

THE GREATEST RELIGIOUS WONDERS

"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." II Corinthians 5:21.

The ancient world had its seven great wonders, and so has the modern world; but greater than either are the three wonders set forth in II Corinthians 5:21. Whereas the former wonders chiefly inspire awe and admiration for the handiwork of God, without conferring any blessing on us, these wonders affect our eternal destiny.

There is a constant tendency for the great facts of the Christian faith to begin to seem commonplace. Even Christians need again and again to look intently at them in order to keep a fresh sense of the importance of these facts and to experience their power.

There are many wonders in the Christian religion, but three of them are outstanding. They are found in the words of our text; "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." As we look at these words we see three great wonders.

I. A Sinless Saviour.

Due to Adam's sin of disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit, all of his posterity have been sinners and consequently share his depravity. God's Word says, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). The only sinless Person who ever walked on this earth was the Lord Jesus Christ. Of Him God the Father said, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). After the most careful and thorough scrutiny, His most critical enemies were forced to admit that they could not find any fault in Him.

1. Christ was sinless in nature.

Gabriel called the child who was to be born of the virgin Mary "that holy thing which shall be born of thee" (Luke 1:35). Christ Himself testified that "the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John 14:30). In no respect and to no degree was Christ ever subject to Satan. In Hebrews 7:26 He is said to be "holy, guileless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." In I Peter 1:19 Christ is spoken of as "a lamb without blemish and without spot."

2. Christ was sinless in conduct.

Peter said that Christ "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (I Peter 2:22-24). Hebrews 4:15 tells us that He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Christ challenged His own adversaries with these words: "Who of you convicteth me of sin?" (John 8:46). Nobody was able to accept His challenge and point out a single flaw in His life.

Among all the billions who have lived on this earth, there has only been One Who was sinless in His nature and in His conduct, and that was Christ Jesus our Lord. Not only was Christ free from original sin, but throughout the entire course of His active and eventful life He kept Himself unspotted from the world. Christ was absolutely sinless. Personally He was free from sin. Sin never stained His heart. Although He lived in a sinful world, He was without sin. He was surrounded with sin, as with a dense atmosphere, but it did not taint Him. Even though He was tempted greatly and on many occasions, He was without sin. There was no sin of omission or commission in Him.

II. A Substitutionary Sacrifice.

"He hath made him to be sin for us." Here is the second great religious wonder. Just as Adam was our representative, so Christ was our substitute. Adam brought us our guilt, and Christ took away our guilt. In Adam we were "made sinners." Christ was "made sin for us." There is a similar statement in Galatians 3:13; "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (I Peter 2:24). God put human sin upon Him that He might judge it in Him and so put it out of the way.

The God of the Scriptures is sovereign; that is, He is the God Who has absolute authority, and the necessary power to do exactly as He pleaseth. Over God there is no law; He knoweth no rule except His own free and mighty will. Although He will not do anything but what is just and good, yet His nature is absolutely free. God is not to be controlled by the will of man, nor the desires of man, nor by fate in which the superstitious believe. He is God, and doeth as He willeth on this earth and in the heavens.

As for the difficulty about God's justice in punishing the innocent Christ, that vanished when we remember that God Himself, in the Person of Christ, voluntarily took sin upon Himself. In II Corinthians 5:19 Paul had just said that, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." Have we any fault to find when the offended himself takes the penalty? Since Christ assumed the full debt owed by man, nobody can rightfully accuse God of injustice in ratifying the assumption. Christ, the Son of God, being of the same substance with the Father, was co-equal, co-eternal and co-existent with Him. As the son of Mary, He was subject to all the infirmities of human nature, except the infirmities of sin; a man of suffering and of woe; of pain and trouble; of anxiety and fear; of temptation and of trial; of weakness and of death. He saw sin in others, but He did not know what it was from experience. He did not experience sin in thought, word or deed. The judgment for sin which should have fallen on us fell on Him. That is substitution. It is also one of the greatest religious wonders. "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8).

What was done with Him Who knew no sin? He was "made sin." The more you weigh that wonderful expression the more you will marvel at its depth of meaning. Even now, despite the emphasis, clearness and distinctness of the language used here and elsewhere in the Bible, there are people who are daring enough to deny that substitution is taught in the Scriptures. With such people it is useless to argue, because it is clear that language has no meaning for them. On the part of many today there is a deadly animosity to this glorious truth of substitution. Much of modern thought labors to get away from what the Holy Spirit had recorded, namely, that the penalty for sin was lifted from the guilty and laid upon the innocent. It is written, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." This language is as plain as can be used. The same is true of our text, "He hath made him to be sin for us."

Christ was not guilty, and could not be made guilty; but He was treated as if He were guilty, because He willed to stand in the place of the guilty. The sinless One was made to be sin for us. If God is pleased with the sacrifice of Christ, shall not we be much more than pleased? Shall we not be delighted to be saved by such a sacrifice as God Himself appoints, provides and accepts? The substitutionary sacrifice of Christ is a religious wonder indeed.

III. A Saved Sinner.

"That we might become the righteousness of God in him." It is a fact that God hath laid on Christ the iniquity of us all. God's Word says so and I believe it. I find life and comfort in it, and rejoice to preach it to others. Instead of the weight of sin resting on the sinner, who committed it, it was made to rest on Christ, Who did not commit it; while the righteousness which Christ wrought out was placed to the account of the guilty, who had not worked it out, so that the guilty are pardoned and treated as righteous. "That we might be made the righteousness of God in him." No theologian has ever gotten to the bottom of this statement. No man can ever exhaust its meaning. Christ was made sin in our behalf, in order "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." The amazing grace of God was shown by His willingness to "give his only begotten Son" for undeserving sinners. Christ revealed that grace when "He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." The purpose of the cross was to bring people into right relationship with God.

Christ's death made such a clothing with the righteousness of God possible. If the righteousness of God which He has provided is to become our actual and personal possession, we must accept the substitutionary work of Christ by faith and reckon His righteousness to be ours. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10).