

The Sinless One Made Sin

by H. A. Ironside

"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" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

I WANT you to consider with me one of the great texts of the Bible, a verse that brings before us the most remarkable transaction that has ever taken place in the universe, when the holy, spotless Son of God took the sinner's place, and offered up Himself in expiation of our sins. Let me ask you to think first for a few minutes of the meaning of the words, "He knew no sin." After that we will meditate upon the expression, "He was made sin," and then we will consider the rest of the verse, "That we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

"He knew no sin." These words suggest three things regarding the perfection of the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the first place, He never made the acquaintance of sin by actual disobedience to the law of God. He never swerved from the path of rectitude in the slightest particular. In all His life down here, He was ever the unerring one. "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). He could turn to His bitterest enemies, and ask without the slightest hesitation, or fear that they would dare attempt to answer, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Neither they nor any of the thousands since who have investigated the records have ever been able to point to one flaw in His behavior.

"He knew no sin" means that He never committed sin, and in this He stands apart from other men; for of every other it is written, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Therefore the need of repentance. "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent," for all men have dishonored Him and are guilty in His sight. But our blessed Lord never repented of anything. He never retracted a word He said. He never confessed the slightest failure. He never apologized for anything. He was never sorry for any act or word. He never lifted His heart to God in confession of failure.

Let me ask you, if you profess to be a Christian, how did your life of piety begin? Did it not start with repentance? When you first came to God, did you not bow before Him a penitent, confessing your sins, and seeking forgiveness because of your iniquities? In the case of every Godly man or woman, contrition and confession have a large place. But how different was the piety of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Bushnell

so strikingly expresses it, "In Him you see piety without one dash of repentance." He never shed a tear because of His blunders or mistakes. He never on any occasion recalled one thing He ever said. His most devoted followers failed: Peter denied Him; James and John would have called down fire from heaven upon those who refused the ministry of their Master; Thomas doubted Him; Philip questioned; Paul brought railing accusations against the high priest in Israel, and immediately afterward apologized for it; Barnabas lost his temper; Mark proved untrustworthy on more than one occasion. But our blessed Lord moved on in perfect serenity through every experience of life. He was the sinless One. And yet He was truly man, but He was more than man. He was God incarnate, and therefore absolutely without sin.

No Confession to Make

Notice the prayer life of our blessed Lord. Because He became man, He prayed to the Father. He took the place of a dependent. He trod the path of faith, and drew His strength from above. He was often found at night on a hillside, or in a garden, pouring out His heart in prayer. But His prayer never took the character of confession. Hence He always prayed alone. He never prayed in fellowship with anyone else. He prayed *for* others. He did not pray *with* them. We never find Him kneeling with Peter, James, and John, His intimate disciples, and joining together with them in intercession, nor with any one else. We who serve Christ today have some of our most blessed experiences as we mingle our prayers and supplications with those of our brethren, and bow together before God in acknowledgment of our common sinfulness and our common need. He never did this with anyone. He taught His disciples to pray, "Forgive us our debts (spiritual debts, trespasses), as we forgive our debtors," but He could not, in the very nature of things, pray that prayer with them. He stood altogether apart. They were sinners; He was sinless, the Saviour of sinners. "*He knew no sin!*"

The Word of God teaches that He not only never made the acquaintance of sin, by actual failure, by transgression, by disobedience in thought, word, or deed, but He knew no sin in the sense that His humanity was never contaminated by an inward tendency to sin. He was absolutely, from the moment of His incarnation, the Holy One. The angel said to the blessed virgin mother: "That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." In Adam, unfallen, we see humanity *innocent*; in all his children since, we see humanity *fallen*, but in Christ Jesus we see humanity

holy. We are told that He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. Some people have taken this last expression to mean, "Yet without sinning." That was true as we have seen, but it is not all of the truth. That verse means this: He was tempted in all points like as we are, apart from sin. He was never tempted by inbred sin. He could say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." You cannot say that; I cannot. When the enemy comes at me from without, there is a traitor inside who would gladly surrender the citadel, if he could; but with my Lord it was quite otherwise.

Tempted in All Points

If any ask how He could be tempted in all points like as we are, if He did not possess a sinful nature, I would remind you that our first parents were sinless when temptation first came to them. They were tested, on three points, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These are the only three ways in which man can be tested. Temptation either comes in the form of fleshly suggestion, the temptation of the body; or, it comes along esthetical lines, the temptation of the soul; or, it appeals to the mind, the temptation of the spirit. When Eve looked upon the tree, she saw that its fruit was good for food—the lust of the flesh; that it was pleasant to the eyes—the lust of the eyes; that it was desired to make one wise—the pride of life. She capitulated on every point. Adam shared in her sin, and thus the race became fallen. To Christ in the wilderness among the wild beasts, Satan said, "Command that these stones be made bread." It was the appeal to the lust of the flesh. He showed our Lord all the kingdoms of earth and the glory of them—the lust of the eyes. He suggested His leaping from the pinnacle of the temple to be sustained by angel hands and thus be accredited to the people—the pride of life. But each temptation failed, even as an arrow is turned back by a steel plate. He was without sin. He suffered being tempted. The very presentation of temptation to Him was in itself so obnoxious that it caused Him the keenest suffering. It is the very opposite generally with us. Peter tells us that "He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin." Sin in our eyes is alluring. It is presented to us as something attractive and delightful. Our corrupt natures respond to the temptation from without, and we have to suffer in the flesh in order to resist. But it was never so with Him. He suffered when sin in any form was presented to Him.

Let me illustrate this. Suppose that a young man of high principles is associated with his own father in the management of a bank. He loves and honors his father, and nothing means more to him than his father's success, and the recognition of his integrity by his business associates.

But suppose some one in the bank should make the suggestion to this son that, if they would act together, they might rob the bank of thousands of dollars, and cover up their wrong-doing temporarily, and be far out of the country before the evil deed could be discovered. Can you imagine the indignation of this young man, and the mental suffering that he would endure, to think that anyone would think him capable of doing anything so vile, so low, when he was his father's trusted son? He would be humiliated and ashamed to think that anyone would dare to present such a temptation to him. So in a far higher sense, the temptations of our Lord Jesus Christ meant the keenest suffering, for He was absolutely free from all inward tendency to sin.

But we may go farther: "He knew no sin" in the sense that it was unthinkable that He ever could sin, for He was God manifest in the flesh. He did not change His glorious personality when He became man. God the Son from all eternity, became in grace the Son of God, when He was born of a virgin mother, without human father. He was ever the eternal God. Now just as truly as God ex-carnate cannot sin, so He who was God incarnate was absolutely above anything of the kind. If any ask, "How then could His temptation be real, if there was no possibility that He would fall?" the answer is clear and simple—the temptation was not permitted in order to find out if He would fall, but to prove that He would not. It was thus demonstrated that He was an acceptable sin offering.

In the Old Testament we read again and again of the sin offering, "It is most holy." How carefully God manifested this in regard to His Son. The temptation proved it, and then on the very day of His crucifixion distinct testimony was given four times to the same wondrous fact. The wife of Pilate besought her husband, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man." Pilate himself washed his hands, and said, "I find in him no fault at all." The penitent thief hanging by His side on the cross declared, "This man hath done nothing amiss." When He at last yielded up His spirit to the Father, the Roman centurion exclaimed, "Certainly this was a righteous man." "*He knew no sin!*"

"*He was made sin.*" In both languages in which the two Testaments were written, the same words were used for sin and sin offering; so we may understand this expression to mean, "He was made the sin offering." We read in Isaiah 53, "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." How tremendously solemn! He upon whom the law had no claim whatsoever poured out His soul unto death in the sinner's stead.

Not Physical Suffering Only

Let me remind you that it was not simply the physical suffering which our blessed Lord endured upon the cross that made expiation for iniquity. It was what He suffered in His holy, spotless soul, in His sinless being, when the judgment that our sins deserved fell on Him. For six awful hours He hung suspended upon that cross. God Himself seems to have divided the time into two halves. From the third to the sixth hour, that is, from nine o'clock in the morning until high noon, according to our way of reckoning, the sun was shining down upon that cross. But from the sixth to the ninth hour, that is, from noon until three o'clock in the afternoon, a supernatural darkness enshrouded the entire scene.

In those first three hours there was no evidence of any special perturbation. He was suffering and agonizing, but He gave no evidence of the least self-pity. Not one word was uttered by those holy lips that indicated for a moment that He was suffering. He looked down at the foot of the cross and saw His mother and John, the beloved, standing near. He said to her, "Behold thy son," and to John, "Behold thy mother." John then took her, and led her away from that awful scene. He looked at the great throng gathered all about Him, and listened to their cries of hatred and blasphemy: "If thou be Christ, save thyself... come down from the cross." He lifted His heart to the Father and pleaded, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Then He heard the prayer of the dying malefactor by His side, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." That was faith. The thief could discern in that thorn-crowned Sufferer, earth's coming glorious King. But Jesus said, as it were, "I will do better than that. You do not need to wait for me to come in my kingdom. Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." All His words have to do with the blessing and happiness of others.

During those first three hours, while the sun was shining down upon that cross, He was suffering from the hand of man. But what Jesus endured at the hand of man would never put away one sin. Then suddenly, at high noon, the sun seemed to be blotted out of the heavens. Appalling darkness spread over all the scene. The early Christians used to say that Dionysius the Areopagite was addressing a class of students in Alexandria at that moment, when this supernatural darkness spread over the world, and he suddenly exclaimed, "Either a God is dying, or the universe is about to go into dissolution."

Yes! He who is both God and man was dying. God was then entering

into judgment with Him regarding our sins. In those three hours of darkness, darkness which no human eye could pierce, alone upon the cross, the judgment which our sins deserved was visited upon Him. Then His soul was made an offering for sin. Then "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him." Then He could cry as in the words of the Psalmist: "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water spouts; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." Then it was that He was made to be sin for us. In some way that our finite minds can not now understand, the pent-up wrath of the centuries fell upon Him, and He "[sank] in deep mire where there [was] no standing," as He endured in His inmost being what you and I would have had to endure through all eternity, had it not been for His mighty sacrifice. Then His soul was made an offering for sin, and as the darkness was passing away, we hear the cry of anguish predicted in the twenty-second Psalm, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Do you know the answer? In order that you and I might have eternal life He, the Holy One, the sinless One, took our place in judgment that we might be forever delivered from condemnation. He went into darkness that light might ever shine upon us. He bore our heavy load of guilt that our sins might be removed as far as the east is from the west.

He is Our Righteousness

"That we might be made the righteousness of God in him." We who believe are now through grace the display of divine righteousness; God has shown how He can be just in justifying all who trust in Him who took our place in judgment. Upon the cross our sins were imputed to Him. He endured what we deserved. He drank the bitter cup of wrath which should have been ours. That was the cup from which He shrank in Gethsemane's garden. He could not have been the holy Son had He been able to look upon it with equanimity. But He emptied that cup. He exhausted the wrath of God against our sins, and now divine righteousness demands that all who trust in Him be freed from every charge, and thus fully justified before the throne of God. Seated high in heaven's glory, on the right hand of the Father, He is there as our Representative. His acceptance is ours. God sees us in Him.

Looking back to the cross, the believer can say: "Blessed Lord, there Thou wert made sin for me; there Thou didst bear my judgment; didst endure my desert; I myself am the answer to the cry, 'Why hast thou forsaken me?'"

Looking up to the throne where He now sits exalted, the believer can

cry in faith, "Blessed Lord, there upon the throne Thou art my righteousness." This indeed is full salvation, and it is all based upon the blessed fact that "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Any attempt of ours to provide a righteousness which will satisfy God is doomed to end in failure, yet thousands today who bear the Christian name have never faced their sins before God and found their righteousness in Christ. Nothing is sadder than profession without possession; nothing more solemn than having a name to live, when actually dead in trespasses and in sins. Yet this, alas, is true of all whose hope of salvation is based upon the fact that they have been brought up to respect Christianity, and in a sense to reverence its Founder, but have never taken their place as lost, guilty sinners before God, looked in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, once made sin for them, and received Him as their own personal Saviour.

Let me affectionately ask you the question, "Have you done so?" Remember that in the life of every one who is saved, there has taken place, at some time or other, that great change described in Scripture as conversion (Matthew 18:3). To be sure, the change is not so marked in some as in others, nor could all point to the day and hour when it occurred; but all who are truly born again have been children of wrath on the road to destruction who came to the place where they received Christ in faith, and thus were saved.

A Religious Woman Lost

Some time ago I heard of a lady living in a country place where modern conveniences in the way of lighting and such like were not to be had. She had never been very wicked, as man would say. Frequently she attended church, said her prayers regularly, even read her Bible, and in short hoped that all was right for eternity, yet was seldom concerned about the question of salvation, for her conscience had never been reached. She had no realization of the sinfulness of her own heart. Wrapped in her rags of self-righteousness she was contentedly hastening on to judgment. Peace in a sense she had, but a false peace, not peace with God. She was simply at peace with herself, for she had never known true soul trouble.

She was alone in her room one night when suddenly the lamp which she had lighted went out, leaving her in the darkness. Almost involuntarily she exclaimed, "There is no oil in the lamp!" Then she added, "I've heard that before. Ah, yes, the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-12). Five of them had no oil in their lamps when the

bridegroom came, and they were shut out of the feast." Her mind became troubled. For several days and even nights, the thought was ever with her. She would often cry out in anguish of soul, "No, I have no oil in my lamp. My God, what will become of me? I have not the grace of God in my heart!"

A horror of great darkness came upon her. She longed to be saved, yet knew not how. In great distress she began to pray, and God opened her eyes to see her utterly lost, undone condition in His sight, and showed her that she could do nothing to save herself. She searched His Word for light as to how she might obtain the longed-for "oil," and at last was led to realize that the work that saves had all been finished long ago when the Lord Jesus bore her sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24); that all she had to do to possess eternal life and to know that she had it, was to believe on Him (1 John 5:13). Glad she was indeed to be saved so simply, and yet in a way that brought such satisfaction. Sin had all been judged on Another, and she was justified from all things (Acts 13:38, 39). She rested in simple faith in Christ, and now rejoices that she is His for time and eternity.

Before, she had a profession; now, she has Christ. Before, she was dressed in the rags of selfrighteousness; now, she is clothed in the righteousness of God (1 Corinthians 1:30). Before, she had an empty lamp only; now, she is a possessor of the oil of the Spirit, who has sealed her for heaven (Ephesians 4:30).

Let me earnestly entreat any reader who is without oil in his lamp to face his true condition now, without any further delay. Hesitate not to tell out everything into the ears of a holy God. Then look up by faith to the One who was made to be sin for you, that you might become the righteousness of God in Him. He was lifted up on Calvary's cross "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Saved then by sovereign grace, you will find every need met for time and eternity in the risen Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

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