

Substitutionalism

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The Bible nowhere talks about “substitutionism.” Actually, it’s not a word. However, the concept is certainly there. In Isaiah 5:20, a woe is pronounced on those who would be so presumptuous as to substitute a mixture for that which God had authorized. In Leviticus 10, we can read of an incident where two priests died because they substituted strange fire for that which had before been authorized by God. King Saul was found guilty of supplanting God’s plan with a plan of his own liking. In each of these instances, and in many others which could be cited, God condemns substitution as not only harmful, but sinful in His sight.

In spite of such clear admonitions concerning the inadvisability of substituting, we still don’t seem to get the message. As a result of disregard, convenience, peer pressure, dishonesty and sometimes outright rebellion, man deliberately decides to substitute, surrogate, swap and switch. Notice that:

Some substitute human wisdom for faith. Today’s traditional denominationalist is especially adept at such an exchange. He develops some sort of ecclesiastical council or convention, drafts documents without regard to the oracles of God, votes on such presented material which he and his constituents have produced, and calls it “religious” simply because it was produced and recommended by so called “religious leaders.” This method of religion shows a disregard for scriptural precedent (I Peter 4:11-12) and has simply substituted human desires and designs for that which has the approval of God. “Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God” (II John 9). Bible faith is based on Bible information (Romans 10:17).

Some substitute personal preferences for authorized worship. The only reason anyone ever moved an instrument of music into the worship services is because he preferred it, and for no other reason. There is no passage that authorizes it, no indication that the early New Testament churches ever employed it. Personal preferences have never been equal to authority. “It doesn’t say not to,” you say? Don’t you think that same argument was likely used by Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10)? And look at what it got for them. And don’t you think the Corinthians used that same argument when they desecrated the Lord’s supper in I Corinthians 11? If personal preference is tantamount to authority then every man is himself an authority and nobody is wrong about anything. Substitution won’t get it, folks.

Some substitute tradition for authority. The Catholic church holds firmly to the notion that tradition is as binding as the written word of God, even if it does not plumb with that revealed word (Matthew 15:3-6). Such a notion is not only unscriptural, but unreasonable. If tradition is on a par with the word of God, then contradiction and confusion are approved by God. How could it be? Furthermore, if such be so, then truth

is relative to whatever has happened, not to an understandable, functional body of revealed truth (John 8:32). Jesus said, "I am the way the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father but by me"(John 14:6). How hard is that to understand?

Some substitute the observance of certain acts of worship for faithfulness. We Christians are certainly not immune to substitutionalism. Some of us seemingly have the notion that attendance at the services constitutes faithfulness—that singing, praying, observing the Lord's supper and giving of their means is what faithfulness is all about. When that's done, he's done. By these actions he seems to think that he is faithful. While it is certainly true that consistent attendance and participation at the services of the local church are required in the life of the faithful Christian, there are other private acts that are necessary, as well—personal prayer (I Thessalonians 5:17), recommending the word for the salvation of sinners (II Timothy 2:2), and many other personal responsibilities (Galatians 6:9-10) are a necessary part of the life of the God-fearing Christian. Letting the light of truth shine in one's private life is necessary, but attendance on the Lord's day is only a part of its effulgence.

It behooves each of use to take note of his own personal progress, his own point of focus, his own responsibilities. Let us come to know what is required of God and make no plans for any sort or kind of substitutions and personal preferences, but fortify our intentions and elongate our spiritual inclinations so as to secure that heavenly abode for which we all long.