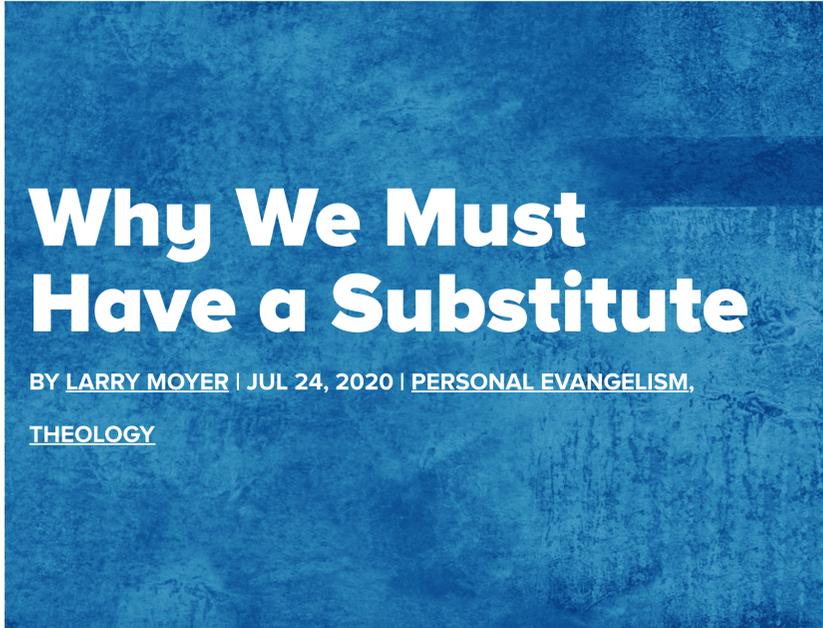


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BY [LARRY MOYER](#) | JUL 24, 2020 | [PERSONAL EVANGELISM](#), [THEOLOGY](#)

People sometimes struggle with John 3:16. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...*” Isn’t that a rather cruel way to deal with the problem of sin? Couldn’t God have come up with a more loving solution? That question or a form of it has been posed to me numerous times.

The Severity of Sin

Let’s back up a moment, because the problem deals with the severity of sin. A holy God demands one hundred percent perfection. To allow any kind of sin into His presence would cause Him to be hypocritical. Throughout the Old and New Testament He declares, “*Be holy, for I am holy.*” (Leviticus 11:45, I Peter 1:16) Hence, He cannot overlook sin; He must punish it. Sin being so severe, the punishment is death and eternal separation from God. He has rightfully declared, “*The soul who sins shall die.*” (Ezekiel 18:20) That means since all of us are sinners who have broken His standard of perfection, all of us deserve to die.

The Failure of our Effort

That is why anything we do in terms of goodness or human effort is frugal in terms of satisfying the righteous anger of God against sin. Even a life of 95% perfection which is far above what we are capable of doing would not pay the penalty of death for those sins we have committed. Going to church, living a good life, being baptized, keeping the commandments, or taking the sacraments does not change our sinful condition or removes the consequences of death.

The Solution of Substitution

The only solution is to have someone pay that penalty on our part. But that is where the problem becomes even greater. Who is going to pay that penalty? One sinner cannot die for another sinner any more than one criminal cannot pay for another criminal’s crime. Each sinner must pay for His own sin. Unless there was someone one hundred percent perfect who would be willing to pay in our place.

That is what makes the death of Jesus Christ not the cruelest thing God ever did but the most loving thing God could ever do. Jesus Christ God’s perfect Son was the only one qualified to die in our place. No wrong was found in Him. Others even observed, “This Man has done nothing wrong.” (Luke 23:41)

God could have kept Jesus in heaven. The Father and the Son could have had heaven to themselves. Jesus Christ Himself could have chosen not to die for us. Christ Himself said, “*Therefore my Father loves Me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.*” (John 10:17-18)

Instead God allowed His perfect Son to come to earth, die in our place as our substitute and pay the punishment we deserved. He did not die to show how to die (not lashing out at those who persecuted Him) or to show us how to live (putting others first), but instead He died in our place. It was indeed a substitutionary death. Had He not died we would have.

Tornadoes in Texas are as feared as hurricanes are in Florida. Years ago one of those tornadoes, deadly in force, struck a convention hall in the town of Saratoga, Texas where residents were gathered for a graduation ceremony. Less than one hour into the program, a man glanced out the door and saw the tornado that was about to strike the building. The father took his mother and daughter, placed them on the floor and stretched his body over them. Seconds later the tornado struck. The father was killed but his wife and daughter were alive and unharmed. He willingly chose to die in their place. Had he not died, they would have. He was their substitute.

Jesus Christ died as our substitute. When He declared on the cross, “*It is finished.*” (John 19:30) He meant that our debt of sin was paid in full before an Almighty God. His resurrection the third day, verified the fact that God accepted what His Son did in our place and His victory over sin and the grave. Jesus Christ was able to declare, “*Because I live, you will live also.*” (John 14:19) All those who come to Him as sinners, recognize that He died on their behalf, and trust in Him alone as their only basis for forgiveness and a right standing before God, are forever His. One of the simplest statements Jesus Christ ever made was, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.*” (John 6:47)

The substitutionary death of Christ – absolutely essential for our eternal forgiveness, the kindest thing Christ could have ever done on our behalf, and the loudest way God could have proclaimed to the entire world, “I love you.”

Substitution is the ultimate expression of love.

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