

How do I Forgive God and Make Peace with Him?

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[0 : 01] Father, we thank you for the different friends and neighbors and co-workers that you've given us. Sometimes, Father, we're not always thankful for them. But we thank you for everyone that we have some contact with, some degree of influence over, and even those who influence us.

And we ask, Father, that you help us to hear their questions and not to be afraid of them, and that you help us to bear witness to Jesus. Father, we ask that you help us not to be afraid of the questions that people might ask about why we follow Jesus.

Grant us, Father, a deep confidence in Jesus, a deep confidence in the Gospel, a deep confidence in your Word, so that we are unafraid of questions.

And this we ask in Jesus' name, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So, I guess some of you, if you're regulars, you've figured out that I do a lot of work in coffee shops.

And so there's one particular coffee shop where I do most of my sermon preparation. And I don't think I've mentioned this before, but there's now, I think, about five different people, they don't do it every week, who will come up to me and ask me what my sermon's going to be on this week.

[1 : 15] And so sometimes it leads to very, very interesting conversations. And something happened just this week, actually. It's partially talked about on the blog.

I don't know how many people read the blog that I write every week that's in the bulletin and then on the web, but that doesn't matter how many read it or not. So this, I was working on my sermon, and this fellow, one of the fellows who occasionally asks me what I'm preaching on on Sunday, and he asks me, and he listens very politely, and after I've told him, you know, very roughly what I'm going to preach on, he then goes into this five-minute, very eloquent, impassioned monologue about all of the pain and suffering in the world.

And all of the natural disasters in the world, and all of the war and evil in the world, obviously he can't cover it all in five minutes, but he just gave concrete example after concrete example, and said, George, in light of all of this, what you're doing on Sunday is a waste of time, because there is no positive news from God or about God, because God can't exist.

And so you can look in the blog a little bit about how I began to answer the question, and a little tiny bit about what happened there, and I can't touch on all of that issue here, but actually, afterwards I was thinking that his question, actually, his comment, was actually very helpful for us, because the Bible text that Laurier read actually gives us a really deep insight into that whole question and problem that my friend raised.

So if you get your Bibles out, we're not going to look at that text, all of that text immediately. I'm going to do something which is a little, actually, get your Bible out now. Get your Bible out. We're going to look at that.

[3 : 09] It's 2 Corinthians 5, verses 11 to 21, and I'm just going to read it, because it doesn't sound at first as if it has anything at all to do with the problem of evil and how we try to think it through, but it actually, we'll see.

So here's how it goes. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is also known to you, your consciences.

We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. For we are beside ourselves, it is for God.

If we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this, that one has died for all, therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

It's a very complicated bit of a sentence, isn't it? I might say a few things about that towards the end. I'm actually leading us to a very, very odd thing, and I want to try to show you the oddness of it.

[4 : 22] We're actually going to spend most of this sermon on one odd bit of the whole scripture. So keep reading verse 16. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.

And just pause here for a second. That doesn't mean, flesh here doesn't mean bodily or physically. The word flesh here means that part of human beings that are in rebellion against God, that want to be like God.

I'm not playing particular favorites here. I know the election in the United States of America is coming up very, very, very soon. My guess is that both Trump and Clinton are pretty high up there in wanting to be like God.

You can all have a little bit of debate as to who has a bigger God complex, Clinton or Trump. I'm not even going to get into it. But in some ways, maybe they have a higher God complex than most of us here in the room.

But every human being has a bit of a God complex where we want to be like God. We want to take God's place. We want to act like God. We want to be the center. And when it says the flesh, it's talking about seeing the world from that perspective.

[5 : 38] Okay, that's what it's talking about. Understanding and seeing different people and processes from that perspective. That's what it means by the flesh. So verse 16 again. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh, even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh.

We regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he has a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And it's that verse 21. And I didn't know this before I started to read the academic commentaries. And it's hard in English to put it and try to reflect what the academic commentaries say is going on at the level of the original language.

[6 : 55] So in the year 56 or whatever, when the original hearers heard this letter in the original language, they would have recognized that this last verse is an odd verse.

It's an absolute statement. And in the original language, it's as if it's not connected to what went on in verse 20, 19 and 20 and before. And in some ways, it's as if it's not connected to chapter 6, verse 1, and what happens after.

It's this absolute statement. And in some ways, almost, we'd want to have it in bold and in a square and in bigger letters. Because in some ways, it's this absolute statement.

It's in a Greek tense that doesn't exist in English where it's an act completed by God. An act of God completed.

And it's just in an absolute sense. In other words, just all of a sudden, it's just there. And in some ways, it's to explain everything in the book. And in some ways, it's connected to everything in the book.

[7 : 57] In some ways, it's connected to nothing in the book at a literary level. And that's just how it's written. And it's hard to communicate in English. And I didn't know that until I was reading the academic commentaries. And it's this, whoa, comment.

And I'm going to have it put up. Andrew, could you put it up on the screen? And I've put it up here. It's almost as if you translated it literally in the order that it's given in with these five different ideas.

And so, you know, I know one of the things I like to try to do with 2 Corinthians is say certain verses over and over again so you memorize them. And I have to confess, I have, when I'm going to look at it, I have this verse memorized.

God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. I have that memorized. And all week, I've been thinking about it this way and I'm all messed up.

So, those of you who have memorized this verse, I don't want to mess you up, but this is how, a literal way, so could you say it with me? I know it's, and I've done it on purpose because it's, and actually Andrew, could you do something for me?

[9 : 09] Could you put the word God in the third line? Could you put that in brackets? Square brackets? Because actually in the original language, oh, he has to take it off.

I guess we can't all read it together out loud until it comes back on. But in the original language, the word God isn't there. It just has this powerful word, made sin. And I guess, Andrew, when it comes to the third point, you can do the same thing.

And just waiting, waiting, waiting. Maybe we should sing a song, tell a joke. I wouldn't do a little bit of a dance because then you'd all want to leave or you'd be rolling in the aisles with laughter because I can't dance at all.

In heaven, I'll learn to dance. That's sort of my hope. There we go. Could you all say this with me? The one who knew no sin for us, God made sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Let's say it together again. The one who knew no sin for us, God made sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

[10 : 12] And I can't see the screen very well, so I should make sure I read it the way it's... Okay. So, here's the thing. So, put up the first thing, Andrew. We're just going to look at each one of those lines.

So, the first line, we're going to look at, the one who knew no sin. Well, this sounds like a very, very odd idea, doesn't it? And in fact, at first, it doesn't sound very attractive if we think about it.

I want to share something with you, true confessions. I don't like Superman. I've never liked Superman. Even when I was a kid, addicting to comic books, every once in a while, I would borrow a friend's Superman comic, and I could hardly finish it because it reaffirmed to me why I so dislike Superman.

And I know I've now completely and utterly alienated myself from some of you, but basically, the problem with Superman is he had no weaknesses. Come on. Like, he can't figure out when kryptonite's coming?

He has no weaknesses. I mean, even if things go really bad, all he has to do is go with his unbelievably super fast speed to go back in time and fix it. And it's not even as fun as when Bill and Ted, in their excellent adventure, they go back in time and forward in time to fix things.

[11 : 24] That at least is amusing. And I just never liked it. He had no weaknesses. And so for many of us, when we hear this idea that Jesus has no weakness, that he has no sin, he knew no sin, and we think of it like Jesus is like Superman, only there's no kryptonite.

Well, how interesting or how relatable is that to us in our human experience? Like, let's just be honest. How can you relate to somebody who just sort of goes through life?

I mean, you know why? Why did I not like Superman? He's stronger than anything. He can, like, there's no drama in his fights. Like, nothing. Like, it just, and so that's how a lot of us feel with Jesus. Like, we know we're supposed to love him and we know we're supposed to adore him and we know we can be thankful for him.

But the fact of the matter is, how can he relate to us as human beings when he knew no sin? I know some of you may be your guests. You're saying, I knew I shouldn't have come to an Anglican church on a Sunday morning because he's just going to preach heresy.

And, and you're already tweeting, Anglican minister once again, preaching stuff which is heretical. But let's just, you know, but here, the text actually, rather than telling us that Jesus is like Superman, is actually telling us something radically different, the complete and utter opposite of Superman.

[12 : 39] The, the word knew there, amongst, another thing, just before I, I go to where this text is going, the word knew, know there, isn't just having an idea in your head.

It's, the same word that is often used in the Bible to describe sexual intimacy, sexual intercourse. Isaac saw Rebecca and they went into their tent and he knew her.

It's the same word and it talks about experiential, intimate knowledge. But what's going on here, this cryptic sentence, it's almost a bit like a creed, just said there very, bluntly, it's made a bit clearer in a different part of the Bible.

Some of you might be familiar with it and it's Hebrews chapter 4. If you just want to turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 4, Hebrews chapter 4 captures what's going on in this verse in the original language, the idea there.

And it's Hebrews chapter 4 verses 14 to 16 and it goes like this. Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.

[13 : 52] Let us hold fast our confession. Here's the bit. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

And then note the very surprising thing that comes next. Tempted in every way like we are, only without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in times of need.

In other words, he's able to identify with our weakness. We get grace from him. So this very puzzling phrase, the one who knew no sin, it's actually telling us that nobody understands human experience better than Jesus.

I'll give you an example. Let's say I'm talking to my friend Bob and I happen to know something about Andy and I don't like Andy.

Andy has hurt me and he's hurt me more than once and I actually find him a pretty obnoxious and unlikable person. I know none of you have people like that that you find obnoxious or that have hurt you, but you can maybe get the idea.

[15 : 09] And I also know that Bob doesn't like Andy, that Bob's been hurt by Andy. And so both of us have been hurt by Andy and I happen by happenstance to know something very embarrassing about Andy that would make Andy look really, really, really bad.

Now do I tell Bob? Well, the Bible would tell me that I shouldn't, that I should love Andy and I shouldn't do something that's going to belittle him and if he knew that Bob knew it would embarrass him because it's something deeply, deeply shameful and embarrassing about Andy and Andy doesn't know that I know and he definitely wouldn't like it that I knew and he definitely wouldn't like it that Bob knew.

But I don't like Andy. So how long before I give in to the temptation to tell Bob? Well, five seconds later, because I'm not very holy, I tell Bob.

Well, maybe that's five seconds later is what I was like five years ago and I've grown in holiness and I wait 60 seconds before I tell Bob. But eventually I tell Bob. Now here's the thing.

In terms of my experience, I only know what it's like to withstand this temptation to do something wrong and I only know what it's like to do something right for one minute.

[16 : 37] but after I give in to the temptation, well, my experience then goes in a different way because I've done something evil. I don't know what it would be like to actually, let's say, be on a flight from Ottawa to Vancouver and I'm in the security checkup with Bob and I sit beside Bob on the plane and in a sense I'm with Bob for about six and a half hours and I don't know how to go six and a half hours without telling Bob the embarrassing thing about Andy.

I don't know what that human experience is like because I gave in within a minute and what's more, I don't know what it's like to know over the next few years because here's the nice thing about telling really, okay, I mean nice in a particular way, okay, here's the problem with not liking somebody like Andy and wanting to tell them, tell other people bad and embarrassing things that make them look bad is I don't just do it a week after or a day after I hear about it but it could even be five years or ten years or twenty years or twenty-five years later when somebody is saying, oh, look at that, Andy, he's such a bleepity, bleep, bleep, bleep, and I said, oh yeah, you should have known what he did twenty years ago.

And I don't know what it's like to not give in to that temptation even if it takes more than a minute, five minutes, an hour, a week, a month, a year, a decade, I don't know what it's like.

I only have a shallow experience of what it means to be human when I give in to evil. So what this line is telling us is that Jesus experienced all of the temptations that we do but he never gave in to them.

He never gave in to them. He never succumbed to the evil and he would know all the different ways that evil would come up and pop in and give me suggestions, give him suggestions, you know, an hour later, five hours later, a week later, two weeks later, all of the different ways that the mind works and the world works and Andy works and all of those types of things to tempt me to finally give in and say that thing.

[18 : 52] I don't know any of that stuff because I gave in. Jesus knows it. He knows, human experience to its absolute depths in a way that none of us know what it means to be human and how to live.

In other words, he's not at all like Superman, just merely impervious. He's not like the bank machine which can't do anything evil.

It's just a bank machine. It's just circuits with pretensions, you know, and Jesus is actually deeply human.

Deeply, deeply, deeply human. And this actually, by the way, is going to put the problem of evil in a very, very different perspective. See, here's part of the problem with the problem of evil is that for many of us in this world, we look at all the bad things that have happened to us in our life and we look at the bad things that go on in the world and then when somebody tells us that we need to have Jesus in our life, what's often going on, even if it's unspoken, is we think to ourselves, well, how on earth am I going to get over all the bad things that God has done?

How am I going to be able to forgive God to have a relationship with him? How am I going to be able to be reconciled to God given all the bad things he's done? Why? Because I'm looking at the world from the perspective of my flesh, which is what the text just said a little bit earlier.

[20 : 21] I'm looking at Jesus from the perspective of my flesh. I've done bad things, God's done bad things, how on earth are we going to work this relationship out? How am I going to work it out with him?

But, and, and, I mean, it's not that God is up there sending lightning bolts at people the second we've done something wrong because in fact if God sent lightning bolts out to people who the second they've done something wrong there would be nobody left in this room and nobody left on the planet.

We'd have been zapped a long time ago. Even if you gave you a clean slate when you woke up this morning, I don't know how many of us would have made it here by now to tell you the truth. Including me, okay?

I wouldn't be up here. You'd be thinking, where's George? But he did something bad, zap. And you're gone, you know? Anyway, and, if in fact no one is perfect and everyone in a sense deserves a punishment from God, it changes the whole problem of evil.

And in fact, I mean, how do you now relate to Jesus if he's never done anything wrong? And he knows human experience so deeply and fully.

[21 : 52] He's experienced all of the temptations you've experienced and I've experienced and he never gave in to them. How on earth do I now relate to him? On one hand, he knows the depth of human experience deeper than me, but now the relationship is very different.

You know, it's not like me and my wife. I mean, you know, one of the issues with all marriages is how does a marriage survive discovering that you're both sinners?

I'm a way bigger sinner than my wife, by the way. She has a lot more to forgive. But how do you, how do we relate to Jesus? Jesus. So let's say that, could you put the text up, Andrew?

Could you say this text with me again? Let's say it. The one who knew no sin for us, God made sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Let's say it together again. The one who knew no sin for us, God made sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

[22 : 57] The next thing, for us. For us. You see, now here's the first thing.

You know, one of the things which is beloved in Eastern religions is the idea that different monks and stuff like that and different people who really get into it that they can do remarkable physical feats of mind over body, that they can lie in a bed of nails, that they can, you know, they can hold their hand over fire and not wince and it's very appealing to many of us in the West to have that type of sense of mastery and power over our body and, but Jesus is here, it's not that he has this type of iron will that's controlling him because that can be so cold and impersonal and frankly, amoral and self-centered.

but the Bible tells us the one who knew no sin for us and this has, this is once again one of these powerful ideas.

If you, in a sense, I don't recommend anybody get tattoos. I don't care if you have a tattoo or not, that's up to you but if you had a tattoo for us would be a good thing to put on thinking of Jesus for us because what motivates everything in the gospel, everything about the one who knew no sin is that he's for us because he loves us and he's for us and it's also this idea of communicating that somehow or another he represents us and the us means everybody.

There's a really good book, I can't pronounce the guy's name, he's a fellow who became a Muslim and he's now a Baptist pastor and I think his name is Tabithi, I can't remember his last name but he wrote a really interesting book called The Gospel for Muslims and one of the things that he says at the very beginning of the book is that there is no gospel for Muslims.

[24 : 56] By that he means is that there's no separate gospel for Muslims, there's just the gospel. There's not like a gospel for Muslims, a gospel for transgendered, a gospel for gays, a gospel for men, a gospel for women as if somehow or another God has to change the message every time for the group, there's just the gospel.

Why? Because Jesus is for us. He's for those who identify themselves as Muslim or Hindu or Republican or Democrat or transgendered or whatever it is.

Jesus is for us. Not necessarily all how we, not what we do, not all of the things we do, not all the ways we identify ourselves but he's for us and he's able to represent us.

I mean, one of the great fears that there's been things in the paper, I don't read most of the election coverage in the states. I mean, it's really just like a test to analyze the fears and idolatries and all of the writers.

I mean, it's just, it's quite astounding and I know the candidates are astounding and I'm not going to, I mean, just pray for the American people and that's good. We should pray for them. But, you know, one of the big things is as if there's going to be somehow violence in the states because they understand it's as if there's these two tribes and it's not as if Clinton is running to be the president of the United States but she's trying to be the head of her tribe to give them goodies and against the Trump people and if the Trump tribe loses there's going to be all this anger and the Trump people want to win so they can do bad things to the Clinton people and it's almost as if there's this dialogue going on and what we have to understand here, the power of this phrase for us, for Republicans and Democrats and those who identify themselves as other, you know, same-sex attracted or having multiple different genders or being rich or being poor, Jesus is for us as individuals, as real people.

[26 : 58] Andrew, could you put the text up again for us, please? Let's say it together again. The one who knew no sin for us, God made sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

When they translate, they often put God there just to help clarify it, but it's actually even more powerful in the original language. When the original people heard it, they would have understood that God was implied, but they would have heard the one who knew no sin for us made sin.

For us made sin. Could you put up the third point then maybe in keeping God in brackets? You can put the God in brackets. Made sin. Now, this very, very powerful two words, made sin, I don't know how to pronounce this grammatical term.

I'm going to make an idea of it. All you grammar geeks out there, after the service, you can tell me how to pronounce it. Metonymy. Metonymy. Basically, what it is, is it's this, it's when you take a small phrase to represent a fairly complex but real reality.

So, for instance, we might say that Justin Trudeau is going to go to Wall Street to talk. And by Wall Street, we don't just mean there's a street in New York called Wall, right?

[28 : 15] We mean all the banking institutions, the central power, we mean the stock exchange. You know, there's a movie, a famous Jimmy Stewart movie about Mr. Smith goes to Washington, right?

We go to Washington, well, it's because we want to talk to the president, we want to talk to Congress, we want to talk to the Senate, we want to talk to the CIA, the FBI, the NSA, Homeland Security, all of those types of things, that's all captured, real things captured with this tiny little phrase going to Washington and that's the same thing here with this idea of made sin, made sin.

And it's this idea, it's talking about something that actually happened, it's a completed action in the past that God did and it involves a real death upon the cross at a certain piece of real estate in real history at a certain time outside a real city done by real people but it's not just talking about something concrete and specific and real that happens in space and time and history that you could have taken a photograph of but it's also something that's transcendental, that it's talking about something that also God is doing and it affects the things in the heavens and heaven and earth and hell and it's talking about human beings at the very, very depth of who they are and it's this image of somehow a burden of all of the things that we've done wrong and all of the things that are wrong acts and all of our shameful acts and all of the shame that comes from and all of the accusations and all of our desires to justify ourselves and all of those things that make us up right from the depth of the things that go through our mind as we're analyzing things, you know, we come into church and say, oh, those pants don't go with that shirt or whoa, why on earth is he wearing shoes like that to go with that shirt or whoa, boy, that's a really nice pair of glasses,

I wish I could have a pair of glasses like that or whoa, they shouldn't be singing like that or whoa, the singing's a little bit thing or whoa, why is the pastor wearing like that whoa, all of these judgments that we go that if we put them up on the screen, if all of a sudden Dr. X from the X-Men came and froze us all in space and all of those things that were going through our mind and they went on the screen and people would be horrified, that's what you're like inside?

Oh, we would be repulsed and all of this complicated idea somehow laid on the one who knew no sin, laid on him for us and I know it sounds very, very, very, very, give you a bit of an illustration about sort of what it's trying to capture as well.

[31 : 05] This is hard for young people, for those of you who are young, I don't want to say young people, for younger people to understand because we get so used to the way the world works now but when I was, when I was first ordained, one of the things I had to do, I was in a large suburban church and there was a lot of elderly people and there was always people in the hospital and I'm not making this up and this isn't like 500 years ago because I'm not that old, I could go to the hospital and I would say, hi, I'm, you know, they don't know me from Adam and I say, hi, I'm George Sinclair, I have my collar on, could you give me the list of every Anglican in the hospital and they would give it to me.

I'm not making this up. They'd give it to you and I could just go through the list and I would be able to tell by, you know, names and other things that have my church list and I would go visit everybody who had a connection to my, the church or within the parish boundaries, I'd go give them a visit.

When I was in Eganville, I could go to the hospitals in Pembroke and Renfrew and Barry's Bay and I would just go and say, hi, I'm George Sinclair, I'm an Anglican minister, could I have a list of all the Anglicans and they would give it to me.

A simpler time. So, so you see now, I was just re-watching the movie Inception and now, we only imagine that maybe the president or the CIA or some unbelievable billionaire would be able to go in and get behind the scenes and go to all of the different databases and get all of the information and move things around so that, so that things could be made right.

because we don't have that type of knowledge, you know, I mean, I couldn't even if my, one of my married kids was in the hospital and, and, you know, him and his wife were both, let's say, in a coma because he'd been in a car accident, I'd have no authority to go in and actually try to, to make things right or to do things and that's just the way the world is but if you just picture this, if God in effect can move things around to make things right, part of that process is going to be that all of the wrong things that I've done, all of the debt that everything, every accusation against me that somehow or another he's going to be able to somehow, the Bible doesn't go through the mechanics, place it on the one who knew no sin.

[33 : 32] Just as for those of you who watch the movie Inception, it's all driven by the fact that the man wants to be reunited with his children and he comes across a rich man who can move everything around behind the scenes to allow him to return to his children.

I won't tell you whether it happens or not, that would spoil the movie. Can you put up the thing again, the sentence please? Can you say it with me? The one who knew no sin for us, God made sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Fourth one, that we might become the righteousness of God. So how does this go? The one who knew no sin for us, he's for us, he can act as a representative, God made sin, some type of idea that something that should have been on me can somehow be placed on him and as it's placed on him, this righteousness of God doesn't mean that I'm a better person than anybody else, it's far from it.

The word righteousness of God in Greek, it has usually one or more of three different meanings. One of them is it's talking about God being right, that God acts in a way which is right and another way which is used which is hard for North Americans to understand, it's an image that made a lot of sense and it would make a lot of sense in most of the world.

Like in China, you're not innocent until you're proven guilty, right? I mean, you know, basically if the state wants to throw you in jail, they'll throw you in jail. And this word, this second word about being given complete and utter blameworthy status and set free, that makes a lot of sense in China.

[35 : 13] It doesn't make as much sense in Canada where you're innocent until proven guilty. So often in Canada, the third sense is the one which is a bit better which is to make things right, to set things right in a way that shows that God is right and to illustrate it, I'll give you a story.

Some of you have heard the story before. Hopefully this will get you a bit of a sense about what it means that in Him we become the righteousness of God. I was a very, very, very, very bad student when I was in elementary and high school.

I was very lazy. And I can't remember now if it was grade 7 or 8. We, coming up into the spring, the end of the year, and I had in my French class, we had to give, I think it was a two-minute speech in French and it was a big project, culminating project for the year.

And I, being a lazy, bad student and despite the fact that I'm absolutely terrible, I was terrible at French, I did absolutely no work on it. I would, I would play road hockey or baseball or touch football with my friends and after that I would either read, but I would do no school work, no preparation.

One of the reasons I didn't do it is because I was very confident that when, in that class, she said it would take us a whole week to go through the speeches and this teacher always did it in alphabetical order, usually from A to Z, occasionally from Z to A and if she was really feeling wild and crazy, she'd mix it up and use first names rather than last names.

[36 : 37] But I had been blessed with the perfect name, George Sinclair, which meant that no matter which way she did it, I would never be in the first group. And being lazy and being cocky and being stupid, I did absolutely no preparation.

So the day comes, beautiful sunny day, I can still picture it in my mind, beautiful sunny day, we're all sitting hubbub, hubbub and she says in her cheery teacher voice, okay, we're going to do our French speeches right now, as if everybody's just looking forward to do it.

And she said, I've been thinking about this and I think it's unfair that, well, it's not unfair, but you know, it's not maybe always fair that I always do things in alphabetical order.

In modern, postmodern language, she'd say, and I don't think it's fair to privilege people with names that begin with K or something like that that are always in the middle. So she said, you know, I've been thinking about it, you know, it's maybe not always fair to do it by alphabetical order and I was thinking, you know what would be more fair, the most fair way in the world to do it is why don't we pick numbers out of a hat?

And I've come to the class, I have a hat and there's 30, I think there was 30 students in the class and you know, we're going to have six students today give their speech and I have numbers one to 30 and it's cut up and we're just going to pass the hat around the room and you just take a name out of the hat and whatever number you have, that's the order you're going to give your speech in and isn't that fair?

[37 : 58] Everybody in the class including myself said that's very, very fair. I didn't realize that my doom had come because when the hat came to me, I picked out number one.

I laugh now, I was not laughing then. If you had seen me, you would have seen my face get red. If there was a way to measure body heat, my body got very hot.

Sweat probably started to pour out of my armpits and other parts of my body and I sat there completely and utterly devastated. My doom had come.

So the teacher and her cheery teacher voice said, okay, who has number one? As if, who would like number one? I don't know. I guess there's always a keener in some class. At coffee, you could say, you know, by the way, I was always the one who wanted to be number one to do things but I was not that student and I say, I'm number one and she said, well, come up, George, do it and I said, I'm sorry, I can't do it and there's this long, embarrassed, stuttering conversation back and forth between me and her that lasted several minutes because this wasn't something I could just blow off.

This was something that if I was to do it at all would really require hard work on my part and I had done no work and I couldn't just get up and do it and she says, well, George, it wouldn't be fair to the class to let you go as number 30 and move everybody else up.

[39 : 32] That wouldn't be fair. I mean, it wouldn't be fair if there's, that for number seven who's right now thinking that they can do it tomorrow that all of a sudden just because, just because of you that now they become number six, it's not fair to number two, it's not fair to anybody and it's very uncomfortable because I couldn't deny that it wouldn't be fair and then she said, I mean, the only thing that could work is if somebody traded their spots with you and then she said, is there anybody here who would trade places with George and there's a silence and then Ricky of blessed memory possessing the great number 17 put his hand up and said, I'll do it and he got up from his seat, he happened to be about a couple of seats behind me and to the side and he got into my aisle and he came and he put number 17 on my spot and literally picked up number one and went to the front and did the speech.

Everything was right, everything was fair but it's an act of grace that made things right that was for me, that was good for me and that's what this phrase means.

Could you put up the whole verse again, Andrew? The one, let's say it together, the one who knew no sin for us, God made sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

That's what Jesus does for us. That's what Jesus does for you. All of those things that are out of whack and deserve punishment and just not right that separate us from God, they're laid on him by God because he loves us and there's this, he can represent us, there's this substitution, there's this taking our place that at the end of the day when it's received, makes us right.

If I had said to Ricky, no, no, no, I only want number 30, I'm not taking it, it wouldn't have worked, right? But I gratefully received what Rick was going to do for me and did for me in that trade.

[42 : 04] Can you please stand? See, this is the good news, this is the gospel.

If you go back and look at the text, you'll see it puts the whole text in a very, very different aspect, in a different light. when you receive this and as it grips you and more and more in your life as you have a deeper understanding as the gospel, what Jesus does for us on the cross becomes more real to us.

When the Bible talks at the beginning of this text about the fear of the Lord leading us to persuade others, our natural inclination is to manipulate people, to coerce people, to get what we want.

But the more that we're gripped with what Jesus did for us, we realize that we can't use coercion with people, that our goal should be to persuade. And the more that this grips us, that we understand that it's not that God and I are equals and we have to figure out how we can get along together, but I'm dependent upon God to reconcile me to himself.

I'm dependent upon God to forgive me for what I've done wrong. I'm dependent for God to make me right to himself. And the more I'm gripped with this story, the more I understand that if this is the love of God that has made me right with himself at such huge cost to himself and the person of his son, then there's a type of compelling that I relate to others out of love.

[43 : 34] And if you go back and you look at the rest of the text in light of all of this, that you understand that if this is what's going on and this is what has fundamentally with the creator of the entire universe and this is how he has acted towards me and how he's made me right with himself and as I become more gripped by this, then the whole model and idea that I might start to live for others in some way, that actually starts to become some type of real thing.

It starts to make sense for me. And then the idea that I can let other people know who are broken and hurting and need to be reconciled to God, the idea that I can somehow bear witness to Jesus, even if I can't explain everything, even if you have to say, I can't answer all your questions but come and speak to Daniel Gilman because that's where I send everybody because he can make it more clear or you go speak to him or whatever but the rest of the text, it starts to make sense from a different perspective, not from the ideas of the flesh, not from the idea of power politics, not from the idea of trying to look good but as the gospel becomes real to us as we receive it, it starts to change how we live.

That's what the text is talking about. And so the question is for you and me, I mean, the mission statement of the church is making disciples of Jesus gripped by the gospel living for his glory and I'm going to pray and I mean, all you need to say to God right now if you've never said to him for the first time is God, thank you that you gave me 17 and you took my place.

Thank you that in a far greater way, Jesus is a far greater Ricky for me and Jesus, I accept that and please make it real in my life that that shapes me and forms me.

See, we enter into the Christian life allowing it to happen and we live the Christian life as this story grips us. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, I thank you for what Ricky did for me way back, many years ago.

[45 : 39] I can't remember if it was grade 7 or grade 8 but many years ago, I thank you for what Ricky did for me and Father, I confess before you that Jesus is the true and greater Ricky not just for me but for everyone who is here and I thank you, Father, that your Holy Spirit led me to come and accept what Jesus did for me and accomplish for me what you accomplished for me in the person of your son.

I thank you, Father, that your Holy Spirit brought that home to me and I said yes and I ask, Father, that if there are any here who have not yet or even now just allowing that to happen that your Holy Spirit would move deeply in their lives as that wonderful transaction is taking place and Father, for myself and for all who are followers of Jesus, may this knowledge of what your son did for us on the cross, may it grip us, may it grip us more and more, may it be the ground upon which we stand, the roof over our head, the air by which we breathe, the lens through which we see ourselves and the lens through which we see the world and this we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.