

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

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[0 : 00] 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 21. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.

We preach.

And that's why you and I need to have some understanding of this subject. Imputation is attributing something good or bad to someone.

And dealing with that person in the light of that imputation. Adam's sin and guilt, we saw it last week, has been imputed to us. He was our covenant head.

Whether you like it or not, we were involved in all the decision making processes of his rebellion against God. In the same way that we're involved in the decisions that our prime minister makes for our good or for our ill.

[1 : 12] We were all in Adam when he defied God. And it's perfectly right for the Lord to treat us as he does. It's not as though day after day we have to be forced to defy God.

There's no command from heaven that says to us every morning, Now ignore God today. Just think about yourself today. Please yourself today. And we reply, alright then. We freely choose, don't we, to keep the living God outside of our lives every day.

How many women choose to live is exactly reflecting God's assessment of them. And so Adam's guilt is our guilt. And we've gone the way of our father Adam.

We share his identical nature. In Adam, do you remember, we all die, the Bible says. And we deserve eternal death because we're sinners. The wages of sin, the Apostle Paul says, is death.

The sinful nature is original to us. And so something has to happen. Forgiveness is essential. Atonement is necessary. Christ, the Lamb of God has to die.

[2 : 22] It is new life that's required. We need the cross because of what we are. Through Adam's sin, we are all constituted as sinners.

And so is there a way that our sins can be removed? One of the most intriguing questions, I think, that I find really helpful to think about is why did the Lord Jesus die?

Have you thought about that? Why did the Lord Jesus die? At a human level, you can read the Gospels and you think, well, it's because of false testimony, isn't it?

The false witnesses. There were people bribed or they were threatened or they were sweet-talked into imputing wickedness to the Lord Jesus.

They testified to, remember, we heard this man blaspheming. And blasphemy was a capital offence in a theocratic Israel. So he was condemned, wasn't he, to be crucified to death.

[3 : 24] But actually anyone who reads the Gospel knows that it was a setup. The men were false testifying. They were false witnesses. Jesus of Nazareth, guilty of blasphemy.

It's beyond contempt. And so, think about it. What could the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount have done in order to be crucified? What did the man who went about doing good suddenly do to receive condemnation?

Everything about the Lord Jesus was good through and through. His friends who lived with him for three years, they compared him, do you remember, to a lamb without spot and blemish.

They quoted the Bible about him. They said he did no sin, neither was any deceit found in his mouth. In other words, the Lord Jesus, he was sincere in everything he said.

A Roman citizen like Pilate's wife said to her husband that this Jesus is an innocent man. A criminal who was being crucified alongside him said he's done nothing wrong, nothing worthy of death.

[4 : 33] The centurion who was looking at him being crucified, who was kind of overseeing the execution, said surely he was a righteous man, the Son of God.

The Apostle Paul, preaching in the Greek city of Athens, said to his hearers that in Jesus there was found nothing worthy of death. Even Christ himself, he asked those who knew him best, if any of

them could point out anything he'd done wrong.

His Father in heaven, who knew everything about him inwardly and outwardly, said, this is my beloved Son with whom I'm well pleased. Imagine with me, we had a spiritual MRI machine. Maybe some of you have had an MRI machine where you're put on a board and you're kind of put through that machine which x-rays everything about you. And let's say this spiritual MRI machine could detect any evidence of sin.

You put Jesus on the board, you feed him into the machine. And when you look at him through the scrutinising eyes of this imaginary machine, his whole being does not have one tiny cell of sin.

[5 : 50] Here's a man who lived in an ordinary home with his brothers and his siblings. He worked with his father in a carpenter's shop for about 17 years. He debated and he argued with inquirers and sceptics and enemies for three years.

And yet he remained as holy and sinless as God. His meat and drink was to do the will of God. There was never a one-off moment where he lost it.

Where he came short of the glory of God. So I'm asking you tonight, why did such a blameless man die? Why didn't God protect him and prevent him from dying?

If you had the power and some thugs were torturing your beloved only son, or let's say your nephew or your niece, wouldn't you want to rescue them?

Wouldn't you? Wouldn't even a bad man do that for his son, his daughter, his nephew and niece? If you just watched them and let them go on suffering terrible pain until they finished by cutting their throat, and you did nothing when you had the power to save them, well, wouldn't you be as bad as their killers?

[7 : 14] Why didn't God deliver his only son if he delighted in him? Was there some sin he committed?

None whatsoever. And so why is his father permitting him to die like this? Why is God standing back and doing nothing?

Where is the love of God? The Lord can deliver Elijah from salvation. He can deliver Jonah from death in the belly of a whale.

He can deliver Daniel from the lions. Those three men in Babylon from the fiery furnace. He can bring back Lazarus from death. He can deliver the demoniac from a legion of demons.

Peter from prison. Paul from drowning. And they're all sinners. All of them sinners. And yet God delivered them. Here's the blessed, sinless Lord Jesus.

[8 : 16] The word who was with God and who was God from the very beginning. The one whom he calls his beloved son. And where's the rescue mission? Why aren't there a kind of squadron of angels swooping down in heavenly commando style?

Why are the hosts of heaven mere spectators? Of the suffering of their Lord. Why should Jesus have to endure any of this?

Even for a second. He's done nothing wrong of such an end. And yet he hangs impaled to a cross with the heavens out before him. Paul in the fifth chapter of the second letter of the Corinthians.

Is speaking as someone who's been commissioned to go and herald. To go and tell. And he is the apostle of the Lord Jesus. As he says. At the end of the chapter.

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. As though God was speaking. Making his appeal through us. And we implore you. On behalf of Christ. Be reconciled to God.

[9 : 23] And then verse 21. Our verse. For he. For our sake. He made him. To be sin. Who knew. No sin. So that in him. We might become the righteousness of God. God. And so Paul is saying something absolutely breathtaking about Golgotha.

Something great was actually achieved by the agonising death of the Lord Jesus. Which could not have been achieved if Jesus had not died that death. It was this.

On Calvary. Can you see it? Verse 21. God made him. Who had no sin. To be sin for us. God. Was imputing. Our sin. To Christ. He was really.

Laying sin on him. We can say it a dozen ways. But the message is always the same. He was accounting. Christ. To be a sinner. He was charging Jesus. With our guilt. He was ascribing.

[10 : 27] To the spotless. Son. The shame. And the blame. Of our bad behaviour. He was reckoning. To the account. Of our Lord. Our sins. And making.

Him. Answer. For us. He cries. Listening on the cross. My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? Why should God add.

Such horrible insult. To the nails. And to the lash. Not rescuing. The one he loves. The one he loves the most.

God. At his hour of greatest need. Does the almighty know what's going on? Yes he does.

God is omniscient. Isn't he? He knows everything. And so the question. Of all questions. Is why should Jesus of Nazareth.

[11:23] The son of God. Suffer like that. Under the wrath. Of a. Of a sin hating God. When he is pure. And kind.

And holy. And sinless. Without a single blemish. On his character. He. He loved God. Didn't he? With all his heart. And mind. And soul. And strength. And he loved his neighbour. As himself. He's the only man ever to do it.

And so if God was counting. Christ sins against him. He didn't have any to count. Not one. And yet God. Is standing by.

And watching Jesus. His own son. Suffer a horrendous. Death. Nailed. Naked. By his hands. And his feet. To a cross. Why? Why?

How? How can the reputation of God. Be saved? Well it can be saved. If you understand this. One word. Imputation. In our place.

[12:27] The son. Was being condemned. Jesus. Was being made accountable. For what we have done. God was making his son. Answer. For my wrongdoing. And Jesus.

Was willingly. And freely. Choosing to be made. Sin. For us. The father. And the son. Were in. Harmonious.

Agreement. There was no disagreement. Between them. There was this mutual. And eternal. Love. For us. That this could be.

The only way. That fallen. Sons and daughters. Of Adam. Could be redeemed. There's something. In the very. Nature. Of. Who God is.

Requires. That death. Inevitably. Has to be the wages. Of sin. Sin. And that is how. The only God. That exists. So let me break it down.

[13:26] What do we see. On Gold Gotha. On the cross. Number one. The innocence. Of Jesus Christ. Has been confirmed. On the cross.

The innocence. Of Jesus Christ. Has been confirmed. Our verse again. God made. The one who knew. No sin. To be sin. Four. Words.

Don't fail to see them. He. Knew. No. Sin. That clears. For us. Is there any. Thoughts.

That Jesus kind of. Committed. Some kind of secret sins. That we don't know about. He wasn't guilty. Of any kind of. Private act of sin. And so. The apostle Paul here. Is in line with every other writer.

In the new testament. That they're totally united. In affirming with one voice. That. The Jesus. Who they knew so well. Was holy. Without anything sinful at all.

[14:21] He had no sins of commission. No sins of omission. No sins of imagination. No sins of thought.

Of emotion. Of affection. Of word. Or deed. He loved his enemies. He turned the other cheek. He was tempted. But he never received that temptation.

Into his heart. He didn't dwell on it. Satan tempted him. But he never yielded. To the devil. And so. In the Lord Jesus.

We are left. Aren't we. With the supreme example. Of what a real man is. Here is God's great definition. Of a man. Here is the proper man. The archetypal man.

And as he lived. So we should live. And walk through life. In. His steps. His enemies. They were desperate.

[15:16] To find something. That would stick. But they found. Nothing. The false witnesses. At his trial. Couldn't agree. Even the.

Sympathetic questioners. In the court. Of the Sanhedrin. They. They wanted a cast. Iron case. And a guilty verdict. They could see. That the charges. Against Jesus. Were just disintegrating.

The witnesses. Spoke up. But they. They failed to agree. As to the place. And the time. And the actual words. Which Jesus. Had alleged. To have spoken. Their stories. Didn't match. As you read. The end of the gospels. The case brought against Jesus. Is pathetic. And embarrassing. Jesus was a sinless man. In the Old Testament. There was a high priest.

And one day of the year. The day of atonement. The high priest. Had to enter the most holy place. On behalf of the people. And he didn't go in. Empty handed. He took with him.
[16:12] The blood of a sacrifice. And it was as much. For his own sins. As for the people's. Aaron. And his line.

Of. Of high priests. Were not sinless. But Jesus was. He needed no sacrifice. For himself. Never did a day. End. With Jesus. Saying to God. As we say to him. Forgive me. For the sins of today. He never prayed. That a single time. He taught his disciples. To pray. Forgive us. Our trespasses. But he never had to pray. That prayer. He never trespassed. He never. Once left. The narrow path. Which leads to God. I want you to note. Can you see the word.

[17:09] That Paul uses. The word that Paul uses. Is this. He says. Doesn't he. That Christ. Knew no sin. He doesn't say that. Christ did no sin. But that he knew no sin. In the Bible. The word no. Means much more. Than. Being aware. In the Bible. Very often. The idea of. Knowledge. Is more. Affectionate. Than. Kind of. Understanding. Cognitive. For God. To know. Means. To love. So in the book of Amos.

God says to his people. You only. Have I known. Among all the nations. Of the earth. Well. Of course. God knows everything about. Egyptians.

[18:06] Syrians. Philistines. Greeks. Romans. The British. God knows everything about the sparrow. Falling. He knows about the hairs on your head. But he loves just his people.

All those whom. The father gave to the son. To save before the foundation of the world. Do you remember. What Jesus said.

At the end of the sermon on the mount. He said. On the day of judgment. Jesus will say. Depart from me. I never knew you.

Of course. He knows everything about them. He's banishing them. From his presence. It's a consequence. That he never loved them.

Again. We're told in the Bible. Adam. Knew his wife Eve. It's not an intellectual knowledge. It was affectionate. And passionate. And loving. It's in the message of the book of Hosea.

[19:15] And the letters of the Ephesians. That Christ. Deeply in love with the church. Gave himself to her. Christ went to Calvary for her.

Passionately. Deeply in love with the people he knew. He knew them. But Christ knew no sin. I don't know about you.

But some sins seem so attractive. Doesn't it? Some sins seem utterly irresistible. Beautiful sins. Not like others. Sometimes people say to me.

Surely God can't oppose me doing this. Because it's lovely. It feels so lovely. Christ loved no sin. No sin. The devil showed the Lord Jesus.

All the nations of the earth. And all their glory. And there was much that was attractive. And glorious. Staggering. The achievements of man. Their works of culture. And yet sin was mixed in with them.

[20:23] And Christ was not bought by any of them. He could look at them all. But he didn't go weak at the knees. And bow down before Satan. He knew no sin whatsoever.

So these first words confirm the innocence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Number two. On the cross the grace of God is being revealed. There are people who imagine that the big problem that Christianity solves is how we sinful men and women can be reconciled with God.

But that isn't the big problem. The greatest problem facing the heavens and the earth is this. How God can be reconciled to us. Let's think about God for a moment.

God dwells in light unapproachable that no man has seen or can see. Our God says the author to the letter of the Hebrews is like a consuming fire.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. The Bible tells us God is angry with the wicked every day.

[21:29] Buddha. Buddha. He shrugs indifference, doesn't he? But the abuse of a woman. The cutting up of an unborn child at 24 weeks.

The crack dealer. Selling his addictive poison to teenagers. The torturing to death of Christians in the Middle East.

All such horrors move heaven to a holy anger. Shouldn't it?

Why would you worship a God who couldn't care less what happens in the world? God dwells in absolute perfection. It's a wonderful thing to know that this world is gripped by a God in whom there is no sin at all.

You shine the light of his own omniscience through his own being. You search out his inner places, his deepest needs, his deepest thoughts, his nooks, his crannies, his past and his present.

[22 : 39] And all you find in God is utter perfection. He cannot clear the guilty. He cannot sigh weakly and say, well, alright, come on.

Come on, you God-hating blasphemers and you unrepentant murderers and thieves. Come on into my presence in heaven. And still love your sins forever and ever.

No, the Bible says he will by no means clear the guilty. You sin and you have to answer to God for it. You act and there's a consequence to the action.

And God delights in manifesting his justice. God is willing to show his wrath and to make his power known. He will most certainly fit out, Romans 9-11 tells us, vessels of wrath for destruction.

And he will fit out vessels of mercy for his glory. We sow and then we reap. We sin and then there is the problem of the wages of sin.

[23 : 43] And so the greatest problem is divine reconciliation. How can God be reconciled to you? After the way that you've lived.

We know that problem, don't we? We see it around us on a human scale. Maybe in your own life there's a breakdown in relationships and you think, well, how can I be reconciled to that person?

We'll multiply that by infinity. How can God be reconciled to sinners? And the answer is by imputation. The cross announces that it is through the death of Jesus Christ because there the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The prophet Isaiah tells us that it pleased the Lord to bruise him. He did not turn Jesus Christ into a sinner.

There's no transfusion of our sin to him. Jesus kept his honour and integrity intact. But God shows his amazing grace to people like ourselves by refusing to spare his son from the wages sinners are paid.

[25 : 09] He alone took their debt and he cleared it all by himself. What obligation was upon God to act like this?

None whatsoever. He was obliged to punish sin. He was not obliged to punish his son. Here's the most astonishing fact since all creation began that once on a green hill far away, God the Father smote God the Son.

And he acted like that out of love for sinners. On that day when the sun refused to shine, God looked for sin all over the world as he does every day and he found it on Calvary.

He had no obligation. Nothing was forcing his hands to make Christ the substitute for sin. It was simply his good pleasure to do it. Think of that. My escape from damnation, from hell, depends on the good pleasure of God.

And the only thing that will keep me from hell forever is the sovereign will of God. I don't know about you, but there are times when I grasp something about the sovereignty of God and I tremble.

[26 : 39] I tremble that I am at the sovereign disposal of the will of God. If I am to escape hell, it is because the Father chose to impute to his Son my sin.

And Jesus received it lovingly. God made Christ to be sin. And so his grace is revealed there.

Number three, on the cross my sins are being punished.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. It was for us. Paul is standing in solidarity with the whole Corinthian presbytery.

For us. He says, me too. Do you remember what Paul had earlier said to the Corinthians? He said this. Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

[27 : 45] And this was what some of you were. But you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

They had sins. And those sins made them unclean. It had left them with a reputation, with a past. There were great chains of guilt that bound them to those sins. Those sins defiled them. It made them dirty. Needing an inward washing. Paul says, but the Son of God has come. And he's done something for our sins. And he's taken them. And he's taken responsibility for them. He has been made them. And when he hangs on the cross, no power of earth or heaven is going to separate him from those sins of ours.

It's the climax of his life. It's why he became flesh. And in my nature bore my judgment. And so if I am in him, then all the sins of my life and my heart and my nature, my original sins, my actual sins, my sins of omission, my sins of commission, they've all been nailed to the cross of Christ.

[29 : 11] Think of every sin that you're aware of. And then if you are in Christ, he was made that sin for you.

Take every sin that you're not aware of. And there's a lot of them. And if you are in Christ, he was made those sins for you.

That means I cannot acknowledge my sin in isolation.

I can only think of them as they've been made Christ. It's difficult to grasp.

I'm not explaining this very well. But those sins, they are no longer mine. In the sense that I will never answer for Christless sins to God.

[30 : 18] Because Christ has comprehensively answered for them already. Understand this. There are no undealt with sins for the people of God.

It is magnificent. It is an incredible concept that our sins no longer control or modify our relation to God tonight. It is as if they weren't there at all.

There is no guilt at all. No defilement at all. No blame at all. There's no shame at all. They have all been removed by God and laid on his son.

He has been made sin for me. He has taken our sin, our past sin, our present sin, our future sin, and he has put it all away forever.

And I'm not sure my conscience really believes this. I'm not sure that there's not something in me that wants to cling on to some self-pity.

[31 : 25] To some remnants of my guilt. So that I wallow in my past and I turn my eyes on my yesterdays. And tell people how badly I've lived so that I can feel sorry for myself.

And so let me plead with you tonight. Let the truth of our text be the whole truth about the way things are between you and God tonight.

There is no barrier whatsoever. There's no impediment. There's no closed or limited access. It has all been forgiven. It has all been remembered no more.

There are people out there who cling to the fantasy land of purgatory. Where they themselves will deal with the pollution of their sin.

They're going to handle their outstanding sins until they're all dealt with. And that actually encourages them to a kind of sub-Christian living. A little less dedication. A little less commitment.

[32 : 37] Because they feel that they're going to have to deal with those sins and the consequences after they die. And in the end they will be delivered from their sins by their own sufferings.

It is utterly blasphemous. They shrug at sin because, well, I'll face my own consequences.

It's a fantasy ride. The only purgatory there is in this world or the next is at the cross. It is only there that our sins are dealt with.

It is only there you will find the blood of Christ. God has not imputed our cleansing to purgatory. I'm saying that the sins of all of God's people through all time, in all places, are people that are as many as the sand on the seashore, have all been forgiven.

He's born them all. Every speck, every spot, every such thing has been imputed to Christ. There's absolutely nothing left. Do you know it?

[33 : 46] The single determining factor of your relationship with God is what happened at the cross.

Nothing else matters. Nothing else is relevant. What God did and how Christ responded. God made Christ sin and he received that sin lovingly.

And so how you feel about your life tonight, how sometimes you doubt, and what you're doing for Jesus, and how you fail is not remotely relevant.

The one thing that matters is that God made Christ to be sin. And I don't for a moment believe that the heart that understands this will take advantage of it.

And get drunk or steal or deceive or live a life without the law, because the cross of Jesus will not allow you to do that. In fact, I think if imputation doesn't have the place that it needs in your thinking, if you're feeling that God tonight has something still against you, that often serves as some kind of unconscious grudge against God, isn't it?

[35 : 10] And it sometimes justifies you from actually not being all out for him. And so I want you tonight to know that in the depths of your heart, that when God made Jesus Christ sin for us, that Jesus dealt with your sin.

That he experienced hell in my place, that he ended it out of darkness instead of me, so that I shall never, never know the outer darkness of hell. And when God comes to me searching for my sin, he finds it on the cross of Jesus, condemned and covered.

And on that fact is my whole confidence grounded. Lastly, and I'm running out of time, number four. On the cross, God's righteousness is satisfied. Do you see the flow of the verse?

God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

What is in it for me? Pardon. It's magnificent that God the just is satisfied to look on him, to look on the cross of his son, the Lord Jesus, and pardon me, but there's more.

[36 : 20] I become the righteousness of God in Christ. In other words, everything that took place in the life and death of the Lord Jesus is all that I need for a complete life with God in this world and in the world to come.

At Calvary, all of God's attributes meet his mercy and his righteousness. The angels in heaven, they stand in amazement as redemption unfolds before them.

There is the righteousness of their Lord Jesus Christ. They've watched him and they've served him all throughout his ministry, the angels, and he's never been less than righteous. They've seen his mercy to the leper, to the grieving sisters, to parents in anguish over their son possessed by a demon.

What a merciful man he is, but they've never seen mercy like this. He now takes responsibility for the sin of his people. He who knew no sin, the holy, perfect, sinless one, is made sin.

So that we cannot tell where sin ends and Christ begins. He clasps all that is filthy and depraved to himself, and he refuses to let go of it, to finish it forever, to bear its condemnation, so that no condemnation might be mine.

[37 : 45] 'Tis mercy all, immense and free, for oh my God it found out me. What mercy, but what righteousness, in the holy lamb, in the just and sin-hating God, in the one who spared not his son, what righteousness, and that righteousness becomes mine by imputation.

God is absolutely satisfied with what Jesus did. Heaven has come down to earth that sinners might be saved. And so there is nothing more for sinners to do.

Sin has been dealt with, the blood of God the son has been shed, every single one of our sins has been dealt with. Everything unacceptable to God has been imputed to Christ, and God is satisfied. The great satisfaction has been rendered to God, the price of our liberation has been rendered to God.

There's nothing left undone, and God is absolutely satisfied. The whole work of redemption, the fulfilling of righteousness has been completed.

And God is satisfied. So let me ask you tonight, are you satisfied with what God did when he imputed all our sin to Christ?

[39 : 08] Are you absolutely satisfied with that? Are you completely satisfied with that? When you fall again, and you feel the power of remaining sin, are you satisfied with the work of Jesus Christ?

And if you're satisfied with Jesus, then you are a Christian. Be content with Jesus.

Let your conscience be satisfied with that. Let your intellect be satisfied with that. Let your past be satisfied with that. Think with me about this.

If God's mercy and righteousness are satisfied with what Christ has done, can't you be satisfied with that too? If God is saying, that's enough for me, then surely, surely, surely it's enough for you.

And so what more is there to say? There's one more thing to say. That we ask you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled with God. No. We entreat you on Christ's behalf, Paul says, be reconciled with God.

[40 : 30] No. We beseech you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. We implore you, be reconciled to God. The truth is, Christ has died, but men and women may perish.

Full atonement has been made, but many are on the broad road heading for destruction. Maybe that's you. The sinless one has been made sin, but still men and women die without hope and without God.

The full gospel has been preached, but many reject it. And so we implore you not to refuse and not to harden your hearts and not to switch off and not to find fault. In the light of eternity, in the light of the sin-hating God, in the certainty of death, in the light of arms of love stretched out to you, be reconciled to God.

Do not leave this building tonight unreconciled. Do not take your sin away and home with you. The Son of God has been made sin, and so I plead with you tonight to take advantage of God's mercy, to entrust yourself to Jesus Christ. Who else are you going to entrust yourself to? To receive him into your life as your great high priest and as your prophet and as your king.

[41 : 47] And so from now on, to walk for him, to walk with him and to live for him, to trust in him, to flee from your sins, to flee from your good works and hide in his wounded side.

And Jesus will receive sinners tonight and he will receive you, so do not reject him. And I can assure you today that if you are reconciled to him, life will be yours and pardon will be yours and heaven will be yours.

And all things will work together for your good. That will be yours. And a living shepherd who will never leave you will be yours. And all your needs richly supplied will be yours. Why refuse him? Take him tonight as he's freely offered to us in the gospel. Be reconciled to God. Let's pray.