



INTRO:

Back in 2012, Abby and I/and at the time Brooklyn who was 2/we'd been in Boston for about 6 months and were sensing that God really wanted us to see the city become our home as we trusted Him to plant an expression of His church with us. And so as we navigated all the questions/AND DOUBTS you might expect that came along with that, one of which was simply what to name the church. And we considered all kinds of names: "Refuge Church" cuz we wanted church to be a place in which all are safe to discover and learn to trust Jesus; "Southie Community Church" cuz we wanted to see the church become a kind of alternative community in this tight-knit community of Southie. Even South Boston Fundamentalist Church cuz...just kidding/was definitely never an option. But obviously, we landed on "Hub" BECAUSE the word "Hub"/we felt, really encompassed Jesus' heart for His church - that it's to be this **wonderful** HUB out of which you live and thrive...Now, that "Hub" happens to be a nickname for our city was a nice bonus. That it ALSO happened to be the name of a prominent liquor store here in the neighborhood for the last 10 years...not so much...But the reason I mention that piece of our story is cuz ever since the beginning we've believed/and still do that there's something uniquely **wonderful** about church....And today, as we come to the LAST verse in our "**What Church Can Be**" series text, I wanna show you what that is - WHY church really can be **wonderful** and really can be all the optimistic things we've seen it to be throughout our series!...SO without further adieu, let's follow along as we hear God's word, paying special attention to our focal verse, **v.21**. Let's STAND and follow along together.

TEXT:

So full disclosure here, I'm a fan of cheeseburgers...because of course, the cheeseburger pairs two independently great things - cheese and burger - TO make something even greater...**2 Corinthians 5:21** is not only the Apostle Paul's concluding statement here and the source of all the optimistic things we've seen church to be, BUT it's a statement that pairs two independently great clauses to make a GREATER point. And you see the two clauses there: First, "*For our sake he made him to be sin, who knew no sin*" and Second, "*so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*" Two independently great clauses, that make the greater point that/write this down: the **wonder** of church is because of: **Jesus In Your Place!**

Check it out: In the first clause we read all about Jesus right? We're told that "*He knew no sin,*" which is to say, He was sinless. That's always been the testimony of Scripture and orthodox Christianity. In 33 years of earthly life, Jesus NEVER sinned. **Think about that!** Never sinned! When we hear the word "sin," we usually think like rule-breaking on steroids right? But ya gotta understand, when the Bible talks about sin, it doesn't do so from a strictly behavioral perspective. Consider **Romans 1:23**, for example, which says that Adam and Eve, who were of course, the first sinners, quote, "*worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.*" In other words, the very first sin wasn't so much what Adam and Eve DID, but rather what they PREFERRED; created things rather than their Creator!...That's always how the Bible describes sin; as an issue of our hearts BEFORE it's ever an issue of our hands.

Often, to remind myself or help others see this, I'll ask a question like, *"If God showed up right now and said to you, 'I'll make ya a deal.' I'll guarantee you'll go heaven and when you do, you'll enjoy everything a perfect eternity has to offer/it's all yours...BUT one caveat...Jesus won't be there."* ...Let me ask you: ***Would you take that deal?...What do you prefer over Jesus?...What do you feel you need to be happy, that isn't God? What makes life worth living for you? Or would make it hopeless if you didn't have it?*** ...Whatever that is, is LIKELY what you're preferring over God - where you're sinning/or at least susceptible TO sin!

When **v.21** tells us here that, Jesus *"knew no sin,"* it's saying is that in all 33 years of his adult, male life, He NEVER, not only disobeyed God, BUT preferred anything TO God. *"Knew no sin!"* ...But keep going, cuz we're also told that this sinless Jesus, *"was made to BE sin for our sake."* ...So He who'd never sinned/was unstained, suddenly *"made to BE sin."* Now notice, that doesn't say that Jesus *"became a sinner."* That would contradict Jesus being sin-less. It says, *"He was made to BE sin."* And that's an important distinction! Think of it like you might think about a magnifying glass that you maybe played with as a kid. You remember, if you held a magnifying glass directly under the sun's rays, it could start a little fire? So if you focused the white spot of the sun's concentrated light on, say, a leaf, that leaf would begin to burn!...When it says that *"Jesus was made to be sin for you,"* it's NOT saying that Jesus BECAME a sinner, but rather that on the Cross, all your sin/all the ways you've preferred something over God...got so focused and concentrated onto Christ, that even though HE was without sin, He nevertheless began to burn/suffered the fiery wrath of God...That was what was going on, by the way, during those 3 dark hours on Good Friday. Ray-after-ray of your sin and mine focused on Jesus', so that He, *"who knew no sin, was made to be sin...for your sake!"* That's the first great clause here!

But look at the second too. Cuz in the second clause, you see Paul says, *"so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."* *"Jesus, who knew no sin, was made to be sin...so that in Him we/YOU might become the righteousness of God."* Now, there's a clear assumption being made there, which is, very simply, that God is righteous/*"the righteousness of God"* it says, meaning there's a perfect "right'ness" about Him. If the negative way to speak about Jesus is to say that He's WITHOUT sin, then the positive way/the other side of the coin if you will, is to say, "He's righteous," meaning that in always preferring the Father, everything about Jesus is rightly ordered. Righteousness in the Bible, you understand, isn't merely about things like private morality; ya know, having integrity, being sexually pure, keeping up with your spiritual disciplines - that's all good, but the way the Bible speaks about righteousness, is in much grander terms...being rightly ordered, OUT OF WHICH things like morality flow...GOD and Jesus as the face of God, is the source of all righteousness. So follow the logic here: If Jesus is righteous, then sin must necessarily then be punished. And to NOT punish it would be injustice! ***Ya Follow?*** SO that means that, you and I as sinners...no matter what we do...deserve to be punished, for what we've broken in preferring things over God. And no amount of good works you do can repair that brokenness...It's like if someone breaks into your apartment and destroys your stuff. Imagine they get caught. And standing before the judge they begin to argue about how: committed they are to the PTA, or how they dedicate their weekends to serving in the community, or only eat locally sourced, organic foods. You might say, *"That's great! But that*

doesn't restore what you've destroyed. "...Your sin and mine destroys relationship with God and therefore deserves punishment! And no good work you do can restore that!

So start to put all this together: What the second-half of **v.21** is telling you is that on the Cross, Jesus took the punishment YOU deserved/ "*He who knew no sin, BECAME sin,*" so that YOU could take what HE deserved; namely, "*His righteousness.*" **You see that?** So this means: 2000 years ago, Jesus didn't merely die FOR you. He died INSTEAD of you, so that through faith in Him, YOU are now seen in God's eyes as justified - literally, "Just As If I'd...Never Sinned." **Think about the wonder of that!**

There's a story in the OT - **Genesis chapter 48** - where Jacob is bestowing the family blessing on his son Joseph's son/so his grandson. And what he does is...he crosses his hands (DISPLAY). Why? To show that what should go to the older grandson - the inheritance, position of privilege - is instead going to the younger grandson; and what should go to the younger, is instead going to the older. And in the story, Joseph of course protests to Jacob, cuz that's just not how you did it. The family blessing always went to the oldest son. But Jacob tells Joseph, "*No, THIS is how God would have it to be...*" Because of course, what God was doing was - even thousands of years prior - was giving you and me a picture of our justification - of how, thousands of years later and thousands of years ago....on the Cross, GOD crossed HIS hands (MAKE CROSS). And in doing so gave to Jesus what was coming to you - condemnation - SO THAT you could get what was coming to Him - righteousness.¹ This is why Martin Luther, during the Protestant Reformation, called it the "Great Exchange"/**Jesus In Your Place!** Jesus treated as deserving everything you've deserved, so that you can be treated as deserving everything HE deserved!

Corrie ten Boom, who famously survived a Nazi concentration camp, put it well. She said: "*On the cross God hurled your sins into the deepest part of the sea...And then...put up a sign saying, 'No fishing allowed.'*"...That's the Gospel...The good news of "**Jesus...In...Your...Place!**"

APPLICATION:

Now, here's why I said at the beginning that this is what makes church so **wonderful!** 3 Reasons: **First, Because That Truth/That Reality Of Jesus In Your Place, It Completely Changes The Way You Relate To God:** Cuz think about it: For many of us/maybe all of us, the way we NATURALLY relate to God is out of either fear or pride! Fear in thinking we need to do something, for God to accept, bless and see us as righteous. And Pride when we think we ARE doing enough to merit acceptance, blessing and righteousness. Fear and Pride. We all tend to toggle between those depending on if it's a "good day" or "bad day." But, you understand, neither of those're the Gospel! The Gospel/**Jesus In Your Place** says, your relationship to God isn't predicated on what you DO or DON'T DO, but entirely on what Christ has DONE FOR you! It's incredibly counter-cultural, because instead of you having to develop a righteousness of your own - be it through job success, beauty, morality, religiosity, or the like - and then offer it to God, wondering if it's gonna be enough - which incidentally is where the fear comes from - OR

¹ OT illustration adapted from "[The Love of Christ Controls Us: 2 Cor 5:13-21](#)," in *J. D. Greear Sermon Archive* (Durham, NC: The Summit Church, 2017), 2 Co 5:13-21.

thinking it IS enough - which is where the pride comes from - the Gospel says, No! Rather, GOD has developed a perfect righteousness in Christ, and gifts it TO you through faith!...SO NOW, you don't relate to God, out of fear or pride, but rather love and joy because you see the extent to which He's gone to justify and save you. In other words, you begin to WANT to live and DO for Him, not because you HAVE to, but because you're grateful for all He's DONE for you. This is why John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim's Progress famously said, "*Run, John, run, the law commands, but gives us neither feet nor hands, Far better news the gospel brings: It bids us fly and gives us wings.*" **It Completely and Wonderfully Changes The Way You Relate To God!**

Second, It Changes The Way You Relate To Yourself: Franz Kafka wrote a book entitled, "The Trial" - I've referenced it with you before, but it's about a man accused of a crime, BUT never told exactly what the crime is. And so what happens is, the more he's accused, the more he thinks, "*Maybe I did do something wrong.*" And what's interesting is if you read why Kafka wrote the book, you find that he's giving a commentary on how you and I generally **relate to ourselves**. He says this/**listen**, "*Modern man - that's us - who no longer believes in sin, still finds himself, in a state of guilt. We have a deep, profound sense that if we were examined, we wouldn't pass. We have a deep sense that we're not loveable the way we are.*" **You hear what he's saying right?** He's saying, we're just like the accused in the book/always questioning if we're good enough, smart enough, beautiful or successful enough. And therefore, as Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones said, "*tremendously busy* (going out, working out, showing out, you name it) *trying to cover up our 'nakedness' and get back the glory that's been lost.*" As if life is one giant episode of Survivor, and we're just trying NOT to get kicked off the island. Or better yet; one giant episode of The Voice and we're desperately hoping that just one of those chairs will turn around for us! THAT'S how **we naturally relate to ourselves**. Which incidentally is why, despite over 15,000 academic studies largely debunking it, the self esteem movement, which falsely teaches that feeling good about yourself is the key to success, is nevertheless alive and well!² Cuz without wanting to name sin, we're all trying to get over the effects of sin and recapture that enough'ness so that we can "stay on the island!"...Which is WHY Friend, you have to understand that **Jesus In Your Place**, IS how you recapture it! Because **Jesus In Your Place** not only means you don't have to "earn your stay on the island" as it were, but you OWN the island! YOU have the smile of God the Father! You are in the sight of God as is the very SON of God Himself!...Think about that! Can't you see how really taking that in would **Completely and Wonderfully Change The Way You Relate To Yourself?** Give you power, for example, to deal with anxiety, fear, setbacks, the critiques and criticisms of others? - How knowing you have the smile of God would make every other frown seem irrelevant? Of course! Because **Jesus In Your Place Completely and Wonderfully Change The Way You Relate To Yourself?**

Third and Finally, It Changes The Way You Relate To Others, BECAUSE it keeps you from seeing people in the "normal" categories that ultimately lead to division, disunity, or worse. Ya know categories like, rich/poor; powerful/weak; white/black; Republican/Democrat. The Gospel subordinates those normal categories! **Cuz think about it:** In the Gospel, people aren't

² <https://st.network/analysis/top/the-self-esteem-movement-and-the-unhappiness-of-a-generation.html>

PRIMARILY rich/poor; powerful/weak; white or black. What are they? They're PRIMARILY righteous or unrighteous, which is to say, imperfect sinners, who've received the truth of ***Jesus In Their Place*** OR those who haven't, and desperately need too... When you understand that, what happens is NOT that you become race-blind or something, but just that you don't see things like race, class, education, as PRIMARY. And when you don't see those things as primary, cuz you see people through the lens of ***Jesus in their place***, you necessarily begin to relate to em with hospitality, grace, and generosity.... Rodney Stark's a historian who's made a career studying the early church. And one of the things he speaks extensively about is how the early church ***RELATED to those around em***; specifically, how they gave their lives to care for the sick and stay and deal with all kinds of urban problems in their cities. And I'm somewhat paraphrasing but he says, "*Regardless of the danger, Christians took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Jesus, and many (of em) departed their life serenely happy, for they were infected by their neighbors.* Cuz of course when things like the bubonic plague broke out, if you were staying to care for you neighbor with it, then you were almost certainly guaranteed to get and die from it! Stark says, *Many Christians in nursing and curing their neighbors, therefore transferred their neighbors' death to themselves. But he says, they did it willingly, because they understood Jesus to have done exactly the same for them!*"³ - ***You hear what he's saying?*** He's not just saying, they followed Jesus' example of caring for others. No! It's way deeper than that! They realized that because Jesus cared for THEM/got infected, died, "*was made to be sin for their sake,*" they couldn't BUT, in a way, do the same for their neighbor. In other words, the way they **Related To Others got Completely and Wonderfully Changed by the Gospel!**

So you see? Jesus In Your Place really does change everything - how you relate to God, yourself, others - and in changing everything, brings real ***wonder*** to life! So why do we make such a big deal about church/say it can be ***wonderful***? Because remember to whom Paul is writing not just about Jesus in your place here, but this entire passage we've now unpacked - to the CHURCH in Corinth right? - So he isn't writing to a group of anonymous Christians. He's writing to a specific gathering of people - a local church family, in a specific city...because there's no doubt he's presuming that it's in the context and under the accountability of a local church family⁴ that the ***wonder of Jesus In Your Place*** will not only comes alive to you, but get shown off to those around you...Friends, it's IN church/AS the church together that we're repeatedly encouraged to savor and show-off: That the sinless God of the universe had every right to exalt Himself by condemning you and me, but INSTEAD condemned Himself...to exalt you and me. ***Do you believe that?*** Cuz it changes everything and means that **Church Really Can Be...A Wonderful "Hub" for life!...*Let's Pray!***

³ Rodney Stark info adapted from "Jesus and Politics - King's Cross: The Gospel of Mark, Part 2: The Journey to the Cross -March 11, 2007 - Mark 15:1-15" - [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#) (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

⁴ Insight about context of Corinthians and some language adapted from <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/christian-life-church-shaped/>