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Series: Fifteen Words of Hope

# Fifteen Words of Hope

(9)

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[2 Corinthians 5:21](#)

(Continuation from 07/07/13)

## 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](#)]

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

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

### The Substitute

[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.

This designation points unmistakably to the only possible sacrifice for sin. It eliminates every human who ever lived, “**for there is no man who does not sin**” ([1 Kings 8:46](#)), since “**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**” ([Romans 3:23](#)). Only one who **knew no sin** of his own could qualify to bear the full wrath of God against the sins of others. The perfect sacrifice for sin would have to be a human being, for only a man could die for other men. Yet he would also have to be God, for only God is sinless. That narrows the field to one, the God-man, Jesus Christ.

In the design of God, the second person of the Trinity became a man ([Galatians 4:4-5](#)). The Bible makes it clear that though He had a human mother, the Lord Jesus Christ did not have a human father. Joseph is never referred to as His father, because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit ([Matthew 1:18, 20](#); [Luke 1:35](#)). As the God-man, He was the perfect One to be the sacrifice for sin ([John 1:29](#); [1 Peter 1:19](#)), fulfilling the Old Testament picture of the unblemished sacrificial lamb ([Exodus 12:5](#); [Ezekiel 46:13](#)).

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The impeccability (sinlessness) of Jesus Christ is universally affirmed in Scripture, by believers and unbelievers alike. In [John 8:46](#) Jesus challenged His Jewish opponents, “Which one of you convicts Me of sin?” Before sentencing Him to death, Pilate repeatedly affirmed His innocence, declaring, “I find no guilt in this man” ([Luke 23:4](#); cf. [Luke 23:14](#), [Luke 23:22](#)). The repentant thief on the cross said of Jesus, “This man has done nothing wrong” ([Luke 23:41](#)). Even the hardened, callous Roman centurion in charge of the execution detail admitted, “Certainly this man was innocent” ([Luke 23:47](#)).

The apostles, those who most closely observed Jesus’ life during His earthly ministry, also testified to His sinlessness. Peter publicly proclaimed Him to be the “Holy and Righteous One” ([Acts 3:14](#)). In his first epistle he declared Jesus to be “unblemished and spotless” ([1 Peter 1:19](#)); one “who committed no sin” ([1 Peter 2:22](#)); and “just” ([1 Peter 3:18](#)). John also testified to His sinlessness, writing, “in Him there is no sin” ([1 John 3:5](#)). The inspired writer of Hebrews notes that “we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” ([Hebrews 4:15](#)), because He is “holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens” ([Hebrews 7:26](#)).

But the most powerful testimony concerning Christ’s sinlessness comes from God the Father. On two occasions He said of Christ, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” ([Matthew 3:17](#); [Matthew 17:5](#)). Jesus’ unbroken fellowship with the Father also testifies to His sinlessness; in [John 10:30](#) He said simply, “I and the Father are one” (cf. [John 14:9](#)).

[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.

After presenting Jesus as the absolutely holy substitute for sinners, the text makes the remarkable statement that God made Him **to be sin**. That important phrase requires a careful understanding. It does not mean that Christ became a sinner; the above-mentioned verses establishing His utter sinlessness unequivocally rule out that possibility. As God in human flesh, He could not possibly have committed any sin or in any way violated God’s law. It is equally unthinkable that God, whose “eyes are too pure to approve evil” ([Habakkuk 1:13](#); cf. [James 1:13](#)), would make anyone a sinner, let alone His own Holy Son. He was the unblemished Lamb while on the cross, personally guilty of no evil.

[Isaiah 53:4-6](#) describes the only sense in which Jesus could have been made sin:

[Isaiah 53:4-6 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him,

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**And by His scourging we are healed.**

**<sup>6</sup> All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.**

Christ was not made a sinner, nor was He punished for any sin of His own. Instead, the Father treated him as if He were a sinner by charging to His account the sins of everyone who would ever believe. All those sins were charged against Him as if He had personally committed them, and He was punished with the penalty for them on the cross, experiencing the full fury of God's wrath unleashed against them all.

It was at that moment that **"About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" ([Matthew 27:46](#)).**

It is crucial, therefore, to understand that the only sense in which Jesus was made sin was by imputation. He was personally pure, yet officially culpable; personally holy, yet forensically guilty. But in dying on the cross Christ did not become evil like we are, nor do redeemed sinners become inherently as holy as He is. God credits believers' sin to Christ's account, and His righteousness to theirs.

In [Galatians 3:10, 13](#) Paul further explained the necessity of believers' sins being imputed to Christ. In [verse 10](#) he wrote that **"as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.'"**

There is no way for sinners to reconcile themselves to God, because no one is able to **"abide by all things written in the book of the law to perform them."** Violating even one precept of the Law warrants eternal punishment in hell. Thus, the entire human race is cursed and unable to do anything to lift that curse. Therefore, the only reason believers can be reconciled to God is because **"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'" ([Galatians 3:13](#)).**

Were it not for the fact that **"while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly"** ([Romans 5:6](#)), no one could be reconciled to God.