

## Christ was made Sin

As responsible creatures we are under obligation to keep the Law of God - but we did not; as law-breakers we are under the condemnation of the same law. We have no title to eternal life, but rather we are in danger of death in hell forever.

Thanks be to God for he did not leave us in our helpless state. 2 Corinthians 5:21 is a profound statement on the gospel message: God justifies the ungodly through his Son Jesus Christ because he fulfilled the Law for us by obeying all its precepts perfectly and endured its awful penalty. "For He (God) made Him (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." May the Spirit of God help us understand and appreciate God's work of reconciliation through his Son.

### Made Sin for Us

The Lord Jesus is able to free us from sin because he himself was sinless. The Bible is emphatic on this point. Jesus was tempted in all points yet "without sin" (Hebrews 4:15); in him "there is no sin" (1 John 3:5); he "committed no sin" (1 Peter 2:22); Jesus is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26).

The apostle Paul declares that he "knew no sin", but what he says next is truly astonishing. God made his sinless Son "to be sin for us". The Righteous was made *sin* for us!

In what sense was Jesus made sin? We can be sure that this does not mean that God made Jesus a sinner, for Christ never committed the least sin in word, thought or deed. He lived a perfect life.

But what does that mean – made "sin" for us? The prophet Isaiah says that "the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"; he was stricken "for the transgressions" of God's people; his soul was made "an offering for sin" (Isaiah 53). The New Testament similarly teaches that Christ "bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24)

Our spiritual debt was transferred to Christ; he became legally responsible for our guilt – in this sense he was "made sin". Christ did not suffer and die on the cross for any sin of his own, but to pay the full penalty for the sins of his people, as the prophet had foretold: "the punishment that brought us peace was upon him."

### The Righteousness of God

God did not only free us from guilt and punishment; he also gave us the title and right to heaven. God gave his Son "that we might become the righteousness of God in him" – that we, sinners and enemies of God, might become righteous and just in his sight.

But what is this righteousness which gives us the right legal standing before the Divine Judge? The Bible tells us that it is not our own righteousness produced by our obedience to the law or by our works. It is the righteousness "of God" provided for us in Christ, wrought for us by Christ's obedience (Romans 5:18, 19), and received by faith. Elsewhere the apostle Paul explains how he counted his own merits as rubbish in order to be found in Christ "not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Philippians 3:9).

Just as Jesus was not made "sin" on account of his personal sins, but because of our sins, even so believers are made "righteousness" on account of Christ's perfect obedience and not our own. What a wonderful exchange: he took our sin; we share his perfect righteousness.

## **Righteous in Christ**

But who is actually reconciled to God? They are at peace with God whose sins are not counted against them and who had been given the gift of righteousness. This grace is bestowed to those who are “in him” – in Christ Jesus. Please note the last two words of the phrase, “that we might become the righteousness of God *in Him*.” We must be united to Christ by faith to be freed from sin and made right with God. Those who remain outside of Christ can expect nothing but wrath, condemnation and hell.

This, then, is the gospel. God treated Christ as if he had committed all the sins of all his people and punished him on the cross instead of punishing us in hell forever. Moreover God now reckons us who are united with Christ as if we had lived his perfect obedience, declaring us righteous and fit for heaven for his sake.

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”