The Doctrine of Substitution

Isaiah 53:4-11, *Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by Hi stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked – but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.*

Please notice what God has clearly stated to the Jews and through them to the human race in Deuteronomy 24:16, *"The fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin."* In other words, you can't transfer guilt and punishment from a guilty person to an innocent person. That is the clearest teaching of the word of God. It is repeated many times in II Kings. Look at Ezekial 18:20, *"The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself."* Since Christ Himself was innocent – Christ did not commit any sin Himself – the big question that the doctrine of substitution has raised is how could God punish His Son on the cross for our sins when He Himself was innocent? Isn't God going against His own law?

How can God justify sinners (Romans 5:4) on the basis of what Christ did and still maintain His integrity to His law that condemns us? This was the main issue fought over the doctrine of justification by faith in the Counter Reformation. Roman Catholic scholars like Juan de Atienza and John Henry Newman accused the Reformers of legal fiction. This is their argument. If God can justify sinners without first making them righteous, then He is guilty of breaking His own law. As a result, the Catholic Church came up with a gospel that is far from the good news of salvation. Their gospel is that God infuses the believer with grace so that through His grace God can make the sinner righteous and only when he's righteous can He take him to heaven. If he hasn't succeeded in this world, He sends him to purgatory where he has to make up for where he failed on this earth – a complete contradiction of Paul's message of justification by faith. A complete contradiction of the message the reformers preached that we are justified by faith alone, through grace alone, because of what Christ did alone.

Today the Muslims are accusing the Christian church of this very same thing. They are accusing Christianity of being the most unethical religion in the world. Let me tell you about an incident that just took place in the second largest city in Kenya. In 1980 or 1981, an American merchant ship docked at the port of Mombasa. Some of the sailors went to a nightclub, got drunk,

and got into a fight. One of the sailors fatally stabbed a Kenyan woman. As a result, he was taken captive by the police. Kenya practices capital punishment. They don't wait for years to execute a criminal. The sailor's mother, who was a Pentecostal in New York, asked the church to pray for her son. Then she went to the Senator of New York and pleaded with him to try to ask the Kenyan government to release her son. At that time, the U.S. was giving aid to the Kenyan government. The Senator used that as leverage and actually got her son set free. He came home a free man. The Kenyans were furious. I was Chaplain of Nairobi University at the time. The head of the faculty of law, who was a Muslim, stood up before a student body of 15,000 students and said, "Kenya has lost all sense of justice. We can't blame the Kenyan government for this. Nor do we blame the British government where Kenya got it's legal system. The blame has to go to the Christian church because Christianity has taught us that we can commit a crime and transfer the guilt and punishment of the crime on an innocent person, Jesus Christ who died on the cross, and we can go scotch free. No law will allow such an unethical solution to a sin problem. Christianity has become the most unethical religion in the world."

How do we solve this ethical problem? First of all, make no mistake that the Reformers were absolutely right. They were Biblical in teaching the doctrine of substitution. The Bible is clear – Jesus lived and died for us in our place. The Reformers failed to show how Christ qualified to be our substitute. Before Christ could represent us – before He could be our substitute – He first had to be qualified to be our Savior. The Reformers could not clearly present Christ as legally qualified to be our substitute because they made a distinction between the humanity of Christ and our humanity that needs redeeming. When you make that distinction, you come up with an ethical problem.

Vicarious substitution has been taught, and is being taught today, in the Evangelical churches. That means Christ took our place, lived and died instead of us without first identifying or uniting Himself to the human race that He came to redeem. The word "vicarious" means you have sympathy for somebody else without actually participating in the problem. Sometimes when someone gets hurt, somebody else gets pain because they can't bear suffering by others. That's vicarious.

Those who teach vicarious substitution say that sin is a problem, and they are right. (1) Sin is a condition. We are sinners by nature. In Ephesians 2:3, Paul tell us that we are by nature children of wrath because we are sinners by nature. (2) Sin is behavior. Most Adventists know that sin is the transgression of the law. I John 3:4. How did Christ save us from this two-fold sin problem? Vicarious substitution teaches that Christ took on a sinless human nature to substitute our sinful nature, and His perfect performance substitutes our failure. In other words, by His sinless nature, He substitutes our sinful nature. By His sinless performance, He substitutes our sinful performance. That sounds wonderful. Does the Bible teach that? Can this be supported from scripture? After all, scripture is the measuring stick of truth. Scripture does not teach vicarious substitution. It teaches the idea of substitution, but not vicarious substitution.

On the contrary, the Bible is clear that in order for Christ to quality to be our substitute, He had to become one of us. In fact, the Bible says that in order to be our High Priest, He had to be one of us. Let me give you some evidence. Start with the genealogy of Christ. If Christ was not one of us, He would not have a genealogy. He would be a unique person outside of the human

race. Matthew 1:1 says, *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.* Matthew is primarily concerned with convincing the Jews that He was the Messiah. God had promised that the Messiah would be a descendant of David and of Abraham. Matthew is giving the genealogy to prove that Jesus fulfilled this promise. He could not do that if His humanity was different from the humanity that He came to redeem. Look at Luke 3:23-38. Luke was a Gentile. Luke's concern is to convince the Gentile world that Jesus is their Messiah. He gives the genealogy; not taking Christ only to David and Abraham, but to Adam, the father of the human race. Verse 23 says, *Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli.* Verse 38 says, *the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.* Jesus took a humanity that was part and parcel of the human race to which we belong and which needs redeeming. Look at Romans 1:3-4. After introducing himself and the mission, Paul says, *concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh.*

The writer of Hebrews is a lot more specific, clearly identifying the humanity of Christ with our fallen sinful human nature that needs redeeming. He became us. Hebrews 2:10-11, 14-17, *For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation* [Jesus Christ] *perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies* [Christ] *and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.* He became us. Verse 14 – 17, *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.* He had to be made us to be legally qualified to save us.

I want to point out two things. First, the two-fold problem that vicarious substitution has created. Second, the true Biblical teaching of substitution.

What is the two-fold problem?

-- Vicarious substitution presents an unethical gospel. The accusation is that Christ illegally represented us. Because vicarious substitution has made a distinction between Christ and us, they ask how can He represent us, how can He substitute us when He was not us or one of us?

-- Vicarious substitution has also created another problem. It has opened the door to cheap grace. Here's the argument. Since Christ lived and died instead of me, without me actually being implicated in His life and death, all I have to do is simply believe in Him, that is, mentally consent to what He did for me, and I can be saved and still live as I please. I can eat, drink and be merry, do whatever I want, but because He did it all instead of me, all I have to do is believe and I'll be saved. This is not what the Bible teaches.

Many Adventists are afraid of the true doctrine of substitution. They are afraid it will open the door to cheap grace. As one pastor said, if you tell me what Christ did at Calvary 2,000 years ago already fully, totally qualifies me for heaven, then what incentive are you giving me to keep the law? His argument is the result of vicarious substitution.

Here's a conversation I had with a young Ugandan while I was ingathering. (U = Ugandan; S = Sequeira)

U Are you saved?
[I knew he was a Pentecostal because that's their typical approach. If he was an Adventist, he would have asked, "Are you keeping the Sabbath?" He didn't know who I was. He thought I was a Hindu. He wanted to witness to me.]

S Saved from what?

U Are you saved from sin?

S Can you be more specific? Are you talking about the guilt and punishment of sin, the nature of sin, or about the power and slavery to sin, which one?

U You sound like a pastor.

S Yes, I am a pastor. Can I ask you, are you saved?

U Praise the Lord I was saved three months ago.

S Brother, you were not saved three months ago, you were saved 2,000 years ago. Please don't give any credit to your faith. We are never saved because of our faith. We are saved through faith. Faith is only an instrument or channel by which we receive the righteousness of Christ. It is the object of faith that saves us – the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ. If you are saved, how come I smell beer on your breath?

U Pastor you know we are saved by grace, not by what we do.

S Explain what you mean when you say we are saved by grace.

U Pastor, you should know. Christ did it all.
[He was right in that statement, but he was misusing it.]

S Do you mean to say that Christ lived a perfect life for us, in our place?

U Yes.

S And you mean He died instead of us?

U Pastor, you've got it now.

S Now, one more step. I'm taking your theology to its logical conclusion. He also went to heaven instead of you.

U No, I'm going to go to heaven.

S Brother, II Timothy 2:11 is based on actual substitution, not vicarious substitution. *This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him.*

I then proceeded to give him some texts.

Romans 6:1-2 has to do with our baptism, our confession that we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior. Jesus said to the disciples, go and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. Romans 6:1-4, *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.* Verse 10 is dealing with Christ, *For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.* Verse 11, *Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* In other words, the death of

Christ to sin was a corporate death – it included you. By faith, you accepted your death to sin in Christ and your resurrection to new life.

Colossians 3:3. This is what Paul says about the believer who has accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, *For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

I Peter 2:24, *who Himself* [Christ] *bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sin, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed.* That is substitution. The death of Christ included the entire human race.

In order for Jesus to be qualified as our substitute, God put us into Christ. He had to unite us, join us into Christ so that we became one. That's the only way He could legally be our substitute.

I Corinthians 1:30, *But of Him* [God] *you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption …*

Ephesians 2:5-6, Paul tells us while we were still sinners, God united us with Christ and made us spiritually alive. The word "together" appears three times in those two verses. We were united, we were made alive with Christ, we were raised together with Christ; we are sitting together with Christ in heavenly places. The word "together" means we became one.

That is why true righteous by faith, which so many Adventists are afraid of, is more than a mental ascent to what Christ did 2,000 years ago. It's more than mentally saying, "Yes, I believe Jesus lived and died for me 2,000 years ago." For what Christ did for us in His life and death we are actually implicated in His life and death. Righteousness by faith is our submission to the new history that God has given us in His Son Jesus Christ. This means by faith, I obey the gospel, I surrender to the demands of the gospel, I identify myself in His life, death and resurrection. In other words, when we accept Jesus Christ, we accept His death as our death. His burial as our burial; His resurrection unto new life as our resurrection.

Faith is accepting what God did to us in Christ as our substitute. Romans 6 is addressing the Christians in Rome. Verse 17-18, *But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered* [the gospel]. *And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.* In other words, obeying the gospel is surrendering the will to what God did to you in Christ as our substitute. This is the true meaning of baptism. That's why all through the New Testament baptism is never into a denomination, it's always into Jesus Christ. Baptism is putting on Christ. It's entering into the history of Christ. If you read Romans 6:3-8, Paul tells us, *Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.*

In Galatians 3:27 Paul tells us that all who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. You see, 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ identified Himself with me. The Bible calls this "you in Christ." For the union to be complete, I have to surrender my will to what I am in Christ. "You in Christ" is what God did to us 2,000 years ago. "Christ in you" is the result of you abiding in Christ; accepting what He did to you in Christ.

In I Peter 3:18-22, Paul uses the experience of the exodus. Paul says Noah and his family were saved when they entered into the ark; they were not saved by building the ark. They were saved because they entered the ark. The ark is a symbol of baptism because baptism is entering into Christ. When the flood came, the people who refused to enter into the ark were drowned; those in the ark were saved.

Once again, Christ is going to come to destroy this earth – not by water, but by fire. When He comes the second time, this earth will be melted with fervent heat. What will happen to those who have entered into Christ – those who have identified with His life, death and resurrection? They will rise up to meet Him in the clouds. Those who refuse to enter into Christ will be lost. By actually becoming us, by actually becoming the second Adam that is mankind, Christ could legally or lawfully represent us as our substitute, so His holy history can be applied legally to those who accept Christ by faith.

This truth is clearly demonstrated every time we participate in the Lord's supper. I Corinthians 10:16, *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ.* Every time we take the Lord's supper, we're reminding ourselves that as Christians, we have become one with Christ. That is possible because we became one 2,000 years ago.

Such an understanding of the doctrine of substitution and our response to it leaves no room for cheap grace. Every believer who has received Christ as their personal Savior by faith has to confess with Paul what he confessed to the Christians in Galatia. Galatians 2:19-20, *"For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ* [Why? Because I was in Christ when He died and I have accepted the truth.]*; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.* It is by faith I let Him live in me.

Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. The life He lived 2,000 years ago, He wants to now live in us. Not to save us – He already saved us 2,000 years ago. The doctrine of substitution saves us. But, He wants to live in us so the world may see Him once again – God manifested in the flesh.

Colossians 2:6-7, *As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.* Notice, you receive Him, now live in Him. It is Christ our substitute that saves us. When we respond to the doctrine of substitution, He comes and lives in us so that the world may see Christ in us.

Correctly understood, the doctrine of substitution, which is a clear teaching of scripture, offers Christians two things. On one hand, it gives us full assurance of salvation because we are already sitting in heavenly places in Christ. We should no longer worry if we'll make it to heaven. If you understand the true doctrine of substitution, you know that you are already saved in terms of going to heaven. On the other hand, this truth does not give us license to live as we please. Our lives are now hidden with Christ in God. As a result, we must from now on put on Christ, remind ourselves we are in Christ, and make no room for the flesh.

I want to conclude with Romans 13:14, Paul's ethical counsel to Christians. *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*

How many of us would like to experience this two-fold joy of the doctrine of substitution – full assurance of salvation and Christ living in you so the world sees Christ, not you?

Loving Father, we thank You that 2,000 years ago You took us miserable, wretched human beings and united us with Your Son, Jesus Christ. This was, indeed, an act of love. Once You qualified Christ to be our substitute, we thank You for His life, death and resurrection. Thank You for the new history He has given us; the new status in which we no longer stand condemned, but justified unto life. Lord, the world doesn't know this wonderful truth of substitution. They don't understand it. They oppose it because it is unethical, because they have not seen the true light. May we as a church be your ambassadors. May we present the true doctrine of substitution that the world may realize that they have a new history in Your Son and that this history is legal, because Jesus became one of us. He was made sin for us that we, in Him, may be made the righteousness of God. Thank you Lord for this unspeakable gift. Bless us now that we may go out and be Your light, Your witnesses to this wonderful truth. May the earth be lightened with this glory. We pray in the precious name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.