

## **Christ Made Sin**

### **The Nature of the Action of God as Described in II Corinthians 5:21**

*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.*

One time I was teaching in the Menya tribe of Papua New Guinea from Romans 5 on the doctrine of imputation as it is revealed in the Word of God – the imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity; the imputation of the sins of the elect to the Redeemer; and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to His people. These three imputations are at the core of the three corresponding doctrines of the gospel – the sinfulness of the human race; the satisfaction of Jesus Christ for the sins of his people; and justification by faith; all found in this great chapter of the epistle of Paul to the Romans. The importance of the doctrine of imputation is hard to be overstated.

In discussion after the teaching, Amos, a leader in one of the churches told me how, a number of years previously, he had visited the Langamar, a bordering tribe with which the Menya had been in tribal warfare with for generations until the Australian government pacified the region in the time of his father. While there a man approached Amos and said, “You killed my father”!

The man was referring to the fact that the father of Amos had killed his father in tribal fighting. Amos himself had not even been born at that time. Amos knew nothing of this act committed by his father, he knew nothing of the anger and the hatred in the heart of his father, he knew nothing of the murderous rage and fear which led to this killing, he knew nothing of the action of wielding the stone axe and splitting open the head of another man. This sin of his father was not in Amos, not in his thoughts, not in his heart, not in his will, not in his action. We could say that Amos knew no sin with respect to this sin of his father. However, Amos said, “The man was not lying; I did kill his father.”

Why would Amos say such a thing? Because imputation is a reality in this culture. Amos himself did not commit this sin. This sin is not in him. In himself he is pure of this sin. Nevertheless it is his sin and he is guilty of this sin by the imputation of the sin of his father to him. Amos is guilty of the murder of this man’s father. According to culture law this guilt passes upon all the male members of Amos’ clan; this relationship is the basis of the imputation.

If cultural tradition still reigned, the male members of the clan of Amos would live their entire lives in fear of death, as would their male children after them, as would their male children after them, until the clan of the man who had been killed by Amos’ father killed one of their clan. This was the only way satisfaction could be made.

Imputation is also a reality in the glorious redemption accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ.

### ***The Question of Christ Made Sin***

This is the question - What does the Holy Spirit mean when he says, “*For he made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him*” in II Corinthians 5:21?

The question is **not** whether Christ was made to be sin; the Scriptures explicitly state here that Christ was made to be sin. All believers know and believe that Christ was made sin. The question is what does the Word of God mean when it says Christ was made sin for us.

There are some who believe that the nature of the action of God in which Christ was made to be sin for us was not by imputation. The argument against imputation says that the word translated “made” never means imputation but is a very intense word that always involves something actually experienced and means it is an actual transformation of a person or thing from one thing into another. On this basis it is said that Christ was “wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably produced, created, caused to become” sin; and that Christ was made to be sin by “an actual transformation” such that He was “made sin in all its hideous ugliness”.

Was Christ made to be sin by the imputation of all of the sins of all of the elect given to Him by the Father in the eternal covenant of grace? Or was Christ made to be sin by an actual transformation of His person from one thing to another in which he was wondrously and mysteriously created, or caused to become, the actual sin of all of His people?

To answer this question it is essential for us to understand the Scriptural teaching of imputation as it is revealed in Romans 4 and 5. This article will attempt to consider imputation and then briefly consider several other doctrines which relate to the question of Christ made sin. Attached is an appendix concerning the meaning and use in the Word of God of the Greek word translated “made” in the phrase “for he made him to be sin” in II Corinthians 5:21.

If we were to read this verse and knew nothing else of the Word of God we would immediately have a number of questions – What is sin? Where did sin come from? How is man made a sinner? What does it mean that God made Christ to be sin? What was the purpose of God in making Christ to be sin? For whom was he made sin? How is man made the righteousness of God? What does “in Him” mean? These are some of the most important questions a man could ever ask.

These are the questions I would like to consider as we seek to understand what it is the Father did, the nature of His action, in which He made Christ “to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”.

### ***Divine Imputation***

The fifth chapter of the epistle of Paul to the saints in Rome, beginning in verse 12 to the end of the chapter, provides answers to all of these questions and so much more. This is one of the most significant portions in all of the Word of God; it is packed with truth which is universal in scope. In it we are given a powerful and profound picture of the action of God in the redemption of his people.

There are two wonderful paradoxes in the work of redemption – God justifies the ungodly but the righteous Judge will by no means clear the guilty; God condemns the righteous One but the righteous Judge will never condemn the innocent. How can these things be?

This passage in Romans 5 tells us repeatedly and insistently that imputation is a reality, and plays a vital role, in the great work of redemption wrought by God according to the eternal covenant of grace. The Scriptural teaching on imputation provides the answers to both these paradoxes and magnifies the wisdom of God. It is by imputation that God is just in justifying the ungodly and it is by imputation that God is just in condemning the innocent One. It is through imputation that God is “just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).

## ***The First Adam and the Last Adam***

The Apostle Paul shows us that the answers to all of these great questions hinge upon two men, Adam and the Lord Jesus Christ, and our relationship to these two men. These two men, Adam and Christ, are the heads of their respective humanity. There has never been any other and there never will be any other. Every man is either *"in Adam"* or *"in Christ"*. All people stand in relationship to one of these two men, whose actions determine the eternal destiny of all those who belong to them.

In verse 14 Paul tells us explicitly that Adam is a type of Christ, he is *"the figure of him who was to come."* The relationship of mankind to Adam is a picture of the relationship of the redeemed to Christ. In I Corinthians 15:45 Paul refers to Christ as *"the last Adam"*, and then in verse 47 he calls him *"the second man"*. Adam was the first man and Christ is the second Man; Adam was the first Adam and Christ is the last Adam.

## ***The First Man and the First Sin – Man made Sin.***

Paul begins at the beginning with the first man and the first sin –

*12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin; and thus death spread to all men, for all sinned -*

Sin entered the world through this one man Adam. It was Eve who had sinned prior to Adam but the sin of Eve held consequences for her alone; sin did not enter the world through one woman. The sin of Eve did not pass on to all of humanity. This alone is sufficient to prove the representative headship of Adam. It was the one sin of Adam which had universal consequences for the world since he, according to God's purpose, was the representative head of all mankind.

With the entrance of sin into the world there was also the entrance of death. God had given the command to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and prescribed the penalty for the transgression of his command to be death, *"for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"* (Genesis 2:17).

The one sin of Adam is the reason that death entered the world. But why did death pass upon all men? There can be no question that *"all sinned"* is explicitly stated as the reason that death passed to all men. The crucial question is: What is meant by *"all sinned"*? The context itself gives the answer: *"by one man's offense many died"* (v.15); *"the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation"* (v.16); *"by the one man's offense death reigned through the one"* (v.17); *"through one man's offense judgment came to all men"* (v.18); and *"by one man's disobedience many were made sinners"* (v.19). It is stated, repeatedly and emphatically, that the reign of sin and death came upon all men, not because of their own personal sin or inherent depravity, but because of the one sin of the one man Adam.

By this one man's offense all sinned and all men were made sinners; as a consequence of the guilt of this one sin judgment came upon all men resulting in condemnation; this in turn brought the universal reign of death upon all men

The Apostle Paul is saying man is made a sinner, judged as guilty, condemned, and dies, not because of sin in his own person as the first cause but because of the one sin of the one man. Before a man is born, before having done any good or evil, he is a sinner, guilty and condemned to die because the sin of Adam is his sin too – *"for all sinned"*. Since all sinned in Adam then all suffer the penalty for his sin and *"in Adam all die"* (I Corinthians 15:22)

It is important to understand that it is not possible that Paul is referring to the communication of the corruption of fallen human nature inherited from Adam by natural generation. This would be saying that condemnation and death come to all men because of the actual inherent sin and sinful actions of each individual. If this were Paul's teaching here then the analogy would be that all men are justified and attain to life on the basis of having been made inherently righteous and by their own righteous actions. This is the complete antithesis of the gospel, the framework of this passage, and the entire Roman epistle, in which Paul establishes the doctrine that men are justified and attain to life by the righteousness of the one man, Jesus Christ.

The Word of God is telling us a most significant truth – All men were made sinners, not by their own personal actions or anything in themselves, but by the one sin of the one man. They are not made to be “as if” they were sinners; nor are they made sinners by the one sin of the one man being wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably produced or created in them. **They are made sinners because the sin of Adam is imputed to them - “all sinned” the one sin of Adam.**

### ***All Sinned and the Reign of Death***

*13 (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.*

*14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.*

Paul has said that death came to all men, not because of their own personal transgression or individual sin but because of their participation in the sin of Adam. To man's way of thinking this seems so unjust. How could the sin of someone else be my sin? This requires further explanation and this is what is provided in these two verses.

The main point is that all men died during the period of Adam to Moses, and since death is the consequence of sin then it is clear that all were guilty of sin. If all men sinned like Adam it could be argued that all men are sinners and die as a consequence of their own personal sin. But Paul says here that there was a category of people who had not sinned in the same way that Adam sinned. Nevertheless death reigned *even over those who had not sinned in the same way Adam sinned*. This is a difficult text but, for our purposes, it is sufficient to say, as others have, that infants can certainly be included in this group and provide a powerful example of what Paul is teaching.

If there was ever a category of people of whom it could be said that they have not sinned like Adam sinned it must be infants dying in infancy. Adam sinned by willfully disobeying the direct revelation of a command of God but infants dying in infancy have not personally, in themselves, disobeyed any command of God. Nevertheless infants die and since death presupposes guilt and condemnation then infants who die in infancy must be guilty of some particular sin.

Paul is asserting that the sin, guilt, condemnation and death of every man, including infants, are the direct result of the one sin of the one man Adam. Adam's transgression, the one sin of the one man, is not in the mind, in the heart, in the will, or in the action of the infant. *With respect to Adam's sin in the garden* the infant, in its own being, knew no sin. Nevertheless the infant is guilty of sin. Infants are not made sinners by the sin of Adam being “wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably produced” or “created” in them. **All men, including infants, are made sinners by the imputation of the one sin of the one man.**

Note that the Apostle Paul does **not** say that all men become sinners because subsequent to Adam all men are born with a fallen sinful nature. The Scriptures are very careful to relate the

reign of sin and death over all men from Adam to Moses to the one sin of the one man and not to the corruption of fallen human nature which is passed on to all men by natural generation.

Paul is concerned to establish this truth because Adam is a type of Christ.

In what way is Adam a type of Christ? *Adam is a type of Christ with respect to the things which are being spoken of in the context of the passage in which this statement is found.* The things being spoken of here are - one offense and one obedience; condemnation and justification; many made sinners and many made righteous; abundance of sin and the super abundance of grace; the reign of sin and death and the reign of righteousness and life. It is in respect to these things specifically that Adam is a type of Christ, *“he is a type of Him who was to come”*.

If we go wrong on the type then we will certainly end up going wrong with respect to Him who was to come.

### **Adam and Jesus Christ**

Like Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, the last Adam stands as the head of his people. He is the head of a new humanity; He is *“the firstborn among many brethren”* (Romans 8:29). Like the first Adam it is the actions of the last Adam, not their own, which determine the eternal destiny of all those who stand in relationship to him as their head.

It is vital to understand that the relationship which Adam sustains to his seed and that Christ sustains to his people are similar and different. Our relationship to Adam as our representative head is a natural and physical union and it is on the basis of this relationship that his one sin is imputed to all his posterity. Our relationship to Christ is a spiritual and mystical union; Christ and the church are one mystical person (I Corinthians 12:12,13) and it is upon the basis of this relationship that his righteousness is imputed to us and our sin is imputed to him. It is the relationship that is the grounds for the imputation. Without the relationship there would be no imputation.

Paul has said at the end of verse 14 that Adam is a type of Christ. Once again he knows that this will cause difficulty – How could Adam, who is responsible for the ruin of the entire human race, be considered a type of Christ? So once again Paul takes time to explain further how it is that Adam is a type of Christ. He does this in verses 15 to the end of verse 17.

The Apostle Paul draws a very striking and compelling analogy between the two respective heads, Adam and the Lord Jesus. In some cases the analogy is contrasting and in other cases the analogy is affirming however the parallels are unmistakable.

*15 But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.*

*16 And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came by one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification.*

*17 For if by one man's offense death reigned through the one; much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ.)*

Paul begins by emphasizing the contrast – *“But the free gift is not like the offense”*. One man acts for all in each case but their actions are vastly different. There is *“the offense”* and there is *“the free gift”*. The offense leads to death – *“by the one man's offense many died”*. Death is the just penalty for sin; it is what sin deserves. Since we sinned in Adam then we deserve death and

receive payment accordingly for *“the wages of sin is death”*. Through Adam we receive the wages we deserve.

But the action of Christ is entirely outside the realm of wages and just desert. Through Christ his people receive a free gift, the grace of God, *“the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many”*. Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more! There is so much glorious gospel truth in this passage but we must stay with the general sense of the teaching as it relates to our question of what the meaning is of Christ made sin.

Paul further develops the contrast in verse 16, *“the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned”*. Clearly Paul is about to compare and contrast the disobedience of Adam, *“the one who sinned”*, with the perfect work of the Jesus Christ on behalf of his people. The results of Christ’s obedience are very different than the results of Adam’s disobedience. What did the one sin of the one man lead to? Adam sinned and the results of his sin were judgment and condemnation. But the one who obeyed brought entirely different results. Through the obedience of Christ came *“the free gift”* which resulted in justification.

Let us keep in mind that our interest in examining the biblical teaching of this passage is to understand the nature of the action of God in II Corinthians 5:21. We have seen that this passage gives us answers to some of our questions - What is sin? Where did sin come from? How is man made a sinner? The questions we would like to have in the forefront of our minds as we continue are – What does it mean that Christ was made sin? How is a man made the righteousness of God? What does *“in Him”* mean?

### ***The Many Offenses and the One Man – Christ Made Sin***

Now Paul makes a striking contrast which is of the utmost importance – *“the judgment which came from the one offense resulted in condemnation”*, and we would certainly expect the parallel to be *“the free gift which came from **the one obedience** resulted in justification”*. Paul does not say this. He says, *“the free gift which came from **many offenses** resulted in justification”*. This seems to make no sense. How could many offenses result in justification? What is Paul saying here?

When Paul says, *“the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification”*, he is stating that the free gift dealt with many offenses resulting in justification. The one sin of Adam resulted in the condemnation of all men; *“the judgment came from one offense”*. The obedience of Christ must take into account, not one sin, but *“many offenses”* for the free gift to result in justification.

What is the one act of obedience in which Christ dealt with the many offenses resulting in justification? Christ dealt with the many offenses of his people when *“he was wounded for our transgressions”*, when *“he was bruised for our iniquities”*, when the Lord *“laid upon him the iniquity of us all”*. Christ made satisfaction for the many offenses when God *“made him to be sin for us”*. We could accurately paraphrase Romans 5 verse 16 by substituting “Christ made sin” for “many offenses” – *“the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from **Christ made sin** resulted in justification”*.

In what way did the *“one offense”* of Adam pass to all men resulting in condemnation? By imputation! In what way did the *“many offenses”* of all the elect pass to Christ resulting in justification? By imputation! It is not credible to believe that anything else is intended. The analogy of this entire passage is structured around the divine act of imputation.

If Christ, in his act of obedience for his people, was made to be sin in some other way than by imputation then Paul’s whole analogy would break down and be nonsensical. The whole force of the argument demands that Christ was made to be sin by the imputation of the many offenses of

all of his people. In the case of Adam, the one offense of the first man, Adam, was imputed to all men resulting in condemnation; and in the case of Christ, the many offenses of his people were imputed to the second Man, the last Adam, resulting in justification. There is no parallel and no analogy if you say that the one offense of Adam was imputed to all men resulting in condemnation; but in the case of Christ the many offenses of his people were “wondrously, mysteriously, produced” or “created” in him resulting in justification.

The work of Christ in the justification of the sinner is accomplished through the imputed righteousness of Christ, and this also includes the satisfaction of Christ for the sins of his people. There could be no free gift of justification unless the many offenses were blotted out. This is clear in the very verse we are interested in – *“For he made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”*. Christ made to be sin for us is a necessary condition for our being made the righteousness of God in Him.

The fact that Paul includes here *“the free gift which is from many offenses resulted in justification”* as the analogy of the imputation of Adam’s sin resulting in condemnation is irrefutable evidence that Christ is made to be sin for us by the imputation of our sins since the entire passage is an exposition of what Paul states in summary in I Corinthians 15:22, *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive”*.

The *“many offenses”* were made to be Christ’s sin even as the one sin of Adam was made to be the sin of all men. He was made to be sin. It could be said that the many offenses were not in the heart, in the mind, in the will, or in the action of Jesus Christ. With respect to the many offenses of his people, the Lord Jesus Christ in his own being, knew no sin. The sin which results in the condemnation of the Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of his people is *not found in anything which resides in him, nor in anything God does in him, nor in anything he did*.

Bunyan makes a point to emphasize this in his work Justification by an Imputed Righteousness in which he writes:

**Our sins when laid upon Christ were yet personally ours, not his;** so his righteousness when put upon us is yet personally his, not ours. What is it then? Why, *“he was made to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,”* 2 Cor. 5:21

It is therefore a justifying virtue **only by imputation**, or as God reckoneth it to us; even as our sins made the Lord Jesus a sinner - nay, sin, **by God’s reckoning of them to him**.

It is absolutely necessary that this be known of us; for if the understanding be muddy as to this, it is impossible that such should be sound in the faith. (bold added)

He was made to be sin for us, *“who knew no sin”*. Nevertheless he is guilty of sin because it is his sin by imputation. Christ is judged as guilty, condemned, and dies, because of the many offenses of his people being imputed to him. As he says in Psalm 69, *“Though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it. O God, You know my foolishness; and my sins are not hidden from you.”*

He was made sin for us *“who knew no sin”*. He had no knowledge of sin in himself, no guilt of sin in his own person, no experience of sin in his being; he had *“stolen nothing”* yet he still must restore it *as if* he had personally stolen everything. Why? Because, by imputation, he *had* stolen everything. He was made to be sin for us. Our iniquity was transferred to him, the Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all, and he became the greatest debtor in the world such that he prays, *“O God...my sins are not hidden from you”*.

This innocent and just person voluntarily assumed the guilt of the sins of his people in being a surety for them and in so doing he made himself subject to the punishment for their sin. It is not unjust that an innocent person should suffer for the guilty or a righteous person suffer for the

unrighteous. Peter states this unequivocally, *“For Christ also suffered for sins, **the just for the unjust**”* (I Peter 3:18). When this is so then it is necessary that the unrighteousness of the one be laid upon the innocent and accounted to be his, *“for the judgment of God is according to truth.”*

This is pictured to us on the Day of Atonement in the scapegoat as the type which finds its fulfillment in Christ. Aaron, the High Priest, would lay his hands upon the head of the goat, *“confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the live goat...the goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities.”* And so we read in I Peter 2:24 concerning Christ, *“who himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree”*. Over him were confessed all the iniquities of the congregation of his people, our sins were laid upon his head, and put to his account.

It seems that at the root of the belief of Christ being made sin by an actual transformation of his person such that he was caused to become the actual sin of his people is the notion that God could not be just in condemning the Holy One unless our sins were communicated to Him in some mysterious way so as to become subjectively and inherently his own. To this way of thinking it is not sufficient that our sin be put to Christ's account such that he bears the guilt and the punishment for our sins; Christ must be made to be **unjust** in his own person for God to find him guilty to be just in punishing him.

Christ made to be sin can never be in such a way that our sin becomes subjectively and inherently his own sin. A transference of sin in this sense is a natural and spiritual impossibility. Take the sin of King David with Bathsheba as a specific example; In the heart of David was the sin of lust, covetousness, deceit, murder. Sin was not transferred to Christ when he was made to be sin in such a way that he was “transformed”, “caused to become”, or “actually experienced” as his own the lust, covetousness, deceit, and murder which was in the heart of David. To say so is to say that Christ was made sin by becoming the actual corruption of the sins of his people. This is an impossibility when it concerns Him who is *“holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners”*. (Hebrews 7:26).

John Gill, in writing on II Corinthians 5:21, makes this point clearly –

Now to be made the righteousness of God, is to be made righteous in the sight of God, by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. **Just as Christ is made sin, or a sinner, by the imputation of the sins of others to him**; so they are made righteousness, or righteous persons, through the imputation of his righteousness to them; and **in no other way can the one be made sin**, or the other righteousness. And this is said to be “in him”, in Christ; which shows, that though Christ's righteousness is unto all, and upon all them that believe, it is imputed to them, and put upon them; **it is not anything wrought in them; it is not inherent in them.** (bold added)

Returning to Romans 5, in verse 17 the analogy is further developed in which the emphasis is on the contrast between the reign of death through the one offense of the one man and the reign of life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

There is a clear progression in thought as the apostle develops the analogy. The sin of one leads to judgment, judgment leads to condemnation, and condemnation leads to death – *“For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one”*. While the obedience of one leads to the gift of righteousness, the gift of righteousness leads to justification, justification leads to life – *“much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ”*.

### ***The Last Adam and the One Obedience – Man Made Righteous***

It is clear that verses 18 and 19 are a summary of all that Paul has been teaching. He restates the analogy he began in verse 12 in slightly different words and then concludes his thought -



*18 Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation; even so through one man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.*

*19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous.*

His statement is much more succinct and consequently the similar and contrasting parallels are brought into sharper relief. We have already considered the imputation of Adam's one offense to all men – “*by one man's disobedience many were made sinners*”, so now we will consider the contrasting parallel – “*by one man's obedience many will be made righteous*”.

Once again he holds up before us the two representative heads of mankind – Adam and Jesus Christ. It is abundantly clear that Paul is saying yet again what he has strongly and repeatedly emphasized throughout the passage – Adam is a type of Christ.

Therefore, he says, “*as*” through Adam's one offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, “*even so*”, ***in the same way***, through Jesus Christ's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life; “*as*” by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, “*so also*”, ***in the same way***, by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. The *nature* of the action is the same in both cases – it is imputation.

Man is justified by a righteousness which is not found in himself. The one who is justified did not perform this righteous act in his own person – this righteousness is not in his heart, not in his mind, not in his will, not in his actions. He knew no righteousness. He is free of righteousness. Furthermore he is the very antithesis of righteousness - he is ungodly.

Nevertheless he is justified by the obedience and righteousness of the one man, Jesus Christ. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him and as a result it is his righteousness as surely as if he performed it in his own person. He is not made to be “as if” he is righteous; he ***is*** made righteous, constituted righteous by God. In what way is he made righteous? In the same way many were made sinners – by imputation.

In Romans 4:1-8 we read that God justifies the ungodly. The Apostle Paul says that God “*justifies the ungodly*” by the imputation of righteousness and the non-imputation of sins. The apostle does not say that God makes the ungodly righteous by wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably making them righteous by a transformation of their being such that they are transformed into the righteousness of Christ, and then justifying them on that basis. God justifies the ungodly by a righteousness which is not found in them, nor resides in them but resides in another.

In his work Justification by an Imputed Righteousness John Bunyan writes –

Indeed this is one of the greatest mysteries in the world – namely, that a righteousness that resides with a person in heaven should justify me, a sinner, on earth.

In this statement Bunyan has captured the essence of the great gospel teaching of justification by an imputed righteousness. The ungodly are justified by a righteousness which is wholly outside of themselves but nevertheless is truly theirs by imputation.

Paul, when writing to the Philippians put it in this way – “*and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith;*” (Philippians 3:9). Paul knows and understands that he has no righteousness in himself but must be found “*in Him*” by faith because the righteousness he is in need of for justification and life resides only in this person and not in himself. The

righteousness of Christ which is imputed to us for justification is still His righteousness, and resides with Him, even though it becomes ours by imputation.

If it is a perfect righteousness which is imputed to us then we are judged according to what is imputed to us and are dealt with as those who have a perfect righteousness. **We are made righteous because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us.** There is no other way for a sinner to be justified except by the imputation of the perfect righteousness of Christ.

It is disturbing that this glorious Scriptural doctrine of imputation has been impugned by statements to the effect that those who preach imputation of sin and of righteousness are teaching “a pasted on righteousness”, and that “God pretended this is the way it was”. This is what the Word of God has to say about the righteousness received by Abraham resulting in justification -

*And therefore 'it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.*  
Romans 4:23-25.

The righteousness by which Abraham was justified by God was an **imputed** righteousness.

Imputation is not a pretense. John Owen describes it in this way –

Imputation of the righteousness of Christ is an act of God's grace in which, by consideration of the work of Christ, he grants a **real, true, perfect righteousness, even the righteousness of God**, to all who believe. He accounts this righteousness to be really and truly their righteousness by his own gracious action of having imputed it to them and is therefore just in forgiving their sins and granting them the gift of eternal life.

And so we read in II Corinthians 5:21, “*For he made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*” We can state then, with absolute certainty, that the action of God in which he makes us to be the righteousness of God in Christ is imputation.

### **One Man's Righteous Act**

The Apostle Paul speaks of the obedience of Christ as “*one man's righteous act*” in Romans 5:18, and the actual text which is reflected in the marginal translation makes it even more striking – “*one righteous act*”. The comparison and the emphasis are on the singularity of the action - *one* offense and *one* righteous act, not a multitude of offenses and not a multitude of righteous actions. What one righteous act would be the antithesis of the one offense? There is no doubt that Paul has in mind the obedience of Christ in His work of atonement on the cross.

We know from the Word of God that the cross is often spoken of as encompassing the entire work of redemption accomplished by Christ. With reference to this climactic event, Christ himself speaks of it as an act of obedience to the command of His Father, “*Therefore my Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received of my Father*” (John 10:17,18).

Why does Paul want to direct our attention to the one righteous act of the cross? Because he is contrasting this with the one disobedience in the garden which resulted in condemnation and death for all men.

When he says, “*through one man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life*” we are to understand that the righteousness, which results in justification, includes the obedience of Christ to **all** of the demands of the law. Christ as our Substitute not only fulfilled the law for us in keeping all of its commands, he also came under the curse and the condemnation of the law due to our sin and satisfied the penalty demanded by the law in his death on the cross. Christ acted as our Substitute in bearing the full judgment of God for our sin, and he acted as our Substitute in meeting all of the demands of righteousness. Without both there would be no perfect obedience, and no perfect righteousness. Both are necessary for the free gift to result in justification of life.

When the Word says, “*by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous*”, and “*through one man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life*” we are to understand that the obedience and the righteous act which result in justification include both the perfect obedience of Christ to the commands of the law and also His satisfaction for the guilt of our sins.

The imputation to Christ of the “*many offenses*” of His people, which Paul speaks of in verse 16, is an indispensable part of the obedience through which many will be made righteous. The blotting out of the “*many offenses*” is a constituent of the righteous act of the one man which results in justification of life.

There can be no doubt that the nature of the action of God in making Christ to be sin is by the imputation of all of the sins of all the elect to Christ as the covenant Head and Surety of His people. Through the imputation of the many offenses, Christ was made sin.

### ***Imputation Concluded***

This passage in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans reveals to us, among other things, three actions – through one man’s offense many were made sinners, through the many offenses Christ was made sin, and through the one man’s obedience many will be made righteous.

The *nature* of the action is the same in all cases – it is imputation. The grounds on which the imputation occurs may be different; the things imputed may be different; and the treatment of the person or persons to whom those things have been imputed may be different. But in each case imputation itself is the act of God in a **true** setting to one’s account.

In the case of Adam and the imputation of his sin to his posterity- *what Adam did is accounted to us*. The grounds of the imputation are that he is the covenant head of all of his posterity and they are united to him by natural and physical descent. The thing imputed to all of Adam’s posterity is his one offense. The treatment of Adam’s posterity is that by the imputation of this one offense they are made sinners and judgment came upon all men, resulting in condemnation.

In the case of Christ’s people and the imputation of their sins to him- *what we did is accounted to Christ*. The grounds of the imputation are that Christ is the covenant head of his people, they are united to him in the mystical union of Christ and the church, and he has voluntarily agreed to stand as the Surety of the covenant. The thing imputed to Christ is the many offenses of all those who have been given to him in the eternal covenant of grace. The treatment of Christ is that, by the imputation of the sins of his people, he was made to be sin, made a curse for us, and bore our sins in his own body on the tree such that he died the Just for the unjust.

In the case of Christ and the imputation of His righteousness to his people - *what Christ did is accounted to us*. The grounds of the imputation are that he is the covenant head of all of his people and they are united to him in the mystical union of Christ and the church. The thing imputed to Christ’s people is his righteousness. The treatment of all those who are Christ’s is that

by the imputation of his obedience they are made righteous such that the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.

## ***Biblical Doctrines in Conflict with Christ made Sin by an Actual Transformation of His Being to be the Sins of His People.***

### ***The Immutability of Christ***

The Lord Jesus Christ is God Incarnate. The Son of God and Son of Man is **one person** and two distinct natures. The man Jesus is God. This is what the Scriptures are speaking about when we read, *“For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”* (Colossians 2:9). We often loosely speak of the Lord Jesus as being both God and Man but this is not scripturally accurate – rather, the Lord Jesus Christ is God-Man.

This one person is unchangeable in His being. This is an attribute of God alone. All of his divine perfections rest upon this attribute.

He took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men but the form of God was unchanged. The glory as of the only begotten Son of God continued in all the perfections of His being. The glory was veiled in human flesh but remained unchanged just as the sun remains unchanged when it is hidden by the clouds. The blood which poured out upon the cross when he was made to be sin was *the blood of God* (Acts 20:28). From eternity to eternity this person is unchangeable in His being. He is God.

It is impossible for God to have been made sin by an actual transformation of His person in which He was wondrously and mysteriously created or caused to become the actual sin of His people.

### ***The Holiness of Christ***

God is holy. This is an attribute of God in which He glories in more than any other in the revelation He has given of himself in the Holy Scriptures.

The apostle John in writing of Christ says that the disciples entire experience of God manifested in the flesh can be summed up in this way - *“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all”* | John 1:1-5. Christ was made to be sin yet in Him there was *no darkness...at all!* In His soul there was not one flicker of evil, not one shadow of sin, not one stain of unrighteousness. Nothing! Only the purity and perfection of His holiness.

This is the essence of the Divine nature in all His perfections; He is essentially, invariably, and incomprehensibly light, purity and holiness. *“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.*

When the Christ took upon Himself the great work of atonement for His people He did not cease to be God. Scriptures vigorously attest to the purity of this person even at the very moment he is made to be sin -

At the very moment that Christ *“by Himself purged our sins”* by being made sin and a curse He was *“the brightness of His Father’s glory and the express image of His person.”* Hebrews 1:3;

As He was made to be sin in His sacrifice of atonement He also acts as the High Priest who would be disqualified from this work if he were not *“holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.”* Hebrews 7:26;

As He was made to be sin, entering the Most Holy Place once for all with His own blood, He *“through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God.”* Hebrews 9:14.

As He was made sin He did not suffer the unjust for the unjust. He suffered for sins, *“the Just for the unjust.”* 1 Peter 3:18;

As He was made sin and His blood was spilt we were redeemed *“with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb, without blemish and without spot.”* 1 Peter 1:19;

As His body lay in the grave prior to his resurrection He is the Holy One still, *“Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hades, neither wilt thou allow thine Holy One to see corruption.”* Acts 2:26,27.

When writing on the imputation of the sins of the church to Christ as the Surety of his people John Owen writes:

Nothing is more absolutely true, nothing is more sacredly or assuredly believed by us, than that nothing Christ did or suffered, nothing that he undertook or underwent, did or could constitute him subjectively, inherently, and thereon personally, a sinner, or guilty of any sin of his own.

It is impossible for the Lord Jesus Christ to have been made sin in such a way as to become the actual sin of His people such that he was made sin in all its hideous ugliness. The Lord Jesus Christ **personally** was, is, and forever will be the very essence of light, purity and holiness.

### ***The Eternal Union of the Godhead***

Here is truly a mystery. When the Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross of Calvary the eternal union of the Godhead was not dissolved. Neither was the eternal union between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit separated in any sense.

The Lord Jesus Christ is God - *“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”* Colossians 2:9. It is impossible for Christ to be transformed in His being to become the actual sins of His people. This would necessitate a dissolution, separation, or suspension of the eternal union of the Godhead and God would not be God.

### ***The Types***

We are told in Hebrews, with direct reference to the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of His people, that the Old Testament types were *“copies of the true”*. The types, which are patterned after the true, all point to the purity and perfection of Christ as the High Priest and of Christ as the spotless sacrifice for sin. To have a high priest and a sacrifice become the actual pollution of sin for which an offering is made is wholly incompatible with the scriptural revelation with respect to the sacrifice for sin.

With reference to Christ as High Priest we read - *“For such an High Priest was fitting for us, **who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners**, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priest men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law appoints **the Son who has been perfected forever**”.* Hebrews 7:26-28.

With reference to Christ as the sacrifice we read - *“For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”* Hebrews 9:13,14.

The prophecy of the death of Christ in Isaiah 53 is very detailed and specific. The language used is the language of imputation and not the language of an actual transformation into the sins of his people. He has *“borne our griefs”, “carried our sorrows”, “the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all”, “He shall bear their iniquities”*; God makes *“His soul an offering for sin”* which are all actions commensurate with imputation. Imputation is implicate in the entire passage. He is not described with any language which would imply his becoming the actual sin and iniquity of His people by a mysterious transformation of his person.

## **Appendix**

### ***The Greek word translated “made” in “made Him to be sin”***

New Testament Greek is a language like any other language. It has its own idiosyncrasies but there is nothing particularly unique or unusual about NT Greek. Rarely, if ever, does a word in any language have a single meaning if it is isolated from any context. One need only open a dictionary to confirm that this is true. Words often have multiple shades of meaning and in some cases can have quite a broad spectrum of diverse meanings depending on the contextual use of the word.

Therefore it is a specious argument to say that *“made”* means *“made”* and those who refuse to agree with this are unfaithful to the plain teaching of the Word of God. No one denies that *“made”* means *“made”*, but this is not the question. The question is – What does *“made”* mean in the particular context in which this word is found?

Even when the definition of a word is fairly constrained the context in which it is found can still be essential to understanding the correct meaning of the word as used in that context. Take for example *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive”* I Corinthians 15:22. Can we say that *“all”* means *“all”* and that settles the debate? Of course not! All of humanity dies in Adam but not all of humanity is made alive in Christ.

It has been stated by some that the Greek word translated *“made”* in the phrase *“made him to be sin”* in II Corinthians 5:21 gives the meaning that Christ was *“wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably produced, caused to become”* sin; that Christ was made to be sin by *“an actual transformation from one thing to another”*.

Is this definition supported by the meaning and use of this word as it is found in the rest of the New Testament? No.

The Greek word which is translated *“made”* in the phrase *“made him to be sin”* in II Corinthians 5:21 in the King James Version is *“ἐποίησεν”* (*epoiesen*). The word *“epoiesen”* is a verb – verb root *“poi”*, aorist active indicative - 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular.

The word *“epoiesen”* is a verb whose root is one of the most commonly used in the New Testament. Strong’s Concordance gives 572 occurrences of this verb in its various forms. The Englishman’s Concordance breaks it down even further listing 75 occurrences of *the exact form* of this word found in II Corinthians 5:21, identical in tense, mood, voice, person and number.

It is notable that the Holy Spirit would use such a common verb for such an important action of God in the work of redemption. This should tell us that the question of the nature of the action of

God described in II Corinthians 5:21 cannot be answered by examining the definitions of this word translated “made”.

It is easily shown that the use of the Greek verb itself gives no support to those who believe that “wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably produced, created, caused to become”, is the definition of this word by looking at just a few of the 572 scriptural uses of this verb.

**I John 5:10** *“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath **made** (pepoieken) him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.”* The word translated “made” is the same Greek verb found in II Corinthians 5:21, the only difference being that here it is in the perfect tense and there it is in the aorist tense. Now it is self evident that those who do not believe in the Son of God do not wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably make God a liar, or cause God to become a liar.

All of the following scriptural uses of this word are the **exact** form that is found in the phrase, “For he made him to be sin for us”.

**Acts 2:36** *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has **made** (epoiesen) this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”* In this instance, not only is this the identical word to that in II Corinthians 5:21 in root, tense, mood, voice, person, and number but the person acting and the object of the action are the same, God the Father and God the Son. God did not wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably produce, create, or cause Jesus to become Lord. He is the great I AM. He always was Lord, is Lord, and will forever be Lord.

**John 19:17** *“The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and according to our law he ought to die, because he **made** (epoiesen) himself the Son of God.’”* It is evident that the Jews are not saying that Jesus wondrously, mysteriously created himself or caused himself to be the Son of God. They are stating that he put himself forward or declared himself to be the Son of God.

**Mark 3:14** *“And he **ordained** (epoiesen) twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach.”* Here the KJV translators have translated the identical Greek word as “ordained” rather than “made” since this clearly accords with the context. Jesus did not wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably produce or create twelve disciples.

**Luke 5:29** *“And Levi **made** (epoiesen) him a great feast”.* Levi did not wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably produce or create a feast for the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Luke 8:8** *“And other fell on the good ground, and sprang up, and **bare** (epoiesen) fruit an hundredfold.”* The KJV translators have rendered this same word as “bare” in this context rather than “made” since, once again, this accords with the context.

**Acts 9:13** *“Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he has **done** (epoiesen) to the saints at Jerusalem.”* Here a proper translation of this word is “done” since the context makes it clear that this is the intended meaning by the use of this word which is identical to that translated “made” in II Corinthians 5:21. Furthermore it is obvious that the meaning cannot possibly be understood to be that Saul had “wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably produced”, or “created”, much evil to the saints at Jerusalem.

**Ephesians 3:11** *“According to the eternal purpose which he **purposed** (epoiesen) in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* The identical word here in Ephesians is translated “purposed” rather than “made” in the KJV because once again this accords with the context which speaks about the action of God with respect to his eternal purpose.

Are there texts of Scripture in which the meaning of this Greek word could be understood as “wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably produced, created”? Yes. The following are two examples -

**John 2:11** *“This beginning of miracles **did** (epoiesen) Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed in him.”* Here the same word is translated “*did*” however it is clear in this case that it could be interpreted as “wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably produced, created, caused to become” since the action is in reference to the miracle of Christ changing the water to wine.

**Acts 7:49,50** *“Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool: what house will you build me? Saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand **made** (epoiesen) all these things? It is undeniable that in this instance it could be said that God “wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably produced, created,” all these things.*

While it is no doubt true that the miracles and the creation of the world were wondrous and mysterious, and there is no debate that they were actions which inexplicably produced and created, it is not at all clear that this meaning was intended by the inspired writers in using the Greek word “*epoiesen*”. On the contrary, it is significant that in not a single instance of the 75 occurrences of the exact form of the word found in II Corinthians 5:21, did the KJV translators translate this word using this type of language.

It is therefore obvious that, to the understanding of the imminent Greek scholars who were involved in the translation of the KJV, the Greek word translated “*made*” in II Corinthians 5:21 does not carry the definition of “wondrously, mysteriously, inexplicably produced or created.”

### ***Conclusion to Appendix***

We can conclude then that the definition of the Greek word “*epoiesen*” which is translated “*made*” in the phrase, “*For he made him sin for us*” gives no support to the doctrinal position that this verse is teaching that Christ was made to be sin by an actual transformation of His person from one thing to another in which he was wondrously, mysteriously, and inexplicably created or caused to become the actual sin of all of His people.