

## ***THE MYSTERY OF GOD***

### **Part 13-B**

Thank you for being back tonight! I hope you've had a wonderful Lord's Day, and that the few hours we spend together here have been helpful and encouraging to you. God has certainly blessed us in more ways than we can count, but making us a part of His church is certainly one of the greatest blessings we have been given!

This morning, unfortunately, I had to leave my lesson somewhat unfinished. I hoped that would have the effect of the old-fashioned Saturday serials. We used to go to the matinee on Saturday afternoon, at which time we would see a portion of a movie, and at just the critical time, the action would be interrupted and you would have to come back the next week to see how the hero survived or got out of the situation he was in. I hoped people would be anxious to learn just what Christ did when He went to the cross for us.

For the sake of those who might not have been here this morning, my lesson had to do with the death of Christ on the cross. I really want you to have a fuller, better understanding of just what Christ did for us. With respect to the atonement, some people believe and teach what might be called the substitution theory. That theory holds that Jesus took our place on the cross; that because of our sins, we were under the penalty of death, and He died in our place. He took our punishment upon Himself. And, according to that theory, since Jesus did that, if we place our faith and trust in Him, then His righteousness is somehow imputed to us. He got our sins; we get His righteousness.

While many people believe and teach that is what happened, I don't believe that is what the Bible teaches at all. It sounds like what the Bible teaches, but there is a critical difference and it is that difference I want you to see.

I left off this morning trying to explain why this idea that Christ became sin for us doesn't mean that He became sin. Even though 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God,*" I don't believe that means that in some way our sins were transferred to him, or that He literally became sin. I suggested that if that were the case, then His offering could not have been an acceptable sacrifice. Nowhere in the Old Testament did God accept an imperfect animal as an offering to Him. So why would we think that somehow God would then turn around and accept Christ as an offering if He had become sin? That's the reason why we could not offer ourselves, or anyone else. Our sins made it impossible for God to accept us, so why would God accept Christ if He had become sin? We need to think about these things.

I briefly introduced the idea that somehow, what Jesus said on the cross inferred that He had become sin. I'm talking about His words, "*My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?*" Many believe, and I use to teach myself, those words imply that Christ had become sin, and as a result of that, God had to turn His back on Him. Well think about that. If that is what happened, would you say that's an indication that that God was pleased and accepted the offering or that He was

offended and rejected it? We can't have it both ways! He was either well-pleased with what Jesus did, or He was displeased by it. I want you to understand that there is no way God turned His back on His Son; that wasn't what happened at all!

Think about it! If Jesus became sin and that's the reason why God turned His back on Him, when did God start looking at Jesus again? If His becoming sin caused a rupture in their eternal relationship, how and when and in what way was that rupture healed? Furthermore, if what Jesus said inferred that He had become sin, then He would not have had to ask that question. He would have known the answer! It would have been as obvious as the nails in his hands, wouldn't it? *"You've been forsaken because you have become an odious, repugnant mass of sin!"* That would have been apparent!

But that isn't what happened. God didn't turn His back on His Son at all; not then, not at any time! Instead when Jesus uttered that cry, he was telling the people, especially the Jewish leaders, who because of their jealousy and hatred for him were responsible for His being crucified, he was telling them to recall the words of the Messianic Psalm, **Psalm 22**. That's the Psalm that begins with those words, *"My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?"* But, if you will look at that Psalm carefully, you will see that it was clearly foretelling of what happened to Christ that day. And look at the last few verses of that Psalm. **Beginning in verse 24**, it says:

*For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, **and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.** 25) From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him. 26) The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever! 27) All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. 28) For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. 29) All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. 30) Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; 31) they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.*

Don't you see what he was doing by saying that? He was telling those who were there that day, *"go back and reread that Psalm, and you will then see and understand what's happened here today."* Like an arrow, that Psalm pointed to what was happening that day there on Golgotha, but it told, not of Christ's sinfulness, but of His righteousness; that He was indeed the King they had been looking for.

Well, how are we to understand and explain what Paul wrote there in 2 Corinthians 5:21, that *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin"*? We understand it to mean that God made Jesus to be a sin-sacrifice, or a sin-offering! In the Greek, Paul wrote God made Him to be *hamartias*. That's the word for sin, but it is also the word used in Greek version of the Old Testament with reference to a sin-offering. For example, in Leviticus 4:21 and again in 24, we read, *"And he shall carry the bull outside the camp and burn it up as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly."* That expression, "sin offering," in the Greek version of the Old

Testament, is the same word used there in 2 Corinthians 5:21. In verse 24 of that same 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Leviticus, Paul says, speaking of the priest, *“and shall lay his hand on the head of the goat and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD; it is a sin offering.”*

Jesus did not become sin; that makes no sense at all, and the text doesn't say that He was made a sinner; it says He was made sin. He was made sin in the sense that he was made a sin-offering. That's what **Isaiah 53** said, wasn't it? Look again at **Isaiah 53, verse 10**: *“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; **when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.**”*

In **1 Peter 2:22**, Peter is quoting Isaiah 53:9, and Peter says, *“He committed no sin!”* That's true, Christ committed no sin, but He did become a sin-offering, and that is what 2 Corinthians 5:21 is saying. Now, if you disagree with me on that, that's okay. I didn't use to agree with me on that either! I didn't like it when I heard preachers and teachers explain this passage the way I'm explaining it to you now. I wasn't happy when brother Hugo McCord translated it that way in his own translation of the New Testament. He said God made Him to be a sin-offering. I was bothered by that because I had my mind made up about how it was, and everything I knew, or thought I knew seemed to fit better with this other explanation, that Christ literally became sin for us. Now I know better.

Galatians 3:13 is another passage I mentioned this morning that some believe teaches that Christ became sin for us. In that passage Paul said, *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”* Now, was Paul saying Christ was literally cursed by God because He had somehow become sin, or that in some way all of the sins of the world were transferred to Him? No, that isn't what Paul was saying.

In the context of that passage, Paul was trying to show that we are not justified by the law but by faith, and that Christ had redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming as it were, a curse himself. Well, what did Paul mean by that? Paul makes it clear what he meant by referring to Deuteronomy 21:23, where it says that a man hanged on a tree is cursed by God.” When the Jews saw a man put to death by hanging, they knew that there was a person who had committed a crime punishable by death. Well, Jesus had committed no such crime, but even so, He was still, as it were, “hanged on a tree,” and therefore as it were, he bore the stigma of one who was cursed by God.

If Jesus had really become a curse, it would have been greatest injustice of all time. Would God have been a party to something unjust in order to bring about His eternal plan, even if it was motivated by His mercy and grace? Absolutely not! Remember, **Romans 3:25** says that what happened on the cross demonstrated God's righteousness. Jesus did not literally become a curse for us, but in order to set us free from the curse of the Law, he willingly suffered the shame as it were, of being a convicted criminal.

What really happened there on the cross was that Christ became the sin-offering, the only sin-offering that God would find acceptable. Every other sin-offering was only a shadow of the

sacrifice God Himself would make in the sending of His Son to die on the cross. Just as in the days of Abraham and Isaac when God stopped the faithful patriarch from plunging his knife into his son's body, and then provided a ram, God stopped short of putting us to death, and provided an acceptable sacrifice. That ram wasn't a substitute for Isaac. How could a wild ram be a substitute for a person? The ram was simply as an offering that God accepted in lieu of the time when He would send His own Son to be the only truly acceptable sacrifice for sin.

We have to keep in mind that it was sin that had caused the rupture in the relationship between the Creator and His creation. A rupture, by the way, that manifests itself, not just in the brokenness caused by sin, but in the brokenness we see in the world all around us; all of the sickness and death, calamities of every kind. Sin is what Isaiah 59 says caused us to be separated from God. Sin is the reason why atonement was needed; a relationship was broken. Remember we said this morning, the word atonement means "at-one-ment." It's a word addressing the problem of a broken relationship. Incidentally, read the whole chapter of Isaiah 59, will you? It's all about Christ and what He did for us on the cross. Read that, it will really bless you if you do that.

Christ didn't come to become sin. He came to become a sin-offering. It was God providing the sacrifice, which we couldn't provide ourselves. Jesus didn't come to take our place. He came to take His place; that place that had been marked out for Him since before the creation of the heavens and earth. Peter says (1 Peter 1:18-20),

*"knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19) but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20) He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you*

Christ didn't come to be a substitute. He didn't come to take my punishment. Thanks to Him, I won't have to be punished, but He didn't take my punishment. Nowhere in the Scriptures does it say that Christ was punished, or that He suffered our punishment. He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin, and those who put their faith and trust in Him, as well as in God find themselves at one with God. They enter into what is called the "new covenant" which was made effectual by Christ's death. That new covenant offers us opportunities that literally go far beyond anything we have ever seen or heard, or can even imagine. In the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter, the Hebrew writer speaks to this at some length and I would like to close by us reading those words together. If you will, please turn to that passage, the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews and begin reading with me in verse 4, and we will read through verse 31:

*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5) Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; 6) in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. 7) Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"*

8) When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), 9) then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. 10) And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

11) And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12) But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13) waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. 14) For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

15) And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, 16) "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," 17) then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." 18) Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

19) Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20) by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21) and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22) let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23) Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24) And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25) not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

26) For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27) but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. 28) Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 29) How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? 30) For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31) It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Well, I fear that even though I have taken two lessons on this subject today, I still have failed to give you an adequate sense of what really took place that day on Golgotha. I can only hope, and pray, that maybe you have a little more appreciation for the gospel and the new covenant, and that maybe because of that, you will be more determined than ever to be faithful and to live a holy life unto God. As we read here in Hebrews, "...draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

*not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as we see the Day drawing near.”*

The lesson is yours, and I know you join me in thanking God for His marvelous wisdom and power and the gift of His Son. If tonight you want or need to respond to God in any way that we can help you with, please come while we stand and sing.