

06-16-13

Series: Fifteen Words of Hope

# Fifteen Words of Hope

(5)

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[2 Corinthians 5:21](#)

(Continuation from 06/09/13)

## Fifteen Words of Hope

[2 Corinthians 5:21 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. [24 words]

[2 Corinthians 5:21 \(KJV\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. [25 words]

[2 Corinthians 5:21 \(Greek\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> τον μη γνοντα αμαρτιαν υπερ ημων αμαρτιαν εποιησεν ινα ημεις γενωμεθα δικαιοσυνη θεου εν αυτω [15 words]

I have six questions that need to be answered.

- 1) How can an absolutely and infinitely holy God be reconciled to sinners?
- 2) How can His just and holy law, which demands the condemnation and punishment of all who violate it, be satisfied?
- 3) How can those who deserve no mercy receive it?
- 4) How can God uphold true righteousness and give grace?
- 5) How can the demands of both justice and love be met?
- 6) How can God be both “**just and the justifier**” ([Romans 3:26](#)) of sinners?

As hard as those questions seem, one brief verse answers them all and resolves the seeming paradox of redemption. With a conciseness and brevity reflective of the Holy Spirit, this one brief sentence, only fifteen words in the Greek text, resolves the dilemma of reconciliation.

This sentence reveals the *essence of the atonement*, *expresses the heart of the gospel message*, and *articulates the most glorious truth in Scripture*—how fallen man’s sinnered relationship to God can be restored.

[2 Corinthians 5:21](#) is like a cache of rare jewels, each deserving of a careful, reverential examination under the magnifying glass of Scripture.

[2 Corinthians 5:21 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

It yields truths about the 1) benefactor, 2) the substitute, 3) the beneficiaries, and 4) the benefit.

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## The Benefactor

*He made (5:21a)*

**2 Corinthians 5:21a (NASB)**

<sup>21</sup> **He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

The end of [verse 20](#) reveals the antecedent of **He** to be God the Father, as seen previously.

**2 Corinthians 5:20 (NASB)**

<sup>20</sup> **Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.**

Reconciliation is His plan, and it could not occur unless He initiated and applied it. Sinners cannot devise their own religious approach to God, because they are **“dead in [their] trespasses and sins”** ([Ephesians 2:1](#)). The damning lie of false religion is that man can reconcile himself to God by his own efforts, but all attempts to do so are futile. Sinners’ **“righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of [them] wither like a leaf, and [their] iniquities, like the wind, take [them] away”** ([Isaiah 64:6](#)). As a result, **“There is none righteous, not even one”** ([Romans 3:10](#)). Not even the **“Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh”** ([Romans 9:4-5](#)) could devise a way to reconcile themselves to God by their own efforts. [Romans 10:1-3](#), expressing Paul’s deep concern for them, reflects that truth:

Despite their zeal for God, they had not achieved salvation, because they sought it through their own righteousness. The religion of human achievement, whether practiced by Jews or Gentiles, can never bring reconciliation with God. The only way reconciliation can take place is if God reached out to sinners; and He did by the sacrifice of His Son.

Jesus therefore did not go to the cross because fickle people turned on Him, though they did. He did not go to the cross because demon-deceived false religious leaders plotted His death, though they did. He did not go to the cross because Judas betrayed Him, though he did. He did not die because an angry, unruly mob intimidated a Roman governor into sentencing Him to crucifixion, though they did. Jesus went to the cross as the outworking of God’s plan to reconcile sinners to Himself.

In the first Christian sermon ever preached, Peter declared to the nation of Israel that Jesus was **“delivered over [to death] by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God”** ([Acts 2:23](#); cf. [Acts 3:18](#); [Acts 13:27](#); [Matthew 26:24](#); [Luke 22:22](#); [John 18:11](#); [Hebrews 10:5, 7](#)).

Only God could design an atonement for sin that would satisfy the demands of His justice, propitiate His wrath, and be consistent with His love, grace, and mercy.

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Only God could conceive the plan in which the second person of the Trinity would, **“being found in appearance as a man, [humble] Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”** ([Philippians 2:8](#)). Only God knew what it would take to rescue sinners **“from the domain of darkness, and [transfer them] to the kingdom of His beloved Son”** ([Colossians 1:13](#)), making them **“qualified... to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light”** ([Colossians 1:12](#)).

Only God knew how to make sinners deserving of hell acceptable in His sight and fit to spend eternity in His presence. Therefore, only God could author and execute the plan of redemption and reconcile sinners to Himself. That plan is so utterly beyond the comprehension of the unregenerate that it seems foolishness to them ([1 Corinthians 1:18, 23](#); [1 Corinthians 2:14](#)). No religion of human design has anything like it.