

Jesus Christ's Representative Substitution for Sin

We live in a time when some voices are questioning what the gospel really is. Here is an essay to help outline the core aspect of the gospel according to the bible. It isn't a short essay - so feel free to read it over time, taking as long as you need to let the truth of this glorious gospel sink in.

OF FIRST IMPORTANCE

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 Paul says,

“1 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve.”

This vital, gospel defining scripture indicates that the author received the message and didn't create it himself (1). In Galatians 1:11-12 Paul states that Jesus Christ (and no other person) gave him this gospel. In Galatians 2:6-7, Paul shows that his gospel matched the message of the other Apostles, which shows that this gospel even pre-dates Paul's conversion, making it the clear belief of the earliest Christians. Paul says that this gospel is the one which actually saves (2). This formative passage teaches that the Apostle Paul wished to pass on this definition of the gospel as of first importance (3). If it is of first importance it must have been believed to be a primary, core belief of the Apostles. It plainly states that Christ died for our sins - indicating a death for the sins of the whole world (as Paul is writing to Gentiles and not just Jews) (3). It states that Christ's death for sins was 'in accordance with the Scriptures', which means that this act fitted perfectly with both the over-arching narrative of God's word and with explicit individual references in the Old Testament (4). The gospel of death for sin is tied to the gospel of resurrection on the third day, also in accordance with scripture (5). Christ's vindication and Lordship are demonstrated through his resurrection. Both aspects (dying and rising) give the full picture of God's good news.

THE POWER OF GOD

In Romans 1:16 Paul says,

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”

In 1 Corinthians 1:18 Paul says,

“ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. “

In other words, the effect of this true gospel is God's actual power to change the relationship between himself and humanity, reinstating us in our right vocation. The state of those who do not believe is to be 'perishing'- indicating the lost and despairing nature of humanity. Power is needed because the problem to be overcome is great. Only the gospel as described can deal with the problem.

In Galatians 1:6-9 Paul says,

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – **7** which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. **8** But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! **9** As we have already said, so now I say again: if anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!”

This earnestly written letter is penned to rescue Galatian Christians from people who were proposing another gospel, which was a distortion or even a contradiction of the true gospel. Paul explicitly rebukes such an act. It is clear that any other gospel is not true, and therefore without God’s power. Only the true gospel for sin actually has God’s power.

Given that the gospel given by the Apostles is of first importance, and is the source of God’s power to save and rescue, we must guard this message from distortion and misrepresentation - for the eternal destiny of human beings is at stake. False gospels won’t save, leaving humanity lost.

ISRAEL’S REPRESENTATION

The plan of God, in the light of humanity’s fall from grace in the garden, was to bring about a complete rescue from the consequences of rebellion and sin. Humanity’s rebellion led to separation and expulsion from God’s presence. God covered Adam and Eve’s nakedness with skins (which involved the death of an animal) as a foretaste of God’s planned rescue. From the call of Abraham onwards, God set in motion the choosing of a people to be humanity’s representatives in his world. Just as Adam and Eve were originally made as God’s image-bearers, with the vocation to represent God and God’s rule in his world, so God was determined that human beings would once again become his chosen representatives, reigning and ruling as his mediators and worshippers on earth, bringing heaven’s influence to the world. Through the covenant with Abraham, the plan began to bless the whole world through his seed (Genesis 15). With the giving of the Law through Moses, the covenant with Israel included the keeping of God’s ways in the world, as a light to the nations. But soon the story of Israel would naturally include a dark side to their representation. As predicted by Moses, they would fail repeatedly in their keeping of God’s Law. As Moses taught, because of longstanding rebellion and disobedience, they would go into exile and be oppressed by other nations, as a result of their sins. Israel was failing to be the light of the world.

EXODUS AND EXILE

The first rescue of God’s people was from Egypt, and there is no suggestion that Israel were in captivity because of their sin. They were there because of oppressive, wicked forces. God dramatically rescued them from evil, and pointed them towards a freedom in the promised land. However, once the Mosaic covenant of Law was given at Sinai, their future oppression and exile (under Babylon in particular) was explicitly regarded by the prophets as a direct result of Israel’s sin. The representative nation of Israel would stay in exile and oppression until their sin was described as dealt with.

Jeremiah said “Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words... this whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years” Jer.25:8-11.

In Daniel 9 the prophet was praying for the end of exile, but was told that the experience of exile would be extended, “...for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place.” (v24). In other words, repeated rebellion would keep representative Israel in captivity for longer. This would even be felt when they were back in their promised land. This experience describes how Israel felt under Roman rule: a kind of exile in their own land. God also promised that he would judge the nations which oppressed and exiled Israel - as all nations and peoples fall under his jurisdiction. No nation was good.

WHAT EXILE REPRESENTED

The story of Israel is the story of the human race. Just as Adam and Eve were ejected from Eden, so Israel was ejected from the promised land. As Eden was a garden temple where God dwelt, so Israel and Jerusalem’s Temple was where God dwelt with his people (through Torah practice and sacrifice). But Israel had to leave because of rebellion and disobedience. All humans are excluded from the presence of our holy God, because of repeated sin. Exodus and the return from exile was what God in his mercy did, while going into exile was what Israel did. They could only truly return when sins were forgiven. This is an early clue about how the gospel works.

A NEW COVENANT AND A NEW REPRESENTATIVE

Meanwhile, the prophets began to speak of a new arrangement and a new solution. Jeremiah 31:31-34 predicted a heart transplant, whereby Israel could actually live up to their vocation, and God would remove their sins from them. Ezekiel 36:24-28 said the same thing, where the heart of stone would be replaced with a heart of flesh, and God’s Spirit would live inside Israel’s people. God would cleanse them from the filth of idolatry. Isaiah prophesied words of future hope (40-55). God would indeed keep his promise to Israel - regarding her as his representative despite repeated failures. God would indeed reign again on the earth and this good news would spread. But Isaiah then surprisingly introduced a new picture of God’s servant (Israel) as a suffering servant (Chapter 53). Somehow Israel as humanity’s representative would achieve forgiveness through suffering and death. This would lead to an everlasting covenant: God would be faithful to his word and actually do what he always promised. The end of exile would finally come, the overcoming of Pharaoh-like evil oppression would happen. The forgiveness of sins would be completed. Human beings would be God’s good representative image-bearers again.

THE SELF-UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS CHRIST

Jesus was steeped in the story of the scriptures. He lived according to God’s word. From this perspective he expressed a clear view on sin, judgement and how sin would be dealt with.

Jesus’ name and view on sin:

Matt. 1:21 says that Jesus was named thus, because he would save his people from their sins. In Mk 2:10 he asserted his authority as the Son of Man to forgive sins. He said that he had come to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32).

Jesus' views on judgement:

Jesus believed in a Day of Judgement (Matt.24:36). He regarded his words as the measure of judgement on that day (John 12:48) and that he would be the Judge (John 5:22). Jesus regarded anyone who did not believe/trust in him as condemned already (John 3:18). He referred to the judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of God's judgement, and said that it would be worse for places that rejected the message of his own disciples (Matt.10:14-15). He said that those who heard his words and trusted in God would not be judged (John 5:24). He described God's intent as not wishing to condemn the world, but to save the world by sending his Son (John 3:17). Jesus spoke parables about judgement day; with people locked out of the banquet (Matt.25:10-13), and people separated out for eternal life or eternal punishment (Matt.25:31-46). He told an explicit story about torment in Hades, where a wicked man was in agony, with a permanent gulf fixed between Hades and the place of rescue (Lk.16:19-31).

Jesus' views on his own role in dealing with sin: Representative Substitution

Jesus heard John the Baptist describe him as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29); and Jesus didn't correct this. In Mk.10:45 Jesus referenced Isaiah 53, saying that he had come to give his life as a ransom for many. In John 10:11 he described himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. He believed that his blood (dramatised in the last supper) was poured out for the remission / removal of sins (Matt.26:28). The underlying shape and narrative of his ministry (explored for example in N.T.Wright's "Jesus and the Victory of God: The aims and beliefs of Jesus") showed that Jesus knew that he was the *new representative of humanity*, and also the Son of God, bringing Israel finally out of exile, through the forgiveness of sins. This was the true, final Exodus and the true sacrifice - with Jesus conflating these two defining metaphors into his actions at the last supper. To be explicit, exile could only be over when punishment for sins had been satisfied - The history of Israel described this repeatedly. The return to the land and to God only happened when sins were forgiven. We know that Jesus referenced Daniel's vision of the Son of Man as a picture of himself (Matt.26:64). In this prophetic book we also read that the Messiah would be put to death and have nothing (Dan 9:25-26). It is clear from his referencing that Jesus saw his own death in this passage, and, combined with Isaiah, Zechariah and the Psalms (Ps.22 - quoted on the cross), Jesus understood all this to fulfil the covenants, enacted as a final, representative sacrifice for sin, bringing peace and reconciliation. Even his prophecy about rebuilding the Temple (John 2:19), combined with his disruption of the sacrificial pattern (John 2:15), indicated his intent to replace the existing function with himself. And of course the Temple was the place of sacrifice for sin.

This description of Christ's own view of sin, judgement and the dealing with sin as a representative substitute, clearly reveals what Paul meant when he said "according to the scriptures". Jesus knew Israel's story and believed he was God's representative. He knew that he was now Israel fulfilling all that God had faithfully promised to do.

THE LAST ADAM: CHRIST'S REPRESENTATION OF HUMANITY

1 Corinthians 15:45-49 says, "If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man."

In this vital chapter about resurrection bodies, Paul describes Jesus as the last Adam. In the first Adam all are dead in sin, but through faith in the last Adam, we inherit what he brings instead. It is only because Jesus is our representative that he can effectively take our place. Jesus frequently referred to himself as 'The Son of Man' - which was a well-known title borrowed from Daniel's visions. This is a human figure who (in Dan 7:13-14) approaches Almighty God, and is given all authority. So Jesus embodies the true human role, this time not falling, but standing for God's ways, and bearing the judgement of all.

SUBSTITUTION IN THE GOSPELS

Not only did Jesus describe himself in this way, the gospel authors describe the work of Jesus Christ in substitutionary ways.

1. In John 11:49-52 it says, "And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad."

John depicts Caiaphas as an unknowing prophet, accurately describing Jesus as a clear substitute for the people. John himself adds that this substitution was for many beyond the nation also.

2. In John 18:7-9 it says, "Then He asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way," that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, "Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none."

In Gethsemane, Jesus deflects the arrest of his followers, protecting them from harm and bearing the consequences himself. Disciples are shielded from punishment, but Jesus walks towards it.

3. In Matthew 27:15-26 it says, " Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy. While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him." But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!". Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!" Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!" When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children." Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified."

Matthew explicitly retells of the exchange of Barabbas; a guilty person, for the innocent Jesus. Jesus actually dies in the literal place of a convicted prisoner. This is substitution in plain narrative. The guilty one goes free, while Jesus dies in his place.

4. Luke 23:36-38 says, “The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, and saying, “If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself.” And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

Jesus is repeatedly described by Pilate (in John 19:1-22), soldiers and the sign on his cross as King of The Jews. The sign is written in international languages. In the history of Israel, kings represented the people. They were personally responsible for the nation (2 Sam.24:1-17). So Jesus is portrayed as the King, standing in the place where God’s judgement of Israel was to fall. Jesus himself had fiercely condemned the neglectful teachers of Israel and predicted condemnation and destruction for Jerusalem and the Temple (Matt.23:1-39). Yet as King he stepped in and received the penalty on their behalf. The crown of thorns indicates that the cross was his dark yet vital coronation. On the cross he said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34). The King is a right substitute for a sinful nation, and now for every nation.

5. Luke 23:39-43 says, “Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

One man mockingly cries out for rescue, but the other rebukes him. They two are rightly condemned, while Jesus is innocent. One man appeals to Jesus to remember him. Jesus promises that this criminal will be with this innocent King in Paradise. Jesus gives the criminal access to the heavenly realm by dying alongside him as a presumed guilty person. Isaiah 53:12 said that ‘He was numbered with the transgressors, bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors’. This is a death in their place.

6. Mark 15:37-38 says, “With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”

The Temple represented God’s holy presence on earth. The curtain within the Holy of Holies represented the barrier between sinful humanity and Almighty God. When Jesus died, this barrier was removed. His sacrificial death outside the city walls opened up what was previously closed and off-limits. His death as a sin offering replaced the whole sacrificial system, allowing God’s presence to be accessed by guilty humans. He died the death we deserved. We gain his access to the Father and he receives our separation from the Father. He is our sacrificial substitute.

SUBSTITUTION IN THE LETTERS

Romans 6:8 says, “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”

1 Corinthians 15:3 says, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,"

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Galatians 1:3-5 says, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree").

Titus 2:14 says, "who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."

1 Peter 2:24 says, "'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.'

1 Peter 3:18b says, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God..."

UNDERSTANDING 'EXPIATION' AND 'PROPITIATION'

Romans 8:3-4 says, "For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (EXPIATION)

This beautiful verse undermines the popular Liberal view that the death of Jesus for sin is 'Cosmic Child abuse.' There is no cosmic child abuse in the bible - It is clear that there is a difference between pagan 'wrath' and biblical wrath. The pictures of Greek or Roman gods capriciously and unpredictably judging situations is nothing like the image we have of God in scripture. In the OT, God is slow to anger and quick to bless. His rebukes are described as a parent rightly disciplining a child he loves. If there is severity in some judgements, it relates to the seriousness of sin involved. The emphasis of John 3:16 is that God's love is the motivation for his giving of his Son, not of a son bearing God's hate on our behalf. The timing of this once for all event shows God's incredible restraint; waiting for the moment when sin would be dealt with properly, by God himself. Acts 20:28 talks of the church being bought with God's own blood. Jesus is portrayed as in complete harmony with the Father, only wrestling with the cost of the cross in Gethsemane. Jesus chose the cross out of love and personal determination (Heb.10:5-9). In Romans 8:3-4 (above) it is clear that, though Jesus is sent by the Father as a sin offering, God doesn't condemn Jesus, but condemns Sin in his flesh. The Godhead agree how to address sin, and God the Son absorbs it in his body on the cross. He expiated sin - removing it, by bearing it and dying.

1 John 2:2 says, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice [propitiation] for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” (PROPITIATION)

An excerpt from R.C Sproul (<https://www.ligonier.org/blog/two-important-words-good-friday-expiation-and-propitiation/>)

“When we talk about the vicarious aspect of the atonement, two rather technical words come up again and again: expiation and propitiation. These words spark all kinds of arguments about which one should be used to translate a particular Greek word, and some versions of the Bible will use one of these words and some will use the other one. I’m often asked to explain the difference between propitiation and expiation. The difficulty is that even though these words are in the Bible, we don’t use them as part of our day-to-day vocabulary, so we aren’t sure exactly what they are communicating in Scripture. We lack reference points in relation to these words.

Expiation and Propitiation

Let’s think about what these words mean, then, beginning with the word expiation. The prefix ex means “out of” or “from,” so expiation has to do with removing something or taking something away. In biblical terms, it has to do with taking away guilt through the payment of a penalty or the offering of an atonement. By contrast, propitiation has to do with the object of the expiation. The prefix pro means “for,” so propitiation brings about a change in God’s attitude, so that He moves from being at enmity with us to being for us. Through the process of propitiation, we are restored into fellowship and favour with Him.

In a certain sense, propitiation has to do with God’s being appeased. We know how the word appeasement functions in military and political conflicts. We think of the so-called politics of appeasement, the philosophy that if you have a rambunctious world conqueror on the loose and rattling the sword, rather than risk the wrath of his blitzkrieg you give him the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia or some such chunk of territory. You try to assuage his wrath by giving him something that will satisfy him so that he won’t come into your country and mow you down. That’s an ungodly manifestation of appeasement. But if you are angry or you are violated, and I satisfy your anger, or appease you, then I am restored to your favour and the problem is removed.

The same Greek word is translated by both the words expiation and propitiation from time to time. But there is a slight difference in the terms. Expiation is the act that results in the change of God’s disposition toward us. It is what Christ did on the cross, and the result of Christ’s work of expiation is propitiation—God’s anger is turned away. The distinction is the same as that between the ransom that is paid and the attitude of the one who receives the ransom.

Christ’s Work Was an Act of Placation

Together, expiation and propitiation constitute an act of placation. Christ did His work on the cross to placate the wrath of God. This idea of placating the wrath of God has done little to placate the wrath of modern theologians. In fact, they become very wrathful about the whole idea of placating God’s wrath. They think it is beneath the dignity of God to have to be placated, that we should have to do something to soothe Him or appease Him. We need to be very careful in how we understand the wrath of God, but let me remind you that the concept of placating the wrath of God has to do here not with a peripheral, tangential point of theology, but with the essence of salvation.

What Is Salvation?

Let me ask a very basic question: what does the term salvation mean? Trying to explain it quickly can give you a headache, because the word salvation is used in about seventy different ways in the Bible. If somebody is rescued from certain defeat in battle, he experiences salvation. If somebody survives a life-threatening illness, that person experiences salvation. If somebody’s plants are brought back from withering to robust health, they are saved. That’s biblical language, and it’s really no different than our own language. We save money. A boxer is saved by the bell, meaning he’s saved from losing the fight by knockout, not that he is transported into the eternal

kingdom of God. In short, any experience of deliverance from a clear and present danger can be spoken of as a form of salvation.

When we talk about salvation biblically, we have to be careful to state that from which we ultimately are saved. The apostle Paul does just that for us in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, where he says Jesus “delivers us from the wrath to come.” Ultimately, Jesus died to save us from the wrath of God. We simply cannot understand the teaching and the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth apart from this, for He constantly warned people that the whole world someday would come under divine judgment. Here are a few of His warnings concerning the judgment: “I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Matt. 5:22); “I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36); and “The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here” (Matt. 12:41). Jesus’ theology was a crisis theology. The Greek word crisis means “judgment.” And the crisis of which Jesus preached was the crisis of an impending judgment of the world, at which point God is going to pour out His wrath against the unredeemed, the ungodly, and the impenitent. The only hope of escape from that outpouring of wrath is to be covered by the atonement of Christ. Therefore, Christ’s supreme achievement on the cross is that He placated the wrath of God, which would burn against us were we not covered by the sacrifice of Christ. So if somebody argues against placcation or the idea of Christ satisfying the wrath of God, be alert, because the gospel is at stake. This is about the essence of salvation—that as people who are covered by the atonement, we are redeemed from the supreme danger to which any person is exposed. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of a holy God who’s wrathful. But there is no wrath for those whose sins have been paid. That is what salvation is all about.”

HOW CHRIST’S SUBSTITUTION ‘WORKS’

Famously, Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This short phrase summarises the inevitable consequences of sinfulness.

God, by his very nature is holy. Isaiah 6:3 reveals a vision of God where angelic creatures close to him cry out ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty’. Three ‘holys’ means; very holy indeed, the most holy, the holiest of all. This utter purity and goodness is not passive and without effect. As when Adam and Eve sinned and had to leave God’s holy presence, so God’s holiness naturally drives away or extinguishes wickedness. Death (which is a separation from God’s life) is the natural consequence. God’s holiness is related to his justice. God in his very nature is completely right and fair in his judgements. Psalm 89:14 says, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.” To behave justly means "acting or being in conformity with what is morally upright or good." The idea of justice is connected to that of merit: those whose behaviour is morally corrupt will be punished, while those who are morally upright, fulfilling their God-given vocation will be rewarded. Therefore God can never ignore sin. He cannot pretend it isn’t there or has no effect. It offends his very nature, and it violates the good world and good roles he created for human beings.

God wants to dwell with human beings. God longs to be our rightful King and Father. Yet when he chose Israel as his first dwelling place in this sinful world, he had to orchestrate a means by which he could be with them without driving them away or extinguishing them. So along with the tabernacle of his presence, he also initiated a system of sacrifice (recorded in Leviticus) - to allow sinful Israel to be close to him without judgement. All this was ‘functional’ - in that it worked symbolically, but (as the author of Hebrews says in 10:4), “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and

goats to take away sins.” This system was set up as a pointer to the real sacrifice which would literally deal with sin.

In Exodus 34:5-7 it says, “Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.’”

This revelation shows that God is loving, forgiving, but won’t leave the guilty unpunished. This is a bizarre contradiction, unless God has designed a way for justice to be served on sin, while still saving sinners.

Hebrews 9 and 10 describe exactly how the death of Jesus Christ, and in particular his blood, atones for the sins of the world. This was a ‘once, for all’ sacrifice, which fully expresses God’s holiness and justice - revealing God’s just wrath against every single wrong thought and act, against the nature of Sin itself in humanity. It also revealed God’s love and forgiveness - showing that God himself - the Son, would willingly bear the consequences on our behalf. He dies our death. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Hebrews 13:12 says, “And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood..” Jesus was driven out (like Adam and Eve, like exiled Israel) to pay the price and receive the guilty sentence on humanity’s behalf. So Christ’s substitution is not symbolic, it actually achieves forgiveness, because Christ suffered and died.

HOW REPRESENTATIVE SUBSTITUTION OVERCOMES EVIL

Acts 4:23-31 says, “On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. ‘Sovereign Lord,’ they said, ‘you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.” Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

The early believers quoted Psalm 2 in prayer as a clear parallel with what had happened at the cross. ‘Powers’ had gathered together (Herod representing Israel’s earthly king and Pilate representing Rome) to do their worst with Jesus. All through the gospels we are given clues about evil reacting and organising against Jesus - in the form of direct satanic attack in the wilderness, demonic reaction in ministry times and religious opposition through teachers of the Law. This clearly comes to a head in Jerusalem, where all forms of evil work as one. At the arrest of Jesus he

said, “Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour – when darkness reigns.” (Luke 22:53). He identified the moment where all evil was gathering to resist God’s Anointed One. God had set this moment up. Like poison gathering to a head in a wound which needs to be lanced, God was bringing to one place the wickedness of a fallen world (including wicked spirits under satan) and God was arranging to deal with them through the cross.

Colossians 2:13-15 says, “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

Evil ones (which are spiritual forces behind and including all wicked human forces - Ephesians 6:12) thought they were defeating Christ by killing him. Yet, by absorbing and defeating sin, as humanity’s representative, he broke any claim or legitimate rule they had over all human beings. This in effect takes the actual power away from the Powers - showing that a loving sacrifice (which refuses to fight like earthly empires do) is actually stronger than all evil. By cancelling the charge against humanity, which left us weak and condemned, the new human representative was enthroned on earth as the rightful King. The cross was Christ’s coronation - over every authority that exists, and his resurrection and ascension was his vindication:

Philippians 2:7-11 says, “rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

So now, because of his sacrifice for sin, all Powers must bow to Christ, as the true Monarch of earth and heaven. They are paraded behind Christ (like after a Roman victory march) as humbled Powers under his direction.

SUBSTITUTION UNDERPINS ALL OTHER FACETS OF THE GOSPEL

There are a number of biblical pictures which illuminate the message of the gospel; like facets of a diamond. Reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19, Ephesians 2:11-22), Redemption (John 8:34-36, Titus 2:13-14), Adoption (Rom.8:15), Sacrifice (Hebrews 1:3, 10:1-18), Victory over evil and death (Col. 2:13-15, 1 John 3:8), Christ’s Lordship (Philippians 2:5-11, Matt. 28:16-20). Each facet gives a particular understanding to what Jesus has done, but each facet is completely dependent on the underpinning fact of Christ’s death for sin. You can’t be reconciled to a holy God without God’s justice being served on sin. You can’t be bought out of captivity without payment for sin, and adoption into God’s family comes as a result of being redeemed out of slavery to sin; back into the restored role our parents in Eden originally had. His sacrifice has no power to effect change between God and humanity unless his blood actually cleanses sin. There is no victory over evil if Jesus isn’t our suffering, captive representative; with all forces of darkness gathered against him at the cross. There is no victory over death if Jesus isn’t raised in vindication - his dying breaks

death's pre-existing hold on us (because of sin) and his rising proves his defeat of sin to be effective.

So it becomes futile and groundless to assert any of these aspects without fully acknowledging Christ's death for sin. His dying in our place is the basis for each gospel facet. Without his effective substitutionary death for sin, there is no basis to claim any of these ideas as true. Such ideas would be mere wishful thinking without the concrete reality of Christ's dying to actually save us. To ignore or leave out the centrality of his death for sin misrepresents and dishonours Jesus' great work. Praise God that his actual death for sin is the foundation for such a great and beautiful gospel message!

SUMMARY

It is very clear from such a comprehensive set of scriptures that **representative substitution for sin** is not an optional theological position. It stands at the centre of the gospel passed on by the Apostles, capturing what Christ himself believed. It is the fulfilment of scripture.

1 Cor. 15:1-4 says, "Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

In a time when the scriptural gospel is being questioned, we must assert the truth of this message without hesitation, as it is the only saving gospel, the only gospel with power to reconcile God and humanity.

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