LD 5; Lev. 16:1-22; Gen. 22:1-14; Searching for a Substitute I. The Concept of a Substitute II. The Options for a Substitute

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, substitution is a concept that we often find in sports. Last week I was playing basketball with a bunch of guys younger than I am, and I was in need of a substitute. However, the game was 5 on 5. No substitute could be found, so none could take my place. There are certain rules that apply to substitution in sports as well. In basketball, a sub can come in for any position. But in volleyball, certain players can only substitute for certain positions like the “libero.” In this example, a substitute has to meet certain requirements before the switch can take place. Well, today we apply the rule of the substitute to our salvation. What does the Bible say about substitution- is it possible and who can take our place. So today we are going to be considering what is called “substitutionary atonement.” A substitute is someone who can take our place and can do what we cannot do. But who would want to take our place? Specifically in this context, we have seen that as fallen sinners we are in line for condemnation- being made a curse. Who would be able and willing to take our place knowing what we deserve? Last time we considered that our God is both merciful and just. His justice is seen in the destruction of the wicked- His mercy is revealed in His pardoning of His chosen people. But we also saw that God remains just even in His mercy! His justice demands that the consequence of sin be meted out- that the cup of His wrath be poured out. So the justice of God means that if we are not to pay our debt to God’s justice- something or someone else must take our place! The scales of God’s justice must be balanced. Today we move into the second section of the Catechism as well. We have considered man’s sin and misery- now we begin to look at God’s grace and our deliverance. In this section of the Catechism we will find the AC unfolded as a summary of our faith. So today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ reveals the possibility of a substitute to take the place of fallen men.

**I. The Concept of a Substitute**

We begin in our first point by considering the concept of a substitute. Going back to our illustration, just because a person wants a substitute does not mean that one can be found. Sometimes it is not possible for someone to take your place- so you just have to suffer through it! God could have said- the one who sins must pay for their own sin. He would be right and just in doing so. But He is pleased to allow in His grace another to take our place under the curse- or to become a curse for us. In His grace, God reveals the concept of the substitute. The fact is, man can be atoned for by another- although we are the ones who sinned, it is possible for another to take our place. Someone or something can become a curse for us- can die in our place. As we confessed in QA 12- the claims of God’s justice must be paid in full- either by ourselves or by another! Praise God- it is possible for another to pay our debt! Another can satisfy God’s justice for us? But who can do this? Who would be willing to take our place to be our replacement? As we walk through the pages of Scripture, we find the concept of the substitute emerging. Shortly after the fall in Gen. 3, we find that God made garment of skin to cover Adam and Eve’s nakedness. In this way, cloths were provided to Adam and Eve to hide their shame. A covering made from the skin of another creature. Although just in shadowing form, we already catch a glimpse of this important concept. Adam and Eve deserve to die, but another died in their place. In order to secure covering- to provide shelter- another had to lose its life. In this case, and animal died so that Adam and Eve might live. A second example comes from our reading in Gen. 22. The LORD had told Abraham that he was to offer up his only, beloved son as a burnt offering. The death of the only, beloved son was a sure thing- it was going to happen. However, at the last moment a substitute is found and provided. God called to Abraham and told him not to harm the boy, instead God provided a ram. Abraham took the ram and offered it in the place of his son, Issaac. Of particular importance is what Abraham said back in Gen. 22:8 where Abraham tells Issaac that God will provide for himself the lamb for a burn offering. Abraham believed that God would provide a substitute offering- and He did! And again in Gen. 22:14- the mountain itself was renamed “The LORD will provide.” So an offering or a sacrifice was necessary- and it was testified to the fact that God Himself would provide what was needed! One more example comes from our reading in Lev. 16. On the Day of Atonement, there was a flurry of activity. Of particular note, we find in Lev. 16: 6 that there are two goats that are set before the LORD. One goat will be presented as a sin offering, the other goat to be presented to the LORD for atonement. So we have two goats- one will die in v. 15 as a sin offering for the people- because of their transgression and sins. The other is presented alive in v. 20- this second goat is then taken and Aaron lays his hands on this goat’s head. The sins of the people are confessed- v. 21 says that the sins of the people are put on the head of this goat. There is a transfer of sorts- the sin and the iniquity of the people are placed on this goat- and the goat bears them away. This goat is then driven into the wilderness- bearing the sins of the people as he is driven into the wasteland. So again we find that this goat represents the people- the sins of the congregation are placed upon its head and he bears their iniquities. So a theme arises- someone needs to die and our sins need to be carried away. But if these twin goats were sufficient- why would the Day of Atonement need to be repeated again next year? Why the repetition- why every year- as Lev. 16:29 says- a statue forever! The Day of Atonement with all this death and blood repeated endlessly? Will the bloodshed never cease? Will God’s justice never be satisfied?

Even though we find glimpses of the concept of substitution in the OT, there remains a significant lack or shortcoming in all of these substitutes. Remember that we owe something to God- really there are two aspects to what we owe God. Not only do we owe God a payment for our sins- we also owe God perfect obedience and holiness! Here we find the concept of both passive and active obedience. In order for a substitute to be fully successful, they must both shoulder the weight of the curse and they must fulfill all righteousness! Why is this point so important? Well, we not only need to escape from hell we also need to be granted entrance into heaven! The only way this will take place is if someone or something becomes a curse and die- but also they must live a perfect life of obedience. This is the only way that we can both escape punishment and enter into blessing! The problem with all of these substitutes so far as found in the OT is this- these animal substitutes cannot offer to God a righteous life! All these animals can do is die- they cannot live a life of faith and obedience being mere animal creatures. So we press on in our second point to consider the options that are available to us. We have seen that a substitute is possible- but what kind of substitute do we need verses the kind of substitutes that can be found.

**II. The Options for a Substitute**

Continuing then in our second point, we will consider the various options that are open to us for a substitute. To summarize- as we begin our second point- there are certain requirements that must be met in order for someone or something to be our substitute. Thankfully, a substitution is possible. But not just any old substitute will work. Going back to our illustration- they need to be on the same team if they will be accepted as a substitute. Here are a few of these requirements. One- they have to be a creature with feelings and a will. So no inanimate objects like rocks or trees can be a substitute for mankind. They have to be able to bear suffering. Second, they need to be able to choose. God will not force someone to suffer in our place if they do not want to. Only a free will offering will be a fully acceptable sacrifice. Third, the one who suffers has to be like us. God is just- and He will not punish another creature’s nature for something that their own nature did not do as QA 14 puts it. In other works- the same kind that sins is the same kind that must pay for that sin. They need to share in our nature. Like us in every way- retaining both a body and a soul. QA 15- our mediator needs to be a man like us. Forth- they cannot have their own sin. As QA 15 says- they must be righteous. Why? Because a sinner cannot pay for another sinner- since they have their own sins to deal with. For example, someone who is bankrupt cannot pay off your debt if they cannot pay off their own debt! This means that we cannot pay for the sins of others- we cannot make this payment ourselves as QA 13 clarifies. Fifth and finally- whoever would be our substitute must have great power. QA 15- more powerful than all creatures. The power of this substitute must be of such caliber to withstand the heat of God’s justice! The strength of His shoulders must be of such capability that they can bear the weight and carry the load! No mere creature can stand up under the wrath and curse of God and not be consumed.

So let’s review the candidates- who could possibly be the kind of substitute we need. What kind of options do we have? Being a just God- someone will pay for what we have done. Lets go down the list- what possible candidates do we have? The list of creatures begins with animals. Can an animal- any animal at all- take our place? Can the blood of bulls and goats take away our sins? As you will remember from Heb. 9- the answer is no. The blood of bulls and goats cannot secure forgiveness. Blood needs to be shed- but the blood of bulls and goats will not work. How about angels? These heavenly beings do not have sin- they are perfect, spiritual beings! But still no- angels do not have bodies like ours- they are spiritual beings who cannot have their blood shed. So any animal will not work- and angels are out of the question. These do not share our nature- they do not have a human body and soul. God will not accept these because these did not commit the sin of mankind! What about another man, then? Can I or someone else take the fall for the sins of another? Here again, the answer is no. Every man is born in sin and continues to commit sin. As QA 13 applies- we actually increase our debt every day. What about the so-called saints- the great men and women of old? Sorry- even the saints had their own sins. But what if we could find a man who had no sin? Ah- now we are getting closer! Someone who is like us in every way- yet without the baggage of their own sin! That is the only way that a substitution can be made- they have to be wearing our jersey- part of our team! But who is this man? Who would be willing to be our sub- to take our place under the wrath and curse of God? To answer that question- you have to come back next week as we consider LD 6!

To conclude, understanding the justice of God helps us appreciate His mercy all the more! God is just- QA 14 summarizes. He will not put the burdens of humanity on someone or something that is not a man. So the only hope we have is in a substitute who is like us- one who can legally take our place! One who would not be compelled- but would freely choose to stand under the burden and debt we have amassed! As we have just begun the 2nd section of the catechism, we are incredibly close to identifying the one who can be our substitute- one who can be our mediate and deliver! Our substitute and savior! It is this one who will give His life as a ransom for many- it will be by His stripes that we are healed! As our Theme states: Jesus Christ reveals the possibility of a substitute to take the place of fallen men. He not only reveals the possibility for it- but He is, in reality, our own possible substitute!