CHRIST'S VICARIOUS PERFORMANCE

The Missing Heart of the Gospel and the Whole Antidote to Condemnation and Failure.

"Before we can properly understand just **what** Christ has done, we must first grasp **who** Christ is. Before everything else, He is a vicar / priest to the whole world, and this is how we must understand Him, if we are too avoid turning faith into another work." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer. German theologian and WWII martyr). A very early quote from the Patristic's reminds us that "Those un-included in the Incarnation are forever the unredeemed". (Therefore, unless Christ included all people in His righteous identity we have no right to tell everyone that "Christ died for them". He cannot die for those whom He did not include, so unless 'He' includes 'all', He could not represent any.

Vicarious;

from whence comes the word 'Vicar' and Priest - actually means 'the one for the many', or 'on behalf of all'. Words used in the New Testament which witness to its truth are 'Emmanuel - God with us', 'The Son of Man', the 'Second Adam', the High Priest, the 'Incarnation', and the 'Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world. But the emphasis of all of these titles is upon the being of Christ, as distinct from His actions. Evangelicals know that Jesus died for us, but this is only possible because 'He' included us, i.e. we were 'in Him' from the beginning. But we do not place ourselves in Him by virtue of our will power, commitment, or exemplary behaviour. Rather, we discover that we are already 'in Him' when we realise that what He did at Calvary, He did for us, or more accurately, as us, and thus we may "accept Christ" as our true self - our true identity, as St Paul also discovered.
So, it is in accepting Christ, that we are then enabled to accept ourselves. This is vital to grasp, in order to achieve true peace with Gods fierce righteousness and escape the unrelenting searchlight of our own guilt, idealism and the tyranny of perfectionism which can easily spoil our best moments. Who can honestly examine their shame until they are certain that it won't all result in God's rejection of them?

'For Us' means 'As Us'.

So it is more accurate to say He died as you. Nothing too new here, this of course is basic evangelical theology - the substitutionary atonement / sacrifice. What is not so well understood, and what is more needed in a performance driven world (and church), is that He also therefore lived His perfect life for us all of us. Indeed that He lived perfectly as all of us. And this is exactly the point that Paul is at such lengths to make in Romans 5, when he opens up the vicarious nature of Adam and of Christ. Adam has vicariously doomed us ALL to failure, futility and death - but the Second Adam has 'performed' perfectly before God, on behalf of ALL. His 100% pass is ours to rest on / accept / appropriate. In other words **there**

are no more 'brownie points' left for you to earn, 'cos Jesus has got the lot, on your behalf. Is this real for you yet, or are you still focused on others opinions of you, or yourself and your own performance? Remember Paul's words; "Indeed I do not even judge myself, but leave all that to Him.." (1 Cor. 4:3) Result; a joyful end to unhealthy introspection, idealism, perfectionism, guilty condemnation, spiritual 'driveness' and inadequacy - fear of failure. It is true peace with self and God; the 'Good News' (Uon galeon).

This then sets up a place of utmost security in which therapy may safely progress - from which one can only then consider one's own or one's client's real faults and true guilt - without anticipating a knee-jerk reaction or psycho- spiritual danger. This is also the way to get past the over-powering reaction to deny, justify, trivialise or hide in any one of our multitude of psychological defences, in order to hang on to home-made innocence. The Christian gospel is thus the only totally safe context for depth psychology to operate in. (A person too defensive or too proud to accept correction is simply too scared to humble themselves, because their necessary innocence remains in real jeopardy.)

Without this understanding properly laid down, a dangerous and subtle shift occurs in many Christians thinking.

What happens is that their confidence gradually and imperceptibly shifts from faith in Christ, **to faith in themselves**, by constantly inspecting their own commitment, performance, spirituality, and religious efforts, under the influence of repeated criticism, either from themselves or others. This always results in the insecurity endemic to self-righteousness. To these grace-talking-but-performance-driven people, Paul's words to the Galation's still invoke a wake-up call: "Oh you foolish Galation's, having begun by the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh (will-power and try-harder)?" (Galatians 3:3) Restitution must precede full restoration to psycho-spiritual health and self-respect, but who can humble themselves before people and make themselves so vulnerable, (apologise, back-down, pay-back, confess wrongdoing, humble themselves) until they know that they are STILL SECURE in Gods approval, throughout? (This is the number one healing factor for a troubled marriage where pride is the primary problem.)

Human Being' or Human 'Doing'?
Now it's time to make the paradigm shift from doing to being, from performance to grace, from guilt to gratitude - He has won the victors crown on our behalves - and to relax in the realization that our efforts are no longer the vital factor. Indeed "gratitude that his service isn't vital, is really the only legitimate motivation for a Christian to perform any act of service." Augustine. Finally, we have come into the 'rest' that Hebrews promises us. Our law then, is the 'royal law', the New Testament 'law of liberty', found only 'in Christ', in a place free of fear of condemnation. We'll let Dietrich Bonhoeffer sum it up..."If Jesus is not God, then He can't help us. If Jesus is not man, then He (still) can't help us."
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