

# **THE GOSPEL MADE PLAIN**

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**2 CORINTHIANS 5:20-21 • TV087B**

A television broadcast sermon delivered

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By

**HENRY T. MAHAN**

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### **2 Corinthians 5:20-21**

*“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. 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.”*

Now, we’re turning for our message today to the book of **2 Corinthians Chapter 5:20 and 21**. I’m speaking on this subject: **“THE GOSPEL MADE PLAIN.”** I started to entitle this message: **“DO YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW THE GOSPEL?”** But let’s just call it this: **“THE GOSPEL MADE PLAIN.”**

Now, we are not selling anything; we’re not giving anything away. We’re not raising money for any special causes. I have really a three-fold purpose today; I want to encourage you, you who know Christ, you who love the Saviour; I want to encourage you in the Gospel.

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And then, I'd like to inspire you to love Christ. I'd like to inspire you to walk in the will of God and to study the Word of God. But I believe it's also the minister's place to instruct the people, to instruct you in the things of God. And that's what I plan to do in dealing with this subject: **"THE GOSPEL MADE PLAIN."**

Now, here's a searching question and I want you to prayerfully and carefully deal with it in your own heart. Do you really want to know the Gospel? Do you really care? Paul said; *"The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation."*

I can answer for myself; I want to know the Gospel. I don't want to perish depending on a false hope and building on a false foundation. I'd like to know the Gospel. And I'd like to know the Gospel, not a Gospel or some Gospel or any Gospel; I'd sure like to know the Gospel, wouldn't you?

The apostle said, *"If we or even an angel from heaven preach any other gospel than that which I've preached unto you, let him be accursed."* There is but one Gospel. Do you really want to know the Gospel?

Are you willing to give up your own wisdom and learning and sit at the feet of Christ as Mary and learn of him? Are you willing to quit following men? Are you willing to lay down your traditions?

Are you willing to lay down all of your customs and your forms and your ceremonies and yea, even your own thoughts and let God be God? And let God speak for Himself and say with the prophet of old, "Lord speak; thy servant heareth. Just tell me and I'll listen, I'll listen."

Now look at the text. Turn to **2 Corinthians chapter 5:20** and it begins this way and I'm glad it begins this way because I need to make this clear, *"Now, we are ambassadors for Christ."*

Now my friend; I don't claim any special powers. I don't claim any healing power in my hand. I don't claim any special powers in my benedictions and blessings.

I don't claim any special powers in my words. I say with the apostle Paul in **1 Timothy 4:16**; to Timothy he said; *"Take heed to yourself and to your doctrine. Continue in them for in so doing you shall save yourself and them that hear you."*

Now that's my concern. I want to be saved myself. And I want those who hear me to be saved. I don't claim any special power. I can't help myself, let alone help you. I'm dependent upon God. God must save both of us.

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So, I don't claim any special powers and you won't receive any special blessing by me conferring some sort of blessing upon you. You've got to look to Christ. I point you to Him who alone can save.

And then I proclaim no special privileges. Paul said, "*I keep my body, (my ambitions and my pride) I keep these things and I bring them into subjection, lest when I preach to others, I myself become a castaway.*"

Don't follow me; follow Christ. Don't follow any man because that man may wind up a castaway. It's possible for him to present to you the way of life and never enter therein himself.

So, I don't claim any special privileges. I don't claim some special door for me down at the end of the hall. I've got to come through Christ. Christ is the way for you and he's the way for me.

The way of repentance and faith is the way for all men, black and white, rich and poor, old and young, learned or ignorant, religious or not religious.

And I don't claim any special position, and foolish is the preacher who does. You know, Paul said in **1 Corinthians 3**: "*Neither is he that planteth anything, neither is he that watereth anything, but God that giveth the increase.*"

Paul said, "*I'm less than the least of all the saints. I'm not one wit behind the chief apostle, but I'm nothing. I'm the chief of sinners.*" I don't claim any special position in the kingdom of God and I don't claim any special holiness.

In **2 Corinthians 4:7** Paul said: "*We have this treasure in earthen vessels.*" That's what it's in. If I bring anything to you I bring it in an earthen vessel. I don't bring it in a silver cup or a gold cup; "*I bring it in an earthen vessel that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.*"

"*Who's sufficient for these things?*" No man; our sufficiency, thank God, is not ourselves. Our sufficiency is Christ.

The only claim I make; I claim no special power, position, or authority. But, I do make one claim; the only claim that I make is a call to the Gospel ministry. I'm preaching as one who may never preach again. I'm preaching as a dying man to dying men.

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I believe that the Word of God; I believe that the Word of God is the infallible, inerrant, inspired, verbally inspired, God-breathed Word of the living King and that he has called me to preach it to you. I do make that claim.

I do believe that I'm an ambassador of Jesus Christ in human flesh and as Paul said: *"We call upon you in Christ's stead as though God did beseech you by us; be ye reconciled to God."* That's the only claim that any human being can make.

I believed God called me to tell you the truth, to preach to you the Gospel. That's what he said, *"As though God did beseech you by us."* We know that God speaks to men through men. Listen to these Scriptures; *"There was a man sent from God whose name was John."* And God told the people to hear him. And then the Scripture says, (Paul talking) he says, "Commit this gospel to faithful men. You commit it to faithful men that they may teach others." And then he says, *"God has entrusted us with the gospel."*

Therefore, if you really want to know the Gospel you're going to have to listen to somebody. You're going to have to listen to somebody who knows it himself, who has been taught of God. Paul said, *"I wasn't taught this gospel by men; I was taught this gospel by God; God revealed it unto me."*

If you care how God can be just and justifier; if you're interested in God's divine purpose and redemption; are you willing to listen to the Word of God, and to the one who believes that God called him and sent him to deliver that Gospel to you?

Well here it is; here's the Gospel. Here is the message made plain. Here's the message of redemption. Here's the Gospel without fine words or eloquent phrases. Here it is in **verse 21**; Paul said, *"I am an ambassador of Jesus Christ. As though God did beseech you by me; be ye reconciled to God."* I speak in Christ's stead (now look at this next verse, here it is): *"For he who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. God hath made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."*

Now, in order to learn from this verse, we need to camp a little bit on each word. And I see three words here which introduce three persons. Listen to it again: *"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."*

There are three words that introduce us to three persons: *"He hath made him to be sin for us,"* (He) God the Father, (Him) the Lord Jesus Christ and (us) the sinner. Now let's look at them a moment:

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**First of all:** “*He hath made!*”

All things begin with God. There’s nothing that doesn’t begin with God. Everything has to start there. Creation started with God. Time started with God. Light started with God. Life started with God.

So redemption starts with God. Everything has God as its beginning and God as its source. If we are going to study the Gospel we don’t start with man. We don’t even start with a blessing. Anybody who knows anything about the Gospel has to start at the beginning and that’s to start with God.

That’s where Paul starts; he says: “*He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*” Everything starts with God.

Eternal life is to know God. Salvation is to be reconciled to God. To be redeemed is to be redeemed by God, not a god, not some god, not any god, but the living God. That’s what Christ said, “*Eternal life is to know thee the living God.*”

So everything begins with God, the God of heaven and the universe, the God of creation, the God of Holy Scriptures, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and David. It all begins with God.

And if a man is going to know the living God he’s going to have to hear of the living God. So, we start with God, “*He hath made him to be sin.*”

Paul wrote in **Romans 10**: “*Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how shall they call on him in whom they’ve not believed and how shall they believe in him of whom they’ve not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?*”

So, that’s where I start; I start with God. If I’m going to teach the Gospel to any man I start with God. Sin is in relation to God. Sin is against God. Mercy comes from God. Everything starts with God.

And there are three attributes of God given in this text. We know these three things about God.

First of all: He is a sovereign God!

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What does the word sovereign mean? It means almighty, omnipotent, and all powerful, that God does as He pleases, when He pleases, with whom He pleases. He's answerable to no one. He's sovereign and independent.

*"He hath all power."* That's what the Word said. They said: *"David, where is your God?"* He said, *"Our God is in the heavens. He hath done whatsoever he pleased in the heavens, in the earth, in the seas, and all deep places."*

That's **Psalm 115 and Psalm 135**. God says, *"Can I do with mine own what I will? I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy."* God is sovereign.

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God says, *"Can I do with mine own what I will? I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy."* God is sovereign.

That's what this verse is saying: *"He God hath made him to be sin for us."* God did it because God could do it and because God would do it and because God was pleased to do it. God's sovereign.

The next thing we find out about God, the next attribute that we learn about God in this verse of Scripture is:

Now, this is so important. This is so vital to learning the Gospel: *"He hath made him to be sin for us,"* that He is a sovereign God, is seen in His power to make Christ to be sin for us. Only God can do that. An angel couldn't do it and a man couldn't do it. All the forces of hell couldn't do it.

But God can make Christ to be sin for us. The fact that He did, the fact that He did it, reveals His power. And the fact that He was willing to do it and had to do it in order to satisfy His justice, reveals His righteousness and His holiness.

That's right! Now you think about that a moment, that He as a sovereign God is seen in His power to make Christ to be sin for us, that He is a just God is seen in the fact that *"he spared not his own Son"* but made His Son to be an offering, a sin-offering for us.

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His law must be honored. His justice must be satisfied. Even His divine sovereignty cannot overlook His divine mercy. The law says we're guilty and God won't clear the guilty, not without satisfaction.

You see; the God of justice cannot wink at sin. The God of righteousness must punish sin. The God of justice cannot compromise His holiness: *"Shall not the judge of the earth do right?"*

So, we see this in this verse of Scripture that God's a sovereign God: *"He hath made him to be sin."* He's the only one who could. He has the power. He has the right. He orders all things according to his will.

*"He hath made him to be sin for us"* reveals the justice of God because God must have a sin-offering. *"God will in no wise clear the guilty."* The justice of God must be satisfied in order for God's love to be expressed to the creature; God's justice and righteousness have got to be honored.

So, the very fact that he sent His Son into this world to be the propitiation for our sins; reveals His justice, His righteousness, and His holiness.

Thirdly: He's a God of mercy! He's a God of grace. He could have left us in our sins. God is not obligated to us. *"He is plenteous in mercy. He delights to show mercy."* And as a Judge He must punish sin, but as a Father He must pardon sin.

I heard somebody say one time that, "God could have damned everybody or God could have saved everybody." Well, I'm not so sure about either one of those. I would go along with the fact that God could have saved everybody. That's in God's secret purpose and pleasure and wisdom. I don't know.

But I do know this is not right; "God can damn everybody." God cannot damn everybody and be God, because God is love. I know God's justice, righteousness, and holiness, but God's love demands to be expressed just as much as His holiness, just as much as His righteousness. God is good!

You know, when Moses said: *"Lord; show me your glory,"* what did the Lord show him? Did He show him the power of His might? Did He show him some miracle? Did He show him some wisdom? Did He show Moses some accomplishment?

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No sir! He showed him His goodness. That's God's glory, His goodness. "*God is love.*" I've heard people say, "God is a God of love." I beg your pardon! "*God is love,*" God is righteous, God is holy, God is sovereign.

And God must not only show His justice but love must be expressed. God is not obligated to men but He is obligated to Himself. God owes men nothing but He's bound by His love and His mercy to be gracious "*for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.*"

It was because He loves. Christ didn't come down here to get God in the good humor toward us. He came because God was in a good humor. Christ didn't come down here to get God to love us; He came because God did love us.

Do you see that? "*For God so loved the world that he gave his Son.*" Do you see what I am saying? This verse shows me a lot of things. We need to study the Bible. You can't read the Bible like you read a novel or a newspaper because it's the Word of God.

God can say in two words what it takes men volumes to say in their rambling praises. And it shows me as I look at (He, and Him, and us), these three persons; I look at (He) first, (God), and He's sovereign. "*He hath made him to be sin for us.*"

And I see His justice and righteousness, the fact that He made Christ to be sin for us. It shows that His justice; there's no other way. If there had been another way to save sinners He would have taken that way but there is no other way but the death of His Son, the infinite, everlasting, eternal, Son of God, dying for sinners.

And then God's mercy, God's love; God must be merciful because He is merciful. God must manifest His love because He is love. His love elected a people. His justice demanded a sacrifice and His grace provided that sacrifice.

It all began with God. "*Salvation's of the Lord.*" That's the reason Jonah cried in the depths of the fish's belly: "*Salvation's of the Lord*" because it is.

That's the reason our Lord Jesus said to his disciples: "*With men it's impossible. With God all things are possible.*" That's the reason David repeated again and again: "*The salvation of the righteous is of God and of him only.*"

Now let's look at the Him; "*He hath made him.*" Who is the Him? Well, first of all, it's the second person of the blessed trinity; it's the Son of God. "*The Lord Jesus Christ is the only begotten of the Father,*" not made, begotten.



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You know, when Isaiah announced His coming, he said: *“Unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given.”* As a child Jesus Christ was born into the world, that body God prepared for Him, the dwelling place of His Son on earth: *“But a son is given.”*

He wasn't born. The Son of God wasn't born; He was begotten, *“the only begotten of the Father,”* begotten, not made, begotten, not born, being of the same substance as the Father, as the father co-equal, co-eternal and co-existence.

As the Father is eternal so is the Son. As the father is almighty, so is the Son. As the Father is infinite, so is the Son. As the father is omnipresent, so is the Son. As the Father is omniscient, so is the Son. He said: *“I and my Father are one.”*

He is the Son of God. Who is Jesus Christ? He's the Son of God. *“Whom do you say that I am? Thou art the son of God.”* Without stuttering or stammering or apology He is God, very God of very God. *“He's the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person.”*

Not only is He the Son of God; He's the Son of man. That's right, very God of very God, very man of very man, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, one with us, *“numbered with the transgressors.”*

*“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”* That's incarnation. I suppose the three greatest miracles that this world will ever experience are incarnation, regeneration, resurrection, or glorification.

And the first one is incarnation that God should come down here and dwell on this earth. He's the second Adam. *“As in Adam we die, so in Christ we are made alive. By the disobedience of one we were made sinners. By the obedience of one we were made righteous.”*

Jesus Christ is God almighty. He is the Son of man. *“He, (God) hath made him (the Son of God and the Son of man).”*

What else does it say? He is the sinless substitute. It says, *“He knew no sin.”* Now notice my friend, it doesn't say, “He did no sin,” though He didn't. It doesn't say “He performed no sin,” though He didn't; it says *“he knew no sin.”* There was no sin in Him.

The virgin birth is absolutely, unconditionally, absolutely necessary. If Jesus Christ had been born of a human father he would have known sin. He would be born with a sinful nature, with a fallen nature, with an Adamic nature.

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But He was born, that son of Mary was conceived, begotten, and born of the Holy Spirit. That's right: *"He knew no sin. He was tempted in all points as we are and yet without sin. He knew no sin but he bore our sins. He was made sin for us."* Our sins were laid on Him. Our transgressions were laid on Him.

Here's the third person; listen: *"For he hath made him* (the Son of God, the Son of man, the sinless substitute, the sacrificed Jesus Christ). God hath made Him actually to be sin for us, for you and me, for sons of Adam, for rebellious creatures.

We were created in the image of God and now we are dead in trespasses and sin. We once walked with God and now *"we walk according to the course of this world with the prince of the power of the air."*

We once were children of grace and love and now we are children of wrath. We once communed with the living God and now we cry: *"Crucify him, crucify him."*

We once were the friend of God but now we are the natural enemies of God. That's what the natural mind is, it's enmity. We once were created upright and holy but *"we sought out many inventions and in our flesh dwelleth no good thing."*

We once knew God and now Christ said, *"You neither know me nor my Father."* We once were higher than the angels and now lower than the beasts. We once were the kings of creation and now the servants of sin.

We once had freedom of will and now we are prisoners of our own fallen nature. We were once filled with love and now we are filled with nothing but hatred and malice. *"O the exceeding sinfulness of sin."*

*"What the law saith it saith to everyone under the law that every mouth may be stopped,* (speechless before the Holy law of God, condemned with nothing to say) *"and all the world become guilty."*

But here's the good news and here's the Gospel. But for us in that condition, for us in that helplessness, for us in that depravity and darkness, for us upon that dunghill of corruption; He, God hath made Him, (His blessed, only begotten, well-beloved Son) to be sin for us, to come down here in the dunghill, and in the pit of depravity, and to take literally upon His body, our guilt and shame and filth and sin, and to go to that cross and under the wrath and judgment of a Holy God to die for us.

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He wore my crown of thorns that I might wear His crown of glory. He took my nakedness that I might wear His robe of holiness. He bore my shame that I might share His honor. He endured my suffering that I might have His joy.

He died my death that I might live His life. He went into the grave that I might come forth. He ascended to glory that I might one day in His likeness ascend to the presence of the Heavenly Father.

That's the Gospel, "*that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*" We have no righteousness of our own. This is what Paul, the charge that Paul brought against those beloved friends of his in **Romans 10**, he says: "*I have great heaviness of heart, continual sorrow for my brethren according to the flesh. (I want to see them saved). I bear them record; they have a zeal for God; (they're religious) but not according to knowledge; for they are ignorant of God's righteousness and they are going about to establish their own righteousness.*"

What is God's righteousness? It's Christ; it's not my works: "*It's not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to his mercy he hath saved us. My righteousness's are filthy rags in God's sight.*"

They may look beautiful to me. I may treasure them and hold them close and take great pride in them. They may even look good to you. But anything I do is sinful in the sight of God. Even the plowing of the wicked is a shame and sin in God's sight.

And even our righteousness's, our works, our good thoughts, even our prayers, and even our tears need to be wept over and repented of because they are so full of sin and self, so imperfect. "*All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*"

"*But he; (God) hath made him (Christ) to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God.*" I don't have any of my own and you don't either. Don't bring it to God. Don't talk to God about what you deserve. Talk to God about what He in mercy is pleased to give through Christ, for in Christ we have a perfect righteousness.

**"He for the sins of all the elect  
Hath a complete atonement made  
And justice can never expect  
That the same debt should twice be paid."**