

LD 5; Is. 53:10-12; Heb. 10:1-10 "Substitutionary Atonement" I. The Possibility for a Substitute II. Fallen Man's Ability III. Other Creature's Ability

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, imagine for a moment that your team is in the championship game, and you are on the floor giving it your all- when suddenly one of your teammates gets injured. Imagine, however, that there were no subs! Your injured teammate was out- but no one could take his place! Today we are going to consider what is called substitutionary atonement. We live in a self-made and self-trusting society. Now there is a good development that kids go through- when they learn to brush their own teeth and tie their own shoes. This is a normal part of maturity. However, problems arise when this "I can do it myself" mentality creeps into religion! But we can't do it on our own as we will see. We need a sub! Last week we looked at how the character of God moves us to proper worship. God's holiness and justice move us to fear, reverence and awe in worship. While God's mercy and kindness move us to joy and thanksgiving in our worship. As we continue in the Catechism, we are moving into the second section. Moving from man's sin and misery to our deliverance and salvation. And as we begin this section on deliverance and salvation, we start by making sure every other source of salvation is rightly disqualified. Every other window and door are going to be closed- so that we might know and believe that there is only one way in which we might be saved. One path that leads to the Father and glory above! Our theme is this: Jesus Christ is revealed as the only acceptable substitute for our salvation. And the application will be simply- trust in Jesus alone because He is the only sacrifice that can save!

### **I. The Possibility for a Substitute**

In our first point, we consider the possibility for a substitute. We saw this very briefly last week, as we looked at QA 12. A substitute is one of the ways in which God's justice can be satisfied. So we start with a confession- we deserve punishment- both in this life and in the next! We all need to start here- with a confession of our guilt and deserved destruction! But praise God- there is a way for us to escape this punishment! The justice of God does not forbid another from taking our place and paying our debt. But there

are specific requirements that must be met in order for this substitute to be accepted. One of the requirements is that the substitute's blood needs to be shed, as Heb. 9:23 makes clear. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. And as Rom. 9:23 reaffirms, the wages of sin is death. Therefore, since we are sinners, it follows that whoever would be our substitute must die in order for those since to be forgiven. Someone has to suffer- someone will be cursed. Either ourselves or another- but the consequence is clear and will be meted out. God's holiness and justice demand this. So the good news is that God's justice can be upheld and satisfied when another dies in our place- instead of us! Now how do we know that God will accept and allows a substitute? Well, we would not know this fact unless God would reveal it! The presence of sacrifices in the OT and the perfect sacrifice provided in the new is what proves to us that God will and does accept a substitute. The fact that God permits another to stand in for us- to be our substitute- is a great blessing! As we read in Isaiah 53, the suffering servant will make many to be accounted righteous and He shall bear their iniquities. The God- ordained mediator would secure both forgiveness and righteousness for us! God did not need to give or allow a substitute. As we saw in the introduction, when a teammate goes down you need a sub! Well, we as sinners are much worse off than simply injured! We are the ones who need a sub- someone to take our place and do what we could not! And God allows- even more than that- He Himself provides this substitute! But what do we mean when we speak of substitutionary atonement? Well, substitutionary atonement is the satisfaction made for an offense by another. It is when someone stands in the place of another to make a payment and bring peace. By this substitute, reconciliation of the sinner to God is secured. This atonement really has two blessings, first the guilty escape punishment and second, these same ones receive reconciliation! Pardon and peace! Or they are made righteous and their iniquity is carried away as we read in Is. 53:11. That is what is secured! Not only forgiveness, but a return to fellowship with the Father! It could have been that God would simply forgive sins- but still not want to be near us. I forgive you- but stay out of my sight. But that is not what our God does- He forgives and brings us near! Now this is something that we all should want- because we all need it! I hope that you want to escape the punishment

that you deserved! Do you want to spend eternity in hell? If not, then you will give attention to who is this one who can be your substitute! Also, don't you want to spend eternity in the bliss of glory with your heavenly Father? Then you need to know who this substitute is! But who is this one who stands in our place? Where do we find this one who will prove to our substitute?

## II. Fallen Man's Ability

So if it is possible- in keeping with justice- for there to be substitute- who will this substitute be? Can we look to mankind in order to find the mediator that is necessary? Can we ourselves or some other man make this payment at QA 13 ask? Now it is possible for a man to be a substitute for a fellow man. Since they share the same nature, this is strictly possible. Man has sinned- so a fellow man can pay for the sins of man. So on the one hand, it is possible for another man to take your place under the judgement and wrath of God in your stead because a fellow man shares your nature. But on the other hand, since all men are sinners, it is impossible for a fellow sinner to take your place! Only a righteous man could take the burden of a sinner- and the fact is- all men are unrighteous! Since we are the ones who made the debt- can we then pay this debt? No- as the answer is given. We cannot provide the necessary satisfaction- either by our obedience or by our suffering. By our obedience, there is no man righteous and thus it is impossible for a man to be perfect as is necessary. And in regards to our suffering, we are finite and a finite, limited man cannot suffer as is necessary. We are unable- mankind does not have the power to bear the weight of God's anger against sin. That is why hell is eternal punishment and pain- eternal because man can never endure the weight of God's infinite wrath! So there is a two-fold problem- we are all sinners and we are finite. In order for a man to be a fitting substitute, He must be both a righteous man and more than just a man as QA 15 will continue.

But what about a partial payment- can we slowly work our way back into God's favor? No, it is also impossible for man to incrementally pay down his debt. This payment plan is very common in the buy now pay later mentality of the world. I can get the car I want now- and for the next 36 months I can pay it off in increments. But remember- whatever obedience we could offer to God is what we already owe- obedience it not paying

God off, it is deserved- rightly rendered to Him! So even if we could somehow live a perfect life from this moment on- we could not pay God back for previous sins! But there is no man that actually does this – none of us cease to sin on this side of glory! In fact, as QA 13 puts it- we increase our debt every day! The best we do is but filthy rags as Isaiah 64 states. Instead of making our cause better- instead of slowly paying God back for our sins- we continue to sin- thus we increase the debt we owe to God each day! We do not make it better- we make it worse! And this really is the error of all other religious. The religions of this world teach that we can slowly make ourselves good- or we can slowly and incrementally appease God. That we can by our own works make God happy with us- making ourselves right with God! But there is no amount of works that a mere man can do that would make himself or others right with God- because we are all fallen! With God it is all or nothing- perfectly holy or polluted in sin. Only a perfect sacrifice will be accepted!

### **III. Other Creature's Ability**

But what about other creatures- as QA 14 asks. Can another created being pay this debt and cancel our sins? Here, too, the answer is clear. Any other creature cannot do what is required. As QA 14 unfolds, God will not and a mere creature cannot pay this debt. So first of all, God is and remains a just God. God will not, in His justice, require from some other creature a payment for man's sins. It would be unfair for God to require of another creature what that creature cannot supply- as well as to punish the nature of that creature for what that creature did not do. In other words, since animals did not sin, God cannot and will not punish animal kind for man's sins. Added to this, a mere creature cannot pay this debt. Being a mere creature means that they are limited in time, power and scope. So the weight of the payment that is necessary cannot be shouldered by a mere creature. That creature would be consumed before the fullness of God's wrath would be poured out. Consider angels for a moment. These mighty ministers of fire are not fallen- so they do not have sin to content with. Can they be a fitting sacrifice- can they be a substitute for us? No, because they do not share our nature- God is just- and because they are not infinite- they are unable. Added to this- angels cannot die and they do not have blood that can be shed. So no forgiveness of sins can be found at the hands of angels.

Although being more powerful than people, they are still creatures limited in time, space and ability. Well then, what about other created beings- like animals. How about bulls, goats, lambs and other animals. Well, these cannot serve as a fitting mediator because they do not share our human nature nor are they powerful enough to carry the burden of our debt. However, animals are similar to us in some ways. Animals do have blood and they can die- which makes them a fitting picture used by God in the OT. Although the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins as we read in Heb. 10:4, the fact remains that bulls and goats do have a similar flesh and blood that can be shed. It is for that reason that God choose to use these animals as picture of a future sacrifice. So our reading from Heb. 10 compares and contrasts the OT sacrifices and the one, NT sacrifice. In the OT, sacrifices were commanded as a shadow- v. 1 says. They were a reminder of sin- v. 3. They were necessary according the Law- v. 8 continues. So the OT sacrifices of bulls and goats were a temporary picture and reminder of what was necessary and what was to come. But these were limited- pointing to the good thing and reality that was to come. These OT sacrifices needed to be repeated because they could not make perfect- they could not atone- they were needed but not sufficient. These passed away when perfection comes. So on the Day of Atonement, for example, the death of the animal as a sacrifice represented the death of the worshipper- the animal took the person's place. But that person's sin would only be fully atoned for when the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ came. So the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins and did not purify those who offered them. It would take the perfect blood of the Lamb of God to achieve this goal. So it now becomes clear, there is no hope for substitutionary atonement found in fellow man, in angels or in animals. These mere creatures cannot stand up under the judgement of God in your place! So at the end of this Lord's Day, every road is closed. Every window shut! There is only one way left open- only one possibility. If you will be saved, you need to have someone die in your place who is a man, but also righteous. And this man must be more than just a man- He must be all powerful as well! Praise God that this Savior has been sent- and the perfect man is our Lord Jesus Christ whose sacrifice we now celebrate. Trust in Him alone because He is the only sacrifice that can save!