

2 Corinthians 5:21

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Date: 23 January 1983

Preacher: Donald Macleod

[0 : 01] We shall turn now to 2 Corinthians 5, reading at verse 21. 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21.

For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that will be made the righteousness of God in him.

Amen. In the closing part of this chapter, Paul is defining for us his own relation to the Christian gospel.

And he does so in terms of two words especially. In verse 18, he refers to the ministry of reconciliation.

That is something he says that God has given to us. And from that point of view, Paul sees himself as the servant or the minister, the deacon of the Christian gospel.

[1 : 27] He is not its owner. He is not its lord. He is very much its servant. He is its dispenser. And then in verse 20, he has another word.

He says, we are ambassadors for Christ. We are servants of reconciliation. We are ambassadors of Christ.

Paul sees himself as the Lord's plenipotentiary. The one who represents Christ to sinners.

The one who speaks in Christ's name to sinners. The one who speaks with Christ's authority. The one who does business for the Lord of glory in this fallen, un sinful world.

And I want for a moment just to lay hold of that word. The sole idea of the apostle as an ambassador of Christ.

[2 : 44] I don't want to apply it to every preacher because we aren't apostles. But this was how Paul saw himself. He was Christ's ambassador.

And the question I want to ask is, how does Paul conceive of his own role? What were the ambassadors' precise functions?

And I think that Paul offers to that a twofold answer. First of all, it was his business to explain the gospel.

That is what he says, because the word of reconciliation in verse 19. God has committed to us the word that is the logos, the reason, the explanation, the doctrine of reconciliation.

And the second thing was that the ambassador was called upon to plead with men. We beseech you in Christ's stead.

[4 : 01] Be you reconciled to God. And so the apostle has this twofold role. First of all, to explain the gospel. And then secondly, to plead with men in the name of that gospel and in the name of the Lord of that gospel.

And I want for a moment tonight to try to follow the apostle along those two lines. I want us first of all to look at this whole question of explaining the gospel.

What is the word of reconciliation? And it's that word which we have in verse 21. The word is, God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin.

That is Paul's gospel. That is the logos. That is the launching. That is Paul's statement. That is Paul's explanation.

Of the very heart of the Christian message. I want to analyze for a moment its elements. It tells us to begin with that God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us.

[5 : 20] The very first point in Paul's word is that Christ was absolutely without sin. He knew no sin.

We have emphasized often that Christ had a humanness. That was in every respect identical with the role.

The Lord had a human body. The Lord underwent human growth and development. The Lord experienced human education.

The Lord had a human mind. Human emotions. Human affections. Human relationships. Human decision making.

The Lord had human experiences. The Lord endured human suffering. The Lord went through human temptation. Humanization. In all of these points.

[6:21] There is continuity. Between us and him. But there is one point. At which the New Testament is emphatic.

That there is no continuity. There is discontinuity. And it is this very point. That Paul mentions here. Christ.

You know sin. Every other human being has known sin. And at every other point. Christ is like. Every other human being. But at this point. Christ is utterly unlike. Here. All the similarities. All the continuity.

Continuity ends. Here we have one. Who is without sin. In other words. In Christ. There was no actual sin.

[7:20] There was no sinful deed. There was no sinful word. There was no sinful thought. There was no sinful emotion. There was no sinful desire.

There was no sinful ambition. All that belongs. All that belongs. To the whole complex. Of actual sin. And in Christ. There was none of that.

But I go beyond that. And I say. Not only was he without actual sin. But he was completely without. Original sin. In other words. I hold. That Christ was unfallen. I hold. That his human nature.

Was unfallen. I believe. That in Christ. There is all the compassion. In the world. There is all the sympathy.

[8:17] In the world. There is all the empathy. There is all the understanding. Of my predicament. And my position. But I. Believe. Most emphatically.

That we never have any right. To speak. Of the Lord's humanness. As a fallen. Humanness. The best definition.

I know. Of fallen humanness. Is the one given to us. In our shorter catechism. Which speaks. Of sin.

In those terms. The guilt. Of Adam's first sin. The want. Of original righteousness. Of the corruption. Of our whole nature. And when I meet a man. Who speaks of the Lord's humanness. As a fallen humanness. I ask. Do you mean. That it lacked.

[9:14] Original righteousness. Do you mean. That it was corrupt. As all. Humanity. Is corrupt. In its entirety.

And I'm saying. That there is no way. It can comport. With the dignity. And identity. Of the son of God.

There is no way. It can fit. Into anything. We know. From the New Testament. About Jesus Christ. To allege of him.

That he lacked righteousness. To allege of him. That in his personality. There was corruption. Whether partial. Or entire.

And I'm saying. Instead. That not only. Was there no. Sinful deed. Attributable. To him. I'm saying.

[10:12] Also. There was no. Defect. In the structures. You go. Right into the roots. And foundations. Of the Lord's. Personality. And it is.

Sound. And it is. Unfallen. To the very core. There is no. Disturbance. There is no. Dislocation. There is no. Propensity.

To sin. There is no. Footfall. For sin. There is no. Possibility. Of sin. In Jesus Christ. It was said. By the old.

Theologians. Of the. Unfallen. Adam. That he was. Able. Not to sin. It was said. By the same.

Theologians. In the. United. Reformed. Tradition. That Christ. That Christ. Was. Not. Able. To sin.

[11:07] Adam. Was. Able. Not. To sin. Christ. Was. Not. Able. To sin. Sin. The moment. The moment. We bear in mind. That. He is.

The son of God. The moment. We bear in mind. That he is God. That he is God. In his own right. The moment. We see that. It becomes.

Impossible. To conceive. Of him. As. In any. Meaning. Of the word. Fallen. In any meaning.

Of the word. Liable to sin. It could not be. That the son of God. Should be a fallen person. It could not be. That the son of God.

Should be characterized. By the want to righteousness. Or by the corruption. Of his nature. Paul's. Paul's. Logos.

[12:00] Paul's word. Paul's. Ambassadorial. Explanation. Of the gospel. Begins. With the affirmation. That his Christ.

His Lord. Had no sin. There was no sin. In his actions. And there was no possibility. Of sin. In his personality.

And the second point. In Paul's word. Is this. God. Made him sin.

God. Made him sin. There is no word. Anywhere. In the whole of scripture. There is more awe. Inspiring. And more intimidating. Than that. God. But I remind you. Of what we. Saw last Lord's Day. Evening. In the fellowship.

[12:59] We were speaking of. The prescribed syllabus. And I dare to suggest. That the Bible was. The prescribed syllabus.

And that because it is. The prescribed syllabus. Then the Lord's people. Must wrestle with all of it. And I am going to say.

That those words here. God made Christ's sin. These are part. Of God's. Prescribed syllabus. They are part of God's curriculum.

They are part. Of what God wants you to know. And what God wants you to understand. And I point out also. How close.

This whole marvelous statement lies. To the very heart. Of Paul's. Evangelistic appeal. Because it's going on to appeal.

[14:04] And it's not appealing. In the name. Of illustrations. Or in the name of anecdotes. Or in the name. Of the self evident.

Is going to appeal. In the name of this. Absolutely incomparable. Theological conundrum. It is the most difficult.

The most. Staggering statement. In the whole word of God. I've preached. On these words. I'm sure. 30 or 40 times. And I preached.

Differently. On them every time. Because I try. To climb the mountain. The cliff face. And. Every time. I fall off. And.

I fall off. Tonight too. But they remain. Part. Of the syllabus. They remain. The basis. Of the greatest.

[15:01] Appeal. To the enemies. Of God. To be found. Anywhere. In the whole. Of the scripture. And that's why. I want you to look at them with me.

For a moment. God. Made. Christ. Sin. Now it doesn't mean of course. That God. Impelled. Christ. To sin. It isn't made. In a sense of. Compelling. As we say. He made me do it. It isn't in that sense. That Paul uses.

It. And it doesn't mean. That God. Made Christ. Sinful. That God. Defiled. Or. God. Corrupted. Or God. Polluted. Or God.

Depraved. The personality. Of his old son. It can't possibly. Mean that. The only light.

[15:55] I have on it. Is the light. That I would. Take from. Isaiah 53. Well there are two great words.

That. Go some way. Towards elucidating. This terrible statement. And one of the words. Is this. The Lord. Hath laid on him. The iniquities.

Of us all. The Lord. Hath laid on him. The iniquities. Of us all. This. Greatest. And this most.

Staggering thing. That. Jehovah. Ever did. Jehovah. Laid sin. On his own son. God.

Took this. Great burden. Of human sin. And God. Laid it on him. So that he became.

[16:53] The lamb of God. That bears the sin. Of the world. God laid on him. Our guilt. God.

Placed against his name. Our debts. God made him liable. For our trespasses. In that sense.

The Lord laid on him. The iniquities of us all. And we see the son of God. Who is the lamb of God. We see him as the sin bearer.

We see him. On the way of the cross. Bearing the burden. Of the sin of the world. Whose own self. Bore our sin. In his own body. To the tree. Christ. The bearer. Of human iniquity. Christ.

[17:52] The one. Who by God. Is made answerable. For our sin. But then there is a second word. In his fire. And it's this. It pleased the Lord.

To bruise. It is a terrible thing. That God. Who laid on him. The iniquity of us all.

God. But then the gospel. Goes beyond. But this great news. Have you. Heard the news. About God's son. God made him sin.

The news is. That God. Laid on him. The iniquity of us all. The news is. That it pleased the Lord. To bruise him. You bear in mind.

The imputation. The imputation. Goes before the bruising. The transference of guilt. Goes before the suffering. The Lord lays on him.

[18 : 50] The iniquity. And the Lord bruises. The Lord crushes. The Lord deals out to him.

All that our sin. Deserved. Great word of Romans 8. He did not spare. His own son.

God. God. Visits Jesus. With all that our sin. Deserved. That is Paul's.

Explanation. That is. Good. Paul's. Logos. That is the word. Preached in the marketplace. In the synagogues.

Of dispersed Judaism. That is the word. That turned the world. Upside down. The word.

[19 : 47] Of the conundrum. God. Made his own son. Sin. God. Laid on him. Human iniquity.

God. Bruised him. For human sin. He received. The wages of sin. Because.

Of the burden. He bore. He is born. In a low condition. Because. Of the terrible reputation.

Because. Of the guilt. That he bore. He experiences. All the mysteries. Of this life. Because. Of the burden. He bore. He is immolated.

On the cross. Of shame. Because. Of the burden. That he bore. He must. Pour. His soul out. Unto death.

[20 : 46] He must. Undergo. The terrible. Dismemberment. Of his personality. Which is death. In the severance. Of soul. And body.

And because. Of the name. He bears. As a sinner. Because. Of the name. That he bears. Sin.

Because. Of that. His death. Is death. Without mitigation. It is death. With a sting. It is death. With the anathema.

It is death. With a curse. Of God. And. He redeems us. From the curse. Of the law. Being made a curse. For us. He dies.

He is born. In loneliness. And shame. He walks. Through the veil. Of tears. He dies. And in that death.

[21 : 45] The unspeakable. Intensification. Of death. In the dereliction. My God. My God.

Why? That place. Where there is no sense. Of God's love. Where there is no sense.

Of God's care. Where there is no sense. Of God's control. Where there is no hope. That God will work. These two together. For good.

That place. Where there is no light. That place. Where there is no hope. Of victory. That place.

Where there is no support. That place. Where there is no comfort. That place.

Where a man cries. Why? And cries. Why? Into the emptiness. Of an answering God. That voice.

That comes. To God.

[22 : 39] From the far country. From his own son. My God. My God. Why? That voice. That God. In his love.

For his son. Would love to answer. Longs to answer. But cannot answer. He is in the far country.

And he can't answer. Because he is sinned.

He knew no sin. God made him sin. God laid on him. God laid on him. The iniquity. Of us all.

And God bruised him. There was all the bruising. Our sins deserved. So that tonight in Christ. We are immune. From the bruising.

We are immune. From the anathema. We are exempt. From the wrath. God. Because. Because. It pleased the Lord. In the glory of his grace. To bruise him.

[23 : 36] He knew no sin. God made him sin. By. Laying our sin on him. And bruising our sin. In him. And I do want you to know.

And I do want you to notice. What a terrible paradox that is. I want you to notice. The absurdity of it all.

I want you to notice. The ugliness of Calvary. I want you to notice. The darkness of Calvary. I want you to see.

The impenetrableness of Calvary. I want you to see. The foolishness of it. And the hellishness. And the. Very satanicalness.

Of it all. I want you to see. The incomprehensibility of it all. Because I am more and more convinced. That we handle this cross.

[24 : 43] Far too easily. Manage it too facilely. We take Calvary. In our stride. And I am saying to you. You have no right tonight.

To imagine. That here is the familiar. And here is the lucid. And here is the moral. And here is the lovely.

I have told you. I have told you ugly things. I have told you foolish things. I have told you absurd things. And if we haven't noticed.

Then we shall never see the glory of the gospel. I am not talking. I am not talking. I am not talking. About a golden crucifix. I am not talking.

About a beautiful green hill far away. I am talking. About the darkest. And the ugliest. And the least lucid moment.

[25 : 42] In the history. Of the world. Because what I have said to you is this. That God. Made the son of God.

Sing. And I am saying. That you have no right. To take that in your stride. You have no right to say. If you have heard it all. You have no right to say. How lovely. Because it is not lovely. You have no right to say. How simple. Because it is not simple.

You have no right to say. How moving. Because it is not moving. The men who saw it happen. They were bewildered. And they forsook him.

And they fled. And they ran. And they destroyed their faith. They destroyed their hope. It made them moral and spiritual wrecks.

[26 : 40] Because they saw the ugliness of it. And they saw the horror. And they saw the folly of it. And until we see these things ourselves.

We'll never know their power. And you say to me. Well what do I mean by all this emphasis on. The ugliness and the folly of it all. I come back to this.

We're talking about something that God did. And God is love. We're talking about something that God did.

And God is righteous. And here. Is the God of love. And the God of infinite rectitude.

The God of unblemished integrity. And he's taking. The sinless one. And making him sin. The one in unison.

[27 : 39] He takes. The only. He takes. The only. Lovely. Glorious. Beautiful person there has ever been.

He takes sin. And he makes him sin. He takes his own son. And he bruises.

Takes his own son and crushes. Takes his own son. And forsakes. Takes his own son. And desolates.

Takes his own son. And refuses. To hear. The cry. Of his inexpressible anguish.

As it comes. From the far country. And I'm saying. You've got a problem. And I'm saying. I've got a problem.

[28 : 41] I am saying. The cross. Needed. An ambassador. It needed. Someone to explain it.

It needed. Someone to defend it. It needed. Someone to vindicate. At Calvary. The ways of God. Not this time with men.

But with his only son. And I cast a boat. In a kind of theologian's desperation. I cast a boat for a logos.

And people ask me what I'm looking for. And I say I'm looking. For a way to explain Calvary. For a way to justify Calvary.

I'm looking for an explanation. I'm looking for the Lord's sake of it. I'm looking for the reason of it. And the heart of the gospel lies.

[29 : 44] And Paul's great discovery. Of that explanation. And I live with it.

I live in it. And I live by it. And it's there. So obscure. It's there.

So easily passed by. In the glory. Of the New Testament's propositional theology. In verse 21. For us.

In my place. Condemned. He stood. And I ever sinned.

From that point. Seen. I ever sinned. From that point. Delivered. I ever sinned.

[30 : 46] From it. Irradiated. And inspired. And free. And redeemed. For us. Why.

Why. Why did God. Prove the innocent. For us. Why.

Did God. Not hear. Why did God. Forsake. For us. For us. For us. My theology.

Needs. That preposition. As it may. Beats. Nothing else. I live. By far. I survive.
 By far. I preach. For. Christ. Our representative. Christ. Our substitute.
 [31 : 46] Christ. The judge. Judged. In my place. Christ. Christ. Christ. For me. Christ.
 For us. Christ. For. Not because. The father. Forces him. To be there. But because. He. Wants.
 To be there. He loved. The church. And gave. Himself. For it. For it.
 For it. Always. For. For. That is. Our gospel. This great world.
 For. For. For. For. For. For. For. He. In our place. And I carry one.
 [32 : 43] Stage. Beyond that. And I see this. Well. What is the result? And what is the
 consequence? What is the. Upshot of it all? And it's this. That we might be made.
 God's. Righteousness. In him. And. You see the beautiful. Multiple antitheses.
 That we have. Built into that. He who knew no sin. Is made sin. For us.
 Who knew no righteousness. That we should become. Righteousness. In him. There is the
 contrast.
 Between Christ. And us. There is the contrast. Between sin. And righteousness. And there is. Not
 the contrast.
 [33 : 42] Perhaps so much. As the tension. Between those two. Mighty. Prepositions. Christ.
 Christ. For us. And we.
 In. In Christ. By being. For us. Christ. Contracts. Sin.
 By being. In him. We contract. Righteousness. Righteousness. And you see.
 The glory. Of that righteousness. The righteousness. Of God. How righteous. Is a man. In Christ.
 He is righteous.
 With all. The righteousness. Of God. Righteous. With all. The righteousness. Which God's.
 Righteousness.
 [34 : 39] Required. Freedom. To require. How is it mine. It is mine. In Christ.
 And it's on this great basis. That Paul builds. This reconciliation. Why does God forgive us. Why is
 God reconciled to us.
 Because. Because. We are righteous. We are blameless. We are exonerated. We are vindicated. In
 the obedience. And suffering.
 Of the son of God. We are righteous. In Christ. I wonder. Wonder. Wonder. Wonder. How often do
 we see ourselves. In that light.
 There is no stain. Sinners. Plunge. Beneath this flood. Lose all. The very guilty stay. I have.
 [35 : 40] Got to. Such a standing. In God's presence. I am so. Blameless. In God's presence.
 Presence. All my past. Is forgotten.
 All my past. Is cancelled. God has cast it. Into the depths. Of the sea. And I have. What standing.
 Do I have in heaven. I have the standing.
 Of the son of God. He is my sponsor. He is my advocate. He is my name. He is my password. He is
 my reputation.
 All that Jesus did. He did for me. That is the gospel. That is the assurance. Of life. Behind this.
 Whole possibility. Of reconciliation.
 Every step. Was obedience. Every obedient step. Was for me. It was all. The cares. You have the
 great. Logic. Reformation. Theology.
 [36 : 37] Of imputation. And counter imputation. All my sin. Was reckoned to Christ. My every
 single sin. And all his righteousness.
 And it's every element. And it's every phase. All of that is reckoned to me. And I am righteous in
 him. And on that basis. I have peace with God.
 I have peace with God. Because. I in Christ. Am a righteous man. And that is the great challenge.
 Eventually. Whether we are in Christ.
 He for us. Sin. We in him. Righteousness. That is Paul's.
 Word. Paul's explanation. Let me come briefly. To the second. Great thing. Which is this. Paul's
 appeal. And Paul's appeal.
 [37 : 36] Is built. On the great foundation. Of this mass of theology. And he says. We are
 ambassadors. For Christ. As though God did beseech you.
 By us. We pray you in Christ's head. Be ye reconciled to God. In other words. On the basis.

Of his gospel indicatives. Paul builds his gospel imperative. On the foundation. Of what God has done.

In Christ. Christ. Paul faces each of us tonight. With this mighty. Directive. Be ye.

Reconciled. To God. Paul is wanting. A response. To the cross. The response.

[38 : 33] That Paul is wanting. Is that we should accept it. We should accept. God's reconciliation. We should accept.

God's terms. We should accept. God's peace. We should use Paul's language. In Romans. We should submit ourselves.

To the righteousness of God. Paul is saying. Look. My master and you are at enmity.

My master and you are at war. Between you and my master. There is the most appalling tension. But my master.

My Lord. My government. Have taken. Momentous steps. For reconciliation. And in his name.

[39 : 32] I offer you peace. In his name. I offer you terms. And I want you to accept. To every sinner.

Paul is saying the same thing. Be reconciled to God. Make peace with God. How do we respond. To what. God has done. With indifference. With rejection. With hostility. Or do you.

Says the apostle. Submit. Do you accept God's terms. Be reconciled. I tell you two things.

Paul says it as an ambassador. He speaks. Us of plenty. Potentially. With full power. And full authority. He is speaking forth.

[40 : 39] The mind of his master. Telling what his master has done. Telling what his master requires. Is saying. Christ was for you.

You come. To be in him. That in him. Is vital. And with all his authority. And all his prestige.

As an ambassador. Of the son of God. Paul says. Be reconciled. To God. It's a terrible thing.

That authority. And it's a terrible thing. The rejection. But it's not the greatest thing.

And it's in fact. Not even the distinguishing thing. Of Paul's appeal. The distinguishing thing. In Paul's appeal. Is its tone.

[41 : 45] The tone of entreaty. And the tone. Of beseeching. As though God did beseech you.

By us. We pray you. We beg you. Be reconciled. To God. Paul.

Was a logical preacher. Paul was an argumentative preacher. But Paul was also.

A pleading. Passionate. Begging. Preacher. And so tonight.

You stand before. A beseeching. And a pleading Paul. But that's not all. As though God.

[42 : 50] Did beseech you. In other words. Behind. The beseeching Paul. There is a beseeching Jesus. We pray you.

In Christ's head. Paul. On bended knee. Saying to these people. My Lord.

Begs you. On bended knee. Be reconciled. That is almost as big. An anomaly.

And as glorious. A paradox. As a statement. God made him sin. Because it is telling us.

That the God of heaven. Is on his knees. Pleading. Pleading. Beseeching sinners. To be reconciled.

[43 : 52] To lay down. Their enmity. Behind my passion. There is Paul's passion. Behind Paul's passion.

There is God's. Passion. He lives. He lives. He lives. In preparation as we watch. In wholeport. metro. E That God is on bended knee.

Pleading. For those who are not in Christ. To come to be in Christ. I believe that.

God beseeches. And God entreats. God pulls. And God tugs. And God wrestles. And I'm saying again.

Be reconciled. Because he made him who knew no sin. To be sin. For us.

[45 : 04] We have a glorious affirmation. That. That. Christ was made sin. For us. That tonight is accomplished.

Historical fact. It's not the preposition for. That bothers me. It's a preposition in.

That bothers me. Because there are some of you. Who are not in Christ. And it is to that. That the ambassador.

Pries himself. And begs. Beseeches. And treats you. To come to Christ. Christ. I'm not going to ask you.

To come forward. Or to stand up. Or to sign a card. Or make any other sign. But I am going to ask you.

[46 : 08] Where you are. To come into Christ. Christ. So that. By taking that step. You can benefit.

From the far. You must do it. God acquires you to do it. God.

Beseeches you to do it. God. God prays. God pleads. With you to do it. Let us pray.

Oh Lord. We need always. More light. We need the power of thy spirit.

We need thy known drawing. As our heavenly father. Oh Lord. Do draw us. Draw us all to thyself.

[47 : 17] That we may find peace with God. Peace with. Through being in the one. Who died for us.

May it be. Oh Lord. That we shall know that peace. That passes all understanding. That liberates from the fear of death.

That makes it the greatest longing. Of our lives. To be that place where. We see thee. As thou art. Lord.

May the day. Is. And we will be ready for it. When that great summons. Comes. For Jesus. Say.

Amen.

Thank you.