

Instead of Me

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MANY years ago, I was walking with a friend along the pleasant banks of a Scottish river, in one of the early months of summer, when the trees had just begun to show their fresh verdure and to offer us a shade from the sun. A man in rags came up to us begging. We supplied his wants somewhat, and entered into talk with him. He could not write nor read. He knew nothing of his Bible, and seemed not to care about knowing it.

“You need to be saved, do you not?” “Oh yes; I suppose I do,” he said. “But do you know the way of being saved?” we asked. “I dare say I do,” was the reply. “How, then, do you expect this?” “I have not been a very bad man; and am doing as many good works as I can.” “But are your good works good enough to take you to heaven?” we asked. “I think so; and I am doing my best.” “Do you not know any good works better than your own?” “I know about the good works of the saints; but how am I to get them?” he asked. “Do you know of no good works better than those of the saints?” “I don't think there can be any better,” he said. “Are not the works of the Lord Jesus Christ better than the works of the saints?” “Of course they are; but of what use are they to me?” “They may be of great use to us, if we believe what God has told us about them.” “How is that?” “If God is willing to take these works of Christ instead of yours, would not that do?” “Yes, that it would. But will He?” “Yes,” we replied, “He will. For this is just what He has told us; he is willing to take all that Christ has done and suffered instead of what you could do or suffer; and to give you what Christ has deserved instead of what you have deserved.”

“Is that really the case? Is God willing to put Christ instead of me?” “Yes, He certainly is,” we said. “But have I no good works to do myself?” “Plenty,” we responded, “but not to buy pardon with them. You are to take what Christ did as the price to be paid for your pardon; and then, having thus got a free pardon, you will work for Him who pardons you, out of love for His love to you.”

“But how can I get this?” he asked. “By believing the gospel, or good news, which tells you about the Lord Jesus Christ: how He lived; how He died; how He was buried; how He rose again—all for sinful men; as the Bible says, ‘Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things.’”

The beggar stood and wondered. The thought that another's works would do instead of his own, and that he might get all that this other's works deserved, seemed to strike him. We never met again. But the Word seemed to tell upon him; he seemed to take it with him as something which he had never heard before—something which seemed almost too good news to be true.

I have more than once spoken of this since, in illustrating the gospel, and it seemed to tell. The man's wonder that another's works should do instead of his own was in itself an insight into the effects produced by the gospel of Christ. “Christ for us,” is the message which we bring; Christ “bearing our sins in His own body on the tree”; Christ doing what we should have done, bearing what we should have borne; Christ nailed to our cross, dying our death, paying our debt—all this to bring us to God, and to make everlasting life ours; this is the pure word of the gospel, which whosoever believeth is saved, and shall never come into condemnation.

There are few who do not know what that word “substitute” means when used concerning common things; but it is well that we should see how the right knowledge of this word is the key to the right understanding of the gospel. “Christ for us,” or Christ our Substitute, is the gospel or glad tidings of great joy which apostles preached, and which we can tell, even in these later days, to the sons of men as their true hope. The good news which we bring is not of what we are commanded to do in order that God may be reconciled to us, but of what the Son of God has done instead of us. He took our place here, on earth, that we might obtain His place in heaven. As the Perfect One, in life and in death, as the Doer and the Sufferer, He is presented to us that we may get the complete benefit of that perfection so soon as we receive His gospel. All our imperfection, however great, is lost in the completeness of His perfection, so that God sees us not as we are, but as He is. All that we are, and have done, and have been, is lost sight of in what He is, and has done,

and has been. "He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

It is this sin-bearing completeness of the Son of God, as the Substitute, that the sinner rests upon. It is on this that we take our stand in our dealings with God. We need a sinbearer; and God has given us One who is altogether perfect and Divine. "The Chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." "He, His own Self, bare our sins in His own body on the tree."

We once dealt with a young man as to this. He sat, with his Bible before him, pondering the way of life, and asking, What must I do to be saved? He was in darkness, and saw no light. He was a sinner—how was he to be saved? He was guilty—how was he to be forgiven?

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done." "No, certainly; but how then?" was his question. "By Christ doing the whole." "But is this possible?" he asked, "Can I be saved by another doing the whole for me?"

"It is not only possible, but it is certain. This is the way; the only way. It is God's one way of saving the sinner." "And have I nothing to do?" he asked. "Nothing in order to be saved," we replied. "But tell me how this is to be."

"Let us come back to the truth about the Substitute. You know what that is?" "I do. But how does this bear upon my case?" "Christ offers Himself to you as your Substitute; to do what you should have done, to suffer what you should have suffered, to pay what you should have paid."

"Do you mean that Christ has actually paid my debt, and that this is what I am to believe in order to be saved?" "No. Your debt is not paid till you believe: then it is paid—paid once for all, once and for ever; but not till then." "How, then, is the work of Christ, as the Substitute, good news to me?"

"There is enough of money lodged in the bank to pay all your debts twice over; and you have only to apply for it. Hand in your check, and you will get the money at once." "I see; I see," he said, "It is 'believing' that brings me into actual possession of all the fruits of the sin-bearing work upon the cross."

"Yes; just so. Or, let me put it in another way. Christ died for our sins. He is the Substitute. He is presented to you as such. Are you willing to take Him as such, that He may pay all your debts and forgive all your sins?" "Yes. But let me see this more fully; for it seems too simple."

"Well; put it thus: God has provided a Substitute for the guilty, who, eighteen hundred years ago, suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust. The Father presents that complete Substitute to you, and asks your consent to the exchange. The Son presents Himself to you, offering to be your Substitute. The Holy Spirit presents Him to you as a Substitute. Do you consent? The Father is willing, the Son is willing, the Spirit is willing. Are you willing? Do you give your consent?" "Is that it?" said he. "It is. Your consenting to take Christ as your Substitute was the dawning of the day."

Thus it is that the sinner's chain is broken and he is set free to serve God. First liberty, then service; the service of men set free from condemnation and from bondage. It is in accepting the Divine Substitute that the sinner is set free to serve the living God. The liberty flowing from forgiveness, thus received, is the true beginning of a holy life.

If, then, I am to live a holy life, I must begin with the Substitute. I must deal with Him for pardon and deliverance. Thus being by Him "delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life."

If I am to serve God, and if I am to possess anything of "true religion," I must begin with the Substitute. For religion begins with pardon; and without pardon religion is a poor and irksome profession. "There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." This is the Divine watchword. Not first the fear of God, and then forgiveness; but first forgiveness, and then the fear of God.