

God Made Him Sin for Us

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Easter / Sin; Crucify; Christ; Punish / 2 Corinthians 5:21

God, in His mercy and love, provided a remedy for sin - the sacrifice of His Son. Jesus "released us from our sins by His blood" (Rev.1:5) and by His "one offering...perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb.10:14). Join Pastor Steve as he shows how God reconciled sinners to Himself from 2 Corinthians 5:21.

INTRODUCTION

- This week marks the final week leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ
- Reading the Gospel accounts gives us a good understanding of what that week entailed
- For example, on Saturday, Jesus arrived in Bethany and stayed with His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus ([John 12:1-2](#))
- On Sunday, crowds gathered in Bethany to hear Him teach ([John 12:9-11](#)), He predicts His death ([John 12:20-36](#)) and visits the temple ([Mat.21:14-17](#); [Mk.11:11](#))
- On Monday, He rode into the city of Jerusalem to the hosannas and praises of the people, who proclaimed Him as their Messiah ([Matthew 21:1-11](#)) and curses a fig tree ([Mat.21:18-19](#); [Mk.11:12-14](#))
- On Tuesday, He gives the lesson from the fig tree ([Mat.21:18-19](#); [Mk.11:12-14](#)) and cleanses the Temple ([Matthew 21:12-13](#))
- On Wednesday, He both taught the people and rebuked the religious leaders ([Matthew 23:1-39](#)) while the Sanhedrin plotted to kill Him ([Matt. 26:3-5](#); [Mark 14:1-2](#); [Luke 22:1-2](#))
- That evening, He ascended the Mount of Olives and taught the disciples about His second coming ([Matthew 24:1-51](#))
- On Thursday, Peter and John prepared for the Passover, and that evening, Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover meal ([Matthew 26:17-30](#))
- Also during supper He washes the disciples feet, interacts with them, and delivers the Upper Room Discourse (farewell discourse) ([John 13:1-17:26](#))
- After the meal, they sang a hymn and left the upper room, passing through the city of Jerusalem and out the eastern gate north of the Temple, descending the slope of the Temple mount, crossing the Kidron brook, and then ascending the Mount of Olives
- They stopped for a brief time on a slope of the Mount of Olives, where Jesus warned the disciples about their impending defection

- Then, they arrived at the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus interceded with the Father and was later taken prisoner ([Matthew 26:36-56](#))
- So on Friday, after He was taken prisoner, He spent the rest of the time before two trials, a religious, Jewish trial, and a secular, Roman trial
- Also during this time, Peter denies Jesus and the rooster crows ([Matt. 26:58, 69-75](#); [Mark 14:54, 66-72](#); [Luke 22:54b-62](#); [John 18:15-18, 25-27](#))
- Following those two trials, He was condemned to death on a cross, Judas changes his mind, returns the silver, and hangs himself ([Matt. 27:3-10](#))
- Pilate questions Jesus and sends Him to Herod Antipas ([Matt. 27:11-14](#); [Mark 15:2-5](#); [Luke 23:1-7](#); [John 18:28-38](#))
- Herod questions Him and sends Him back to Pilate ([Luke 23:8-12](#))
- Jesus appears before Pilate a second time and is condemned to die ([Matt. 27:15-26](#); [Mark 15:6-15](#); [Luke 23:13-25](#); [John 18:38b-19:16](#))
- He is then mocked and marched to Golgotha ([Matt. 27:27-34](#); [Mark 15:16-23](#); [Luke 23:26-49](#); [John 19:17](#)) where He is crucified between two thieves ([Matt. 27:35-44](#); [Mark 15:24-32](#); [Luke 23:33-43](#); [John 19:18-27](#))
- He breathes His last ([Matt. 27:45-56](#); [Mark 15:33-41](#); [Luke 23:44-49](#); [John 19:28-37](#)) and Joseph of Arimathea buries Him in a new tomb ([Matt. 27:57-61](#); [Mark 15:42-47](#); [Luke 23:50-56](#); [John 19:38-42](#))
- On Saturday, the chief priests and Pharisees place guards at the tomb with Pilate's permission ([Matt. 27:57-61](#); [Mark 15:42-47](#); [Luke 23:50-56](#); [John 19:38-42](#))
- On Sunday some women discover the empty tomb and are instructed by angels ([Matt. 28:1-7](#); [Mark 16:1-7](#); [Luke 24:1-7](#); [John 20:1](#))
- The women, fearful and joyful, leave the garden and tell His disciples ([Matt. 28:8-10](#); [Luke 24:8-11](#); [John 20:2](#))
- Peter and John rush to the tomb based upon Mary Magdalene's report and discover it empty ([Luke 24:12](#); [John 20:3-10](#))
- Mary returns to the tomb and encounters Jesus ([John 20:11-18](#))
- Jesus appears to Cleopas and a friend on the road to Emmaus ([Luke 24:13-35](#))
- That evening Jesus appears to the Eleven (minus Thomas) in a house in Jerusalem ([Luke 24:36-43](#); [John 20:19-23](#))
- Later He appears to the Eleven again but this time with Thomas ([John 20:24-31](#))
- He then appears to some of His disciples at the Sea of Galilee ([John 21](#))

- He then gives them the Great Commission ([Matt. 28:16–20](#) (see also [Luke 24:45–49](#); [John 20:21–23](#); [Acts 1:8](#)) and later ascends back to the Father ([Luke 24:50–53](#); [Acts 1:9–11](#)) (Taken from John MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 2 Corinthians and Andreas J. Köstenberger, The Final Days of Jesus: The Most Important Week of the Most Important Person Who Ever Lived)
- The crucifixion of Christ is the climax of redemptive history
- God's plan of salvation culminates in the cross, as the Lord bears the sins of the world and provides salvation for all who believe in Him
- Our text this morning is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 5:21
- This verse, comprises 15 Greek words, and gives us the purpose of Jesus' crucifixion from God's standpoint

It says...

2 Corinthians 5:21 LSB

²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- All of us have been affected by what the Puritan writer Ralph Venning calls the “plague of plagues”
- This one plague is more widespread and deadly than all others combined
- It effects every person who ever lived – and is 100 percent fatal
- Unlike other plagues, which cause only physical death, this plague causes spiritual and eternal death as well
- The plague I am referring to is the plague of sin
- Because Adam's fall plunged the entire human race into sin ([Rom.5:12-21](#)), all people are sinners from birth
- [Psalm 51:5](#) says, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me”
- In [Psalm 58:3](#), David adds, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth”
- Not only are all people sinners by nature, they are also sinners by action
- Paul said in [Romans 3:10](#), “There is none righteous, not even one”
- Later in that same chapter he added, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” ([Rom.3:23](#))
- Therefore, “There is no man who does not sin” ([1 Kings 8:46](#)), and no one who can say, “I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin” ([Prov.20:9](#))
- So the inevitable outcome for all those infected by the sin plague is death.

- [Ezekiel 18:20](#) states plainly, “The person who sins will die”
- Adam’s tragic epitaph, “and he died” ([Gen.5:5](#)) will be written for all his descendants
- The prognosis is no better in the spiritual realm
- Sin produces two disastrous spiritual consequences: alienation from God in this life and unrelenting punishment in hell in eternity
- But the good news of the gospel is that there is a cure for the sinner infected by the deadly sin epidemic
- God, in His mercy and love, provided a remedy for sin – the sacrifice of His Son
- The Lord Jesus Christ “released us from our sins by His blood” ([Rev.1:5](#))
- [Hebrews 10:14](#) says, “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified”
- Those who experience “redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of [their] trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” ([Eph.1:7](#)) are cured from sin’s deadly spiritual effects.
- As a result, they have “passed out of death unto life” ([1 Jn.3:14](#)) and “are no longer strangers and aliens, but...are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household” ([Eph.2:19](#))
- How God made the cure possible is the theme of verses 18-20
- In those three verses, Paul described the glorious truth of reconciliation – that the sin-severed relationship between holy God and unregenerate sinners can be restored “through” and “in” Christ
- Notice verse 21 begins with God
- It says, “He”
- “The end of verse 20 reveals the antecedent ‘He’ to be God the Father” (MacArthur)

• So it all starts with...

I. God Initiated Our Reconciliation (v.21a)

A. Reconciliation is God’s Plan

1. It could not occur unless He initiated and applied it

- Verse 18 says, “Now all these things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ.”
- Verse 19 continues by saying that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself...”

2. It could not occur apart from Him because sinners cannot devise their own religious approach to God; for they are “dead in [their] trespasses and sins” ([Eph.2:1](#)).

- The dooming lie of false religion is that man can reconcile himself to God by his own efforts.
 - But all attempts are futile
 - Paul said in [Titus 3:5](#) that it was “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us” (NKJV).
 - In [Ephesians 2:4](#), he said that it was because of God’s “great love with which He loved us,” and in verse 9 that it was “not as a result of works” on our part.
 - All our deeds apart from Jesus Christ are like “a filthy garment; and all of [them] wither away like a leaf, and [their] iniquities, like the wind, take [them] away” ([Isa.64:6](#), NKJV).
 - As a result, “There is none righteous, not even one” ([Rom.3:10](#)).
 - Not even the “Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh” ([Rom.9:4-5](#)) could devise a way to reconcile themselves to God by their own efforts.
 - [Romans 10:1-3](#), expressing Paul’s deep concern for them, reflects that truth:
 - “Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. 2 For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. 3 For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.”
 - “Despite their zeal for God, they had not achieved salvation, because they sought it through their own righteousness. The religion of human achievement, whether practiced by Jews or Gentiles, can never bring reconciliation with God. The only way reconciliation can take place is if God reached out to sinners; and He did by the sacrifice of His Son” (MacArthur)
3. Jesus did not go to the cross “because a fickle people turned on Him, though they did. He did not go to the cross because demon-deceived false religious leaders plotted His death, though they did. He did not go to the cross because Judas betrayed Him, though he did. He did not die because an angry, unruly mob intimidated a Roman governor into sentencing Him to crucifixion, though they did. Jesus went to the cross as the outworking of God’s plan to reconcile sinners to Himself. In the first Christian sermon ever preached, Peter declared to the nation of Israel that Jesus ‘was delivered over [to death] by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God’ ([Acts 2:23](#))” (MacArthur).
4. Only God could design an atonement for sin that would satisfy the demands of His justice, propitiate His wrath, and be consistent with His love, grace, and mercy.
5. Only God could conceive a plan in which the second person of the Trinity would, “being found in appearance as a man, [humble] Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” ([Phil.2:8](#)).
6. Only God knew what it would take to rescue sinners “from the domain of darkness, and [transfer them] to the kingdom of His beloved Son” ([Col.1:13](#)), making them “qualified...to share

in the inheritance of the saints in Light” ([Col.1:12](#)).

7. Only God knew how to make sinners deserving of hell acceptable in His sight and fit to spend eternity in His presence.

8. Therefore, only God could author and execute the plan of redemption and reconcile sinners to Himself.

· So...

B. Reconciliation Flows Out of God’s Love

1. It is because He “so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” ([Jn.3:16](#)).

2. It is a demonstration of “His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” ([Rom.5:8](#)).

3. It is because “God [is] rich in mercy, [and] because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, [He] made us alive together with Christ” ([Eph.2:4-5](#)).

- The next phrase in [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) shows how God provided His own appeasement for justice and the means for sinners to become His beloved children. Paul says, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf.”
- “This designation points unmistakably to the only possible sacrifice for sin
- It eliminates every human who ever lived, “for there is no man who does not sin” ([1 Kings 8:46](#)), since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” ([Rom.3:23](#)).
- Only one who “knew no sin” of his own could qualify to bear the full wrath of God against the sins of others.
- The perfect sacrifice for sin would have to be a human being, for only a man could die for other men.
- Yet he would have to be God, for only God is sinless.
- That narrows the field to one, the God-man, Jesus Christ” (MacArthur).

· In this next phrase we see that:

II. Jesus Was Treated As If He Were A Sinner (v.21b)

A. “Him Who Knew No Sin” Refers to Jesus

This truth was affirmed by:

1. Jesus Himself - [John 8:46](#)

“Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?”

2. Pilate, who repeatedly affirmed Jesus’ innocence, said, “I find no guilt in this man” ([Lk.23:4](#); cf. vv.14, 22).

3. The thief on the cross, also said “This man has done nothing wrong” ([Lk.23:41](#)).

4. The Roman Centurion in charge of the execution detail also admitted, “Certainly this man was innocent” ([Lk.23:47](#)).

5. The apostles testified to His sinlessness

- Peter publicly proclaimed Him to be the “Holy and Righteous One” ([Acts 3:14](#))
- In Peter’s first epistle he declared Jesus to be “unblemished and spotless” ([1 Pet.1:19](#)); one “who committed no sin” (2:22); and “just” (3:18).
- John said “in Him there is no sin” ([1 John 3:5](#))
- The writer of Hebrews said that “we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” ([Heb.4:15](#)), because He is “holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens” (7:26).

B. After Presenting Jesus as the Absolutely Holy Substitute for Sinners, the Text Makes the Remarkable Statement that God Made Him “to be sin”

1. This does not mean that Christ became a sinner – that would go against what Scripture teaches “As God in human flesh, He could not possibly have committed any sin or in any way violated God’s law...He was the unblemished Lamb while on the Cross, personally guilty of no evil” (MacArthur).

2. [Isaiah 53:4-6](#) describes the only sense in which Jesus could have been made sin

“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.”

- Christ was not made a sinner, nor was He punished for any sin of His own
- Instead, the Father treated Him as if He were a sinner by charging to His account the sins of everyone who would ever believe.

- “The one who lived a sinless life died a sinner’s death, estranged from God and the object of wrath. He was treated as a sinner in his death” (Garland, D. E. (2001, c1999). Vol. 29: 2 Corinthians (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (Page 301).
- It is crucial to understand “that the only sense in which Jesus was made sin was by imputation.
- He was personally pure, yet officially culpable [deserving blame]; personally holy, yet forensically guilty. But in dying on the cross Christ did not become evil like we are, nor do redeemed sinners become inherently as holy as He is.
- God credits believers’ sin to Christ’s account, and His righteousness to theirs” (MacArthur).
- In [Galatians 3:10-12](#) Paul explains the necessity of believers’ sins being imputed to Christ.
- There is no way for sinners to reconcile themselves to God, because no one is able to “abide by all things written in the book of the law , to perform them” (v.10).
- “Violating even one precept of the Law warrants eternal punishment in hell. Thus, the entire human race is cursed and unable to do anything to lift that curse. Therefore, the only reason believers can be reconciled to God is because ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” (v.13).
- Were it not for the fact that ‘while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly’ ([Rom.5:6](#)), no one could be reconciled to God” (MacArthur).

· That leads to...

III. The Purpose of Reconciliation is that We Might Become the Righteousness of God in Him (v.21c)

A. The People of Reconciliation Are Those Chosen in Him Before the Foundation of the World

- “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”
- “The antecedent of our reconciliation is the phrase “ambassadors for Christ” in verse 20; those to whom the “word of reconciliation” was committed (v.19), who have been reconciled to God (v.18), and are new creatures in Christ (v.17)” (MacArthur).

1. Christ’s substitutionary death was efficacious only for those who would believe

- [John 1:12](#) - “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”

- [John 3:16-18](#) - “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”
- [Romans 10:9-10](#) - “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”
- Only those who believe “become children of God.” They will “not perish but have everlasting life,” because they are not “condemned.”

2. All those whom the Father gives to Jesus He draws to Him

- [John 6:37](#) - “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.”
- [John 6:65](#) - “And He was saying, ‘For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.’”

B. The Result of Reconciliation is Us Becoming the Righteousness of God in Him

- The phrase “so that” reflects “a purpose cause in the Greek text. The benefit of God’s imputing believers’ sins to Christ and His righteousness to them is that they become righteous before Him.

1. Paul said it this way in [Philippians 3:9](#), “And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”

- “The very righteousness God requires before He can accept the sinner is the very righteousness He provides. Because Jesus paid the full penalty for believers’ sin, God no longer holds it against them” (MacArthur).

2. In [Psalm 32:1](#) David wrote, “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered!”

3. In [Psalm 130:3-4](#) the psalmist added, “If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.”

- “In metaphorical pictures of forgiveness, God is said to have removed believers’ sins as far from them as the east is from the west ([Ps.103:12](#)); cast their sins behind His back ([Isa.38:17](#)); promised never to remember them ([Isa.43:25](#)); hidden them from His sight behind a thick cloud ([Isa.44:22](#)); and cast them into the depths of the sea” ([Mic.7:19](#)).

CONCLUSION

- Believers experience the blessedness of forgiveness solely by faith in the complete redemption provided by Jesus Christ; “the righteousness of God [comes] through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe” ([Rom.3:22](#)).
- They are “justified as a gift by His grace through redemption which is in Christ Jesus” ([Rom.3:24](#)); therefore, God is “the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” ([Rom.3:26](#)).
- In [Romans 3:28](#) Paul stated definitively, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”
- When repentant sinners acknowledge their sin ([Ps.32:5](#)), affirm Jesus as Lord ([Rom.10:9](#)), and trust solely in His completed work on their behalf ([Acts 4:12](#); [16:31](#)), God credits His righteousness to their account
- On the cross God treated Jesus as if He had lived our lives with all our sin, so that God could then treat us as if we lived Christ’s life of pure holiness
- Our iniquitous life was legally charged to Him on the cross, as if He had lived it, so that His righteous life could be credited to us, as if we lived it
- That is the doctrine of justification by imputation
- That truth, expressed so concisely and powerfully in this text, is the only cure for the sin plague
- As we reflect this week on the death and resurrection of Jesus, focus on why He was made “to be sin on our behalf.”
- Paul says, “so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”
- Have you been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ?
- Are you a “new creature” in Christ (v.17)?
- Are you an “ambassador for Christ” (v.20)?
- If not, I want to urge you to acknowledge your sin ([Ps.32:5](#)), affirm Jesus as Lord ([Rom.10:9](#)), and trust solely in His completed work on your behalf ([Acts 4:12](#); [16:31](#))
- If you will do that this morning, God will credit His righteousness to your account
- Let’s pray