

Focus Text

"From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." **(2 Corinthians 5:16–21, ESV)**

I Blood Debt

"And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them." **(Genesis 3:21, ESV)**

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." **(Genesis 9:6, ESV)**

"And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half." **(Genesis 15:10, ESV)**

"Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb." **(Exodus 12:21, ESV)**

"And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord." **(Exodus 24:5, ESV)**

"And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." **(Exodus 24:8, ESV)**

The texts above represent the understanding of a blood covenant. The idea is that blood is shed, and if one party violates a covenant with the other, a blood debt is owed.

Adam formed the first covenant with God to care for the Garden and not eat of the knowledge of good and evil. God says if you eat this, you will surely die. See Gen 2:15-17 below. When Adam violated that covenant, a blood debt was owed. Adam was warned that sinning against God and violating His perfect creation would result in the loss of his life.

All throughout the Old Testament, we see God covenanting with people. As you can see, every time this reminder of a blood debt is mentioned.

Summary: All sins violate the covenant we have made with God and are owed in blood. When we sin, we are reminded that we belong to Adam and that we, too, will dabble in the knowledge of good and evil. Paul reminds us that the wages owed in sin are death. Because we are violators of the covenant, blood must be shed.

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:15–17, ESV)

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23, ESV)

II God's Desire

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:18–19, ESV)

God's desire is that humanity would be redeemed to Himself. Paul is noting here that reconciliation starts with God needing to deal with our blood debt that is owed. God being perfect means He cannot overlook our debt. For the Hebrews, they had to sacrifice innocent and blameless animals for their transgressions. Yearly, they would put these creatures to death. This was not a sign of celebration. It was a reminder of Adam's sin and our eternal debt.

However, Good Friday brings us to God's perfect and final reconciliation plan. To undo Adam's sin and offer us the ability to become a New Creation.

*"In the Jewish cult the animal offered up to atone for sins "had to be holy, without defect, precisely so that both priest and offerer could be confident that the death it died was *not its own*."¹*

III: Substitutionary Atonement

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:20–21, ESV)

Now we get to the heart of Jesus's crucifixion. God, in a great mystery of faith, personally pays your blood debt in the person and work of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

In Romans 5, Paul reminds us that we were inherently enemies of God because of our personal rebellion and our family lineage in Adam. Dave Garland, in the New American Commentary, explains that the purpose of an alabaster is to seek peace between God

¹ Garland, David E. 1999. *2 Corinthians*. Vol. 29. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

and Humanity. In order to do so, Christ will take our debt and spill His blood so that we may be "paid up" and allowed to inherit God's righteousness. But How?

As you can read from the commentators below, Jesus, who was not a sinner and deserved none of our punishment, stands in our place and holds in essence our sin. All of the times in which you and I have hurt God and not loved our neighbors are attributed to Christ. Think of abstract art. The artist takes a blank fresh canvas and batters it with paint to create a flow of colors. Jesus, who was a perfect being, never hurting God and always loving His neighbors, and yet God pours out His wrath upon Jesus...

Now imagine using paint thinner to clear all the stained paint off of a canvas, and it becomes pure and clean. Jesus doesn't pay our debt for no reason. He atones for our sins and gives us something we cannot have ourselves: the righteous (right relationship) with God the Father. The miracle of substitutionary atonement is that when God sees us, He sees an upright people made in the likeness of Jesus. When you stand before God in judgment for your debt, He sees His perfect son, pure, perfect, and clean, and announces your status as righteous, not as Adam's ancestor.

In summary: You are a New Creation, no longer a product of flesh (Adam) but a product of the Holy Spirit (Christ). It's true Jesus really did "Pay it All!"

"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." **(Romans 5:10–11, ESV)**

"For Paul it is not God who was our enemy; rather we were the ones who were opposed to God (see Rom 5:10–11). Note that Barclay uses the term "friendship" throughout this section, while *CEV* draws on the image of "peace."²

God's purpose in sending Christ and his envoys has the same end—to put an end to hostilities and to bring about a reconciliation. God sends out envoys to continue to announce that now is the day of salvation and reconciliation.

Garland, David E. 1999. *2 Corinthians*. Vol. 29. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² *CEV* Contemporary English Version

Omanson, Roger L., and John Ellington. 1993. *A Handbook on Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies.

The words *who knew no sin* are a Hebraic expression which means “to have no personal experience with sin.” Paul is stating that Jesus did not sin; he “was without sin”³

“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.” (Isaiah 53:10, ESV)

“Christ became sin in order that others might become the righteousness of God. Paul is not focusing on Jesus’ human life but on his inglorious death. Christ experienced the consequences for human sin. The one who lived a sinless life died a sinner’s death, estranged from God and the object of wrath. He was treated as a sinner in his death.⁸³⁴”⁴

“Christ becomes a transgressor through an act of substitution. Paul is not satisfied with noetic processes: it is not enough for God to reckon humanity to be righteous, nor is a new self-understanding among Christians sufficient. A real transfer of sin and curse to Christ was essential. Christ must truly become polluted.... A real death was necessary to put real distance between saved Christians and the power of sin.⁸³⁸”⁵

“With the next phrase, “he [God] made himself [Christ] to be sin,” we penetrate to the center of the atonement and stand in awe before one of the most profound mysteries in the universe. All the interpretations of the phrase have in common the idea of identification, the understanding that God caused Christ to be identified in some way with what was foreign to his experience, namely human sin.”⁶

³ (TEV). Some languages may use a verbal form: “Christ never sinned” (CEV).

TEV Today’s English Version

CEV Contemporary English Version

Omanson, Roger L., and John Ellington. 1993. *A Handbook on Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies.

⁴ ⁸³⁴ Windisch sees an allusion to the scapegoat (Lev 16:21) on the Day of Atonement (*Der zweite Korintherbrief*, 198).

Garland, David E. 1999. *2 Corinthians*. Vol. 29. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁵ ⁸³⁸ Ibid., 144. Thrall concurs with this view: “Christ became identified with sinful humanity, exchanging the situation proper to his own sinlessness for the condition consequent upon human sin. In this second half the second element is described. Through their relationship with Christ, men and women may exchange their sinful condition for the state designated ‘God’s righteousness’ ” (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:442).

Garland, David E. 1999. *2 Corinthians*. Vol. 29. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁶ Harris, Murray J. 2005. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press.

Application

"For by grace, you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

(Ephesians 2:8–9, ESV)

Follow Jesus and know that He has done something for you that no other could ever do!

Surrender your life to the King who bought you. You are now a citizen of God's Kingdom, and Jesus is your loving, self-sacrificing King!

Be Thankful! You have no right to complain any longer, friend. The stains on your canvas were many, deep, and horrible. You were an enemy of God and deserved to pay with your life. These truths are often forgotten easily because they are painful to acknowledge. But, after the work of the Cross, if you accept the gift of God's grace, you have been made clean (righteous) because Jesus took your sinfulness to the Cross. This is why we call it Good Friday. Amen.