation” of God’s wrath for our sin depends on it. In the doctrine of salvation, “propitiation” refers to the ‘turning away’ or ‘appeasing’ or ‘satisfying’ of God’s just wrath for our sins by an offering being made.<sup>3</sup> Our sin is an offense to a holy God; and His wrath must

truly be propitiated. But unless the death of Jesus has an authentic relation to our sin, it could not propitiate God toward us. If anything, the death of His own sinless Son apart from that connection would only increase His just anger toward us! But because of the doctrine of Jesus' substitutionary death for our sins, as 1 John 2:1 says, "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."

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Before leaving this subject, it would be good to stop and consider one of the most important things that is shown to us in the doctrine of Jesus' substitutionary atonement--and that is the immeasurable degree of His love for us. In becoming our sinless Substitute on the cross as the Son of God in human flesh, He bore on Himself the full penalty for our every sin--every sin we've committed in the past, and every sin we may commit in the future. He received all the cursedness and wrath that justly should have been poured out on us by a holy God. And He not only became the propitiation for our sins, but also for the whole world.

What would it have been like for Him to have borne all the guilt and condemnation of our fallen race in our place; and be made to cry out to the Father for that brief while, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" We couldn't even begin to imagine! But even so, He did indeed those dreadful words on the cross for just a period of time in our place, so that we wouldn't have to cry them throughout eternity! And we wouldn't be thinking of the doctrine of Jesus' substitutionary atonement as we should if we didn't respond by saying, "Oh, how He loves you and me!"

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<sup>1</sup>These notes are adapted from Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), pp. 329-342.

<sup>2</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from The Holy Bible, New King James Version; copyright 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc.

<sup>3</sup>Some Bible scholars felt uncomfortable with the seemingly 'pagan' idea that God could have the emotion of 'wrath'; and so, instead of using "propitiation" in their translating work, they chose the word "expiation"--which means simply the cancelling of sin. This is found to be the case in the *New English Bible*. But this translation choice seems to ignore the reality of God's real wrath for real sin.