

# What Kind of Sinner Was Jesus?

by Maurice Barnett

Numerous theories about the person of Jesus have littered the pages of history from the time of His personal ministry to the present. Such theories have been the cause of division and destruction that comes with doctrinal error. Today, brethren are not immune to such theories and the division that follows.

Words are the vehicle of thought. They represent ideas. They form the nature of communication. God has communicated His mind to us in human language, words, I Corinthians 2:10-13. If we miss what those words mean, the ideas they represent, then we miss the mind of God.



That leads us into error on any subject. The examples of such error are beyond imagination. We must understand that there are different meanings to words, and even phrases. Words and phrases may not, necessarily, mean the same thing in every place they are found. For example, there are fourteen meanings of the word "spirit," several meanings of "faith," etc. If we don't get the meaning right in a particular verse, we miss the mind of God and wind up in error.

Mormons believe in Jehovah God and Jesus Christ. But, when they finish defining what they mean by those words, they don't believe what the Bible teaches. They believe in millions of gods that populate millions of worlds in this universe. They claim that the god of our world was once a human just like we are but on another world in this universe. He was obedient to the god that ruled over his particular world. As a reward for his faithfulness, he was made a god by a counsel of gods and allowed to create a world(s), and populate them with his literal offspring who would then worship him. Thus, the aim of every Mormon male is to become a god of his own little world, or worlds. So, for a Mormon to say that he believes in the god of the Bible and in Jesus Christ does not, of itself, tell us anything about what they believe. When they finish explaining it, they don't believe what we do nor do they believe what the Bible teaches. Other religious groups are just as wrong in other directions.

Over the past few decades, the theory was energetically pursued that Jesus was a man, just a man and nothing more than a man. Certainly, the Bible says that Jesus was "a man" but some made out of it other than what is biblically meant by it. Supposedly, He was subject to every weakness and desire as any other human, was ignorant of who He was and where He was going. Some went so far as to claim that Jesus "lusted to do evil" but just didn't convert the lust into action. That alone meant that Jesus was defiled from the heart out because such lust is sinful of itself, Mark 7:21-23, and Jesus could not be the sinless savior. That certainly is not the Jesus in whom I believe. The entire issue was a result of the way they defined terms. Biblical images were changed.

Calvinism has had an extremely profound effect on modern religion, even on brethren. This has traveled in numerous directions. One reason this has happened is because brethren depend on commentaries and dictionaries that are written, either by avowed Calvinists or those greatly influenced by Calvinists, and they accept what they read without question. Preachers pick up those ideas and preach them. Brethren thus become infected with error. Many songs we sing are written by Calvinists and reflect their doctrine. In places, brethren are brainwashed with Calvinism three times a week.

The area we want to specially look at is the death of Jesus. Calvin, and even Martin Luther, claimed that Jesus literally became a sinner in order to accomplish salvation for us. Martin Luther says in his Commentary on Galatians, page 213—

**"And this, no doubt all the prophets did foresee in spirit,—that Christ should become the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel, blasphemer, that ever was or could be in the world. For he, being made a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, is not now an innocent person and without sins..."**

The same thing is said by Calvinists. Perhaps the most graphic picture of what Jesus supposedly endured "in our place" is the following from J. Rodman Williams in his book, *Renewal Theology*, page 359—

**"As the one great Sinner—the one who had become sin, the one who was accursed beyond all that ever lived—all the wrath of God Almighty was poured out upon Him. The head of the serpent was someday to be crushed (Gen. 3:15), but at this moment Christ had become so identified with evil that the crushing was on Him. This weight of the divine fury directed against sin at the cross is humanly inconceivable. For at Calvary all the sin of all the world was receiving the outpoured vials of divine wrath. It was for Christ alone to bear that awesome punishment and to experience its indescribable torment and anguish."**

To present an echo of these theologians, here is a short piece from brother Foy E. Wallace, Jr. It is taken from a taped sermon he preached some years ago. As a matter of fact, it was a sermon he often preached in meetings all over the United States—

**"And when it says that God saw that He poured out His soul unto death, that means that Jesus died a spiritual death. We picture the agonies of the cross of Christ as excruciating physical pain He suffered. And, of course that was terrible but the thieves suffered physically. The message of the cross is not the physical suffering of Christ. He poured out His soul unto death. But the soul cannot die in any way but spiritually. The only way a soul can die is in the sense of separation. That's the only way it can die. And when Jesus died, the spiritual death, poured out His soul unto death, it meant that Jesus died spiritually. That meant that Jesus Christ was separated from God on the cross of Calvary. The sinner is separated from God and He took the sinners place. But He couldn't take the sinners place without getting in it and He had to be separated from God....Redemption called for it, it had to be done. When God saw that He poured out His soul unto death, He was satisfied. That means the law was satisfied. Sin was so great that it had to be reckoned either with the punishment of the sin or the banishment of the sinner. And God's justice could not permit sin to go unpunished but God's love could not permit the sinner to be banished and Jesus Christ took the sinner's place. And the law was upheld, legally satisfied."**

A statement brother Wallace makes regarding sin that it was so great that it required *"either...the punishment of the sin or the banishment of the sinner"* makes very little sense. Sin only relates to a sinner and the punishment for sin *is* the banishment of the sinner. It isn't either/or. The fact is that *sin has to be punished or the sinner forgiven!* What brother Wallace presents here is straight out of Calvinist textbooks. It presents a theory from Anselm in the eleventh century and amended by Calvin. Yet, it is all based on the ideas of Augustine from centuries before. By preaching this sermon for so long a time, to so many hundreds of brethren, brother Wallace influenced them toward this view and thus it is no wonder the theory is so widespread. Even a Jule Miller filmstrip that has been used for decades as Bible studies says that Jesus suffered "the hell we deserve."

Brother Wallace bases his whole argument on the phrase "poured out his soul unto death." However, his interpretation of the phrase only asserts that it refers to spiritual death rather than physical death. From this he then concludes that Jesus took all of the sins, guilt and punishment of the world upon himself while on the cross. Jesus took the sinners place, Calvinist substitution. This, he said, was required by the law of God.

However, the specified phrase is like that said of Rachel in Genesis 35:18, "as her soul was in departing (for she died)..." What is meant regarding Jesus is stated for us in the gospels, Matthew 27:50, Mark 15:37 John 19:30. Luke 23:46 says— "And Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said this, he gave up the ghost."

This only meant that Jesus died because the spirit departed from his body and the body without the spirit is dead. "Poured out his soul unto death" in Isaiah 53:12 refers to the same event as Luke 23:46. Further, in the phrase "bare the sin of many" in the same verse, "bare" is from the Hebrew, *nasa*. *Nasa* may be translated in some passages as "forgive" or "pardon," such as Exodus 32:32, 34:7, Numbers 14:18. *Nasa* is also translated by "forgive" and "pardon" in the following verses—

**"So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him." Genesis 50:17.**

**"Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the LORD your God, that he may take away from me this death only." Exodus 10:17.**

**"Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD." I Samuel 15:25.**

Must we conclude from these verses that the sins of the people involved were transferred to Joseph, Moses or Samuel? Were their sins imputed to these individuals? No, they were not. In some places, even though the words "bore" or "bear" are used, it may mean only "removal." The conclusion that *nasa*, "borne," refers to a transference of sins to the one who "bears" is a false conclusion. There is no imputation of sins inherent in the word any more than there is an imputation of the righteousness of Christ to us, the "imputation theory" of Calvinism. To bear sins is to remove them, not impute them to Himself. See also John 1:29, Hebrews 9:26, 28, I Peter 2:24. There is no hint at all of imputation/substitution in these verses nor any of the verses in Isaiah 53:4-12, but to the contrary.

Consider the consequences. If Jesus took all of every sin that man has ever committed onto Himself then He is the blackest of ungodly individuals who ever lived, as was claimed in the quotations we looked at before. No one human commits every possible sin that one can do.

But, it is said that Jesus took EVERY sin of mankind into Himself on the cross. He became a sinner so great that God could not stand to look upon Him. I deny that any such scripture says such a thing but to the contrary. The scriptures deny it.

If this doctrine of substitution is true, then no one has any sins because Jesus took them away 2000 years ago; no one should feel any guilt about anything because Jesus took our guilt upon himself. No one should feel any fear of punishment for their actions because Jesus took all our punishment for sinful conduct on Himself. In fact, whatever we do, we cannot call any of it sin because we have no sins; Jesus took them all away before we were born. Why do people today feel guilty for transgressions of Gods word when they are not guilty of anything? Why does God still threaten us with punishment for sins we dont have when He put *all* of our guilt and punishment on Jesus 2000 years ago?

Further, we should remember that just the death of Jesus, what happened on the Cross, meant absolutely nothing without His resurrection and ascension to become High Priest in order to complete the offering for sin, I Corinthians 15:17, Hebrews 9:11ff. Paul said that if Christ had not been raised, "ye are yet in your sins." If our sins were all removed on the Cross, there would have been no need for the resurrection, ascension and Priesthood of Jesus. Substitution is an attack on the gospel of Christ.

**"We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech *you* on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God. Him who knew no sin he made *to be sin* on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him." II Corinthians 5:20-21.**

The usual interpretation of the statement, "made to be sin," echoes Lutheran/Calvinist theories that Jesus actually became sin. Supposedly, He took all of the sins of the world, all of the guilt and punishment for sins, upon Himself. Lets look at a couple of authors who take that position so we can see what this means—

**"And this, no doubt all the prophets did foresee in spirit,—that Christ should become the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel, blasphemer, that ever was or could be in the world. For he, being made a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, is not now an innocent person and without sins..."** Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, page 213.

**"Because He was 'made sin,' impregnated with sin, and because the very essence of sin, on the cross He was banished from God's presence as a loathsome thing. He and sin were made synonymous."** Paul Billheimer, *Destined For The Throne*, page 83.

**"God made him sin: that is to say that God the Father made His innocent incarnate Son the object of His wrath and judgment, for our sakes, with the result that in Christ on the cross the sin of the world is judged and taken away. . . Our sin is transferred to Him and His righteousness is transferred to us..."** P.E. Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, pages 213-214.

Such quotations could be multiplied many times over. Not only is it supposed that all of mankind's sins were embedded in Christ but His righteousness was thus embedded in us, which is what "that we might become the righteousness of God in him" is supposed to mean. That is the "imputation" theory of Calvinism. The verse works just as well in one direction as the other. It doesn't matter whether we call it imputed to Him, laid on Him, placed on Him, transferred to Him or any of a number of other expressions. If Jesus literally took all of our sins upon Himself, they were transferred to Him 2000 years ago, then we have no sins which means we are therefore righteous. There is the imputation theory of Calvinism.

The worst "translation" of II Corinthians 5:21 that I have seen is that of Living Letters, the Paraphrased N.T. It is not a translation at all but a brazen effort to insert a theological position into the Bible. It shows just how far Calvinists will go to support their doctrines. Here it is—

**"For God took the sinless Christ and poured into Him our sins. Then, in exchange, he poured God's goodness into us."**

Is this really what II Corinthians 5:21 is saying? The superficial reading of a word or phrase can be dangerous. Words and phrases can easily mean different things in different contexts. The focus here is on the meaning of "sin." Does it really mean that Jesus became the biggest sinner in the history of the world? No.

(1) I will start with an assertion and then present the evidence. The word sin, in this passage means sin-sacrifice. It is a figure of speech called *synecdoche*, meaning a part is given for the whole, one word is given to stand for a larger thought. There are many such instances of synecdoche in the Bible. Even the words faith and grace are used as the figure, *synecdoche*, in some passages. If we miss that fact, we will pervert revelation and wind up with false doctrine.

For evidence we will begin in the Old Testament—In the book of Leviticus alone, just the single word for "sin" is translated as "sin-offering" over 50 times because that is what it means in those verses. For instance—

**"Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, saying, This is the law of sin offering: In the place where the burnt offering is killed shall the sin offering be killed before the Lord: it is most holy."** Leviticus 6:25.

In both places where sin offering is found here, just the word for sin is in the original text. The word "offering" is not in the Hebrew text at all. This is also true concerning trespass and trespass-offering, *asham* in Hebrew. In Isaiah 53:10, it is said "when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin." The phrase, offering for sin, is from the single word, *asham*.

This word for "trespass" is appropriately understood to be "trespass-offering," or "offering for sin."

(2) In the Septuagint, a translation into Greek by Hebrew scholars long before Christ, the

phrase, "sin offering," from the Hebrew word for sin, is translated into the Greek word, *harmatia*, the single Greek word for sin. Not so strangely, that is exactly what we find in II Corinthians 5:21.

(3) Lets now go to the New Testament. First, Hebrews 10:6 says—

"In whole burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou hadst no pleasure."

There is a quotation from Psalm 40:6. The word "sacrifices" has been added to the word, "sin." It is just the Greek word for sin, *hamartia*, again as in II Corinthians 5:21. We thus have a New Testament commentary, made by the Holy Spirit, on how the word is to be understood in many passages. We find the same fact in Hebrews 10:8. Romans 8:2-3 says—

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh."

In the phrase "and for sin," the single Greek word for "sin" refers to sin sacrifice, which is identified as such in a footnote in the *American Standard Version*. Notice what the footnote says as well as the verses listed as references—

"Or, 'and as an offering for sin,' Lev. 7:37 &c. Heb. 10:6 &c.14."

The New Testament usage of the word "sin" to stand for "sin sacrifice" is rooted in the Old Testament as we have seen in Leviticus. Notice also that in Hebrews 10:14, the word translated from *prophera* is "offering." Take the time to run the context and you will see that "offering" in verse 14 is the same as "sin offering" from the word for "sin," *hamartia*. So, *hamartia*, "sin," and *prophera*, "offering," are synonyms in that context. We might also note that the *UBS New Testament Greek Dictionary*, #271, says that just the word for sin, *hamartia*, is "often sin offering."

(4) Here is another interesting item of translation. Strangely, *The Jewish New Testament*, translated by David Stern gives us this proper rendering of II Corinthians 5:21—

"God made this sinless man be a sin offering on our behalf, so that in union with him we might fully share in God's righteousness."

(5) For what it is worth, here is an interesting portion from Adam Clarke on II Corinthians 5:21. Clarke goes on in his commentary to list many passages where the word "sin" stands for sin sacrifice.

"In the second place, it signifies a sin-offering, or sacrifice for sin, and answers to the *chattaah* and *chattath* of the Hebrew text; which signifies both sin and sin-offering in a great variety of places in the Pentateuch. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew word by *hamartia* in ninety-four places in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, where a sin-offering is meant; and where our version translates the word not sin, but an offering for sin. Had our translators attended to their own method of translating the word in other places where it means the same as here, they would not have given this false view of a passage which has been made the foundation of a most blasphemous doctrine; viz. that our sins were imputed to Christ, and that he was a proper object of the indignation of Divine justice, because he was blackened with imputed sin; and some have proceeded so far in this blasphemous career as to say, that Christ may be considered as the greatest of sinners, because all the sins of mankind, or of the elect, as they say, were imputed to him, and reckoned as his own. One of these writers translates the passage thus: '*Deus Christum pro maximo peccatore habuit, ut nos essemus maxime justi*, God accounted Christ the greatest of sinners, that we might be supremely righteous.' Thus they have confounded sin with the punishment due to sin. Christ suffered in our stead; died for us; bore our sins, (the punishment due to them), in his own body upon the tree, for the Lord laid upon him the iniquities of us all; that is, the punishment due to them; explained by making his soul - his life, an offering for sin; and healing us by his stripes."

(6) Everything about the sin-sacrifices in the Old Testament was most holy to God. The animal itself had to be without blemish. The place where the animal was slain had to be most

holy. The priest had to be holy in order to make the offering. Whoever touched the flesh of the sin-offering was holy. I Peter 1:18-19 says—

**“...knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without spot, *even the blood of Christ.*”**

If Jesus was a blemish free, spotless, most holy and righteous sacrifice, how could He actually and literally be the blackest of sinners on the cross? Further, look at Hebrews 7:26-27. Notice especially the phrase, “when he offered up himself.” The “offering” of Christ was more than just His death on the cross—

**“For such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the *sins* of the people: for this he did once for all, when he offered up himself.”**

Jesus was both sacrifice and High Priest. He neither had sins He had committed nor did He become sin, as such, but a sin-sacrifice offered up on our behalf. Read carefully Hebrews chapters 7-10 to see just what He did for us.

In studying any subject, we must consider related passages and subjects, the context, figurative versus literal language, etc. If we do not do so, then we wind up in error. We have seen the evidence from both Old and New Testaments that the word, sin, when connected with what Jesus did, refers to a sin-offering, a figure of speech known as *synecdoche*.

Lastly, notice II Corinthians 5:20 that leads in to our disputed verse 21—

**“We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God.”**

If “reconciliation” took place on the Cross, as Calvinist substitution makes it to be, why does Paul put on us the responsibility of “be ye reconciled to God?” Did not Jesus do all the reconciling while on the cross? We sing, “He bore it all,” paid it all! Well, He did His part but we have to do our part. You see, He made it possible for us to be reconciled. He is the door, the bridge between man and God just as He was both man and God. That made Him the perfect intercessor. And, the theory that He had to become the blackest of sinners in order to satisfy law and justify man is a figment of man's imagination. Such a doctrine leads us directly into other errors.