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LAP 872

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham at Galeed Chapel
Brighton on Sunday morning 25 January 1925

I CORINTHIANS V verse 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 immediate object apparently of this verse is an argument used for these Corinthians, to whom the Apostle and his fellow labourers were as ambassadors for Christ, beseeching them in the name of Christ and for Christ's sake to be reconciled to God. The church had become grievously irregular in some of its practices, had fallen from the simplicity of the truth, as the truth is in Jesus. Had been split up into factions. One was for Paul, another for Appollos and another for Cephas and another, better than the rest apparently to himself, was for Christ. Now the Apostle says - We who have the ministry of the gospel committed to us beseech you in Christ's stead, leave these things off. Put off the works of the flesh. Turn away from your things, your carnal things. I am not able to write to you fully as I could do if you were spiritual. You are carnal and you walk as men. Now I beseech you put away these evil things, and be reconciled to Him, who has reconciled you to Himself in the body of the flesh of Jesus, through death. And the verse read for a text is, as one may say, a word to clinch the whole thing, for why are you in this state? Why have you turned aside, and why do you continue in these evil things? for God hath done the greatest thing possible to you. The greatest mystery that ever can be, is here before you - "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 text reveals three parties. First, God the Father - infinite, holy, just, wise and good. Second, God the Son, equal with His Father in majesty, and glory in eternity, wisdom, goodness and mercy. And third, sinners, wretched, corrupted, corrupt, ignorant, wayward people, and with these people God had to do, and for them He acted in His wisdom and goodness and power, and said to His beloved only begotten Son, - You shall be my servant, shall go in the fulness of the

time we fixed, have fixed, and be made of a woman, made under the law, and redeem these chosen ones" "I will make you to be sin, will gather the sins of this people up, and remove them from the doers of them, and impute them to you" Of all the wonders of God, all the wonders of creation, all the mysteries of divine providence, there is nothing to be compared with this. This is incomparable wisdom, and love and justice and power. And the Son said "I am willing. It is in My heart. I am willing." "It is written of Me in the volume of the Book - I delight to do Thy will, O My God" "Thy law which these people have broken, is in My heart. I am willing. I put on wings and fly with all infinite willingness and kindness and mercy to this people. Fly from Thy bosom to the ignominy of the cross and death" If this love were in our hearts, we should be different people from what we are in many respects. And we have these people in all the malignity of the fall, in all the turpitude of their ungracious lives, in all the death and trespasses and sins, in the black ignorance of their minds, in the stubbornness of their warped wills, in the idolatry of their foolish affections, in the haste of their wicked steps, we have these people, and God the Father goes to them as it were and takes all their sins away, and imputes them by an act of wisdom and love to His dearly beloved Son incarnate, and He is made sin for them. And the wondrous exchange takes place both of place and character. He is their sin. They are His righteousness. So we have this before us this morning, namely, first of all the substitution of Jesus Christ. A substitute is a person who is put and fixed in the place of another to act for Him, to take on him in certain particulars the duties, liabilities, responsibilities. This substitute, Jesus Christ became.

Behold a scene of matchless grace

'Tis Jesus in the sinners' place

And if you see Him, O sinners, in your place, if I see Him in my place, to suffer, bleed, obey, and die, we shall be filled with the most pure repentance, raised up to be before the Father, as His Son is, and as His Son died unto sin once, but now liveth unto God, we shall die through grace unto sin, so that we shall live no longer therein. However plagued by sin we may be we shall not live in it.

Substitution - What a doctrine it is. It underlies all the mercies of God given to the church. It is the cause of all His kind dealings with the church. It is the reason and source to them of all the blessings they ever have, and shall have through eternity. Therefore may the Lord help us to look at it. It is

fundamental and essential. It is God's wisdom and power and grace manifested in the Lord Jesus.

May we look at our own case first, for a minute. What is our case? The case of a law-breaker, of one who outraged the goodness of his Creator, and disobeyed the most beautiful, beneficent law. It is the case of a man who preferred himself before God, who sinned with his eyes opened, for Adam was not deceived, and we, in him as our head, federal head, did all that, and we are with him; as before his fall we were with him, so in his fall we were in him. As before his fall, we partook of all the benefit of his creation and of the law, so in his fall, we partook of his guilt, all the cutting off, the banishment, the hiding of God's face, and the curse of the law broken. This is our case, yours, mine. If our eyes are closed to it, the case is the worse for us. O, it is solemn not to know what we are. Terrible to know nothing about sin. Terrible not to feel it. Also it is a good thing to be led so as to entirely justify God in His severe sentence against us, and to say to Him that He is justified when He speaks and clear when He judges. What is the law? The revelation of God's will concerning us. The laying on us of duties, of responsibilities, from which we can never absolve ourselves. The loss of ability is no excuse for sin. This makes our case extremely serious, and terrible. How are we to escape? Is escape possible? Is it possible for men banished from God to come to Him; men wicked, to be sinless, defiled to be holy, guilty to be justified? Is it possible? Turn away from the Bible you get no answer. Turn into yourself you will see nothing but darkness. The Scriptures do reveal that it is not only possible, but through the exceeding grace and wisdom and love and power of God, it is a fact. Men are made just who are unjust, clean who are defiled, holy who are sinners, members of the body of Christ in particular. Substitution answers all, the putting in the place of sinners a sinless man united to Almighty God. The very Son of God in His divine person, assuming the body prepared for Him by the Lord, taking it up into an indissoluble union with Himself, put into the condition, the place, the law place of His people. This is substitution. The substitution of Christ means what the text says "He was made sin" Not a sinner. "He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth" If He had been a sinner He could not have been a substitute. If He had been a sinner He could not have been acceptable to His Father. Hold fast the sinlessness of Christ's human nature. Hold fast the impeccability of it, that it was not possible for Him to sin, because

of the personal union of our nature with His divine Person. O the glory of this substitute. May God fix this in your hearts, and in my heart, and in our understandings and affections, that we may love the Lord Jesus Christ in this particular. He took the dying traitor's place. What an act was this. Look at it. Was made sin, so made sin as that He was liable to all that the law spoke against sinners, liable for all the debts that these chosen people, sinners, had contracted. Liable to the death that was due to them. His substitution means nothing less. O sinner, did you ever see your sins on the Lord Jesus? Did you ever get a sight of the Holy One of God under the burden and the condemnation of sin? If you ever had that sight, two things you felt. First, you loathed your sins, and then you loved Him for bearing them. Sin on Christ. It was not in God's nature to do away with it by an act of omnipotence. He could make the world by an act of omnipotence. He can rule by omnipotence, and wisdom and He does, but sin against His law, sin against His nature, sin marring His own work, this, this, He could not put away by an act of omnipotence singly. Simple justice forbade that. How could it be done away with then? Why, by the dearly beloved Son of God becoming man, taking the place of this people, and doing for them what they could not do for themselves. Glorious substitute this. Now it became just and proper on the part of the Father to punish this sin. Never, never think that God dealt unjustly with Christ when He smote Him. Never did God the Father do a more proper or just thing than when He smote, punished and wounded and grieved His Son. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him" Could the Lord be pleased with anything unjust? "He hath put Him to grief" "He", Jesus Christ, "was wounded for our transgressions, was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed". Only think, God cause us to believe it, that the loving heart of God the Father took pleasure in punishing, grieving, wounding, piercing His Son Jesus Christ. May we be brought before this mystery, and believe in it, and love it, and participate in all the benefits of it, and see the cross with all its ignominy as one of the most glorious spots and places and things imaginable. The glory of divine love, of divine wisdom, of omnipotence, of pity, you will find in their highest, most distilling blaze, and beauty and wonderful efficacy, on the cross. This is heaven's window through which beam the favours and kindnesses and righteousnesses of God, and here sinners are fixed. There were parties there on the cross and at the cross, wonderful to consider. There was God the Father, in His inexorable

righteousness, represented by the law, spoken by the law. There was the law in all its strictness, all its justice. There was the law, demanding, exacting. There was justice divine, not willing, not able to give way, or allow one jot or tittle of its commandments to be disregarded. There was love wishing, seeking, and determined to find, and have a vent for itself, to reach this chosen people. There was pity in all its omnipotence and tenderness that would reach them, and the cross was the place where all could be effected that God intended to effect. My brethren, if we were brought to the cross, and kept there, living, breathing, taking in the atmosphere and the justice and the love and the kindness of it, we should be wonderful people. O, christianity is here, If christianity means the life of Christ and the likeness of Christ, it is here. God is here. The Father is here. The Son is here, The Spirit is here. Man is here. Sinners are here. Sinners, one with Him. Sinners, represented by Him, sinners obeyed for by Him, atoned for. Sinners whose dreadful debts are all discharged, and whose difficult duties are done. Sinners whose unrighteousnesses are removed. They are all here. Were you here? Have you any evidence of it? Did the Holy Spirit ever show you that you were there? Did you ever get that sight of which Newton sweetly sings

I saw One hanging on a tree
In agonies and blood
Who fixed His languid eyes on me
As near His cross I stood

You wont gad about for something else if you get this sight. This will fix you so substantially in its greatness and in its completeness, in its efficacy and in its glory. God made Him sin. All His groans were on this ground, for this reason. That bloody sweat was caused by this. His prayers, night and day, arose from this. He feared on this account. He had conflict on this account. This sent Him down into the wilderness, He being led there by the Spirit, to be tempted of the Devil. This took Him into the Garden of Gethsemane, that there He might sweat blood, and this sealed His lips in the judgment hall, when He might easily by one word have showed how innocent He was of the things which were laid to His charge by men, but because He represented men, who ought to be dumb under the law, He opened not His mouth. Think of all this as being the act of God. He made Him sin. He, in His love for chosen sinners; He, in His wisdom and in His power, and in His determination to deliver these favoured sinners, He made Him, His only begotten Son to be sin.

He did it. Men said He had a devil and was mad, they traduced Him in every possible way. They cavilled at every step He took, every good deed He did, every gracious word He uttered. Nothing pleased them. Nothing that Christ did, or said, or was, but all that was as nothing to this that His Father made Him to be sin, and what for? "Made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin" He was not ignorant of sin as to its being, but He was ignorant of sin as to act a sinful deed. He did no sin. He knew none as being in His own Person naturally, but He knew it as imputed to Him. He knew it in that way as you have it in the Psalms, where He says that "His iniquities were more than the hairs of His head, that He could not count them" He knew it as when He said again in the Psalm "O God Thou knowest My guiltiness" He knew it when He groaned and sweat blood. He knew it when He said to His disciples "they shall take the Son of Man and crucify Him"

And now turn with me to what the consequence of this is, that we, for whom He was made sin, might be made the righteousness of God. Not simply righteous people, but the righteousness of God. To be righteous is to be quite straight with the law and the nature of God. Think of it. You cannot be righteous unless you are quite straight with the law, and the nature of God. He hates sin naturally and cannot look upon it, and you, if you are righteous are brought into a conformity to that. Now a sinner can never by doing what is right, become all this. He must be made this. "That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Made so. Made so first by imputation. Imputation in the text has reference to both these acts of God. He imputed sin to Christ. He imputes righteousness to sinners. By imputing sin to Christ, He made Christ sin. By imputing righteousness to sinners, He makes them the righteousness of God in Christ, and thus they stand, by imputation, blameless. If you look into yourselves as being born again, and taught by the Spirit, you will see everything in yourself to be blameworthy. What have you done upon which that character can be stamped, without blame? Nothing. What can you do that will ever entitle you to be that blameless person? Nothing. But God, by an act of infinite goodness and grace, imputing to a sinner what the Lord Jesus did, constitutes that sinner righteous, righteousness itself, and God is the judge of this. Think of that also. God is the judge. If you take the pharisee and his judgment about himself, you will see what an easy thing it is to be righteous. "I thank Thee that I am not as other men are" He was a good man as he thought and he did good deeds as he said, but they did not constitute him the righteousness of God. Another man, at the same time, of whom we read standing by the side of this haughty pharisee, who had

nothing to ask for at the hand of God but only could tell God what he did and what he was, this other man there, troubled, grieved, was repenting, was sorry, was ashamed, had no courage to look to heaven. He smote upon his breast, the place where his trouble was, the seat of his grief and shame, and he prayed - "God be merciful to me a sinner" and he went home a different person from what he was when he went up to pray. He went home justified. Who made him just? He did nothing to make himself just. Could not do. Starting as an unjust person how could he make himself just? But God did it. He went to his house justified. God made him so and that is the case with every person who receives into his conscience the sentence of justification. And see the change that takes place in this person. See the change. Got another name. He is known by another denomination in the Scriptures. God justifies the ungodly that believeth in Jesus, and now this believer in Jesus is said to be without blame and spotless. Spotless, innocent and pure, the great Redeemer is. He put away sin. He died unto it. He lives unto God. He was buried. He rose again from the dead, and now just as He is, so is the sinner who is justified and who shall condemn the man whom God justifies? The law never will. Men may. The devil will, and always himself will, but when God justifies a person, that person is just, and there is an end to it in a sense, there is an end to it, that is, there is no controversy about it in the word of God. O sinner, if ever you get this, you will get heaven in your heart. You may be very religious without it and not enter heaven. You may be very ungracious in your own judgment with it, but you will enter heaven. Who shall condemn the Lord's elect. It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? What do you say sinner to this challenge? Who shall condemn? You say - I condemn myself. Happy man in that, but mind this, God will always have the last word in this matter. What He says shall stand, and if He says to you, says in your heart and conscience that He has nothing against you, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses you from all sin, that you are accepted in the Beloved, that the Father has no fault to find with you, then that will stand. Mind how you believe as well as what you believe. If you believe in this and speak of it as your own possession, see whether you have good reason to believe it. What would be a good reason? One says the Bible. That is a good reason for believing the doctrine, but it may not at all be a reason for you to say that you are justified. Why? Because you may be dead. You may be dead in sin. You may be under the law, and if you are so, you have no reason to believe that

you are justified. But if you are condemned in your conscience, if the law comes against you and speaks against you, and if you say all it says is right, and I am wrong, what then? This. Follow this advice as well as you can. Go with the chains about you, with the condemnation in your conscience, with the guilt upon your conscience. Go, with all the gloom and fear and bondage and trouble that you feel, go to this one place, the throne of grace, go there. But I cannot. You will, you will. Two things will take you there. Necessity, and the Spirit and when you go there, tell the Lord all that you have and feel and fear. He will listen. O, He will listen. He will listen. The pharisee's chattering was an abomination. The publican's prayer was acceptable and sweet music in heaven. Tell Him, poor sinner. If you turn into the Hebrews you see a remarkable case, a wonderful invitation given. "The word of God", says the Apostle there, "is quick" that is living and powerful, "and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight, for all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do". I get on well with people of that sort. Exposed to the gaze of the scripture, searched, penetrated, dissected by the scripture. Troubled because God's eye is on all that nakedness of sin and shame, and what is this person to do? O, says the Apostle, go to the throne of grace. But I am not fit. That is quite true, quite true. I am not worthy. Indeed you are not. But how am I to go? There is a High Priest, says Paul. There is a High Priest, and if you go there, you will find grace to help and mercy and this mercy comes in the form of justification and a justified person, when justified in his conscience by the blood and Spirit of Christ, and the righteousness of Christ, finds himself now able to do as Paul speaks in the Corinthians, first epistle "With open face to look into the glory of God" An open face is an unveiled heart. The veil of ignorance and enmity taken away, and wisdom to look to the end of that which was abolished when Christ said "It is finished" and, looking into that glory, the glory comes in its own sweet mercy and power and imprints itself, its own image upon that sinner, and he is justified, "he is sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God". The righteousness of God. The righteousness of God. And now between heaven and this justified person there are but a few days of trouble. There is sin troubling him, there is affliction troubling him, there is the

devil troubling him and the burden of mortality troubling him, but there are but a few days between this person and heaven. He gets defilement, alas, it is very painful and bitter. He gets defilement, but there is a fountain opened to remove that for all causes of separation, all causes of separation. My brethren the one thing is to go to the blessed altar, upon which the fire of justice was ever burning, and see the consumed sacrifice that was there offered. Remember that in the type there was something very beautiful. When the door of the tabernacle was opened, the first object to catch the eye of the worshipper was the altar, and when a sinner goes to God, the object of His worship, the object of his hope, the ground of his faith, is the altar of which the Apostle Paul says "We have an altar ". We have an altar and we have a right to eat of it, which is marvellous. We have a right to eat of it and what is that, the Lord Jesus Himself, the altar, Himself the Priest, Himself the sacrifice. We have an altar, this is the altar. Made the righteousness of God in Him.

And now, as the Father could do nothing but smite the Son as a Surety, a substitute, He can do nothing but bless the sinner, who is made righteousness, the righteousness of God. He can do nothing but bless him. Do you believe it? Do you believe it for yourselves? Have you reason to think it, indeed that God can do nothing but bless you? O, but you say, He afflicts me. If you be justified his affliction is a blessing. But He chastens me. Whom He loves He chastens. He is good. He can do nothing but bless you, because He has received such satisfaction in His Son sacrificing Himself, that now He has nothing to ask of the person who is justified, and when you go to Him with this sacrifice, then you go with your hands full of that that pleases Him. Everything is right here, nothing is right but here. All other things are wrong. This is right. How will the Lord bless these poor people who are justified? He will bless them by giving them His Spirit. Whoever receives the Spirit of Christ walks after the things of Christ, and after the Spirit of Christ, and what will God do with a person who walks after the Spirit? Receive him, own him, bless him. What does He see in a person who walks after the Spirit? His own life, and can He disown that? He sees His own grace, and can He be other than pleased with that?

Then the first thing, the first concern with a new born person is whether his sins can be put away. Whether God can save his soul. That is the first thing. Thousands of things will crowd in to turn away the mind from this one matter, but that is the thing. And when that is

answered to the satisfaction of the unjust person in making him just, and making him the righteousness of God in Him, then all is settled, and yet his conflict of trouble will then begin. O, but is this true? Are we made the righteousness of God in Him? Have we any apprehension of it? Is it the object of our search and prayer? For, if it be so, the answer is on the way. It will come. The devil may hinder for a time, but it will come. Unbelief may hinder, but it will come. Fears will crowd in, but the blessing will come in God's own time. That we might be made, as we were made of clay, and God breathed the Spirit of life in us; we were made men, so we must be made righteous by that Great God. Must be made so. Do not try to mend a bad case. Do not try to put good things into yourself. Do not try to take any penny to buy grace with. Just go as you may be exercised and troubled about sin, just go like that, poor, destitute, ragged vagabonds, as sin has made you. Go like that, and God who gives the power to go will recognise in you that that He has put in you, hear the prayers which have come from heaven into your heart, and have descended to you. He will recognise them all. And one day, seeing you importunate, seeing you determined not to leave His throne unblessed, seeing that you have got hold of Him by faith, for He has given you that hold, He will say "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt" And then this glory will be on you, the glory of the perfection unattainable by the creature, but given by the Lord. This glory, the glory of being just, the glory of being the righteousness of God, so that the eye of infinite purity looking upon you can find no fault. May the Lord make this out to you and make it out to me. In one sense it is more important to me, than to many of you, only in one sense, and that is, that I am nearer to eternity than the bulk of you. But this is the thing, just to be made the righteousness of God. Then heaven's gates will fly open when we are to be ushered in, and the Trinity will welcome us, and the spirits of just men will welcome us, and holy angels will welcome us, and we shall be in that society from which we shall never be removed, and in which we shall be always delighting.