

Questions and Answers

Q

How much does the word "gospel" include? D.W.

A

Strictly speaking, the word applies to the good news regarding Christ's death and resurrection (see 1 Cor 15:1-3; Rom 1:1-4). It is said to be a revelation of "the righteousness of God," and, as more accurately translated by the NIV, "A righteousness from God." The glad tidings assure every hearer that he or she has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, and that his life and death are put to their account in righteousness if they will only believe.

Q

Is not the idea of substitution an old-fashioned idea in religion? W.A.

A

Yes, as old-fashioned as the Fall, but as relevant as forgiveness. When 2 Corinthians 5:14 says that "one has died for all; therefore all have died" (RSV), it can only mean that Christ died as our substitute, and that Christ's death is a vicarious atonement.

A.M. Hunter, with reference to the concept of substitution in his discussion of the various views of the atonement, says: "Under this head we may include all theories which deal in 'satisfaction' or substitution, or make use of 'the sacrificial principle.' It is with this type of theory that the sayings of Jesus seem best to agree. There can be little doubt that Jesus viewed His death as a representative sacrifice for the many. Not only is His thought saturated in Isaiah 53 (which is a doctrine of representative suffering), but His words over the cup—indeed, the whole narrative of the Last Supper—almost demand to be interpreted in terms of a sacrifice in whose virtue His followers can share. The idea of substitution which is prominent in Isaiah 53 appears in the ransom saying. [Mark 10:45.] And it requires only a little reading between the lines to find in the 'cup' sayings, the story of the Agony, and the cry of dereliction, evidence that Christ's sufferings were what, for lack of a better word, we can only call 'penal.'" *The Work and Words*

of Jesus, p.100.

The Anglican scholar, Leon Morris, is also worth hearing on this point. He writes: "Many who object to the concept of substitution do so on the grounds that it is unthinkable. And so it is, if it be understood in the external mechanical way in which it is often pictured. Thus God is thought of as one individual, Christ as another, and the sinner forms a third entity. The sinner has deserved punishment. God, the Judge, arbitrarily substitutes the innocent Christ for the guilty sinner, and let the latter go free...."

"Now it is not this crude thing that the New Testament teaches as substitution. But before going into this, I want to point out that there are far-reaching implications in rejecting substitution as immoral. To put it bluntly and plainly, if Christ is not my Substitute, I still occupy the place of a condemned sinner. If my sins and my guilt are not transferred to Him, if He did not take them upon Himself, then surely they remain with me. If He did not deal with my sins, I must face

their consequences. If my penalty was not borne by Him, it still hangs over me. There is no other possibility. To say that substitution is immoral is to say that redemption is impossible. We must beware of taking up such a disastrous position.

"When we try to understand the New Testament doctrine of substitution we must bear in mind first the close unity between God the Judge and Christ the Saviour. In the process of salvation God is not transferring penalty from one man (guilty) to another man (innocent). He is bearing it Himself. The absolute oneness between the Father and the Son in the work of atonement must not for a moment be lost sight of. When Christ substitutes for sinful man in His death that is God Himself bearing the consequences of our sin, God saving man at cost to Himself, not at cost to someone else." *The Cross in the New Testament*, pp. 409-410. □

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