

Together with Him

How Jesus Joined Us on Earth So We Could Join Him in Heaven

A group of behavioral scientists wanted to see if exposure to female leadership increased women's "empowered behavior." Essentially they asked, "Will seeing confident women in leadership help women lead more confidently?" In other words, what effect do female leader role models have?

Here's how the experiment worked: The sample of 149 students each gave a speech using a headset that created a virtual classroom. On the virtual back wall, behind the virtual students, the researchers occasionally flashed pictures of either Hillary Clinton, Angela Merkel, or Bill Clinton. They thought this would give a subtle message about role models to the speakers. They were right. When researchers showed pictures of Bill, women spoke less than men, but when they showed pictures of either Hillary or Angela, women talked more confidently, used better posture and vocal tone, and spoke for a longer period of time. They also felt better about their speeches.¹

Whether you agree with these leaders' politics or not, the lesson stands: It's amazing what a little representation will do.

When we see someone like us go where we've never gone, we conceptualize ourselves going there, too. Jesus became like us so that we could be like Him, and came where we are so we could go where He goes—not just to political or social heights, but to the heights of heaven where we sit with Him in heavenly places.

As we study the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, He will enfold us in that sense of belonging we all crave. But He is more than a mere role model. He is our substitute and representative. Let's examine these roles one at a time.

Substitute

The Bible is clear that Jesus died for us. Beginning in Eden, God symbolized Himself in the garments of skin He placed upon Adam and Eve, saying in effect, "For you to be covered, I must die" (See Gen. 3). Cain's vegetable offering brought condemnation while Abel's obedience to the command to offer an animal brought divine approval (See Gen. 4:1-5). The sacrificial system of the Old Testament symbolized the principle of the innocent dying in place of the guilty; individuals who sinned offered an animal, and priests offered animals to cover congregational and unintentional sins (See Lev. 4).

The prophets envisioned the Messiah as a sacrificial lamb. Most poignantly, Isaiah devoted what has become a whole chapter (53) to the death of the Messiah for the sins of the world. According to Rabbi Raphael Levi, this chapter caused such contention among Jewish scholars that they took

¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022103113000206>

it out of the Haftarah readings, which divided the Torah into a series of Sabbath readings used in synagogues.² Here are a few selections from that chapter:

He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . . He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed . . . the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all . . . He was led as a lamb to the slaughter . . . for the transgression of My people He was stricken . . . it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, He has put Him to grief; When You make His soul an offering for sin . . . He shall bear their iniquities.

More facts, this time from the New Testament: John announced Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). At the last supper Jesus offered the disciples bread and wine, saying it was His body broken and His blood shed for them (See Luke 4). Paul said, “When we were still sinners, Christ died for us” Romans 5:8. The book of Revelation refers to Jesus as “the Lamb” 28 times. The substitutionary death of Jesus can’t be denied.

But like all good things, it can be perverted.

In an effort to facilitate the execution of Jesus, Caiaphas said, “It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation perish not” (John 11:50). Consider this observation:

On the lips of Caiaphas this most precious truth was turned into a lie. The policy he advocated was based on a principle borrowed from heathenism. Among the heathen, the dim consciousness that one was to die for the human race had led to the offering of human sacrifices.³

Did you get that? In pagan religions, a partial understanding of God sending His Son to die for humanity *led* to human sacrifice! What a tragedy it would be to adopt a heathen view of the Cross! How essential that we carefully distinguish biblical from unbiblical substitution. It may help to consider two things—God’s wrath and Jesus’ choice.

God’s Wrath is different than human wrath. While God’s anger in response to sin can’t be denied, it comes from a basis of love. Do we not become angry when people suffer harm at the hands of others? And even when they hurt themselves? Like a protective Father, God fumes at whatever harms His child.

In a warped understanding of God’s wrath, He fumes at whatever harms *Him*, making His wrath self-centered. This “dim consciousness” results in a concept of God as, not a protective father, but an abusive father. He controls His children with a hot temper that he discharges upon them for the sake, not of helping them, but to “let off steam.”

Jesus’ Choice- Biblical substitution contrasts with pagan substitution in that Jesus died in accordance with the “counsel of peace” which was “between them both,” the Father and the Son,

² <https://rlsolberg.com/isaiah-53/>

³ Ellen White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 541

(Zechariah 6:13). Jesus gave Himself on the Cross. He said of His life, “No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down myself” (John 10:18).

In a twisted understanding of substitution, God the Father releases His wrath on an unsuspecting Jesus. Unbiblical substitution, again, features an abusive god whose chief attribute is anger, and who must be appeased for his own sake. In giving Himself on the Cross, Jesus did not earn God’s love, but bore the fruit of that love.

Some have viewed the idea of substitution like this: “Jesus died instead of me so that I could keep sinning and still be saved.” But the Bible teaches substitution like this: “Jesus died in my behalf, standing in as my Representative, so that I could, through appreciation of that sacrifice, see Him more clearly, love Him more dearly, repent more deeply of my sin, and obey God’s law of love more fully.” Consider Paul’s words in Romans 8:3-4:

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Representative

Let’s talk about Jesus as our representative now. Jesus died for us. But in a sense, He also died *as* us. Because Adam stood at the head of humanity, his sin came upon us all. Thankfully, the story doesn’t end there. Through taking upon His divinity our fallen humanity, Jesus became “the last Adam” (See 1 Cor. 15:45), the Representative of the human race. By natural birth we are children of the first Adam, but by rebirth we are children of Jesus Christ.

Here’s even better, warmer, and more heartening news: By His life and death, Jesus adopted the entire human race. He made the legal arrangements through the counsel of peace, paid the infinite cost with His life, and by laying His body down, laid the foundation for our acceptance into the heavenly family. Every man, woman, and child who has ever lived and who ever will live has a place in God’s heart. Regardless of belief system, religion, political persuasion, or social status, we are loved equally and impartially by Him. And whether Christian believer or not, His life counts as ours.

In Romans Chapter Five, Paul says Christ died for us when we were “without strength,” “ungodly,” and “sinners” (vs. 6-8). Then it he says:

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation (vs. 10-11).

Through the death of Jesus we were reconciled “when we were enemies.” He didn’t reconcile only good little boys and girls, but *enemies!* Enemies don’t make the first move toward reconciliation; in fact, they steel themselves against it. Jesus reconciled us anyway.

Paul calls this cosmos-shaking event “THE reconciliation.” In this term he does not refer to our moment of coming to Christ, but to the historic event of the Cross, after which Jesus cried out, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). His all-sufficient sacrifice on the Cross satisfied the just demands of the law in behalf of every human being. Through the Cross He could be “just and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26). Thus it is “the reconciliation” of all humanity.

And because of that complete, all-atoning sacrifice, Jesus rose from the dead. He was “crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God” (2 Corinthians 13:4). God called Jesus forth from the grave, and Jesus by His own divine power took up His life again (John 10:18). He then ascended to His Father to present His sacrifice. And “when He ascended on high, he led captivity captive” (Ephesians 4:8). Every lost and lonely person captive to the despair of the dark lord has now be led captive to the hope of eternal life.

Feast on this passage from Ephesians 2:4-10 in which Paul details again how the representative power of Jesus’ resurrection has literally placed us in heaven:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

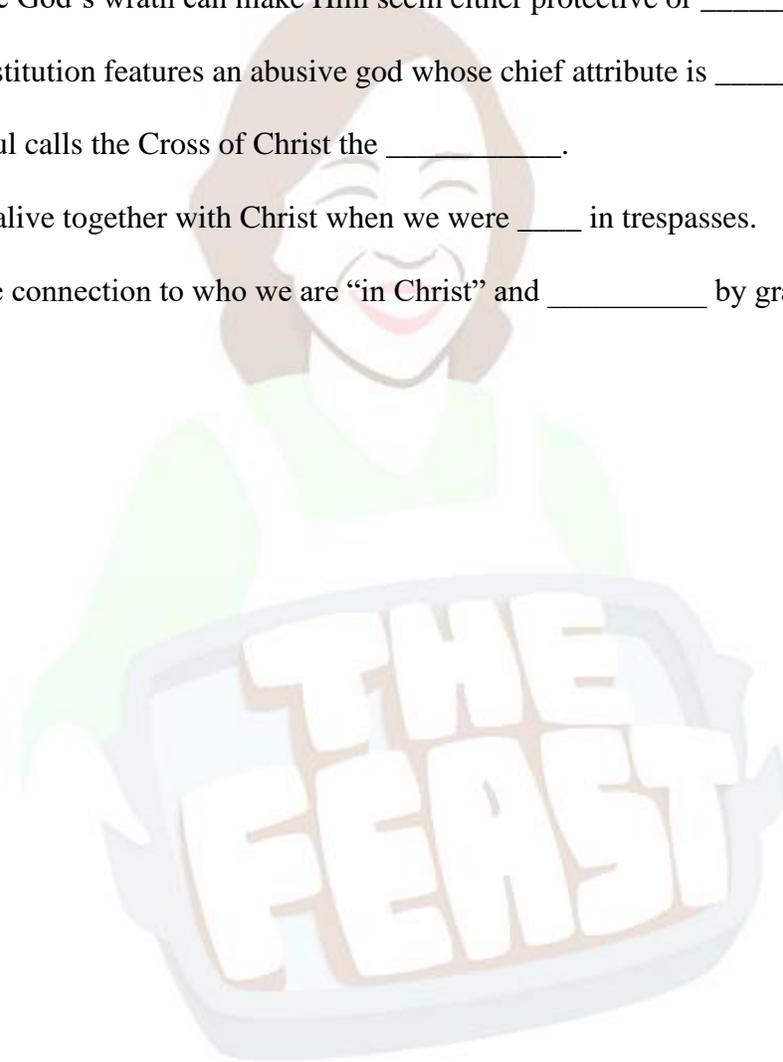
Notice the close connection between who we are “in Christ” and salvation by grace, “not of works.” Embracing what God has already done for us when we were dead, helpless, ungodly, and enemies is what breaks the deep psychological hold of self-justification on the human heart and opens us up to the reality of grace.

The Takeaway

God, we’re told, “did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him” (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10). Through Jesus, the path to heaven is already mapped out in behalf of every person. We’ve been adopted into the family of God. Jesus, the second Adam, represents us in the heavenly courts. He believes we belong there. Do we believe? Now as we see Someone who has come to where we are, we can go to where He is.

Quiz

1. Jesus is both our substitute and our _____.
2. The Old Testament sacrificial system shows the innocent dying for the _____.
3. Chapter ___ of Isaiah was so controversial it caused a debate among some Rabbis.
4. The way we see God's wrath can make Him seem either protective or _____.
5. Unbiblical substitution features an abusive god whose chief attribute is _____.
6. The apostle Paul calls the Cross of Christ the _____.
7. Jesus made us alive together with Christ when we were ____ in trespasses.
8. There is a close connection to who we are "in Christ" and _____ by grace.



Answer Key

1. Representative
2. Guilty
3. 53
4. Abusive
5. Anger
6. Reconciliation
7. Dead
8. Salvation

