

### The Great Exchange

In our Second Reading today, Paul makes the startling claim, “*God made Him who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God,*” (2 Cor. 5:21). This is God’s “Great Exchange.” On the one side is Jesus, the one who “*did not know sin.*” He had experienced temptation many a time. In fact, He had been “*tempted in every way, just as we are,*” (Hebrews 4:15), but He had never succumbed to temptation. He had never personally experienced what it means to sin nor what it means to be a sinner. Peter says, “*He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth,*” (1 Peter 2:22). He is the “*Lamb without blemish or defect,*” (1 Peter 1:19).

On the other side was us. By us Paul includes himself and everyone who has ever lived and will ever live. The “us” side is not a pretty picture. In Romans, Paul combines several Old Testament passages to paint the picture of us: “*There is no one righteous, not even one.*”<sup>11</sup> “*There is no one who understands, there is no one who searches for God.*”<sup>12</sup> “*All have turned away; they have together become worthless. There is no one who does good, there is not even one.*”<sup>13</sup> “*Their throats are an open grave. With their tongues they have been practising deceit.*” “*The poison of vipers is under their lips.*”<sup>14</sup> “*Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.*”<sup>15</sup> “*Their feet run quickly to shed blood.*”<sup>16</sup> “*There is destruction and misery on their roads,*”<sup>17</sup> “*and they have not learned the way of peace.*”<sup>18</sup> “*There is no fear of God before their eyes,*” (3:10–18)

On the “us” side is only sin, lack of righteousness, which merits death. On the Jesus side is what the “us” side desperately needs, righteousness, holiness, which gives life.

Then came the exchange: “*God made Him who did not know sin to be sin for us.*” Note the words “*God made.*” Christ’s crucifixion on Calvary with the world’s sins upon Him was no accident. Isaiah writes, “*It was the LORD’s will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer,*” (Isaiah 53:10). The Lord had the world’s good in mind. On Calvary, Christ’s triumphant “*It is finished*” communicated clearly that the death penalty that the world’s sin merited had been paid in full by another.

That’s one half of the exchange. The other half: “*so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*” God, who because of Christ no longer charges the sins of the world against the world, credits the righteousness, the holiness, of Christ to the world. Christ’s righteousness for mankind’s sin is a great exchange indeed!