



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 6.7.2.4 – The Doctrine of Jesus, Son of God, Messiah (Christology)

### Jesus as Our Substitute

Jesus Himself indicated that He was giving Himself as a sacrifice in the place of other people. Jesus gave Himself up for sinners who deserve to be punished, but even so, Jesus willingly substituted Himself for them. Sinners deserve to die because of their sins. But Jesus died in the place of every sinner, as their Substitute. Jesus said: **“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”** (Matthew 20:28). The original Greek word that is translated “for” is *anti* (ἀντί), which means “in place of” or “in instead of”. It is the same word that is used by Jesus in Matthew 5:38: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’”**. The meaning of that Old Testament law was that the punishment should fit the crime. If a person knocked out the eye of another, he should have his own eye taken, one eye for or in place of the other.

There is another Greek word, *hyper* (ὑπέρ), that is also sometimes used to express the idea of substitution, one person giving himself instead of the other. Jesus said: **“The bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world”** (John 6:51). Jesus said: **“I lay down My life for the sheep”** (John 10:15).

The idea of substitution comes out clearly in a vicious remark made by the high priest Caiaphas. This remark actually turned out to be a true statement in a way that Caiaphas never intended. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead after being dead for four days, the chief priests and the Pharisees became alarmed and held a council to determine what they should do about Jesus. At this meeting **“Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.’ Now this he did not say on his own authority but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that he would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad”** (John 11:49-52). What Caiaphas meant was that instead of the whole nation perishing because the activity of Jesus would turn the Romans against them, only one man should die: Jesus. In vicious hatred Caiaphas wanted Jesus to be put to death. But actually, God worked it out so that what Caiaphas said was actually true in a deeper sense. Jesus would indeed die for the people – for or instead of the many sinners who deserved to die because of their sins. Jesus would take their place and be their Substitute, so that they would not have to die.

It is true that in some passages the word “for” may mean “for the benefit of” rather than “in place of.” But when the context calls for it, it is helpful to understand that Jesus lived and died in our place, as our Substitute. The term that is sometimes used for this is vicarious; that is, Jesus suffered and died for us vicariously, as our Substitute.

Consider the following New Testament references: **“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:6-8). **“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”** (Romans 8:32).

The thought of substitution is clearly present in 2 Corinthians 5:14, where we read: **“We judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died.”** If Jesus died as the Substitute for all human beings, it is as if all human beings had died, for Jesus died in our place. So also we read: **“He (God) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”** (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Here are some more examples: **“The Son of God...loved me and gave Himself for me”** (Galatians 2:20). **“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us”** (Galatians 3:13). **“Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma”** (Ephesians 5:2). **“Our Lord Jesus Christ...died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him”** (1 Thessalonians 5:10).

Notice that Jesus gave Himself as a sacrifice. In a sacrifice, the victim takes the place of the sinner. So Christ was not only the High Priest who brought the sacrifice, but He was also the Victim given as the sacrifice in place of sinners. In this way, Christ’s entire obedience was vicarious. **“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; ...He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed”** (Isaiah 53:4-5). **“Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us”** (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The Bible also uses the terms “redemption” and “ransom.” A ransom is the price paid to set a prisoner or slave free. We sinners were purchased or redeemed, not with money or animal blood, but by the suffering and death of Jesus Christ in our place. **“Do you not know that...you are not your own? For you were bought at a price”** (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Corinthians 7:23). **“The Man Christ Jesus...gave Himself a ransom for all”** (1 Timothy 2:5-6). **“Our Savior Jesus Christ...gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works”** (Titus 2:14). **“Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption”** (Hebrews 9:12).

## Questions

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1. Which Bible passages clearly teach that Jesus was our Substitute?
2. What did Jesus endure in our place?
3. What did Caiaphas mean when he said Jesus should die for the people?
4. What is the deeper meaning of what Caiaphas said as a high priest?
5. If Jesus died in our place, why do we still have to die?
6. What comfort is there for us in having Jesus as our Substitute?
7. What was the ransom or redemption price by which we were purchased by God?