Elder's Corner

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21)

The Great Exchange. That is a term that was coined after the effects that the discovery of the Americas caused on both sides of the Atlantic were realized. It's also referred to as the "Columbian" exchange because of Christopher Columbus, one of the best known early European explorers of America. The following quote reveals what the "great exchange" consisted of:

> The Age of Exploration was the era during which explorers traveled to new lands and not only made exciting discoveries, but also helped develop a larger global economy. The people living on the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe, known as the Old World, already had access to each other, but broadened their world when they explored the Americas, bringing with them their cultures, plants, animals, and, unfortunately, disease. In turn, the New World sent its cultures, plants, animals, and disease back to the Old World.[1]

Columbus came to the new world looking for spices. Whether he found spices or not, Columbus unknowingly began the introduction of things both foreign and previously unknown to the new world. And the same was true of the Old World as the quote above shows.

Go back to the top of the page. The Apostle Paul writes there about the greatest exchange that can ever take place. In the latter part of 2 Corinthians 5 the apostle reminds his readers of another of the wonders and blessings of being **"in Christ." In Christ,** the believer is now **a new creation,** and he learns as well, that **God** has **reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17, 18).** However, anyone with an ounce of theological knowledge will see a problem (actually 2) regarding **God** reconciling **us to Himself**. First, there is the problem of our **sin,** and second, there is the complete absence of **righteousness** that is necessary to enter into the presence of our **righteous** and holy **God (Rom. 3:10, 23; Job 9:2; 15:14).** In **2 Cor. 5:21** above the Apostle Paul explains that the **reconciliation** that he writes about in this portion is possible only because the greatest exchange imaginable takes place when a lost, fallen sinner comes to **faith in Jesus Christ** and His finished work that was accomplished at Calvary 2000 years ago. Just like the great exchange found in the opening paragraph, when the sinner comes to **faith in Jesus Christ,** something foreign and unknown, **the sin** of the new believer, is imputed or charged to **Jesus Christ,** the one who never **committed** or ever **knew** or ever had any **sin in Himself (1 Pet. 2:22; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 3:5**). In exchange, the Lord **God** imputes His very own **righteousness** to the previously unrighteous one, something that was formerly foreign and unknown to him. This is the greatest of all possible exchanges—one each of us need to spend more time marveling about. Without it, we would remain lost in our **sin** and unrighteousness.

There is a clarification that must be made here regarding the **righteousness** that is part of this exchange. Many people, even evangelical believers, hold the view that **the righteousness** that the believer receives **by faith** is the perfectly **righteous** life that **Jesus Christ** lived, the life that the believer could never live. For example, in a book that I am currently reading, the author writes, "In our union with Him, His perfect righteousness is counted to us."[2] Randy Amos and I discussed this matter over lunch many years ago, and I found myself in agreement with Randy. The perfectly **righteous** life that the Lord **Jesus Christ** lived qualified Him to be the antitype of the Passover lamb, **"without blemish" (Exod. 12:5).** It is not the practical **righteousness of Jesus Christ** that is imputed to the believer, but the intrinsic essential **righteousness of God Himself** that is imputed to the believer, which in reality is the grounds of the believer's justification. That is the reason why that as the Holy Spirit moved Paul (or others) to write about man's justification or standing before **God,** the biblical authors always wrote that it is the **righteousness of God** as in **2 Cor. 5:21** above. When Paul gave his personal testimony in **Phil. 3:9** he wrote, **"the righteousness which is from God by faith."** Again, as Paul wrote about justification in **Rom. 3:22**, he wrote, **"even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ."** In **Rom. 4:6** Paul writes, **"just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works."**

The important thing right now is for you, the reader, to determine if you have taken part in the great exchange that has been described in this article. If not, you are **dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1).** Trust **Jesus Christ** today to be your Lord and Savior and begin to experience, **"the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works," "the righteousness which is from God by faith."** Maranatha.

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[1] "The Great Exchange," Exploros, https://www.exploros.com/summary/The-Great-Exchange (accessed July 30, 2026).

[2] Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Union with Christ: The Blessings of Being in Him* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2025), 60.