

An Attempt To Listen To God

The Doctrine of Substitution

By

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## Introduction

One of the greatest doctrines of the New Testament is the sacrifice of our Lord as our substitute. Without it there would be no reconciliation, justification, redemption, sanctification, cleansing from sin, or eternal security. This doctrine has given to thousands of saints quietness in the hour of death, and comfort when the enemy assails causing them to question their salvation. It seems to me that if the saints understood the glory of substitution and its accompanying doctrines, there would be fewer who would question such a precious truth.

There are words we use to describe biblical truths which are not found in the scriptures such as “trinity” or “rapture”. Substitution and expiation are two such words not found in most translations, although expiation is the translation of the RSV in Rom. 3:25; 1 Jn. 2:2, 4:10.

It is necessary to define such terms for speakers often speak of the expiating or substituting work of the Lord, possibly assuming all know what is meant. However, many do not know the meaning of the terms, especially “expiating”. Some get “expiating” or “expiation” confused with expiring or expediting, both of which are totally different. Christ expedited the purposes of God, that is, He advanced them by His work. He expired on the cross when He dismissed His spirit, but these are not expiation. Simply put:

- a) Propitiation is the appeasing of God’s righteous judgment against sin.
- b) Expiation is the removal of guilt and punishment because the execution of judgment has already been meted out. This can only be done if propitiation has been to God’s satisfaction.
- c) Substitution is the one bearing the punishment of another.

## Illustration:

Many years ago my car broke down at the traffic lights. The four way emergency lights were blinking so the car was clearly seen. While I went to get help my wife and children stayed in the car. Suddenly, a very large truck ran into the back of the car and it was totalled. The fellow was brought to court and given a fine. He payed the fine, and the law was satisfied. That was expiation. The sentence was passed and punishment executed.

However, I was not pleased. The law was satisfied but I was not propitiated, for the punishment was not to my satisfaction. I then had to rent a car, look for another car, and getting a loan have several years of payments. For me to be satisfied with the punishment would have meant a car provided free of charge and another car of equal value given to me. Had that happened I would have been propitiated.

Neither expiation or propitiation are concerned with who the judgment is executed upon, however, righteousness is. The question then becomes: “Was it righteous for God to punish the innocent for what they had not done, and give opened ended forgiveness to the guilty?” Naturally speaking it was not righteous. Consider the following. If I had two children, one was an obedient child and the other a disobedient rascal. If I had told them both not to touch my computer and then discovered the disobedient one not only had touched it but had wiped material off. Would it be righteous for me to discipline the obedient child for what they had not done and let the rascal go free? How then was it righteous for God to do that very thing in Christ being chastised for my transgressions? The answer is in the fact that had the obedient child volunteered to bear the punishment out of love for the other, then it would have been perfectly just. God’s salvation was not that which was obtained by the end justifying the means, it was a righteous work, becoming to His own person and character. Our Lord was never coerced into being a substitute. In the words of the prophet he said: “Here am I; send me” (Isa. 6:8), and again: “I come to do thy will” (Heb. 10:9).

God’s love leads to an activity of mercy seen in expiation and propitiation, after which grace is manifested in the blessings of forgiveness, etc.

In this paper the concern will be basically on the differentiating and working together of “expiation”, “propitiation”, and “substitution”, with particular emphasis on “substitution”.

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## The Questions

- 1) There are those who teach that since God is the God of love, everyone will go to heaven. It is called “universalism”. There is another which teaches that Christ died, but only for the elect, and it is called “limited atonement”. It is my understanding that they both distort the character of God:
  - a) “Universalism” focuses on the love of God, but then whither in part or in whole, ignores His justice. It must be observed that before it ever says: “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8, 16), it says: “God is Light” (1 Jn. 1:5).
  - b) “Limited atonement” confuses Christ as the substitute and Christ as the propitiation. The Holy Spirit informs us that: “Christ is the propitiation . . . for the sins of the whole world”, but does not say “Christ is the substitute . . . for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2). Lockyer writes: “Christ is the substitute of the believer, and becomes the sinners substitute once he is accepted as Savior” (All the doctrines of the Bible). That which ought to be preached in the gospel is the truth of propitiation and the all sufficiency of the work of Christ for every sinner gathered. It is not biblically correct to preach a gospel which states Christ as their substitute. Propitiation is the message for the sinner, substitution is the message for the saint.
  
- 2) Since Christ bore the penalty for the sins of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2), is it righteous of God, having executed judgment on Christ, to execute judgment again on the unbeliever? I am deeply grateful to God for every man, woman, or child who presents the gospel to the unsaved, and to the many evangelists and missionaries whose lives have been devoted to spreading the gospel. However, there is an observation which is a universal fact. A gospel preacher will have no problems with ignoring context, original meanings of words, or stating that what he/she is presenting is application and not interpretation. For instance: “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23) is often used to prove the sinfulness of man, yet this is not the meaning in its context. Paul has dealt with the sinfulness of man from ch. 1:21-3:19, and then begins to show the way of salvation for everyone is the same, for all need it (Rom. 3:20-4:25). It is in this section we read Rom. 3:23. The problem arises when the application becomes the interpretation, and this has happened with the truth of substitution.
  - a) There is no scriptural foundation to preach to the unsaved that “Jesus is your substitute”.
  - b) There is scriptural foundation to preach to the unsaved that He is willing to be such, and ready to be such, there is sufficient in Him and His work to be such, and He alone is the “propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2). Propitiation is not substitution. Through the work of Christ mercy can be extended to those who put faith in His blood through His propitiatory work (Rom. 3:25).
  
- 3) If Christ were the substitute for every sinner of Adam’s race, then it would be very unrighteous for God to punish a second time and it would necessitate universal salvation. That is, no one could be banished to the Lake of fire and all would be saved whither they accepted it or not! It is a little misunderstood fact that only those who are saved can say: “Christ is my substitute”. Thank God we who are saved can sing with assurance the words of Toplady:

If Thou hast my discharge procured,  
And freely in my place endured  
The whole of wrath divine,  
Payment God will not twice demand,  
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,  
And then again at mine.

## What Was, Is, and Will Be Accomplished By His Substitutionary Work?

Luke is the gospel of death for in it there is the record of the deaths of a poor man and a rich man (Lk. 16:22); a little girl (Lk. 8:42); and those on whom the tower in Siloam fell (Lk. 13:4). With that in mind, when reading of the transfiguration Dr. Luke informs his readers that Moses and Elijah spake of “His decease which He should accomplish” (Lk. 9:31). None of the other deaths could be said to be an accomplishment or accomplish anything. Every one was a reminder of man’s failure and sin. Rich is the truth, the work of our Lord was an

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accomplishment laying the foundation for multiple blessings. He was the only human who ever accomplished anything by His vicarious sufferings for sin and death. By that death the Lord:

- a) Laid the foundation to destroy him that had the power of death. (Heb. 2:14)
- b) Fulfilled the purpose for which He came: “to seek and to save that which was lost”. (Lk. 19:10)
- c) Ratified the new covenant. (1Cor. 11:25)
- d) Made available:
  - i) Justification (Rom. 5:1)
  - ii) Sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30)

### What Were The Characteristics of The Substitutionary Sacrifice of Our Lord?

The sacrificial sufferings and death of the Lord are unique in the annals of eternity. No other sacrifice:

- a) Satisfied the justice and holiness of God.
  - i) There used to be a hymn sung:

*“Such was the sacrifice He made, the law could ask no more,  
For not a mite was left unpaid when He my judgment bore”.*

When an individual accepts the finished work of the Lord, they are justified, gloriously free from the condemnation of the law of God. Paul writes: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made (ginomai) a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13); again: “made Him to be sin for us. . . that we might be made (ginomai) the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Divine justice has been executed on Christ, propitiation is available for the whosoever will, but it is only upon “them that believe” (Rom. 3:22).

- b) Enabled full reconciliation in its effects (Rom. 5:10). (The word ought to, by context and language, be “reconciliation”.)
- c) A ransom. (1Tim. 2:6)
- d) A manifestation of the love of the Lord for the Father. (Jn. 14:31)
- e) A manifestation of the loyalty and devotion of the Lord to the will of God. (Heb. 10:5-7)
- f) A manifestation of the love of the Lord for His own. (Gal. 2:20)
- g) A manifestation of the love of God for humanity. (Rom. 5:6-10)

### The Word “For”

***This italicized section on the word “for” is somewhat technical so unless one wants to consider the prepositions it can be skipped.***

*When we humans read a paper or listen to a speaker we interpret the words by their context. Take for instance the word “shirt”. It can mean a piece of clothing for the upper body; indicate to a person not to lose their temper; to lose ones possessions, or indicate ultimate generosity. Therefore, in the consideration of the word “for” context must be taken into consideration. Secondly, the word must be understood, not from our understanding from our mother tongue, but from the Greek of the New Testament. The English word “for” is the translation of at least three Greek words, “gar”, “huper”, or “anti”, with each having its own shade of meaning.*

*The word “gar” indicates “a reason” as in: “For that which is conceived in her” (Matt. 1:20). “Huper” can indicate “on behalf of” as “pray for (huper) them which despitefully use you” (Matt. 5:44), or “for the purpose of” as when the Lord said: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God” (Jn. 11:4).*

*At times the words “gar” and “huper” are used in the one verse as when Paul wrote: “For when we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). The first “for” is “gar”, the second “for” is “huper”, which in this case means “in place of”; also (Jn. 18:14; Gal. 2:20).*

*The third word “anti” means “in the place of”. This is the word used when it is written: “When he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room (anti) of his father” (Matt. 2:22), or “Give His life a ransom for (anti) many” (Matt. 20:28).*

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*It will be evident that the word “huper” (on behalf of) is the word most often used of the sufferings and death of the Lord (Lk. 22:20; Jn. 6:51, 15:13; Rom. 5:6, 8; 8:32; 2 Cor. 5:14, 21; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:18). However, at times “huper” (on behalf of) is used as the equivalent of “anti” (in the place of) (Phm. 1:13 and 2 Cor. 5:14) as the contexts show. In the context of the clauses: “Raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25); “Who gave Himself for our sins” (Gal. 1:4); “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3); even though the preposition is “huper” yet it evidently has the truth of “anti”, “in the stead of”, that is “in the place of”.*

*In that lovely picture of Abraham and Isaac, Abraham offered the ram “for a burnt offering in the stead (Heb. “Tachath” which is the equivalent to “anti”) of his son (Gen. 22:13); Eve called her son Seth who was given “instead” (tachath) of Abel (Gen. 4:25).*

*Those who are Greek scholars all indicate that “huper” must be determined by context as to whether it signifies “for the benefit of” or “in the place of”. Robertson, in his book “A Grammar of the Greek New Testament”, writes: “In the papyri a huper often bore the sense of “instead of”. Collecting all the usages of the words it is my understanding that anti specifies only the idea of substitution, whereas huper may include both, “in the interest of” and substitution. Huper indicates Christ suffered and died on behalf of all humanity therefore, is the “propitiation for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2) indicating the Lord suffered and died in the interests, on behalf of the unsaved and also as their substitute?*

What is propitiation? Concisely put, propitiation is the holy justice of God being executed so that His anger against the sinner is satisfied. If the work of salvation was put in a chronological order, it would be divine love caused the mercy and grace of God to flow out in giving Christ to make propitiation through His work on the cross, and be available to be the substitute for all who would accept Him.

### Why Must God Punish Sin?

God does not punish disobedience because He has the authority to make demands and punish attitudes and behavior unacceptable to Him.

God does punish disobedience because:

- a) His holiness is perfection and He is perfect, therefore to ignore the attitude or behavior manifested, would indicate He put little value on His holiness.
- b) His righteousness, moral sense, demands retribution for the wrongs committed.
- c) It is the only way by which the flood gates of His love, mercy, and grace can be wide opened and bring blessing to all who desire salvation.

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**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.  
John 16:13**

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