



2 Corinthians 5:11-21

# A New Creation

*<sup>11</sup> Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. <sup>12</sup> We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. <sup>13</sup> If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

*<sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

I discovered a short video on the birth of the nation of Israel when God led them out of slavery in Egypt. Sadly, this story told by a Jewish man completely misses the point. [Listen to his description of Abraham](#). (Quoting—"They were gigantic intellects with Abraham discovering on his own the rationale for the existence of one God.") Did Abraham discover the rationale for the existence of God **on his own**? Not only did he not discover this on his own, I would argue the truthfulness of the first half of the sentence—discovering the rationale of the existence of God. Abraham's experience was not a "rational" decision based upon the facts. It was a sovereign creator of the universe bursting into Abraham's life and revealing himself to this chosen man. It was divine revelation and divine initiative and divine explanation. Abraham believed it was credited it to him as righteousness, but he was 100% dependent upon God .

What this Jewish man has done is to clearly define a religion. A religion is man discovering the rationale for God. Of course we can see the error in this man's explanation. We know that salvation is always by grace through faith and not of our own initiative. Hopefully we are not "religious" in this sense, but many believers do become "religious" after their salvation in trying to live the Christian life. We attempt to live the Christian life by reason and pure human effort.

To help us understand the difference, we will be studying what I call the "Gospel Glove"—2 Corinthians 5:21. If you have been at our church for any length of time you know how much I love this verse. I call it the gospel glove because it is broken down into 5 short phrases, like the five fingers on our hands. This helps you memorize this verse which all by itself is an effective gospel presentation. I want to explain the verse in detail. This week I will apply it to the resurrection and next week I will show how it is vital for our daily walk, to keep us from becoming religious.

### **God made him**

Why did Jesus go to the cross? Why did he offer his life as a ransom for many? Many of you have heard the story about the man who works in the train yard switching the tracks and keeping all things in order. One day he brought his son to work with him. Later that day he looked down the track and noticed that his son had caught his foot in a crevice in the track. To his horror he saw a train speeding in the direction of his son. He could switch this train to a different track and save his son, but if he did that, this train would crash into another train killing hundreds of people on both trains. The father had to make a painful decision and sacrifice his son to save the lives of the people on the train. The father is meant to represent God and the son is Jesus. It has to be one of the worst illustrations of the gospel I have ever heard.

Not only is it a story about really bad parenting—after all, who would bring their young child to a train yard with dozens of speeding trains passing through all day long and say to his son, "OK son, run along and play now."—but it borders on the blasphemous. God the Father was not surprised by the necessity of his son's sacrifice. The Father planned his son's sacrifice. The Father desired it to happen. He willed it to take place. But that wouldn't make for a very good story, would it. The father says to his son, "OK, listen carefully. Today is the day that I want you to get your foot stuck in the tracks so I can appear to make a painful decision between your life and the lives of people on the train. Do you see that track over there next to the yellow sign? There is a deep crevice next to the track. Stick your foot deep into the hole and twist it sideways. That way when the train comes bearing down upon you full speed you won't be tempted to pull your foot out and run away. I love you pal. Have a nice day."

The Father was not surprised but rather planned his son's sacrifice. This is so evident in no place better than in Isaiah 53. We all know that this chapter is all about Jesus. Last week I was at a conference in Chicago and the theme was "preaching Christ in the Old Testament." The joke was that the speakers were not allowed to preach on Isaiah 53 because it was just "too easy." Here are some key verses.

*Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,  
yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.*

<sup>5</sup> *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities;*

*the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

<sup>6</sup> *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

<sup>10</sup> *Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer*

This clearly demonstrates 2 Corinthians 5:21—God made him. The father took the initiative. It was the Father's will to crush the son. More evidence is spoken by Jesus himself in the garden. As he sweat drops of blood hours before his crucifixion, he prayed, *Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done* (Luke 22:42). The Father was not willing to remove the cup of wrath from the lips of his son. The gospel message is not an accident or a surprise. Jesus was stricken, smitten, afflicted and crushed because the father purposed that it should be so and the son obeyed his Father's will. The motivation was love, but the plan was unalterable. On one level this is even more shocking than a father intentionally sending his son to die on the tracks of a train, but the shock value, if you will, is meant to increase our wonder at the infinite sacrifice and love demonstrated in the cross. This was premeditated love.

### **who had no sin**

The gospel is founded upon the reality of a sinless Savior. The entire OT speaks of the spotless and unblemished lamb that is the only acceptable type of animal for a sin offering. We are familiar with this in great passages like Hebrews 4:15. *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.* The doctrine of the sinlessness of Christ is part of what is called the hypostatic union. The hypostatic union is the union of two natures—the divine and human—into one person, Jesus Christ. Jesus is not half man and half God, like a centaur or minotaur or some other mythical creature. Jesus is at the same time fully God and fully human. Both are undeniably present but become one nature in the person of Jesus. Jesus was sinless because he was fully God and he remained sinless because he perfectly obeyed his Father's will throughout his lifetime.

But Jesus was not just without sin because there is no such thing as merely the absence of sin. There must also be the presence of righteousness. Therefore, the sinlessness of Jesus is also inseparable from his perfect holiness. He is sinless because he is holy and he is holy because he is sinless. Jesus had no sin *and* he possessed perfect righteousness and holiness.

Once again, this is the consistent teaching of Scripture. "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory (Isaiah 6:3). What did Isaiah say after witnessing this sight? *Woe to me!*" *I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.* The same refrain is spoken by the four living creatures in Revelation. *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come* (Revelation 4:8). We will never appreciate the gospel until we appreciate God's holiness. God's perfect, blazing holiness is the thing which makes him worthy of all worship.

Think what it would be like if God possessed omniscience and omnipotence but not holiness. He would be all-knowing and all-powerful but he may or may not be good. Such a god would be the

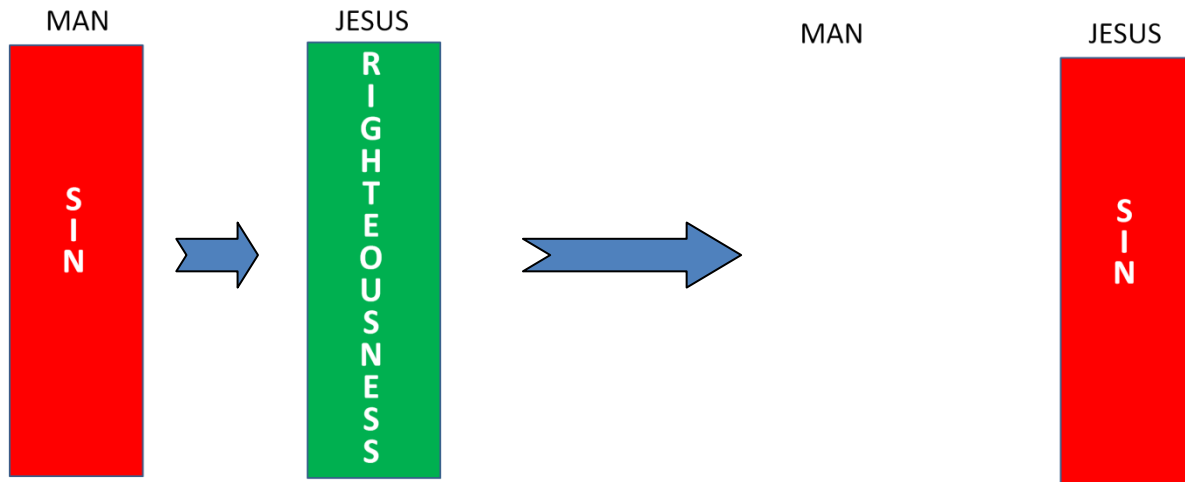
most fearsome creature in the universe. This describes the Muslim god, Allah. Allah is all powerful and all knowing but is not holy in the Biblical sense. A person could be a good Muslim all of their life but in the end, Allah may or may not grant them entrance into paradise. He is free to choose as he wants regardless if it is consistent with what he has done before. This is also what the gods of the Greek pantheon are like. These gods are petty and jealous gods who continually fight with one another for supremacy and use humans as pawns in their conquest for power. Some may possess more goodness than others but none of them are remotely holy in the Biblical sense of holiness.

But in stark contrast to every other “god” and pretender, holiness is the very essence of who God is. He doesn’t just possess holiness, he is holy. Holy, holy, holy *is* the Lord God Almighty. God is holy and righteous. He is perfectly good. He cannot sin or do wrong. And since Jesus is fully God, he is also perfectly holy. Jesus was sinless because he was fully God and he remained sinless because he perfectly obeyed his Father’s will throughout his lifetime. He was *tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.*

### **to be sin for us**

This past week a co-worker of Ryan’s mentioned how much he likes the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, just for its cinematic beauty, even if he doesn’t believe the message. This gave Ryan a great opportunity to share his faith and answer his questions. If you haven’t seen it, the thing you need to know about the passion of the Christ is that it is very bloody. In fact it is so bloody that I dare not show a video clip from the movie. It does the best job of any film in portraying the physical suffering of Jesus. This is the only reason it was given an “R” rating. However, no amount of human suffering could ever compare to the burden of bearing the sins of all mankind. When Christ became “sin for us,” he was also absorbing the righteous wrath of his Father, the same wrath that we had justly earned. *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him* (John 3:36). *But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger* (Romans 2:8). It is nearly impossible to portray this wrath-absorbing, sin-substituting truth in a film. You must read about it in Scripture and meditate on its enormity. It is the reason we sing, “I’ll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross.”

The last of the five phrases is about the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to us. A few weeks ago I mentioned that this is often called “alien” righteousness because it is so alien to our nature as sinful humans. Just as the righteousness of God is alien to us, so our sin was fully alien to Jesus. It was foreign. It was reprehensible. Remember that Jesus’ sinless nature was not merely the absence of sin but the presence of righteousness. In the same way, when he took our sin upon him, he also was removed of his perfect righteousness. He could not be our sin substitute while also remaining righteous. This is part of the act of reconciliation in verse 19—not counting men’s sins against them. Our sins are not counted against us because they were moved over into Jesus’ ledger, so to speak. But when our sins are counted against Jesus, his righteousness immediately was erased. He began with the presence of infinite righteousness and an absence of sin and he ended with a presence of sin and an absence of righteousness.



Many refer to our salvation as the Great Exchange. Our sin is exchanged for the righteousness of Christ. You cannot possibly get a better deal than that. Try going to a bank with your \$100,000 mortgage and asking them if they would be willing to trade in your mortgage debt for a ten million dollar payout. Do you think there is any chance this would succeed? This is a small picture of our great exchange. Jesus removes our infinite debt of sin and exchanges it for his infinite righteousness. However, in order for our great exchange to happen, Jesus had his own great exchange, but in reverse. He exchanged his infinite righteousness for our infinite debt of sin.

### **so that in him**

This may seem like a simple phrase and not much can be said about it, but let me offer a few thoughts. The phrase “in Christ” is used almost a hundred times in the New Testament and most of those have a relational meaning. Colossians 2 is an interesting example. *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,<sup>10</sup> and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.* The first “in Christ” has nothing to do with us and is only talking about Christ specifically. This is one of those wonderful statements on the full deity of Christ, which is also part of our gospel glove verse.

But the second “in Christ” is all about us. We have the “fullness in Christ.” That’s pretty amazing, especially when it comes immediately after the statement about Christ’s deity. All the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form in Jesus and we have been given the fullness in Christ. Obviously, it doesn’t mean that the fullness of the deity also lives in us, but it is a statement of deep relationship. Do not ever forget that we are not merely saved from punishment but fundamentally we are saved into a relationship. To have your sins not counted against you is to be “in Christ.” As a believer, you are not just headed for Heaven, you are already “in Christ” and will be “in Christ” and finally with Christ for the rest of eternity. Therefore, I hope you see that “in Christ” is not mere prepositional phrase to get us to the next thing.

## we might become the righteousness of God

MAN

JESUS



RIGHTEOUSNESS

As has already been expressed, the work of Christ in salvation is not limited to not counting our sins against us and counting them against himself, but he also gives us his righteousness. Please understand what takes place here. He does not make us righteous in the sense that now we are good or that he reformed us and made us righteous. Some might think that since our sins are not counted against us that all that would be left after that would be goodness. Some Christians understand our righteousness like a chocolate Easter egg covered with an onion skin of sin. That's a delightful thought, isn't it? Merry, do you have any of those for us after the service? Once you peel away the onion skin of sin what's left over is the delicious chocolate center that is made up of pure goodness. But that is a totally false idea of righteousness. If you peel away our onion skin of

sin you are left with nothing. We do not have any inherent righteousness. If God only removed our sin then we would be in a state of moral neutrality, similar to Adam and Eve before they sinned.

This is why we are given—theologians say “imputed”—with Christ’s righteousness. It is not ours. It is the righteousness of Jesus. Paul expressed this accurately and beautifully in Philippians 3:8-9. *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.* It is like it says in the old hymn, Rock of Ages.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
let me hide myself in thee;  
let the water and the blood,  
from thy wounded side which flowed,  
be of sin the double cure;  
save from wrath and make me pure.

Be of sin the double cure. Save from wrath and made me pure. Jesus saved us from wrath by counting our sins against himself and then he made us pure by crediting his righteousness to our account.

The imputation of Christ’s righteousness is the basis of our justification. Justification is God declaring us to be righteous. But on what basis does God declare us to be righteous? It is based upon the righteousness of Christ that is credited to our account. We are declared righteous, not because we are doing good things after we are saved but because God looks at us and sees the righteousness of Christ as belonging to us.

This is the gospel glove. And why is any of this possible? What is the one act in history that seals this truth forever? It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as Paul wrote in verse fifteen. *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them*

*and was raised again.* The resurrection is the power of the gospel, the truth of the gospel, the foundation of this gospel. As it is written in 1 Corinthians 15:17 *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.* If Christ is not raised, then not only are we still in our sins, so is Jesus. He died for us but without the resurrection he was just a pretender, he was a fake. He spoke a false message and gave us false hope. But Jesus is risen, and we are raised with Jesus, so that we can live for him who died for us and was raised again.

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