

“Him Who Knew No Sin ...”

“... he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Does this passage teach that Christ actually became a sinner (thus was punished as one) or that he became a sin offering for man?

Some regard that the suffering of Christ did not end when He died on the cross; that He went to Hell and suffered as unforgiven sinners might suffer for their sins. It is true that the psalmist looks forward to the resurrection of Christ by saying, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou give thy holy one to see corruption” (Psa. 16:8-10, KJV) yet to equate “hell” in Psalm 16 as the place of punishment (as some have done in past years) is a grievous mistake. The word “hell” in the King James Version is a translation of three different Greek words: “gehenna”, “tartarus”, and “hades” and while “gehenna” and “tartarus” do imply punishment, “hades” does not. “Hades” means the “unseen” and signifies the place where departed spirits go after death whether they be good or evil. And it is the word “hades” that is found in Psalms 16:8f in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Jesus could not have been regarded as a sinner for had He had been, He would not have been seen as a fitting offering for sin. When Jesus took the cup and had given thanks, He gave to the apostles and said, “Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out unto remission of sins” (Mt. 26:27f). Only a lamb “without spot and blemish” was suitable to be offered at the Passover and that lamb duly represented Jesus who offered Himself for sinners. John the Baptist said, “Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world” (Jn. 1:29). Peter wrote that man is redeemed with the blood of one who was without blemish and spot (1 Pet. 1:18f). Jesus was not “punished” after His death three days more for man’s sins. To the contrary, His death brought His release from pain. Jesus said He was going to Paradise, a place which implies rest and in which is found the tree of life (Lk. 23:43; Rev. 2:7).

When Jesus was made to be sin for us, we must understand that the writer is saying that Jesus became a sacrifice for us; giving His life for the sins of man. That was what He said His death was for when He instituted His supper. “He took the bread and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to them saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me” (Lk. 2:19). When Jesus’ “soul” was made an “offering for sin” (Isa. 53:10) that was tantamount to saying His life was made an offering for sin. “The son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45). Jesus said, “I lay down my life for my sheep” and “Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 10:15; 15:13). Paul wrote, “In due season Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). John wrote of the praise given Him by heavenly creatures when he recorded them saying, “Thou was slain and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe and tongue and people and nations” (Rev. 5:9).

Christ’s life was given for us that we might become “the righteousness of God in him”. Paul wrote of the righteousness that was revealed in the gospel (Rom. 1:16ff). Paul

shows in Romans 3:25f how Christ's sacrifice made it possible for God both to be just and the justifier of them that hath faith in Christ: "Whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God for the showing, I say, of his righteousness at the present time that he might himself be just and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus." Paul writes of God "passing over of sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God." He did not punish sinners who, before Christ, had served God yet had not had an adequate sacrifice for removal their sins. How could God be just and "fail" in this regard? Christ was the solution to the problem — because God planned to offer Christ as a sacrifice for sin, He deemed it just to pass over those sins of good man before Christ, anticipating that Christ would be a sufficient sacrifice for the removal of their sins. The Hebrew writer said, "And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant" (Heb. 9:15). Christ's sacrifice made possible that God could be just and yet justify the sinner through the timeless and all powerful cleaning blood of Christ. Christ, by His sacrifice, made it possible that we might be made righteous through Christ. Thus, we become the righteousness of God in Him. Praise Him from whom all blessings flow!

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