

CONSEQUENCES OF THE SUBSTITUTION THEORY

BY MAURICE BARNETT

The Substitution theory originated in the centuries following the first one. It was given form and substance by Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, in the eleventh century. But, it was John Calvin who gave it final form and set the tone for "theology" up to the present time. Substitution is an inseparable necessity for the five points of Calvin and is why it is known as the Calvinist theory. William Newton Clarke, in *An Outline of Christian Theology*, page 319, says,

At the Reformation, this doctrine was modified by the introduction of the analogies of criminal law. In this view, the satisfaction that was due to God consisted in punishment. It was now held that Christ actually took the place of sinners in the sight of God, and as their substitute, suffered the punishment that was due to them, including, as many Reformer's taught, the sufferings of hell. Upon him fell all the punishment of all the sins of all the men for whom he died; against them, therefore, penal justice could have no further claim.

Perhaps the theory is best expressed by the renowned Baptist preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon in a sermon titled "Sin-Bearer." It can be found on the Sage Library CD. Spurgeon says,

This sin-bearing is *final*. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, but He bears them now no more. The sinner and the sinner's Surety are both free, for the law is vindicated, the honor of government is cleared, the substitutionary sacrifice is complete. He dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over Him; for He has ended His work, and has cried, 'It is finished.' As for the sins which He bore in His own body on the tree, they cannot be found, for they have ceased to be, according to that ancient promise, 'In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be

found' (Jeremiah 1:20). The work of the Messiah was 'to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness' (Daniel 9:24). Now, if sin is made an end of, there is an end of it; and if transgression is 'finished', there is no more to be said about it.

We are henceforth legally dead to the punishment of sin. If I were condemned to die for an offense, and some other died in my stead, then I died in him who died for me. The law could not a second time lay its charge against me, and bring me again before the judge, and condemn me, and lead me out to die. Where would be the justice of such a procedure? I am dead already: how can I die again? I have born the wrath of God in the person of my glorious and ever-blessed Substitute; how then can I bear it again? Where was the use of a Substitute if I am to bear it also? Should Satan come before God to lay an accusation against me, the answer is, "This man is dead. He has born the penalty, and is 'dead to sins,' for the sentence against him has been executed upon Another.

Don't miss just what this theory is saying!

All of my *sins*, past, present and future, before I was born, literally and actually were transferred to Jesus and taken away at the time He was on the cross. All of the *punishment for sins* that God has determined for sinners was transferred to Jesus at the time He was on the cross. All of my *guilt* was transferred to Jesus when on the cross. Jesus "paid" every "debt" I owe to God *while he was on the literal cross*. Consequently, we are not accountable for our sins, owe God nothing and thus will not be punished because our *substitute stood in our place* nearly two thousand years ago. This means we were pre-forgiven of everything. ***That is the Substitution Theory, what the vicarious death of Jesus means.***

This theory stands on the two legs of the imputation of our sins to Christ and the imputation of His righteousness to us; one goes with the other

and both are necessary to substitution. After all, if all of our sins, guilt and punishment were taken by Jesus in our place, then we have never had any sins or guilt and will not have to face punishment for them. Thus, His righteous act is laid to our account *as though* we had done all this ourselves; by His righteous act, His righteousness is imputed to us, laid to our account. Spurgeon further said in a sermon titled, *Justification by Faith*,

This is the language of God, put into human words, 'I can deal with you upon terms of mercy through the merits of my dear Son.' This is the way in which the gospel comes to you, then. If you believe in Jesus, that is to say, if you trust him, all the merits of Jesus are your merits, are imputed to you: all the sufferings of Jesus are your sufferings. Every one of his merits is imputed to you. You stand before God as if you were Christ, because Christ stood before God as if he were you - he in your stead, you in his stead. Substitution! that is the word! Christ the Substitute for sinners: Christ standing for men, and bearing the thunderbolts of the divine opposition to all sin, he 'being made sin for us who knew no sin.' Man standing in Christ's place, and receiving the sunlight of divine favor, instead of Christ.

What is meant by doing something "on their behalf" is to do it *for their benefit, for their sake*. Some will say they see no difference between doing something "in another's place" and doing something "on their behalf." Of course, in doing something on another's behalf, one *might* do that thing in their place. But, one might also do something on another's behalf *without* doing it in their place. For example, as Christians, some help we give to others is just for their *benefit*, but not necessarily in their place.

Sometimes it is expressed that what Jesus did was something he did in our place which we could not do for ourselves. But, because there is something we cannot do for ourselves does not mean whoever does it is doing in our place. Two years ago, the tendon in my right ankle snapped. The next day a surgeon put it back together. He did that on my behalf, for my benefit, for my sake. But, he did not *take my place* for I was not scheduled to perform such surgery nor could I have performed it to begin with; the surgeon *did not substitute for me*.

Abraham was told to offer Isaac on an altar. God stopped him short of doing that and a ram was offered in the place of Isaac. That was true substitution. However, Isaac was *supposed to have been offered to begin with* so the ram could be termed a substitute for Isaac. Where is the Bible teaching that says that I was scheduled to die on a cross or an altar, especially in the manner of Jesus, so that He took my place as a sacrifice? If Jesus physically died in my place, why will I die some day? If Jesus took all of the punishment for my sins in my place, why am I in possible danger of suffering eternal punishment for sins? Jesus died for my benefit, he suffered on the cross for my benefit. But, He did not take my place there.

I have heard some ask the questions, "Where is the danger? What does it matter?" Well, it matters a lot. Not only is substitution not taught in the scriptures, there are some serious consequences to the theory. Substitution contradicts basic Bible teaching.

[1] ***Substitution establishes Universal Salvation***. I John 2:2 says that Jesus was "*the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*" Whatever Jesus did, *it was for the sins of all men of all time*. It was potentially as much the *propitiation* for Adolph Hitler, Mohammed and the worst scum of humanity, as for any of us. Therefore, if Jesus took away at the time He was crucified, as the substitute for all men everywhere for all time, all of their sins, guilt and punishment, *then all men will be saved*.

Calvin realized this and could not accept universal salvation. Therefore, the number had to be limited. The answer was that only a predestined few would be saved. Jesus took only the sins, guilt and punishment of those predestined to salvation upon Himself - *Limited Atonement*. That being so, God had to let these few know they were saved - *Irresistible Grace*. Further, since Jesus took all of the sins, guilt and punishment for sins upon Himself on the cross, those few for whom He died could never be charged as guilty and would have no punishment to face - *Perseverance of the Saints*.

Once one accepts the Substitution Theory, he must accept either universal salvation or Calvinist predestination, limited atonement, irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints. One follows the other. The only other position possible is to reject both and take the Bible position.

[2] **Substitution nullifies the gospel.** I Corinthians 15:17, "...and if Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." The message was the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. These are the gospel facts. They were supposed to be preached and were preached, Acts 2, 13, 17, I Corinthians 15:1-4. If Jesus had just died, and nothing more, if He had just stayed in the tomb, there could be no salvation. Substitution places everything about our salvation at the death of Jesus. It is sometimes expressed as "redemption was completed at the cross." Again, Spurgeon said, in the sermon "*The Curse Removed*,"

It is our delight to preach the doctrine of substitution, because we are fully persuaded that no gospel is preached where substitution is omitted. Unless men are told positively and plainly that Christ did stand in their room and stead, to bear their guilt and carry their sorrows, they never can see how God is to be "just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly."

No, there is no gospel of Christ where substitution is included. Paul said that if Jesus had not been raised then they would still be in their sins, which means that sins existed beyond His death. Assuming substitution is true, if Jesus had not been raised from the dead, they would *still have had their sins forgiven*; His resurrection was superfluous to salvation. But, if there was something more beyond the *death* of Jesus that was necessary to remission of sins, substitution is false. Substitution is a contradiction to the gospel.

[3] **Substitution makes useless the Priesthood of Jesus.** Jesus was raised from the dead to become High Priest. This was necessary to complete the offering for sin. Leviticus 16 presents the shadow of the substance to come. Jesus corresponded first to the animal who was slain and whose blood was taken by the High Priest into the Holy of Holies to be sprinkled there for sins. He then corresponds to the High Priest who took the blood into the Holy of Holies. Jesus was *both* the lamb of God and the High Priest. He thus completed the steps to remission of our sins by taking His own blood into the heavenly Holy of Holies to offer it before the face of God. This is clearly presented in Hebrews 9. The chapters surrounding chapter 9 also speak of what was accomplished and support the points discussed in chapter 9.

If everything was accomplished at the literal cross when Jesus died, then His priesthood had no meaning and the book of Hebrews is a useless exercise.

[4] **Substitution nullifies Obedience.** Hebrews 5:9 says, "...and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation." Many passages inform us that we must obey God's commands in order to be saved. John 3:36, ASV, says, "*He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.*" Matthew 7:21ff, II Thessalonians 1:7-9 are like passages. Yet, the wrath of God against sin was supposed to have been taken away at the cross, according to substitution. Jesus supposedly placated deity (propitiation), "satisfied" divine law, and thus took away the wrath of God against sins and sinners. We ask, "why then does God's wrath against sins and sinners still exist?"

I have heard it said, "I believe in substitution but I also believe one must obey the commandments of God in order to be saved." Sorry, but substitution and obedience are contradictions; one can't hold to both. Calvinists try to solve that contradiction by a supposed imputation of Christ's *perfect obedience* to us, imputed righteousness. However, that again absolves us of all responsibility. If substitution is true, we don't have to do anything; Jesus has already done it all in our place!

[5] **Substitution establishes salvation by perfect works.** On what basis can God be merciful to sinners? With substitution, God owes the sinner salvation because his "debt was paid" at the cross by his substitute! The "debt" cannot be required of both the substitute and the sinner as well, collecting twice to satisfy "law and justice."

Further, substitution was made possible by the *perfect life* and *perfect obedience* of Jesus. That amounts to salvation by perfect works, in our place. Thus, grace is excluded because the salvation was accomplished by perfect obedience. Barton Stone, in the *Works of Elder B.W. Stone*, page 126, says it well,

This scheme contradicts the Gospel plan of justification by faith. For it represents the sinner as justified by the surety-righteousness of Christ imputed to him. This surety-righteousness was Christ's active obedience to the precepts of the

moral law, and his passive obedience in suffering its penalties in the sinner's stead. This righteousness of Christ is entirely a law-righteousness; and if a sinner is justified by this righteousness imputed, he is justified by the works of law. It matters not whether he or the surety has fulfilled it, for they are one in law, as before observed. This is not the righteousness of faith; *for the law is not of faith*. Faith has no part in this justification; the elect sinner being as much justified before he believed as afterward; for the works were finished near eighteen hundred years ago, when Christ died on the cross. *Then the satisfaction was really, properly and fully made, and their debts fully discharged*. If not, then something else is necessary, and therefore the satisfaction of Christ is not full and complete.

[6] ***Substitution leads directly to the impossibility of apostasy.*** With Calvinism, it's called perseverance of the Saints. Those who are saved can never be lost. Loraine Boettner, in his book,

The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, page 155, says,

The great Baptist preacher Charles H. Spurgeon said: 'If Christ has died for you, you can never be lost. God will not punish twice for one thing. If God punished Christ for your sins he will not punish you ... How can God be just if he punished Christ, the substitute, and then man himself afterwards.'

The reasoning of Boettner and Spurgeon on this point cannot be refuted. If one cannot scripturally accept the impossibility of apostasy, then he must likewise reject the substitution theory. One follows the other. Albert Barnes said,

It would follow, further, that those for whom he died could not themselves be held and regarded as guilty. If there has been a *transfer* of their guilt, it is no longer their own, and they cannot be responsible. Two persons cannot be

SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTION OFFER



**Subscribe to the Preceptor
for one year for \$15.00 –
Up to the next five
subscriptions for \$7.50 each.**

**A savings of 50% from
Regular Price!!**

OR



**Renew your subscription
for one year for \$15.00 –
Subscribe for up to 5 others
for \$7.50 each!!**

**NOW is the time
to send a gift subscription
to a friend!!**

**Regular
Subscription
\$15.00**

**Additional Subscriptions
\$7.50 each
Limit 5**

Order From:

**The Preceptor Company
P. O. Box 22283
Beaumont, TX 77720**

**(409) 866-3598
(409) 866-8259 Fax**

held responsible for the same offence. If a debt has been paid by a friend, it cannot be demanded of him who originally contracted it. If one could be substituted in the place of another in a penitentiary, and serve out the term of punishment assigned to the original offender, the offender could not be again imprisoned for the crime. If a man who is 'drafted' for military service procures a substitute who is accepted, he cannot be made to serve if the substitute dies of disease or is killed in battle. And so, if Christ was literally made 'sin' and a 'curse,' if he took literally upon himself the sins of men and paid the penalty of the law; if there was a real transfer of the whole matter to him, then it would follow that those whose place he took could no longer be held to be guilty. *The Atonement*, pages 298-299

This point was not lost on Calvin. If Jesus paid everything at once, satisfied Divine justice by His life and sacrifice, then no one can ever be held guilty of anything and hence is no longer subject to punishment for sins. Barton W. Stone had been a Presbyterian minister until he left them in 1815. One of the reasons he left the Presbyterians was because of the doctrines he was expected to preach, one of them being substitution. He energetically opposed the Campbells on the subject. In his paper, *The Christian Messenger*, 1833, Stone said,

In the close of my first letter, I was remarking on your exposition of Isa. 53,6 and 2 Cor. 5,21. 'He hath laid on him the iniquity of us all' — this, in your view, means he laid on him the punishment due to us all. You think by this vicarious punishment we are justified. 'Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him:' Rom. 5,9. You add a little to the text, 'that being justified by faith in his blood.' — Dear bro: What has faith to do in the justification of which you speak? If "A" is guilty of murder and is condemned to die; and if "B" becomes his surety, and bears the punishment due to "A" — then is not "A" clear, whether he believes or not that "B" has died for him? "A's" faith produces no effect whatever, in the matter of his justification. But, why talk of justification or forgiveness at all in "A's" case? The debt due was fully paid by "B" the surety of "A," could the law, or executive now say to "A," I forgive or justify you freely by my grace? Not freely, might "A" say;

for my surety has paid my due, or debt, fully in my stead — I have nothing to be forgiven.

Substitution is the basis of Baptist salvation by *faith only* and the *impossibility of apostasy*, as has already been seen from Spurgeon. Without substitution, their doctrine has no meaning regardless of the number of passages they misuse. General Baptists reject predestination as well as universal salvation. Though it is contrary to their substitution doctrine, salvation is open to anyone, in Baptist theology. Yet, they reject obedience as being necessary to salvation. All one must do in order to be saved is by faith accept Jesus as one's personal saviour, believe that Jesus died in your place. You are then saved at that point and cannot be lost no matter what sins you commit. Redemption was completed at the cross and all one must do to benefit from it is accept that fact. Of course, they are in contradiction both with substitution and the scriptures because if substitution is true, faith has nothing to do with it and everyone will be saved, regardless.

[7] Substitution makes much of the Old and New Testaments to be useless. Of what use are all the instructions on how to live, or the necessity to obey God? If all our sins, past, present and future have been transferred to our substitute, then we can do nothing wrong; there can be no guilt because guilt applies only where there is sin; there can be no punishment for sin because we are no longer guilty. Our substitute has taken all that upon Himself - in our place.

The fact is, the substitution theory came out of human reasoning and philosophy and is contrary to truth. Jesus died for our benefit, for our sake, potentially for the whole world. Everyone who would be saved by the blood of Christ must believe what God says he must believe and then obey His commandments. We make contact with the death of Jesus, not because he took my place on the cross, but when we are baptized with Him, into His death, burial and resurrection, Romans 6:1-6, Colossians 2:11-13. We must afterward continue to walk with God in the light to maintain the relationship and be cleansed by the blood of Christ, I John 1:7-10-2:1-6, Colossians 1:19-23.

Editor's Note: We are in the process of producing a book with more information on this subject entitled "**Reconciliation**" - **The Scheme of Redemption, Volume II** authored by Maurice Barnett. Order it now to be sent as soon as it is available.