

Title: **“That We Might Be MADE THE
 RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM”**

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:21

Subject: *Believers Made the Righteousness of God in Christ*

Introduction:

You will find my subject in the last part of 2nd Corinthians 5:21. —
“*That we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*” Let’s begin
reading in verse 17.

(2 Corinthians 5:17-21) “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (18) And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; (19) To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (20) Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. (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.”

“MADE” AND “MADE”

Do you remember what I told you this morning about the first word translated “*made*” in verse 21 as it relates to Christ being made sin? — It is not a legal term, but a word that carries the idea of “create.” **It is in the past tense and implies that he who was made sin for us was personally involved in the work means, “by one act gather together and cause to be.”** Paul is telling us that God the Father, by one great,

mysterious act, gathered together all the sins of all his elect throughout all the ages of time, and caused his darling Son to be sin for us.

But when he tells us that we are “made the righteousness of God in him” another word is used for “made.” When he speaks of us being “made the righteousness of God in him,” the word Paul uses for “made” is another word altogether. **It is a present tense, passive verb, implying total passiveness on our part and means “continually cause to become.”** Paul is telling us that those for whom Christ was made sin God continually causes to become the righteousness of God in him without doing a thing.

Be sure you understand what the Holy Spirit here teaches us. Christ being made sin for us, was made exactly what we are – Sin! He was made sin for us that we might be made exactly what he is — Righteousness, the very righteousness of God. He was not made less that we are; and we are not made less than he is. The very sinfulness that we were, Christ was made before God; and the very righteousness that he is we are made before God. This is absolute substitution. The Lord Jesus Christ took our persons and condition, and stood in our stead before God. We take his person and condition, and stand in his stead before God. What the Lord God beholds Christ to be, that he beholds his members to be. — The Very Righteousness of God!

PROPER ESTEEM

If we could really learn this, in a practical way, it would forever put an end to all bickering, strife, and division among God’s saints. Let me show you. Look at Philippians 2:1-3.

(Philippians 2:1-3) “If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, (2) Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. (3) *Let* nothing *be done* through

strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”

If we look upon one another as believers, as sinners saved by grace, in union with Christ, as one with him we must never look upon our brothers and sisters in Christ, judging them in the light of what we see manifest by their actions, but in light of what they are in Christ, the righteousness of God. That will make us kind and gracious to one another, each esteeming the other better than himself.

I know something of what I am by nature — sin, nothing but sin. I know a little bit about the evil of my own heart, the vileness of my thoughts, the corruption of my motives! And there sits Bro. Tim James. I know him too, but not like I did when we were both boys on the Southside streets of Winston-Salem. Now I know him in Christ; and I am not to know him any other way. Since Christ died for him and rose again, I know him “*no more after the flesh*” (2 Cor. 5:14-16). Every time I look at him, think about him, pray for him, or do anything regarding him, I ought to see and think of nothing but Christ. That dear friend sitting there is Christ, the very righteousness of God! If God the Holy Spirit will teach me, give me grace, and sweetly force me so to esteem him, I’m going to have a real tough time fighting with him, no matter what he says or does. Christ himself is not more righteous than that man right there is in Christ.

RIGHT RECKONING

But that is not the end of the story. God the Holy Spirit tells me that I am to think of myself that way, too. In spite of all that I know myself to be by nature, even when the corruptions of my heart are most vilely manifest, I am to look upon myself as one with Christ, completely righteous before God. Yes...

“With His spotless garments on
I’m holy as the Holy One!”

Do you trust Christ? Do you believe on the Son of God? Is his blood your only atonement for sin? Is his righteousness your only righteousness before God? Is your only hope of life eternal the Son of God and God's boundless grace flowing freely to your soul through him? If so, God reckons you to be the righteousness of God in him, and tells you that you are to reckon yourself the righteousness of God in him, really, truly, and absolutely. That is what we have confessed in our baptism, and that is how we are to live by faith before him (Rom. 6:1-11).

(Romans 6:1-11) “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? (2) God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? (3) Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? (4) Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of *his* resurrection: (6) Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (7) For he that is dead is freed from sin. (8) Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: (9) Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. (10) For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. (11) Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Proposition: The Lord God would have all who are his always to reckon ourselves in Christ, one with Christ, and the righteousness of God in Christ. I cannot tell you how much I want you who trust the Son of God to see and live in the sweet experience of this blessed gospel revelation. — **Until the Lord God Almighty finds a sin in his darling Son, a sin for which to crucify him again, he will not find one in you!**

(Romans 8:33-34) “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? *It is* God that justifieth. (34) Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

(Romans 8:38-39) “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

I am here tonight to proclaim this sweet, good news to every sinner who will hear my voice, to every sinner who believes on the Son of God. — **If you trust Christ, the God of Glory who made his dear Son to be sin for you has made you the very righteousness of God in him!** And he would have you to reckon it so.

Perhaps you are thinking, “Bro. Don, I’d give anything to know that what you have said is true. But, surely we cannot carry those words ‘*made the righteousness of God in him,*’ that far. Does the Word of God really warrant such full, confident assurance of absolute righteousness before God?”

I’m glad you asked. I want you to see and see clearly that what I am preaching to you is precisely the doctrine of this Book. — In Christ we have, no, we are the righteousness of God. Our God has made us to become the righteousness of God in his Son. And that righteousness is a righteousness that can never be soiled, tainted, or corrupted in any way, much less lost. Let me show you.

JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU

Turn to Jeremiah 23:5-6. Don’t’ look at those verses. Just turn to them. Then turn to Jeremiah 33:15-16. If you can, fold the pages of your Bible over so that you can see both passages at once. In both places Jeremiah is describing for us this blessed gospel day in which the Branch of

Righteousness has grown up unto David and his seed. That Branch is Christ. And that David is Christ our King. Our David is now seated on his throne in glory, having grown up righteousness, by bringing in everlasting righteousness. He now executes judgment and justice throughout the earth in the salvation of his people by the gospel. Now, let's read these two texts of Scripture.

(Jeremiah 23:5) “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.”

(Jeremiah 33:15) “In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.”

(Jeremiah 23:6) “In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this *is* his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

(Jeremiah 33:16) “In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this *is the name* wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.”

That is not a mistranslation. I double-checked these passages again late last night. Every word is translated with exact accuracy. **This is what the Lord God tells us about the work of Christ in this day of grace in which we live...**

- Judah, the tribe of God's choice, shall be saved.
- Israel, God's holy nation, his chosen generation, his royal priesthood, shall dwell safely.
- And this is the name whereby that Righteous Branch our King shall be called — JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU! “*THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*”

- And this is the name wherewith every saved sinner shall be called — Jehovah-tsidkenu! “*The Lord Our Righteousness.*”

OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Now, go back to 2nd Corinthians 5:21.

(2 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.”

The righteousness which the Lord God makes redeemed sinners to become, the righteousness by which we are accepted and with which we are made worthy of heavenly glory (Col. 1:12) is always called “*the righteousness of God.*” It is the work of Christ alone. It is that righteousness of which all men by nature are ignorant. And the proof of their ignorance is that they go about to establish their own righteousness (Rom. 9:33-10:4).

According to the Book of God, **it is the life obedience of Christ that constitutes that righteousness with which we are clothed and made to become before God.**

- His death washed away our sins, and his life covers us from head to foot.
- His death was the sacrifice to God, and his life is the gift to man, by which all God’s elect have satisfied the demands of the law.

Only in this way is it possible for the law to be honored and our souls accepted by God. Many who appear to be perfectly clear about the merits of Christ’s death, do not seem to understand the merits of his life. **Remember, brethren, that from the moment that our blessed Savior broke his mother’s womb until the hour that he ascended up on high, he was at work for his people.** From the moment that he was seen in Mary’s arms, until the moment that he was in the arms of death when “*he bowed his head and gave up the ghost,*” he was performing the work of our salvation.

The Lord Jesus Christ completed the work of his obedience in his life, and said to his Father, “*I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do*” (John 17:4). **Then he finished the work of his atonement in his death**. And, knowing that all things were accomplished, he cried, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30).

- Throughout his earthly life, the Savior was spinning the fabric of that royal, priestly garment in which we are robed, and in his death he dipped that garment in his blood.
- In his life he was gathering precious gold, and in his death he hammered it out to make for us a garment of wrought gold.
- We have as much to be thankful for in the life of Christ as we do in his death. In his life, Christ Jesus rendered perfect obedience to the law as our Substitute. And in his death, he satisfied the claims of the law as our Substitute.

Therefore, the prophet of God declares of Christ, “*This is the name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS,*” and of us, “*This is the name whereby she shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness.*”

That is the message that is set before us in 2nd Corinthians 5:21. — The Lord Jesus Christ is our only righteousness, and it is our joy to confess that he is (1 Cor. 1:30-31).

(1 Corinthians 1:30-31) “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: (31) That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

HOW?

Let me answer this one question for you, and I will be done. — **How are sinners made to become the righteousness of God in Christ?** I will appeal to the Word of God alone for the answer to that question. The

opinions of men are totally irrelevant. What does the Book say? Nothing else matters.

Remember what I told you when I began. When Christ was made sin, that was a one time, once and for all act accomplished in the past, a work in which he was personally involved. But when the Holy Spirit speaks of us being “*made the righteousness of God in him,*” the word he uses for “*made*” is another word altogether. **It is a present tense, passive verb, implying total passiveness on our part and means “continually cause to become.”** He is telling us that those for whom Christ was made sin God continually causes to become the righteousness of God in him without doing a thing. Let me show you how he has done it and is doing it.

1. **ETERNALLY** — Our great, all-wise, eternally gracious God made us righteous before the world was in Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, in his sovereign, eternal purpose of grace (Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:3-6; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; Jude 1).

(Romans 8:28-30) “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. (29) For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (30) Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

(Ephesians 1:3-6) “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: (4) According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: (5) Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, (6) To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

If we were blessed of God with all spiritual blessings before the world began and accepted in the Beloved, it was not as unrighteous but as the righteousness of God in Christ.

(2 Timothy 1:9-10) “Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, (10) But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:”

(Jude 1:1) “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, *and* called:”

2. **JUDICIALLY** — We were made to become the righteousness of God judicially, in a legal sense, when the Lord Jesus died as our Substitute under the wrath of God, satisfying divine justice for us. When he had put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, he obtained eternal redemption for us and we were made to become the righteousness of God in him by divine imputation in justification (Rom. 4:25; 5:12, 17-21).

(Romans 4:25) “Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”

(Romans 5:12) “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:”

(Romans 5:17-21) “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) (18) Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation;

even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life. (19) For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. (20) Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: (21) That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

3. **EXPERIMENTALLY** — But this matter of being made the righteousness of God in Christ, while it is something with which we have no involvement, it is not just a matter of law, any more than Christ's being made sin was just a matter of law. It is not something that takes place altogether outside our experience, any more than Christ being made sin was outside his experience.

Sinners are made the righteousness of God in Christ experimentally in the new birth, when we are made "*partakers of the divine nature*" (2 Pet. 1:4). That holy thing in us that is born of God, that John tells us cannot sin, is "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*" (Col. 1:27).

We experience this blessed thing (being made the righteousness of God) in the inmost depths of our souls, in the constant assurance of our access to, acceptance with, and forgiveness of our sins by our God (1 John 1:7-2:2).

(1 John 1:7-10) "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

(1 John 2:1-2) "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus

Christ the righteous: (2) And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world.”

- We are in Christ, in whom alone God is well pleased. That means he is well pleased with us (Matt. 17:5).
- Our sacrifices are accepted of God as a sweet-smelling savor in Christ (1 Pet. 2:5).
- Our sins are never imputed to us, but perpetually forgiven because we are one with him who was once made sin for us, in whom we are perpetually made to become the righteousness of God.

4. **ABSOLUTELY** — Now, hang on to your seat. Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, every sinner who trusts him, is made to become the righteousness of God in him absolutely (2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 1:12).

(2 Corinthians 5:17) “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

(Colossians 1:12-14) “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: (13) Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son: (14) In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins.”

Discerning the Lord’s body, that is to say, knowing our need of a Substitute and knowing the Substitute himself, trusting his finished work and trusting him, sinners like you and me are worthy to enter his church, worthy to call upon his name, worthy to receive the Lord’s Table, and worthy to enter into and possess forever his glory!

5. **EVERLASTINGLY** — One more thing. We shall be made to become the righteousness of God everlastingly in the last day, in resurrection glory.

- We shall be raised in righteousness.
- We shall be declared righteous according to the record book of heaven at the Day of Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15; Jer. 50:20).

(Jeremiah 50:20) “In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and *there shall be none*; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve.”

- We shall be declared righteous to wondering worlds to the glory of our God forever (Eph. 2:7).

(Ephesians 2:4-7) “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, (5) Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) (6) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: (7) That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”

- Then we shall forever begin to enjoy, in such experimental reality as words cannot describe, the blessedness of being made to become the righteousness of God in Christ (Rev. 21:2-5; 22:1-6).

(Revelation 21:2-5) “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. (4) And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (5) And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”

(Revelation 22:1-6) “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. (2) In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, *was there* the tree of life, which bare twelve *manner of* fruits, *and* yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. (3) And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: (4) And they shall see his face; and his name *shall be* in their foreheads. (5) And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. (6) And he said unto me, These sayings *are* faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.”

I am lost in wonder. All this, all that Christ has as the God-man my Mediator, I have in him. All that he is, I am in him. All that he enjoys, soon, I shall enjoy forever in him, because...

(2 Corinthians 5:17-21) “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (18) And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; (19) To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (20) Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. (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.”

(Romans 8:32) “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”