

Q. Does 2 Corinthians 5:21 mean that Jesus Christ actually became sin?

A. The verse in question says, "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." If you read the context, you will see that "he" in the verse refers to God, and "him" refers to Jesus Christ. So, the verse appears to be saying that God made Jesus to be sin for us. There are those who say that this is exactly what Paul is saying here; that, although we may not fully understand it and it may have to remain a mystery to us, we must accept that somehow God actually made Jesus to be sin for us. Others say that the verse merely means that God imputed our sins to Jesus.

This verse has been a source of controversy among a number of pastors and their churches. So much so, that it has resulted in disfellowshippings, breaking off of relations between congregations, and some very hard and hurt feelings. All of this could have been avoided if someone would have but researched the meaning of one Greek word and its use in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

The Greek translation of the Old Testament I have in mind is known as the Septuagint, and it was translated about 250 years before the birth of Christ. It was in common use at the time of Christ, and it is often quoted by the New Testament writers. Also, many of the phrases, words, and allusions the New Testament writers use stem from the Septuagint.

The Greek word I have in mind is *hamartia*. It is the word translated "sin" in 2 Corinthians 5:21. Certainly, *hamartia* means "sin" and it is often translated as such. But, considering that the version of the Old Testament commonly used at the time the New Testament was written—the version they often had in mind as they wrote—was the Septuagint, it is often very enlightening to see how a Greek word in the New Testament was used in the Greek Septuagint.

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What we find, is that in the Septuagint, the word *hamartia* is very commonly used to mean a "sin offering." That is, it is used where the Hebrew Scriptures are obviously referring to a sin offering and where the English translations also have "sin offering." In just three chapters alone that I happened to pick out (Leviticus 4, 5, and 6), *hamartia* is used over twenty times to refer to a sin offering.

Considering this, then, what is the best and most natural translation of 2 Corinthians 5:21? Of course, it is simply this: "For the One not knowing sin, He made a sin offering for us, that we should become the righteousness of God in Him." This does not introduce some new idea that Jesus Christ somehow became actual sin, and it perfectly agrees with other Scriptures, such as Ephesians 5:2, "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour," and Hebrews 10:10, "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

I pray this little article will get into the hands of those who have been arguing over this Scripture, that they will see the truth of it, and that they will repent of the unnecessary divisions they have caused through ignorance.

Peter Ditzel