

Substitution

by H. A. Ironside

THE word I now desire to bring before you is one that is not actually in the Bible. It is the word "substitution." Although it is not in the Bible, it stands for a great truth that runs through the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. That is, the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ in infinite grace took the place of poor, lost, guilty sinners, and made it possible for a holy God to reach out in mercy and save all who would come to Him in the name of His beloved Son.

I do not have one particular text in mind, but I have been thinking of five different passages in the New Testament where we get the same expression—He "gave himself"; and I want you to think with me of these Scriptures. The One who gave Himself was our Lord Jesus Christ, and I should like you to notice what it was for which He gave Himself.

In the Epistle to the Galatians, chapter 2 and verse 20, the apostle Paul writes:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Note the individuality of it. Paul, who had been a bitter persecutor of the people of God, who had been an enemy of the Cross of Christ, one day had his eyes opened, and he suddenly realized that the One who had died on that cross went there for him, that He had taken his place, that it was love that led Him to go to that shameful death. From that moment the heart of Saul of Tarsus went out in adoring gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ, and until the very end of his days he found his greatest joy in trying to give some evidence, by a life of service, of his love for the One who had thus loved him.

Notice how he speaks of Him: "The Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." There you have the very heart of the gospel—"Himself for me." That is substitution. Some people tell us, because we do not find the actual word "substitution" in the Bible, that the truth of it, the fact of it is not there, and so they talk of atonement by other means than by substitution, atonement by example or atonement by reconciling love, that leads men to turn to God adoringly, simply because of the goodness that He showed in seeking them out in the person of His Son. But no, the Word of God makes it very definite. The work that took place on Calvary was a substitutionary transaction. It was the Lord Jesus Christ, God's own blessed, eternal Son, who

became man for our redemption, giving Himself on our behalf.

"The Son of God loved me, and gave himself for me." That is the language of faith. When a poor, needy sinner looks at that Cross and sees, as it were, the blessed Saviour hanging there, he says, "He was there for me; it was my sins that put Him there; it was in order that I might be fitted for the presence of God that He went into the darkness and endured the judgment of God. He is my Substitute. The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me.

But it is not only for me, it is also for us. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 5 and verse 2, we read:

And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

I am so thankful that in my thinking I do not have to limit the gift of God's grace in the person of His Son to just some little group, as though it were just for a small elect company that Jesus died. "He gave himself for us." I can look out over the whole wide world, whether men are saved or unsaved, and say to them on the authority of the Word of God that "He gave himself for us"—for everyone of us. Whether you be Jew or Gentile, whether you be very religious or have no time for religion, I would say to you, "The Son of God gave himself for us." He saw us in our lost condition, and He went to Calvary's cross in order to redeem us. That is how the Prophet Isaiah puts it. He looked on down through the centuries and by faith he saw the very scene of Calvary, and he cried out, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

I remember a number of years ago I went over to a town in Minnesota to hold some meetings. My wife and our eldest son, just a little child at the time, went with me. When we got there, a big, burly highland Scotsman met us. He said, "Now you come along with me; I am going to take you to my house. We are going to sleep you there, and then across the way at the McKenzies they will eat you." Of course I knew he didn't mean anything cannibalistic, and I was glad to accept the provision made. We went to his house and settled ourselves, and then went over to the McKenzies for our meal.

I remember one Sunday we left to go down to the meeting in the afternoon, and it happened that there was one daughter in the family who had not yet received the Lord Jesus Christ as her Saviour. The mother said, "Will you pray for Jean? She knows the way, but somehow she doesn't seem to want to come. She says she is young yet and she wants to have her fling before she settles down." Well, we did pray for her, and some way or other as I preached that afternoon in the

big tent, I couldn't help seeing Jean way in the back, eagerly listening to the message. When it was over, I thought she might be one who would move to the front when the invitation was given, but instead of that, I saw her get up and hurry away, and I felt a little bit disappointed. When I finished speaking with those who had come forward, I went on home, and when I got there I found, as I opened the front door, my wife sitting there with an open Bible and Jean beside her. My wife turned to me and said, "Come and join us. I am trying to show Jean that Christ died in our place, but somehow or other she can't seem to grasp it." So I sat down with them and said something like this: "Jean, you know the gospel, don't you?"

"Yes," she said, "I think I do."

"What is the gospel?"

"Well, it is that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures"; and my wife said, "I have been showing her Isaiah 53." The Bible was open at that chapter so I said, "Look, you have it right here: 'But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.' Don't you see, Jean? Christ died for you, He took your place, He bore God's judgment against your sins."

"I see what is written there," she replied, "but somehow I can't get hold of it for myself. It doesn't seem to mean me."

So we got down on our knees and prayed that the Spirit of God Himself might make the great truth of the substitutionary work of the Cross real to her; and then I said to her, "Jean, while we are here on our knees, I want you to read the words for yourself, and we will pray that the Holy Spirit will open them up to you." And so she read them: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

Then she said, "Yes, I see it, but I don't seem to be able to make it my own."

"Perhaps it would be different now if you will just read it again and change the pronoun, putting it into the first person singular. Read it like this: 'He was wounded for *my* transgressions'; because you see, Jean, it really means that. He was wounded for the transgressions of all of us, yours and mine. Read it that way." And she started to read, "He was wounded for *my* transgressions." She stopped as the tears began to flow. She wiped them away and read on, "He was bruised for *my* iniquities," and again she stopped; and then she read, "The chastisement of *my* peace was upon Him," and then she fairly shouted,

"Oh, I see it! With His stripes *I am* healed." And in a moment the light had shone into her darkened heart. She saw that the Lord Jesus was *her* substitute; He had taken *her* place. We gave thanks, and then she said that she must go and tell her "Mither." She didn't know that all the while her mother had been standing outside the window and had heard the whole thing. Out the front door she went and down the garden path and around to the side, and she ran right into that mother's arms, "Oh Mither, Mither, I'm saved; by His stripes *I am* healed." What joy that brought to the mother's heart, and what a happy time of rejoicing we all had then!

You see, that is substitution. That is the very pith and marrow of the gospel. A poor old colored woman was asked once, "Dinah, you are always talking about being saved through the atonement of Christ, but do you know what the word 'atonement' means?" She looked up and said, "Honey, 'deed ah does understand de word 'atonement.' It just means this: He die, or me die, He die, so me no die." "The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me." He gave Himself for our sins.

Next we do have a special group mentioned for whom He gave Himself. In the last part of the fifth chapter of Ephesians, in the twenty-fifth verse we read:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.

When we get home to Glory, when we who have been redeemed to God by His precious blood are presented faultless in the presence of our heavenly Bridegroom, we shall look up into His face and we shall be able to say, "The Son of God loved the Church, and gave Himself for it."

You remember the story that is told of one of the generals of Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, and the one who overthrew, in God's providence, the mighty Babylonian Empire. One of his generals came home from a campaign and was shocked to find that in his absence his own wife had been arrested and was languishing in prison, charged with treachery against her country, and the trial was to be held that very day. The general hastened to the court of Cyrus, and the guards brought in his own beloved wife. She, poor woman, pale and anxious, tried to answer the charges brought against her, but all to no avail. Her husband, standing near, heard the stern voice of the Persian ruler pronounce the death sentence. In a moment, as they were about to drag her away to behead her, he ran forward and threw himself down at the feet of the Emperor. "Oh sire," he cried, "not she, but me. Let me give my life for hers. Put me to death, but spare my wife." And as Cyrus looked down upon him, he was so touched by his deep devotion and his love for his wife that his heart was softened. He remembered, too,

how faithful this servant had been, and he gave command that the wife should go free. She was fully pardoned. As her husband led her out of the room, he said to her, "Did you notice the kind look in the eyes of the Emperor as he pronounced the word of pardon?" She said, "I did not see the face of the Emperor. The only face that I could see was that of the man who was willing to die for me."

Oh, when we get home, when we see the face of the Man who did die for us, how our hearts will praise Him! How we will rejoice in His presence as we say, "The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me."

We need to realize that He died not only to deliver us from the judgment due to our sins, but He died for us in order that we might be delivered from the power and pollution of sins right here and now in this life. In Galatians 1:4, we have these words:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.

He gave Himself for our sins, not simply that we might have our past sins forgiven, nor that we might stand justified before Him as to the future, but in order that the power of sin might be broken in our lives, that we might no longer be subject to Satan's authority, that we might be free men and women, living here to the glory of the Lord Jesus.

This is one of those truths that I do want to press upon you who have but recently been brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. Dear young Christian, do not be satisfied to know that you are saved from hell, blessed as that is, but oh, go on day by day to a fuller walk with God, that you may be saved from sin, and that your whole life may be lived to His praise and to His glory.

After all, somebody might raise the question, "Well, it is perfectly true that it says He gave Himself for us, and He gave Himself for the Church, and He gave Himself for our sins; but are you really sure that it applies to everybody? May He not, after all, have had just some particular elect company in view when He thus gave Himself, and if we do not belong to that company, what right have we to come to Him at all, and to expect Him to do anything for us?" For answer, will you look at the first Epistle to Timothy, chapter 2, verses 5 and 6:

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

Oh, dear friends, do not allow anything to narrow down your conception of the inclusiveness of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"He gave Himself a ransom for all." Do not try to read into that what it does not say. Some people say, "Well, of course, you know we must understand the words 'the elect' to come in there. He gave Himself a ransom for all the elect." Oh no, God does not need you and me to help Him out. He knows what to say, and He means what He says. When He writes, "He gave Himself a ransom for all," He means us to understand the words exactly as they are written.

They used to tell a story about a certain professor of theology at Princeton Seminary in the days when Princeton was pretty rigid as to what they called "a limited atonement." One day one of the students looked up and said, "Professor, just what is our stand in this seminary on the atonement?" And the teacher replied, "Well, we stand with Dr.--; we preach the theology of Dr.—, and he taught a limited atonement—that Christ died only for the elect." Then said the student, "And over at New Haven, Connecticut, (At that time New Haven was a very sound seminary,) what do they teach there? What is Dr. Taylor's theology?" The professor said, "Over there they teach that God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"Oh," said the student, "well, I'll accept that because that is what the Bible says. That is not just Dr. Taylor's theology nor New Haven doctrine; that is the Word of God."

And so we say to you, whoever you may be, the Lord Jesus gave Himself a ransom for *all*. On Calvary's cross He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. In other words, when He presented Himself there as a substitute for guilty humanity, He finished the work that satisfied every righteous demand of the Throne of God and met all the claims of His holy nature, so that on the basis of it, any poor sinner in all the world who comes to Christ and puts in his claim will be saved on the basis of the substitutionary work of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the doctrine of the atonement as we have it in the Bible. There is no other in this blessed Book, and so we put the question to you: have you put in your claim? There are a lot of people who know all about it, but they have never believed and acted upon it.

You remember the incident of the veteran of the Civil War who was found living in wretched poverty. The city authorities found him in such a deplorable state that they thought all they could do was to take him to the county poor farm. One of them happened to notice something on the wall. It wasn't exactly a picture; it looked more like a document of some kind. He took it down and looked at it, then he asked, "What is this, my friend?" The poor old man replied, "That was sent to me by Abraham Lincoln himself, and I kept it because it has his signature on it." It turned out to be a check. I forget the amount of money, but it was really a pension check signed by the President and

sent to this man years ago. Instead of cashing it, the poor man had kept it all the time, and had framed it and hung it there on the wall. In the meantime he got poorer and poorer, until he was a candidate for the county farm. They found that the government at Washington would still honor the check, although it was years old, and so they had enough to take care of the man comfortably until he died.

Oh, do not be content just to have the statement of the substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus, but come to Him for yourself, trust Him as your own Saviour. Cash in on it. He gave Himself a ransom for *all*.

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