

INTRODUCTION

Once there was a Baptist Preacher, a lawyer, and a doctor who went deer hunting. As they were walking toward their stands, a big buck walked right in front of them, and they all three shot simultaneously. The deer fell over dead, and all three of the hunters claimed to have fired the shot that dropped it. Since they couldn't agree, they decided they would take the deer to a veterinarian for examination to see if he could determine which of the three men had killed it. After a few minutes the vet came out and said, “Well, there's no doubt, the Baptist preacher killed the deer.” The lawyer and the doctor said, “How do you know for sure?” The vet said, “Well, the bullet that killed the deer went in one ear and right out the other!”

I realize some of the teaching I share with you goes in one ear and out the other, but today I hope you'll let this truth lodge in your mind, because I'm going to talk about the greatest thing that ever happened to you. I'm calling it “The Great Exchange.”

If you visit Manhattan Island, you'll see a monument at the entrance to Inwood Park which commemorates the site where, in 1626, Dutch Governor Peter Minuit made an amazing exchange. Minuit traded some scarlet cloth, brass buttons, and other trinkets to the Indians for the entire island we now call Manhattan. The trinkets were worth 60 guilders, or about \$24. So, he exchanged \$24 of baubles for 14,000 acres—that's about a penny for every six acres. How many billions of dollars do you think that real estate is worth today? You may think that was a lopsided exchange, but the great exchange I'm going to talk about makes the Manhattan trade seem like an even swap! We're going to examine the great exchange where God took my sins and laid them on Jesus, while at the same time He gave me the righteousness of Christ. What an exchange!

2 Corinthians 5:18-21: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

Here's our focus verse—the great exchange:

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

The message of this verse is simply profound, and profoundly simple. In the English version there are 23 words in this verse and every word except two have only one syllable. Jerry Bridges and Bob Bevington wrote a book entitled, *The Great Exchange*. They write: “It would not be an understatement to view this verse as the single key verse of the entire Bible.” They describe the great exchange this way: “The Cross—where the God-man, Jesus Christ, traded places with the sinners he redeemed, exchanging his perfect righteousness for their sin, condemnation and death.” (*The Great Exchange*, pp. 5, 186) I want to share with you three wonderful benefits that have happened to God's children through the Great Exchange.

(1) GOD EXCHANGES MY GUILT FOR HIS GRACE

750 years before the cross, the prophet Isaiah had this to say about us and about Jesus: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6) That's an apt description of us in our lost condition—we want things our way! We are by nature, sinful, self-centered people.

One of the greatest problems people face is the guilt and shame they carry from their past mistakes. Every one of us has done things in the past we regret. There are all kinds of self-help books, seminars, and new age mantras that attempt to help people deal with their sense of overwhelming guilt. But do you know WHY people feel this inner burden of guilt and shame? Because in our lost condition we ARE guilty and we SHOULD be ashamed! The Bible says in Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. We are natural born sinners, and the only way to have our guilt removed is to go to the cross and accept the greatest demonstration of God's grace—Jesus taking our guilt and shame upon Himself.

There are three wonderful Bible doctrines demonstrated in each of my main points. Now some people think doctrinal preaching or teaching has to be dull, and boring. And sadly, some preachers have made doctrine as dry as dust and as dead as King Tut. But doctrines are simply thrilling, life-changing truths! Doctrinal preaching is like eating meat—it takes a little more effort to digest it, but it's healthy for you. Sadly, our churches are full of undernourished believers who don't really know what they believe because they've been fed a solid diet of spiritual Cool Whip. There are a lot of words, but you can't really sink your teeth into it. So get out your knife and fork and let's feed on some meaty doctrines today!

The Doctrine: The Grace of God

The first great doctrine we see is the grace of God. Paul wrote to Titus, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." (Titus 2:11) We see God's grace in this verse, because we learn He initiated our salvation. The Great Exchange was His plan, not ours. The first word in the verse is "God" and the last word in the verse is "God." Redemption begins and ends with God. This great exchange wasn't dreamed up by some human being, it was born in the heart and mind of God. Our part was the guilt, and His part was the grace. My favorite definition of grace is that it is God giving me what I *need*—an eternal pardon—rather than what I *deserve*—eternal punishment.

Of all the religions that claim that there is a God, ours is the only faith that embraces a God of grace. Religion is humanity seeking after God, but Christianity is God seeking humanity. So WHY does the God of the Bible take the first step toward reconciliation? Because the Bible teaches that our God is a God of love. It was God's great love that motivated Him to send His son to take on our sins and give us His righteousness.

My Response: I rejoice that God loves me so much!

So, based on this truth, what is my response? I rejoice that God loves me so much! As the song

says, “Oh, the love that drew salvation’s plan. Oh the grace that brought it down to man!” Paul was so overwhelmed by the grace of God that when he was in prison he wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). The more you understand just how guilty you were, the more you rejoice in the love of God. Paul called himself the chief of sinners, and he lived a life of joyful praise because of God’s love and grace.

God’s amazing love for us should change us forever so we live a life of rejoicing. That’s why I love that song by Chris Tomlin that says, “I’m forgiven, because You were forsaken; I’m accepted; You were condemned; I’m alive and well, Your Spirit is within me; because you died and rose again.” And then the chorus sums it up: “Amazing Love, how could it be; that You my King would die for me? Amazing Love, I know it’s true; and it’s my joy to honor you; in all I do, I honor you.” The second part of the Great Exchange is:

(2) GOD EXCHANGES MY FAILURE FOR HIS FORGIVENESS

This verse begins with God initiating reconciliation—that’s the Grace of God. But then you discover HOW God did it. He did it by making “Him who had no sin to be sin for us.” This verse confirms that Jesus was totally sinless. The Bible says Jesus was tempted in every way we are, yet He never sinned. Even Pilate said of Him, “I find no fault in this man.” Jesus was innocent, yet, He took the punishment that we deserve. Again, Isaiah prophesied this with these words, “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5) Look at those three words: pierced, crushed, and punishment. That’s what Jesus endured for us. But notice the REASON He suffered: for my transgressions and my iniquities.

The Doctrine: The substitutionary atonement of Christ

The doctrine contained in this truth is: the substitutionary atonement of Christ. The Bible says, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.” (1 Peter 2:24) We all know what a substitute is—we substitute margarine for butter. In sports, a substitute is someone who goes into the game to take the place of another player. Jesus was our substitute on the cross. The word “atonement” means “to pay a debt.” The best way to understand atonement is to take the word apart and pronounce it “at-one-ment.” We were separated from God because of our sin, and when Jesus paid our debt, he meant for us to be “at one” with God.

At Golgotha, Jesus was my substitute. He endured the scourging that should have shredded my back. The crown of thorns that pierced his head should have been on my head. Those railroad spikes that were pounded into His flesh, should have punctured my hands. Why? Because I am guilty of sin, and He wasn’t. But in the Great Exchange, God took my sin and placed it on Jesus.

At Calvary, Jesus paid the sin-debt that I owed. The punishment for sin is death and hell. For the six hours Jesus hung on that cross, He experienced hell for me. Think about it, hell is separation from God, and when Jesus was nailed to the cross He cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” For the first time in eternity, and for the only time since, Jesus experienced a sense of alienation and separation from His Father—that’s hell. The Bible says hell is also a

place of outer darkness, and when Jesus hung on the cross, the sun refused to shine and it became like midnight at noonday. It was as if a Holy God couldn't bear to look on sin, so He turned out the light. In addition, hell is a place of agony and torment, and I don't need to remind you of the agonies Jesus suffered on the cross. It is a mystery of the ages, and we'll never fully understand it, but perhaps since Jesus was an eternal Being, maybe He suffered for a finite time (6 hours) what we, being finite beings, would have had to suffer for eternity. All I know is Jesus experienced hell so I won't have to—He was my substitute.

My Response: I'm forever grateful my sin-debt has been paid!

So my response is: I'm forever grateful my sin-debt has been paid! A few years ago, *Lookout Magazine* had a true story by Paul Leonard. When Paul was an engineering student at Ohio State, just after the Great Depression, he had to pay his own way through school. He had to pinch pennies and work at several part-time jobs. One of his jobs was waiting tables in the dining hall. One day when he was serving a table of faculty members, he slipped on a slick spot and spilled an entire tray of food onto an engineering professor. This professor always dressed with impeccable taste. Horrified, Paul grabbed a napkin and tried to wipe the food stains off the expensive suit, but all he did was manage to smear the stains and push them in deeper.

The professor glared at him and said, "Young man, what are you going to do about this?" Paul quickly said, "Sir, I'll be glad to pay to have your suit dry cleaned." The professor said, "I don't believe this suit can be cleaned, do you?" The professor was irritated and Paul could only say, "Whatever it takes, sir."

Later that afternoon Paul had to suffer through the Engineering class lecture taught by the professor wearing a food-stained suit. When the bell rang the professor said, "Paul Leonard, see me after class." When everyone had left the professor said, "Mr. Leonard, I think it's only fair that you buy me a new suit." Paul grimaced as he thought about the cost but said, "Yes sir."

The professor instructed Paul to meet him the next day at a men's clothing store in downtown Columbus known for its expensive, tailor-made suits. When Paul arrived, the professor had already chosen his material and had his measurements taken. The professor said to the clerk, "Mr. Leonard, will take care of the bill." Then he looked at Paul and asked, "Won't you?" Paul nodded humbly and said, "Yes sir. It will take me some time, but I'll pay the bill." Then the professor's face changed. He smiled and turned to the clerk and said, "Why don't you fit Mr. Leonard for a suit using the same material I chose, and then put both of them on my bill." Paul Leonard said that day; his professor taught him an unforgettable lesson about grace and forgiveness. We're in the same situation. I violated the holiness of God, but not only did He cancel the debt, He paid it Himself, and then gave me what I didn't deserve!

What if someone went down to the bank and paid off your mortgage and all your bills, what would your disposition toward them be? You'd never be able to thank them enough. That's what Jesus did for us, so we should be always give thanks with a grateful heart. Finally:

(3) GOD EXCHANGES MY RAGS FOR HIS ROBE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Bible says compared to God's perfect righteousness, even the good things we try to do are like dirty filthy rags. Again we read these powerful words from Isaiah, "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags." (Isaiah 64:6) Those filthy rags are like our sin that Jesus took upon Himself, and on the cross He replaced those rags with a robe of His righteousness. "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." (Isaiah 61:10)

God does more than simply remove our sins—that's only half of the exchange. God gives us the righteousness of Christ. The word righteousness means "right standing before God" or "the right to stand before God." Theoretically, there are two ways to attain righteousness. The first way is to live a totally sinless life. From the time you are born until the time you die, never tell a lie, never have an evil thought, or speak an evil word, never commit an immoral act. Does anybody qualify? If you don't qualify as a perfect person, then the only other option for righteousness is to accept the gift of righteousness that is received from God by faith.

The Doctrine: Justification by faith

The doctrine demonstrated here is called justification by faith. The Bible says, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." (Romans 5:1). To be justified means that God, in His perfect justice, looks at us and declares us to be righteous in Christ. When you say the word "justified" think of it in these terms. It's "just-as-if-I'd never sinned." When you give up trusting your good works and trust Jesus instead, God looks at you and He no longer sees your sin, He sees only the righteousness of Christ.

My Response: I'm free from the pressure to perform to please God!

What is my response to being justified by faith? I'm free from the pressure to perform to please God! Legalism is the belief that you can make God love you more by the things you do. Grace understands that God looks at you and sees the righteousness of Christ. You don't have to work to please God; you already are pleasing to God. Do you remember when Jesus was baptized? God the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." When you are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, God looks at you and says exactly the same thing. "This is my beloved son/daughter in whom I am well pleased!" That's the kind of truth that will set you free!

Once when the great preacher, H. A. Ironsides, was visiting a West Texas sheep ranch, he saw a strange sight. He saw a little lamb with four front feet and four hind feet. He was confused so he asked the rancher to explain it. The rancher said, "Look closely, that lamb is wearing another lamb skin. We had a sheep bear a lamb that died, at the same time; we had another lamb born, and its mother died. So I took the lamb with no mother and put it with the sheep whose lamb had died and I thought the problem would be solved. But the mother sheep wouldn't have anything to do with the lamb, because she knew it wasn't hers.

One of my old ranch hands told me he could fix the problem. He skinned the dead lamb and placed the skin over the living lamb and put it out in the pen with the mother. And, to my surprise, the mother lamb loved it and nursed it as her own. She accepts and cares for the lamb

because it is clothed in her own lamb.” Dr. Ironsides said that this is how God treats us. He no longer sees us as sinners, but as people who are covered and clothed in the righteousness of Christ!

Martin Luther, the great reformer, once received a letter from a Christian friend who was struggling to deal with the guilt of his past sins. Luther wrote these famous words back to him: “Learn to know Christ and Him crucified. Learn to sing to Him and say—Lord Jesus, You are my righteousness. You took on You what was mine; You set on me what was Yours. You became what you were not that I might become what I was not.” That’s a song we should all sing!

CONCLUSION

Walter Wangerin, Jr. has written a fascinating parable called “The Ragman” and I want to tell it in the first person as he wrote it:

One Friday morning, I saw a handsome young man walking into our city. He was pulling an old cart filled with bright, new clothes. He called out in a strong, clear voice, “Rags! New Rags for old! I take your old rags! Rags!” Intrigued, I decided to follow him. I noticed that he was about six-feet-four, his arms were like tree limbs, hard and muscular, and his eyes were full of intelligence. I thought, “This is strange. Couldn’t a man like this find a better job?”

As I watched he approached a woman sitting on her back porch. She was weeping into a handkerchief, shedding a thousand tears, her shoulders shaking with her loud sobs. The Ragman stopped his cart and quietly walked over to the woman. He touched her gently and said, “Give me your rag, and I’ll give you another.” He slipped the tear-soaked handkerchief from her and laid in her hand a linen cloth so clean and new that it shone. Then as he walked away, the Ragman did a strange thing. He put her stained handkerchief to his face and HE began to weep. He started to sob as loudly as she had, and yet when I glanced at her she was left without a tear.

Still crying, the Ragman moved forward. “Rags! Rags! New rags for old!” Not long afterward the Ragman came upon a young girl whose head was wrapped in a blood soaked bandage. A thin trickle of blood ran down her cheek. The Ragman looked at the child with tenderness and withdrew a pretty yellow bonnet from his cart. “Give me your rag” he said, “And I’ll give you mine.” I watched as he loosened the girl’s bandage, removed it, and tied it to his own head. He gently placed the bonnet on her head.

I gasped at what I saw: for with the bandage went the wound. From his wounded head, a darker, thicker line of blood trickled down his cheek. “Rags! Rags! New Rags for old!” Shouted the bleeding, weeping, but strong Ragman. He saw a man leaning against a telephone pole and asked him, “Are you going to work?” The man scoffed, “Work? Are you crazy?” The man shook his head and leaned away from the pole revealing the right sleeve of his jacket—flat, the cuff stuffed into the pocket. He had no arm.

"So," the Ragman said, "Give me your jacket and I'll give you mine." There was such quiet authority and strength in his voice! I watched fascinated as he quickly removed the man's jacket and placed his own coat on the man. I trembled at what I saw. For the Ragman's arm stayed in his jacket and when the man put it on, he had two good arms, thick as tree limbs. But the Ragman only had one arm. "Now you can go to work," the Ragman said.

After that the Ragman found a drunk man, lying sick and unconscious beneath a filthy, old army blanket. The Ragman took the blanket and wrapped it around himself and let a new suit of clothes for the man.

The Ragman headed off. Weeping uncontrollably, bleeding from his head, he pulled his cart with one arm, and stumbled along as if he was drunk, falling down, and yet getting up and moving with determination until he came to the city limits. I wept to see the change in this strong, young man, and yet I had to see where he was going.

Finally, the little old, sad Ragman came to a garbage dump. He found a mountain of trash and climb to the top with tortured steps. There on the top of that hill he cleared off a little spot and laid down. He covered himself with that dirty old army blanket, and with one final shudder and a loud sigh, there he died.

Oh, how I cried to witness that death! I slumped down myself and wept as one who had no hope because I had come to love the Ragman. I sobbed myself to sleep. And without my knowledge I slept a dreamless sleep for one day, two days, even three days. Then on Sunday morning I was awakened by a brilliant light. I looked up and blinked at the radiance before me. Then I saw the Ragman standing, folding the blanket up with two good arms, and the blanket was now white and pure. He was alive!

I heard his clear voice, "Rags! Rags! New rags for old!" Then I walked up to him and told him my name. Next to the brilliance of his clothes, my clothes suddenly seemed filthy and soiled. I bowed my head in shame and said in a longing voice, "Dress me. Please dress me." And He did. My Lord Jesus, the Ragman, removed my sin clothes and dressed me in His righteousness!

OUTLINE

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes