

CHRIST OUR SUBSTITUTE.

BY REV. R.L. DABNEY, D.D.

HUMAN laws teach us what a *substitute* is. In some commonwealths, citizens between certain ages are bound by law to labour on the highways so many days per year. In others, the country people are bound to work the fields of their landlords so many days each season. In France, in Prussia and in some other countries, the *conscription laws* require every young man to serve in the army so many years before he can settle to his business. A person who is bound to one of these duties, but cannot himself perform it, hires another person to take his place, to do just what he was bound for, in his stead, and his is thus acquitted of the whole claim.

Now, Christ is our Substitute with God. "Jesus was made Surety of a better testament" (meaning "covenant"). Heb vii.22. We owe to God a pure, perfect and perpetual obedience, which we, by reason of our sin, are unable to render, and "there is no discharge in that war" – Christ offers Himself a Substitute for us.

Your substitute must be able and sufficient to render us the service for which you are bound. Well; Christ qualified Himself by becoming a holy man as well as the Son of God in one person, so that He was able to render a holy man's service to God in our stead. "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." Gal. iv. 4, 5.

Your substitute must not be himself subject to the duty which you owe. For instance, were you taken for seven years into the army of Prussia, one who was himself a Prussian conscript, subject on his own account to

military duty, could not be your substitute. But where shall one be found for the sinner whose life is his own? Who is exempt from that universal law of God which demands all the service of all in heaven, earth and hell? There can be none but He who is above law, because He is the supreme Law-maker. "This" (Christ) "is the true God and eternal life." 1 John v.20. But in order to become our Substitute, "He took on Him the seed of Abraham." Heb. ii.16. And thus His services may avail in our room.

Your substitute must be accepted by the government before you are released, for it was authorized, if it chose, to hold you bound to serve in person, because your duty to your native land is personal. Now, Christ our Substitute has been accepted by God the Father. He declares, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." Matt. xvii.5. He tells us, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." Ps. ii.12.

When once the government declares itself satisfied with your substitute and enrolls him, you are free for good. The service he renders for you is accepted as though you rendered it yourself, and if he dies during its continuance, the law no longer claims you any more than if you were dead. So the believing sinner is freed from the curse of the law and is dead to its penal claims. "Brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ." Rom. vii.4.

But here, sinners, the likeness ends; for the rest, there is an amazing difference between your substitute under human laws and Christ "our Surety."

In God's kingdom, we are not only subject to duty for life, but already guilty of rebellion and desertion. "All we like sheep have gone astray." Isa. liii.6. "Every mouth is stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." Rom. iii.19. And the penalty is eternal death! "The wages of sin is death." Rom. vi.23. The court

has already set, the sentence is passed, and mercy alone stays the execution for a time. "He that believeth not is condemned already." John iii.18. Now, could a criminal under a human government hope, in this case to find a substitute? He must take the criminal's place for his whole term of service, to bear his toils, dangers and sicknesses, and at the end he must die for his crimes. Could money buy such a sacrifice? Could love persuade to it? But this is what Christ undertook for us. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Gal. iii.13. And the death He died for us had the bitterness of spiritual as well as bodily death. Oh wondrous love! Christ "commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners He died for us." Sinner, will you not henceforth say, "The love of God constraineth me?" 2 Cor. v.14. And this suggests:

If you were a soldier and had not deserted the colours of your country, an accepted substitute would free you from all service and punishment. You are guilty of desertion toward God, and are also bound to pay a service to which sin utterly disables you through your own folly and fault. From these obligations Christ frees you, but it is only to bind you to His service more firmly by love. Now you should follow the Captain of your salvation with all your might, longing to follow Him better, not from fear of being shot for desertion (that danger is gone if Christ died for us), nor from fear of losing emoluments (they are already earned for us by our Substitute, and paid in advance to true believers), but because He asks us to follow Him. And now, if we love Him, we would die for Him were it necessary, because He died for us. If we do not love Him, it is proof that He never became our Substitute. "Now are ye My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." John xv.14.

Once more: for a substitute under onerous civil or military duties you would have to pay dear. But would all the gold in our modern Ophir bribe one to substitute

for you after you had been condemned to die for some breach of your duty? "What shall a man give in exchange for his life?" But Christ offers Himself "without money and without price." Isa. lv.1. It is well for us that He does, for we have nothing to pay; we have forfeited our wages, our privileges, our heritage, by disobedience to our King. But oh, amazing grace! Christ comes to take our desperate place, asking no return but our love.

Sinner, were you a condemned French or Prussian conscript, would you not be glad to be done with rugged war, with the cold watchings, the chill *bivouac*, the weary march, the hunger, the dreary hospital, the dangerous battle and the fearful execution, and to be restored finally to your own home, with your children on your knees and your wife's embrace around your neck? But how much more joyful to have this Substitute release you from sin and death? Do you ask, "How, oh how, may I obtain Him?" By *simply asking Him and trusting Him to undertake for you*. Than God no agent is needed to go between you, no difficult form to authenticate the contract! "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Acts xvi.31. "Whosoever asketh receiveth." Matt. vii.8.

But do you ask, "How shall I have evidence of my discharge?" When your heart no longer serves sin willingly, when you no longer hate the Righteous Judge on high who condemned you, and when you love and follow the Divine Substitute, then you are free. Brother, soldier of Christ, "fight the good fight of faith." "Be thou faithful unto death, and He will give you a crown of life." Rev. ii.10.