



Conducted by
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“I don’t understand what Paul means in 2 Cor. 5:21. What does it mean ‘to be made sin’?”

This is another question which was put to me after a recent study session. Whenever I teach, I always encourage those who listen to look **beyond** the text to what is portrayed by the text; by doing this I have to suffer from self-inflicted wounds whenever passages of Scripture become difficult. This is one of those difficult passages which I personally have wrestled with over the years. I am not sure that I fully understand it yet, but I can at least say where my thoughts have led me.

Whenever we comment on any part of the Scriptures, whatever we say must not be in conflict with what I term ‘the unity of revelation’ of the Scriptures as a whole. Therefore, as we study this question, we should keep in mind certain biblical statements. The first one concerns Jesus during one of His many discourses with the Jews. The Jews took up stones to stone Him because He said, **“I and my Father are One”** (John 10:30). This statement I take to be crucial to our understanding of His true nature. Another is found in 1 John 5:7, **“For there are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these three are one”**. This statement, I believe, is crucial to our understanding of the Godhead. So according to these statements we can say that God and Jesus were and are One; and that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are One in heaven. From this I reason that no matter where and in what form these three Deities subsist in time, space, and location, then the essential Oneness cannot be destroyed, nor can any word or act attributed to any one

of them be disagreeable to the united revelation and witness which they would seek to portray. I think we can now proceed.

The Problem of Sin

If we advance the argument that 'God is Good', then we are saying that He is all Goodness and that no part of His nature can be evil: that being so, we can also advance the further argument (with absolute justification) that God did not create evil, nor can He condone it. If a Divine Creator issues Divine laws, and those laws are transgressed by some of His Creation, then such conscious transgression is designated as sin against those who perpetrate it; the overt acts of transgression are acts of rebellion against just laws given by a just God: in effect and in fact they constitute rebellion against the Creator Himself. The clay does not have power over the potter, nor do the created have power over the Creator. A just God can do no other than punish the transgressor: He cannot allow the transgression to 'slip by', otherwise it would have been pointless to have issued the instructions in the first place, and future generations could have had no confidence in a God who changes His mind and neglects the administration of justice.

Referring the above to the situation in the Garden of Eden, we can understand that Adam and Eve, the progenitors of the human race, had to be punished for their transgression against God's instructions. The penalty for their sin affected the whole of the human race, for as Paul argues, "Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation" (Rom. 5:18a). Sin and its terminal consequence, death, passed to all men, and it has been borne throughout future generations, even to the present day. A loving and merciful God, however, provided a way of atonement for His people in O.T. times, and that way we must now consider.

Ritualistic Sacrifice

In the first few chapters of the Book of Leviticus we read of God's instructions to the nation of Israel concerning the offerings they should bring for the alleviation of sin. Apart from the cereal offering, all the other offerings involve flesh and blood sacrifice of animals. The worshipper brought his animal before the altar, placed his hand(s) on its head, and then killed it. The priest then took the blood, sprinkled it around the altar, and then arranged for the disposal of the residue of flesh. The laying on of the hand symbolised the identification of the offeror with the victim; the sinful offerer with the innocent victim. The shedding and sprinkling of the blood symbolised the 'covering' of the offerer's sin; the innocent victim (the animal) stood 'in the place of' the iniquitous offerer. A life was given and a life was spared. Blood, however, had to be shed and sprinkled, for, as the Hebrew Writer says, "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood: and without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22; but read the whole of chapters 9 and 10).

We must understand, though, that under the O.T. system sins could not be taken away; an animal sacrifice would not suffice for human beings, for as the Writer says, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (10-4). So another way had to be found, but this way would involve and require the shedding of human blood from a physical body of flesh in order to remove the sin of humankind. This is where Jesus, the Christ of God, comes into the picture.

The Cross Of Christ

It is here that the poetry of some of our much-loved hymns tends to obscure the reality of the sacrifice. We sometimes sing a hymn which says that Jesus 'interposed His precious blood', and another which says, "So out of pity Jesus said, He'd bear the punishment instead." I believe it is not helpful for us to consider Jesus as intervening between God and man, and seeming to induce God into giving a salvation which He was unwilling to give; nor is it helpful for us to consider God as singling out Jesus for a punishment which He (Jesus) was unwilling to offer. No, I believe it is most helpful

for us to see God and His Christ in complete unison concerning our salvation. When we read that 'God gave His Son,' we also read that that the Son 'offered Himself: if the cup of bitterness was given by God for Jesus to drink of, then in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus accepted it willingly. And isn't this consistent with what Jesus said to the Jews, "I and my Father are One"?' If there was, and is, no unity of purpose between God and His Christ, then surely there can be no unity in the Godhead, and if that is so, then Christians at best have been the victims of a grim joke, or at worst the victims of inexplicable caprice on the part of God. But even a cursory examination of the Scriptures will convince us that God and Christ acted in complete harmony in procuring our salvation and future spiritual well-being. The Scriptures teach us that Christ "was slain from the foundation of the world"; are we now to conclude that our salvation depends on the whim of a capricious God and an indeterminate Christ? In no way!

The Sin-Bearer

A few lines in another of our hymns read like this, "And was there then no other way for God to take? I cannot say." Could God have reconciled us **without** the sacrifice of Christ in the flesh? A belief in the omnipotent power of God must make us answer in the affirmative. But, you see, the **substance** of the New Covenant in Christ had to be consistent with the **shadows** as depicted in the Old Covenant; a detailed consideration of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah will bear this out. So Jesus had to '**bear in His own body our sins on the tree**' (1 Pet.2:24).

In 2 Cor.5:19 Paul says that, "**God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.**" A dictionary definition of the word 'imputation' might give us a wrong idea for it is said, 'to ascribe another's righteousness or guilt to a person'. Imputation does **not** mean that you can **transfer** sin to another person, i.e., Christ, so as to make that person **sinful**; in the same way you cannot transfer the **righteousness** to another, i.e., God's righteousness, so that a person can become as righteous as God is. If God was **in** Christ, as Their Oneness demands that we think of them, then we can no more ascribe sin to Christ than we can to God. If Christ bore our sins on the tree, and Christ and God are One, then there is a sense in which God Himself bore our sins also. What Jesus did was to accept the **liability** for the sin of mankind, and consequent upon that, to also accept the **penalty** for sin. He became the **scapegoat** of O.T. depiction. You remember that **two** animals were involved; one which was sacrificed so that the blood could be shed, and the other which took away the burden of sin to a far off place. Christ accomplished both these functions in a perfect sacrifice of Himself. Never let it be said, or thought, that He who was without sin, was **made** sin. The righteousness which Christ won for us was a **right standing** before God, not a transfer of **His own** righteousness to us. His blood availed for us; He stood **instead** of us, not because He was made **like us** in sin. I trust these few thoughts will have a little merit in helping us to understand the mystery of salvation a little better. For the sake of Him who died for us.

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden, 20 Cossesy Way,
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