

REQUIREMENTS OF A SUBSTITUTIONARY SIN-OFFERING

According to Scripture, Christ is our “sin-offering” (Rm.8:3, NASV). He was “the just one,” substituted “for the unjust” (1Pt.3:18). A substitutionary offering was necessary, because the generous forgiveness God wants to grant us might send a message of Divine “laxity” (cf. Eccl.8:11). But, by substituting a blood offering for our penalty, God is enabled to justly forgive our sins (cf. Hb.9:22). But what are the *requirements* of a substitutionary sin-offering?

A substitutionary sin-offering cannot receive our actual punishment. The should be obvious from the very idea of a “substitution” – which requires an “*alternative*,” or something “*other than*,” the original thing! What we are saying is that Christ did not endure our actual punishment – which is everlasting torment (Mt.25:46). Rather, His death was a “ransom” offered INSTEAD OF our penalty (Mt.20:28). Out of His abundant mercy, God will accept something “less than” our punishment (cf. Is.53:5-6) – but only if WE accept it, too (cf. Jn.3:16). Further, if Christ received our actual punishment, then NO mercy or forgiveness was shown! Instead, the penalty for sin was executed; justice was done. Indeed, I would argue that an *injustice* was done (cf. Dt.24:16; Ezk.18:20). I would also add that if Christ received our actual punishment, then our sin-debt was paid – NOT forgiven! (but compare Mt.6:12; 18:27; Ep.1:7).

A substitutionary sin-offering must do exactly what our penalty would have done. The penalty for violating the law is designed to mete out justice; to uphold the authority of the law. But the sin-offering of Christ is a *substitution* for that penalty. *By definition, a “substitution” for our penalty must accomplish the same purpose as the penalty itself!* Hence, by means of this substitution, God can still be just – AND forgive our sins (“just and justifier,” Rm.3:24-26). In other words, even though God grants us forgiveness, *He did not simply ignore His law.* The death of Christ does what the execution of our penalty would have done, i.e. uphold the authority of the law. By providing a substitute for our penalty, God demonstrates the *importance* of His law as effectively as the penalty would have.

A substitutionary sin-offering must demonstrate God’s hatred of sin and love for man. Let’s take these one at a time. First, if sin is to be forgiven, and our penalty set aside, then *God must show His hatred for our transgressions.* This was accomplished by Christ, who “condemned sin in the flesh” by His death on the cross (Rm.8:3). Only when we realize that “without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin” (Hb.9:22), will we fully understand the absolute ugliness of sin. Paradoxically, by that same death, “*God demonstrates His own love toward us*” (Rm.5:8). Only when we realize what truly motivated God to die for us will we fully grasp “the width and length and depth and height” of His love (Ep.3:17-19). This public demonstration of God’s hatred for sin, and love for man, brings us to our final point...

A substitutionary sin-offering must be able to reform mankind’s conduct. The love of Christ, which was expressed on the cross, “compels” us to “no longer live for” ourselves (2Cor.5:14-15). The word “compels” reveals the moral influence of the cross upon the hearts of men. When we fully realize the great sacrifice of Christ, we feel compelled to give up sin! Better yet, the love of Christ, which was expressed at the cross “compels” us to live “for Him who died for (us) and rose again.” The moral influence of the cross does not stop at making us give up sin, but also motivates us to practice righteousness! As an illustration, consider how the Jews on Pentecost were “pricked” (KJV) in their hearts (conscience), and motivated to repentance:

“Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made *the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified*, both Lord and Christ. *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?* Then Peter said unto them, *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. ...Then they that gladly received his word were baptized:* and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. *And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*” (Ac.2:36-38,41-42). Clearly, the goal of the cross was not to save us IN our sins, but FROM our sins!

The substitutionary sin-offering of Christ perfectly fits all the requirements above. The only question that remains is: ***What are you going to do about it?***

--Lanny Smith