

OUR SUFFERING SUBSTITUTE



CHARLES SPURGEON (1834-1892)

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OUR SUFFERING SUBSTITUTE

*“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins,
the just for the unjust, that he might
bring us to God.”—1 Peter 3:18*

GOD is just, and a just God must punish sin. The great question is, “How can God be just and yet the Justifier of the ungodly?” False religions endeavor to answer this question, but they completely fail. The poor heathen thinks he has found the answer in his own terrible sacrifices. He thinks he may give his first-born for his transgression, the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul (Mic 6:7). It is not thus that God’s justice is vindicated, neither is it thus that His mercy shines forth in its glory.

There is a cold, speculative theology that seeks to put this question far away. There are a few men who scoff at the atonement,¹ and reject the thought of sacrifice...but that system which denies the doctrine of atonement by the blood of Jesus Christ, or which puts it in the background, never can succeed. Its adherents may profess to be intellectual because they are ignorant, but they will never convince the masses. It is stamped on nature by God that every man feels in his conscience a craving after a reply to the question,

¹ **atonement** – act of bringing reconciliation by paying the debt owed for an offense.

“How can the just God justly forgive me the sinner?” If that question be not answered in some way, so that it may be seen how God can save and yet maintain His justice, no system of theology can by any possibility succeed.

We must resist the tendency that seems to be in the minds of some, to keep back this vital truth—the fundamental truth of the Christian religion, namely, the doctrine of the substitutionary sacrifice of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us not argue against this tendency, but let us rather destroy it by our own personal determination to preach more earnestly and more constantly, “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1Co 2:2). The quickest way to slay error is to proclaim the truth. The surest mode of extinguishing falsehood is to boldly advocate Scripture principles. Scolding and protesting will not be so effectual in resisting the progress of error as the clear proclamation of the truth in Jesus.

Let me now try to preach the doctrine of substitution, which is the Scripture answer to the questions, “How can God’s justice have its full dominion, and yet God’s mercy exercise its sway?”—“How can there be a full-orbed justice and a full-orbed mercy, and neither of them eclipse or cast a shadow over the other?”

1. The Person of the Suffering Substitute

Behold the person of the suffering Substitute: “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.”

Truly man

The Substitute was of complex nature. He was truly man, and yet He was truly God. Christ Jesus, Who “suffered” in the room, place, and stead of God’s chosen people, was man, man of the substance of His mother, most surely man. He partook of all the weakness of humanity, and was in all respects—sin only excepted—tempted as we are; yea, He became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh (Gen 2:23). He was the perfect man, the only man in Whom there never dwelt sin. There was no sin in His nature. No taint of original depravity ran in His veins. In His human nature He was “without spot” or “blemish” (1Pe 1:19). Conceived in a miraculous manner, He partook not in any degree of that transgression which is transmitted to us; for we are born in sin and “shapen in iniquity” (Psa 51:5).

Christ did not receive any of that imputed sin which has fallen upon the race from Adam. Christ never fell in Adam. He was the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15), but He never lay in the loins of Adam. As a private person, Christ never fell; by nature, He was not in any sense a participator or partaker in Adam’s sin. Though on the part of His people Jesus took upon Himself Adam’s transgression, and bore it right away, He himself was, in His original, without the shadow of a spot—the immaculate, the perfect Lamb of God’s Passover (Joh 1:29; 1Co 5:7).

The life of the man Christ Jesus was in every respect blameless. From His eye no fire of unhallowed anger ever flashed. On His lips the word of deceit never rested. His pure mind never knew an imagination of sin. Satan’s sparks fell on Christ’s soul like fire

dropping into the ocean and were quenched forever. Hell's quiver of temptations was emptied upon Him, but no single arrow ever stuck in His flesh and blood. He stood invincible and invulnerable. He could not be wounded by temptation. "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (Joh 14:30), was His own triumphant declaration. Not only did Christ not sin, but He could not sin. He "knew no sin" (2Co 5:21). He had no acquaintance with sin; He was a stranger to sin; sin had no commerce with Him; He had no dealings with sin personally. His head turned not dizzy when upon the pinnacle of the temple (Mat 4). When down in the depths of humiliation, no grief found expression void of completest resignation. He was ever pure, perfect, spotless, holy, acceptable unto God.

The sufferings of Jesus have power to bless others, seeing they were not necessary for Himself. He had no need to suffer as the result of sin, nor yet that, by the discipline of suffering, He might be purged from its evil. There was no reason in Himself why He should ever know pain or heave a sigh. His sufferings all had reference to His people. His object in suffering, bleeding, dying, was to secure the salvation of His chosen. Our souls may now trust Jesus, the perfect Man, with the utmost confidence.

Truly God

Let us also ever bear in mind that, while Christ was truly man, yet was He also very God. We believe and must ever teach that the perfect humanity of Christ did not lower His perfect deity; His divinity was undiluted and infinite. He was "very God of very God," possessing all the attributes of the eternal Jehovah. He Who did

hang upon the cross was the same God Who made all worlds. The very Word Who did bear our sins in His own body on the tree was that Word by Whom all things were made, and without Whom “was not anything made that was made” (Joh 1:3). We know nothing of a human atonement apart from the deity of Christ Jesus.

We dare not trust our souls upon a savior who is but a man. If all the men that have ever lived and all the angels that exist could have wrought together and striven throughout eternity to offer a sacrifice that should be a propitiation² for the sins of a single man, they must have failed. None but the shoulders of the incarnate God could bear the stupendous burden. No hand but that which set fast the spheres could shake the mountains of our guilt and bear them away. We must have a divine sacrifice, and it is our joy to know that we have this in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As for those who do not believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, let them go their way and preach what they will, we cannot stay to enter into controversy with them. We would speak of them as Mr. Gadsby (1773-1844) did. A building where Unitarianism was taught was erected opposite the chapel in which William Gadsby preached the gospel of the grace of God. One asked Mr. Gadsby, “Do you not feel sad about this opposition?” He replied,

² **propitiation** – “Propitiation has reference to the wrath or displeasure of God. To propitiate is to satisfy the divine justice and thus to appease His wrath. In the biblical usage of the term, the justice of God is satisfied by the propitiatory sacrifice.” (Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 382.)

“Opposition, man! I do not know of any opposition.” “No opposition?” “No, brother, none whatever. Suppose I kept a baker’s shop, and sold good wheaten bread, and some man came and opened an ironmonger’s shop opposite, would that be opposition?” “No, that would be quite a different line of business.” “So,” said Mr. Gadsby, “the Unitarian Chapel is no opposition to us; it is in a different line altogether. It is a different article they have to deal out. We deal with the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and on that a soul may rest for eternity; but they deal with another gospel, which is not another (Gal 1:6-7), with that which can never bring peace on earth or blessedness in the world to come. There is no opposition.” Of course, in another meaning of the word, there is the greatest possible “opposition” between us and Unitarians. And we will pretend to no manner of union with them, for we can never give up our belief in the divinity and deity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, nor can we have any fellowship with those who reject that blessed truth (Eph 5:11).

Let us stand beneath the cross of Calvary, and behold our Lord Jesus hanging there, and remember that His bleeding body was in alliance with the unsuffering Deity. Those wounds of His, that streaming, spear-rent side, was taken into union with the nature of the living and eternal God. The infinite merit of the Godhead was imparted to the sufferings of the manhood. Neither your sins nor mine can ever exceed the merit of the precious blood of Christ. If our sins be high as mountains, the ocean of His atonement, like Noah’s flood, covers the utmost summits of the mountains. It prevails twenty cubits upwards, till all the highest

mountains are covered. Though our sins be never so crimson, the blood of Jesus Christ is more crimson, and the one washes out the other. Though our iniquities be never so dark and bitter, His death was more bitter and dark, and the black bitterness of His death hath taken away the blackness and bitterness of our sins; and therefore it is that “he is able...to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25).

Sinner, look at Jesus Christ! There is power in His atoning blood to wash away all thy sins. None can limit the efficacy of the precious blood of Christ. No sins can be too black or too numerous for that precious blood to cleanse. The blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to accomplish all that God has purposed to accomplish by its shedding. Christ shall never fail in any respect. His cross is a battering-ram against which nothing shall stand. Before the cross of Christ, the stupendous ramparts of our condemnation must rock to and fro even to their fall; and not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down. We need a greater confidence in the cross of Jesus Christ, a surer rest evermore on that Rock of Ages cleft for us.

2. The sufferings of the Substitute

Contemplate the sufferings of the substitute: “Christ also hath once suffered for sins” (1Pe 3:18). These were endured on behalf of all them that believe. See Him in Gethsemane—

“Gethsemane, the olive-press!

(And why so called let Christians guess)

Fit name, fit place, where vengeance strove,

*And griped³ and grappled hard with love.
Twas here the Lord of life appears,
And sigh'd, and groan'd, and pray'd, and fear'd;
Bore all incarnate God could bear,
With strength enough, and none to spare."*

There, for us, Jesus sweated until His soul became so full of agony that the blood flushed the rivers of His veins and at last burst the banks and overflowed. "His head, His hair, His garments bloody were." He was clad in a ruby robe of His own blood; and there He continued still wrestling, with His soul burdened, and "sorrowful, even unto death" (Mat 26:38), that He might prevail on His people's behalf, and that He might suffer the wrath of God for their sins.

He rose from the place where He had been pleading, renewed in strength, and went forth to meet His doom. He was betrayed by Judas, one of the twelve. His own familiar friend, whom He had trusted, who did eat of His bread, lifted up his heel against Him. You who have been forsaken by your firmest friend in the hour of your direst need, you that have known a plighted troth⁴ broken, pretended love turned into a deadly hatred, you may guess—but you can only faintly guess—the tremendous sorrow that came into the Redeemer's soul when the traitor, Judas Iscariot, betrayed him.

They hurry the Savior away to Annas, to Caiaphas, to Pilate, to Herod, then back again to Pilate, without any breathing time, without any respite. They accuse Him of sedition. The King of Kings seditious! They

³ **griped** – held fast; grasped; seized.

⁴ **plighted troth** –commitment pledged; promise made.

accuse Him of blasphemy, as if God could blaspheme! They could find no witnesses against Him except the basest scum of the people, who were prepared to swear to any falsehood—and even these agreed not one with another. There stood the perfect man, the Son of God, accused and slandered by men who were not worthy to be spit upon.

They condemn the innocent. They mock Him; they laugh at Him. They jeer at His majesty and torment His sacred person. He is given up to the tender mercies of the Roman soldiery. They set Him in an old chair as though it were a throne. They had just before torn His back with scourges till His bones stood up like white cliffs in a sea of blood. They crown Him with thorns. They cast an old purple robe on His shoulders; they mock and deride Him, as though He were a sham king. For a scepter, they give Him a reed. For homage, they give Him spittle. For the kiss of salutation, they give Him the lips of mockery. Instead of bowing before Him as their King, they blindfold Him and smite Him in the face. Was ever grief like Thine, Thou King of sorrow, despised by Thine own subjects? Thou, Who didst give them breath, dost have that breath back again on Thee in violent and blasphemous oaths! Thou didst give them life; and they spent that life in mocking Thee!

Jesus is led forth to Calvary. He is nailed to the cross by cruel and wicked hands. The rude rabble jeer at His sufferings. Within His soul, there is an agony such as we cannot fathom. Above, there are the swelling waves of Almighty wrath against our sins, covering all His soul. Hark! that dreadful soul-piercing cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mat 27:46). It seems to be the gathering up of all His griefs,

sorrows, and sufferings into one expression. Like some enormous lake, which receives the torrents of a thousand rivers, and holds all within its banks, so does that sentence seem to grasp all His woes, and express them all: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

At last, He bows His head, and yields up His spirit! At one tremendous draught of love, the Lord hath drained destruction dry for all His people. He has suffered all that they ought to have suffered. He hath given to the justice of God a full recompense for all their sins. He has on their behalf presented a complete atonement,

*“And, to the utmost farthing paid
Whate’er His people owed.”*

What joy it is, believer, to think that thou hast such a perfect atonement to rest upon! If there were one sin Christ did not suffer for on the cross, or one evil thought of one of His people that He did not bear, we could not be saved. But He has “finished” the whole of His people’s transgression (Dan 9:24); He has made an end of all their sins. He has obeyed all the jots and the tittles,⁵ as well as the great and weighty things, of the Law of God; He has magnified it and made it honorable (Isa 42:21). He has gone to “the end of the law for righteousness” (Rom 10:4)—not half-way, but all the way; not near to its boundary, but even to its very end. He has not merely sipped from the cup of wrath, not merely tasted a portion of its bitter draught, but He has drained it to the very dregs. Ere He died, He turned the

⁵ **jots and tittles** – “jot,” the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet; “tittle,” the smallest stroke used to make Hebrew letters (Mat 5:18); therefore, minute details.

cup of wrath bottom upwards, for He had taken all it contained. And when He saw that there was not a single black drop trembling on its brim, He exclaimed with the loud voice of triumph, "It is finished!" (Joh 19:30). He had drunk the whole. Glory in this, ye living people of the living Christ! He hath offered for you a complete sacrifice, acceptable unto His Father. Glory in this, ye chosen people of the living God, that "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1Pe 3:18).

3. The Result of the Substitution

Rejoice in the result of the substitution: the sufferings are finished; the debt is paid. Justice is satisfied; the Law is magnified; righteousness is established. For all His people's sins Christ has made a complete atonement, and for their justification He has risen from the dead (Rom 4:25).

Now, poor trembling seeker, what sayest thou to this? Canst thou not now rest on Christ? God is satisfied with His Son's atoning sacrifice; canst thou be dissatisfied with it? God thinks Jesus enough; canst thou think Him too little? Did the Lord, the King, against Whom thou hast offended, accept the reconciliation; and dost thou unbelievably and distrustfully say, "I fear it is not sufficient"? Cast away thy guilty fears, I beseech thee. May the blessed Comforter enable thee now to say,

*"Just as I am—without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,*

O Lamb of God, I come!

Thou art to be saved by faith in Christ, Who “hath once suffered for sins” (1Pe 3:18), and in Christ alone. Do not seek to make a savior of thine own feelings. Do not think thou must experience this or that before thou comest unto Jesus. Christ wants no preparation from thee. Salvation consists in simply casting thyself down on Christ. Cast thyself down on thy very face in the dust before Him, and once for all have done with thine own wretched self. Rely not on anything thou canst do, think, say, or know; rest alone on Jesus only, and thou art saved! Be thou who thou mayest and what thou mayest—though thou wert the very worst sinner out of hell, be thy soul the blackest yet—if thou wilt trust in Christ Who “hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust” (1Pe 3:18), thou shalt be saved.

Trembling sinner, look to Jesus and thou art saved. Dost thou say, “My sins are many”? His atonement is wondrous. Dost thou cry, “My heart is hard”? Jesus can soften it. Dost thou exclaim, “Alas, I am so unworthy”? Jesus loves the unworthy. Dost thou feel, “I am so vile”? It is the vile Jesus came to save. Down with thee, sinner; down, down with thyself, and up with Christ, Who hath suffered for thy sins upon Calvary’s cross. Turn thine eye thither; see Jesus only. He suffers. He bleeds. He dies. He is buried. He rises again. He ascends on high. Trust Him, and thou art safe. Give up all other trusts. and rely on Jesus alone; alone on Jesus, and thou shalt pass from death unto life. This is the sure sign, the certain evidence of the Spirit’s indwelling, of the Father’s election, of the Son’s redemption: when the soul is brought simply and wholly to rest and

trust in Jesus Christ, Who “hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.”

May the Holy Ghost bless these words and send them home with comfort to many hearts, for our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

