

A person stands on the peak of a large, rugged rock formation. The sky is a vibrant orange and yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The landscape below is a mix of green fields and rocky terrain.

RECONCILIATION MAN'S GREATEST NEED

L. R. SHELTON, JR. (1923-2003)

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RECONCILIATION: MAN'S GREATEST NEED

1. Man Is Estranged from God by Nature

That there is a need for us to look into this matter of reconciliation is everywhere shown upon the pages of Holy Writ, for man and God are at variance with each other and this because of sin. Therefore, man lies under the just wrath of a sin-hating, sin-punishing God.

That the Lord Jesus Christ by His own will and purpose came by incarnation¹—God manifested in the flesh—to reconcile His poor people who are sinners and enemies against God is also shown everywhere on the pages of Holy Writ. He came to reconcile them to God by the death of Himself by the shedding of His precious blood.

The state and plight of every man by nature is such that due to the awful, ruined, sinful, depraved condition of his heart and life, the death and resurrection of Christ are necessary to reconcile him to God. This is also shown everywhere upon the pages of Holy Writ.

God's Word pictures man in his natural state as being a rebel against God's authority, as reflected in His holy Law, and as in a state of active enmity against God. This necessitates reconciliation if ever any man can get to God and heaven.

Let us look first of all at the Scriptures which speak of reconciliation and its need. In Romans 5:10-11 we read: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement² [reconciliation]." Also in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 we read: "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did

¹ **incarnation** – (*Latin: incarnation*, "taking on flesh"); "The act whereby the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, without ceasing to be what he is, God the Son, took into union with himself what he before that act did not possess, a human nature, 'and so [He] was and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person, forever' (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 21)." (Walter Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 601); see Free Grace Broadcaster 234, *The Incarnation*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² **atonement** – literally "at-one-ment"; the condition of being at one with another; theologically, atonement means reconciliation with God by removing or covering the guilt of sin; this was accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. See Free Grace Broadcaster 227, *The Atonement*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. 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." Also we read in Colossians 1:21-22: "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight."

We see then in all these verses that man in his natural state of depravity and sin is an enemy of God, cut off from His holy life and abiding under His righteous judgment. Yet in all of this, we also see the mercy of God, the grace of God, and the love of God in sending His Son to make an atonement for man's sin, to pour out His life's blood to satisfy God's broken Law, thereby making it possible for poor, hell-deserving sinners to be reconciled to God.

The word "reconciliation" means *to unite two parties who are estranged*. It means that one has given offence and the other is displeased by it, the consequence of this being a breach between them. Instead of friendship, there is a state of hostility existing. Instead of a state of peace, there is enmity which results in separation and alienation between them. This then makes manifest the need for peace to be made between the estranged parties that the wrong may be righted, the cause of the displeasure removed, the ill-feeling dissolved, the breach healed, and reconciliation accomplished.

The parties in this matter, those who are at variance with each other, are God and man. You see, man has grievously offended the most high God. He has cast off allegiance to Him, revolted from Him, despised His authority, and trampled His holy Law under his feet.

This all came about by one man's sin. The original offence was committed by Adam in the garden of Eden; and since he acted not only as a private person but as the federal head³ of all the human race, in him the whole family of mankind has sinned against God and abides as His enemy. This is clearly brought out in Romans 5 in these words: "Wherefore, as by *one* man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that [margin: *in whom*—Adam] all have sinned" (v. 12). "Through the offence of *one* many be dead" (v. 15). "The judgment was by *one* to condemnation" (v. 16). "By *one* man's offence death reigned" (v. 17). "By the offence of *one* judgment came upon all men to condemnation" (v. 18). "By *one* man's disobedience many were made sinners" (v. 19). Also in 1 Corinthians 15:22 we read that "in Adam all die."

What all of this means, dear friend, is: in our federal head, Adam, we sinned and came under the judgment of God. This is what is called "*original sin*."⁴

³ **federal head** – one who represents the group.

⁴ **original sin** – *Q*: Wherein consists the sinfulness of that state whereinto man fell? *A*: The sinfulness of that state whereinto man fell consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want [lack] of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin, together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it. (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 17; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY)

Here in these verses also is the only key which satisfactorily opens to us the meaning of human history and explains the universal existence of sin. The human race is suffering for the original sin of Adam, or it is suffering for nothing at all. There is no avoiding that alternative. This earth is the scene of a grim and awful tragedy. In it we behold misery and wretchedness, strife and hatred, pain and poverty, disease and death, on every side. None have escaped the awful wreckage of sin; that “man”—as Job puts it in Job 5:7—“is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward” is an indisputable fact.

Yes, it is a divinely revealed fact that “by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (Rom 5:18). Here is the cause of all our trouble. We have been born sinners. We are members of an accursed race, the fallen children of fallen parents; and as such we enter this world “alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18), exposed to His judicial displeasure. In the day Adam fell, the curse of God’s broken Law descended upon all of Adam’s posterity. It is only in this way we can account for the universality of human depravity and suffering. The corruption of human nature which we inherit from our first parents is a great evil, for it is the source of all our personal sins. David in Psalm 51:5 acknowledged this when he said, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Also in Psalm 58:3 he says, “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”

Therefore, dear friend, in the light of all this we see that there is a breach—a real, a broad, a fearful breach—between God and man which necessitates reconciliation by the death of Christ, or we will all abide forever under the wrath of God. For we read in Galatians 3:10: “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” And since we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God, we are under God’s righteous judgment (if we are outside of Christ).

Yes, that breach between man and God is made by sin. You see, God is holy, and so holy that He is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab 1:13). Sin has given infinite offence unto God, for it is that “abominable thing” which He hates (Jer 44:4). Also sin is spiritual anarchy: a defiance of the triune God. It is saying, in actions, “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Psa 2:3). In other words: Let us disregard the divine Law and be lords of ourselves.

This we see everywhere today; the laws of God and man are completely set aside. Each man tries to be a law unto himself and a lord over himself and thereby has brought chaos and ruin upon himself and everything he has touched.

Another thing we know to be a fact from God’s Word and in actual experience is this: man is engaged in a warfare against God which necessitates reconciliation if ever man is to be saved. Man by nature hates the things God loves, and loves the things God hates. Man scorns the things God tells him to do and pursues the things God has forbidden. Man by nature is a rebel against the divine government, by refusing to be in subjection to the divine will. How do we know this? Listen! The moment man’s will is crossed by the providence of God, he murmurs and complains about it. Also he is unthankful for the mercies of which he is the daily recipient, and less mindful of God’s hand, which so freely ministers, than the horse or the mule the One who feeds him (Isa 1:3). Man

continually growls at his lot, constantly grumbles at the weather, and is a stranger to contentment. In other words, “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). Also 1 Corinthians 2:14 tells us “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him.”

All of this, dear friend, necessitates reconciliation if ever man is to be made right with God, because man by his sin has made God his enemy and thereby abides under the righteous wrath of God. There are many things that happened to man when he fell in Adam which I would like to briefly mention, and in our next message, to look at them in detail.

First, fallen man became separated from God in the Fall and therefore needs to be brought back to God in reconciliation. “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you” (Isa 59:2). By nature man’s understanding is darkened and he is alienated—divorced from God—through his ignorance because of sin (Eph 4:18). Yes, man is separated from God and needs to be reconciled to God by the death of His Son.

Second, man became an object of abhorrence to God when he fell in Adam. Isaiah 1:6 tells us that the heart of natural man in the eyes of God looks like this: “From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified [soothed] with ointment [oil].” Yes, fallen man has become an object of abhorrence to God and needs to be reconciled by the death of His Son. He visited us to put His beauty upon us (Rev 3:17-18).

Third, fallen man has come under the condemnation and curse of the divine Law of God. We read in Galatians 3:10—“It is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” Therefore being under the righteous condemnation of God, sinful man needs to be reconciled to God by the death of His Son (Gal 3:13; Isa 55:7).

Fourth, fallen man came under the wrath of God. Ephesians 2:3 tells us that every man by nature is a child of wrath. Whose wrath?—God’s wrath, because of sin. You see, Psalm 7:11 tells us, “God is angry with the wicked every day.” This then necessitates reconciliation to God by the death of His Son (Gal 1:4; 1Th 1:10).

Fifth, fallen man is the subject and slave of Satan, “taken captive by him at his will” (2Ti 2:26). The devil is the sinner’s master; and therefore man needs deliverance from his bondage and reconciliation to God (Luk 1:78-79; 4:18-19; Heb 2:14-15).

Sixth, fallen man is under the reigning power of sin as Titus 3:3 tells us. Here we see the natural man described as “serving divers lusts and pleasures” and yielding his “members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity” (Rom 6:19). This then necessitates reconciliation to God by the death of His Son (Rom 5:21).

Seventh, fallen man hates God as Romans 8:7 tells us: “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God.” Therefore he will not come to God

because he has made God his enemy. This then necessitates reconciliation to God by the death of His Son (Col 1:20-22).

Dear friend, in this first chapter we have tried to lay before your hearts the need of reconciliation and the cause of the sinner's far distance from God. This will lead us then into the next chapters, showing you the provision our gracious God has made for our being reconciled unto Himself by the death of His Son.

2. Subjects of Wrath and Sin

Oh, what a theme is reconciliation to God! It is man's greatest need because we have made God our enemy by our sins, closed the door to heaven, and opened the door to hell with all its suffering, shame, darkness, and separation from God and all that is righteous and holy.

We read in Isaiah 59:2: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you." Yes, sin has made a breach, a broad breach, and an eternal breach between each sinner and God; and unless God in His sovereignty, love, and mercy draws, redeems and reconciles poor sinners unto Himself by the work of Jesus Christ His Holy Son—unless this happens—then no sinner can or will ever be saved. Only as mercy and truth are met together will righteousness and peace kiss each other and grace will be poured out upon sinful men (Psa 85:10).

As we pointed out in the last chapter, there are seven things which happened to sinful man in his fall in Adam, each necessitating reconciliation to God by the death of His Son.

Listen now as we enlarge upon these seven things which happened to man in the Fall! First, *our fall in Adam has separated us from God*. No idle fairy tale, it is everywhere proclaimed on the pages of Holy Writ and is seen in every man's life today. Separation from God! What a word! Separation from God the fountain and giver of all blessedness! Cast out of His favor, severed from communion with Him, cut off from the enjoyment of Him, devoid of His life, of His holiness and of His love. You see, dear friend, sin broke the happy relationship which originally existed between man and his rightful Lord. Sin placed God at a holy distance from man and now God will not let those who are hostile to Him and offensive to His absolute purity dwell in His presence.

Just as God, according to 2 Peter 2:4, "spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment," so He has marked sinful man for His righteous judgment. You see, God had plainly made known to our federal head, Adam, the penalty of his disobedience in these words from Genesis 2:17: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." There at the beginning of human history the Lawgiver announced that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), spiritual death, judicial death, and eternal death, if pardon were not obtained. And my friend, this death is *not* annihilation, but separation. You see, physical death is the separation of the soul from the body, the expulsion from this earth. So

spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God, the expulsion from His favor (2Th 1:7-9). So, when Adam deliberately and premeditatively chose to disobey God, he sinned and came under the righteous judgment of God, and so did we.

This, dear friend, is awful: separation from God because of sin! But this is not all. Fallen man is guilty of breaking God's holy Law; so he lies judicially under the sentence of death, held fast until the day of execution, unless he obtains a pardon from God. If no pardon is obtained, then he shall be cast into "the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone"; and that is declared to be the "second death" (Rev 21:8), because it is a being "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2Th 1:9).

So you see, sin has imposed an effectual barrier between you, the sinner, and a Holy God; and unless you are reconciled to God by the death of His Son, you shall be lost forever. Please don't let this truth slide over your heart as if this does not apply to you, for it does. If you are not in Christ, if you have not been regenerated by the power of God's Holy Spirit on the basis of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are lost, and that for eternity, and are right now separated from God, without hope in this world of darkness.

The second thing we note from God's Word that happened in the Fall of Adam and therefore happened to us is this: *you and I became objects of abhorrence to God*. We became, in the Fall, just the opposite to God and therefore an object of abhorrence. You see, God dwells in spiritual light, man dwells in spiritual darkness; God is holy, man is totally depraved; God is our rightful Lord and King, man is an insurrectionist, a defiant rebel; God is immaculately pure, man is a loathsome leper. Do you want a picture of how God looks at us as we are by nature in His sight apart from the cleansing blood of Christ? Then listen to Isaiah 1:6—"From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." What a repulsive object! Yet that is just what you and I by nature look like in the eyes of God apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. And dear friend, this then necessitates reconciliation by the blessed Lord Jesus Christ; we must be cleansed, washed, and made righteous in Him if ever we are to go into the presence of a thrice Holy God.

The third thing we note from God's Word which happened in our fall in Adam is that *we came under the condemnation and curse of the Divine Law*. In Galatians 3:10 we read: "It is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

"Cursed is *every one*"! These are solemn words, because it means we are under the righteous wrath of God, under a sentence of death for breaking His holy and righteous Law. At this very moment you are under the sentence of death, condemned already, if you are not Christ's. Why? Because the Bible says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Eze 18:4)—die the second death in hell; and that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

This also makes reconciliation to God through Christ a must—your greatest need—if you are to escape the judgment, the curse that is upon you because of sin.

The fourth thing we note from God's Word that happened in our fall in Adam is that *we came under the wrath of God*. This being so, then all of Adam's posterity are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3).

You see, dear friend, God is no indifferent spectator to the actions of His creatures. God knows what happens in the darkness; He knows our thoughts—every one of them—as they come into our minds (Psa 139:2). He knows all about our rebellion, pride, lust, self-will, ungodliness, evil-speaking and contempt for His authority. Therefore we are told in Psalm 7:11 that "God is angry with the wicked every day." He not only detests sin, but He is angry with those who continue to indulge in it. He is angry today—every day—with ungodly and impenitent sinners. Oh, what an awful thing sin is to bring down God's anger upon you every day. The best days, the worst days, the sunny days, the stormy days, your wedding day, your young days, your old days—all your days you abide under the righteous wrath of God, having not been reconciled to Him by the death of His Son.

Then hear the awful words of warning in the seventh Psalm that if the sinner turn not from his wicked ways to Christ in repentance and faith, then "he will whet his sword" and mark him for judgment when it comes to his last day (Psa 7:12).

This then truly bears out our text that reconciliation to God is man's greatest need; and this need can only be met in the Lord Jesus Christ, Who alone can reconcile us unto God by His substitutionary work at the cross and resurrection from the grave; for He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom 4:25).

The fifth thing we note from God's Word that happened to us in the Fall of Adam is that *we became subjects and slaves of Satan*. You see, at the beginning, our first parents preferred Satan's lie to God's truth; therefore God allowed Satan to obtain dominion over them. As a result, each and every one of us entered the world with a nature that is in harmony with Satan's. Yes, without a single exception, every member of our race is born so depraved that he voluntarily serves and obeys the arch-enemy of God, Satan.

Dear friend, did you know that there are two spiritual kingdoms in this world?—that of Christ (Col 1:13) and that of Satan (Mat 12:26); and every human being is a subject of one or the other. Those who have not come to Christ and surrendered to His scepter are ruled by Satan and are fighting under his banner—against God. The Word of God puts it boldly like this in speaking of those who are in Satan's kingdom: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (Joh 8:44). Then Ephesians 2:2 puts it like this: "in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." But 2 Timothy 2:26 puts it even stronger than that. There we read: "That they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." Oh, what an awful state to be in: controlled by the will of Satan!

So this also necessitates reconciliation to God through Christ by the power of His Holy Spirit because we are willing slaves to His enemy, Satan; and we must be redeemed and loosed from his power before we can communicate with a holy God. But—praise God!—this is what the Lord Jesus came to earth to do. Listen to Luke 4:18-19! "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the

poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

The sixth thing we note from the Word of God, which happened to us in our fall in Adam, was that *we came under the reigning power of sin*. Oh, what an awful judgment this is, to come under the reigning power of sin, because the Scriptures declare that sin reigns unto death (Rom 5:21). You see, this abominable thing—sin—which God hates, has entered the human constitution like a deadly poison and has completely corrupted our whole moral being.

Listen to me now! I am now on a subject that I hate with my whole being and that is the reign of sin in the human soul. It is so, whether you believe it or not: sin has full dominion and undisputed sway over the human soul. The mind makes no opposition to it, for it is sin’s servant (Joh 8:34). It exerts a determining power on the will. Sin so reigns in the heart of the unregenerate that it directs their affections and controls all the motives and springs of their actions, causing them to walk after their own evil imaginations and devising. As the air is the native element of the birds, so sin is the natural element of fallen man; and as Job 15:16 puts it: abominable and filthy is man, who drinks in iniquity like water.

This is the reason men and women are driven to every sin imaginable, because sin reigns in them and they must do its bidding. Why?—because man is in love with sin, preferring darkness to light, and this world to heaven. Therefore men persist in sin despite all pleadings, warnings, threatenings and chastisements. The only hope then for this sinful generation in which we live is the great grace of God to reign in our hearts by His Holy Spirit as Romans 5:21 puts it: “that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The seventh thing we note in God’s Word which happened in our fall in Adam was that *man hates God*. Romans 8:7 tells us: “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” You ask the question, “Why does man hate God, His Christ, His gospel, and His light?” It is because his deeds are evil and he is under the reigning power of sin. So when God’s light begins to expose his sinful nature and deeds, he fights back at God because he hates His holiness. And dear friend, unless divine grace breaks through to your darkened soul and breaks down the awful barrier of hatred that is in your heart, you will stay in that condition, and death will usher you into hell where you will remain in that state throughout eternity. Listen to how the Scriptures put it: “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (John 3:19-20). Then in Revelation 16:10-11 we read of the same man in hell and find that he has not changed; for he still hates God and His light. “They gnawed their tongues for pain, And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.”

Let me repeat it again: it is only as divine grace breaks through to your heart, removing the awful barrier of the hatred in your heart, that you will ever be saved. This is done only by the Holy Spirit under Holy Spirit conviction which leads to reconciliation with God through Christ. My cry is like that of the apostle's in 2 Corinthians 5:20: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

3. Reconciliation through Christ the Mediator⁵

We have shown you in the previous two chapters what the word reconciliation means and why it is the greatest need of mankind today. The word "reconciliation" means to unite two parties who are estranged. It means that one has given offence and the other is displeased by it, the consequence of this being a breach between them. Instead of friendship there is a state of hostility existing. Instead of peace there is enmity, which results in separation and alienation between them. This then is what makes manifest the need for peace to be made between the estranged parties, that the wrong may be righted, the cause of the displeasure removed, the ill-feeling cease, the breach healed, and reconciliation accomplished.

The two parties in this matter—those who are at variance with each other—are man and God. Man has grievously offended the most high God. He has cast off allegiance to Him, revolted from Him, despised His authority, and trampled His holy Law under his feet. Also, we showed you that because of our fall in Adam—for by one man sin entered into the human race and all have become sinners—man has fallen into a state of active enmity or rebellion against God and has become separated from God. Therefore if he is ever saved, he must be brought to union and communion with God by reconciliation. Not only that, but man has become an object of abhorrence to God. He has come under the just condemnation and wrath of God; he has become a willing slave of Satan, under the reigning power of sin and therefore hates God, His Christ, His Word, His Spirit, and everything that is God-like.

But, praise the Lord, it is to just this kind of sinner that the word of reconciliation comes. It is a word that means God can be just in justifying a poor sinner who comes to Him by and through the Person of His Son, Who was sent by God to be the means of reconciliation. Listen to 2 Corinthians 5:18-21! "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of

⁵ **Mediator** – literally: "one who goes between"; "It pleased God in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus his only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them both, to be the mediator between God and man; the prophet, priest and king; head and savior of his church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified." (*Second London Baptist Confession*, 8.1) See also Free Grace Broadcaster 183, *Christ the Mediator*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. 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."

We will notice two statements in these verses which bear upon our subject. In verse 18 we read that "all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ," and in verse 19, "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." So we see then that reconciliation to God is possible because He has provided the means for its being brought to pass. It was the Father's will that He would bring a number of Adam's race back into fellowship with Himself by reconciliation. Listen to these precious Scriptures that bring this out! "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace" (Eph 1:5-6). "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2Ti 1:9).

Yes, it is to the "*good pleasure of His will*" that we can know God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. There was no reason in us at all that prompted Him to make a way to bridge the breach between Himself and His rebellious creatures, for He could have justly cast all of us into hell; but He did it according to His own will and out of free love and grace.

Another reason we can give for this act of God in reconciling the world unto Himself in Christ was *His love for His people*. Ephesians 1:4-5 tells us that, "in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself." John 3:16 tells us: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Yes, "God is love" (1Jo 4:8). His whole being of love went out to His people in their state of bondage, rebellion, sin, and separation from Himself. He devised a way to bring Himself and His poor sinful people back together again in that living, loving, lasting union of salvation in Christ.

This brings us then to the third reason that I can give for this act of God in reconciling the world unto Himself in Christ: it was because of *His great wisdom*. You see, a way had to be found for God's *justice* and God's *love* both to be satisfied; for God's Law had been broken by sinful man. Therefore this made man a transgressor of God's Law; he had trampled it under his unholy feet. He had set God's authority aside and made himself a god. So the questions were: How could God be just to His broken Law and yet at the same time be the justifier of poor sinners? How could God satisfy both His justice and His love?

Let me see if we can answer these questions like this. To speak after the manner of men, the Father consulted with Himself, called His omniscience into play, and drew up a plan in which His manifold wisdom (Eph 3:10) was exemplified. In His counsel—for He "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph 1:11)—before man ever sinned, He purposed to solve this complexity by His Son becoming a Mediator, that light and darkness, holiness and sin, godliness and ungodliness might meet together in one

Person: and that one Person take the hand of God and the hand of sinful man to bring them together in a holy fellowship of love by reconciliation.

I believe Psalm 85:10 gives us the picture—"Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Here we have it: Mercy was not given to sinners at the expense of truth, neither was peace given at the expense of righteousness and justice. No! They were made to meet each other and kiss in one Person, Jesus Christ, at the cross, and there grace was born for poor sinners. To me the word that characterizes all of this is the word "substitution";⁶ and this is what the wisdom of God designed so God could be just when He justified⁷ each sinner as he came to Him in repentance and faith in Christ. This is set forth in the following verse: "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" (2Co 5:21).

Another thing that amazes me in the work of reconciliation was that the second Person of the Godhead fully and completely *desired* to carry out to the final act this task of substitution so that God's people could be reconciled unto Him. Many are the Scriptures that prove our blessed Lord's willingness to act as the Mediator between a holy God and His sinful, wretched, rebellious people. Hear some of them and let us rejoice together that there was One willing to die in our stead—to become sin for us so we in turn might have His imputed righteousness and be able to stand before the thrice Holy God reconciled and blameless, pure, clean, and holy.

Listen now as we put these Scriptures together! Our blessed Lord said, "A body hast thou prepared me" and, "I come to do thy will, O God" (Heb 10:5, 9). "I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (Joh 10:17); "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (Joh 10:11). "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil 2:5-8).

Oh, praise be to the name of our glorious Lord Jesus, in that He was willing to take upon Himself the office of mediator (a go-between) so that, in His Person, in His life, in His death, in His resurrection, in His ascension and intercession now within the veil (in heaven), He could reconcile us unto God and bring in peace, harmony, fellowship, and love between a sinful sinner and a holy God.

Another glorious fact of this work of reconciliation was that *the Mediator had to be of two natures*, that He might know the hearts and minds of both parties. You see, it was necessary that the Mediator should be a *divine Person* for many reasons: *first*, in order

⁶ See Free Grace Broadcaster 207, *Substitution*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁷ **justified** – declared righteous by God through faith in Jesus Christ. "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins (Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7), and accepts us as righteous in his sight (2Co 5:21) only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us (Rom 5:19), and received by faith alone (Gal 2:16; Phi 3:9)." (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 32) See Free Grace Broadcaster 187, *Justification*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

that He might be independent and not a mere representative of either party; *second*, that He might reveal the Father (John 1:18; 14:9); *third*, in order to render unto the Law an obedience He did not owe for Himself—as all creatures owe—which is one of infinite value; and fourth, in order that He might be able to administer in the realm of providence and grace which had been committed to Him as mediatorial Prince. You see, none then but God can forgive sins, impart eternal life, restore the fallen creature to true liberty, or bestow the Holy Spirit. It was for these reasons that the Mediator was divine.

Yet it was equally necessary that the Mediator should be *man*; in order that he might truly represent men as “the last Adam” (1Co 15:45); in order that He might be “made under the law” to obey it and suffer its death penalty (Gal 4:4); in order that in His glorified humanity He might be Head of the Church (Eph 5:23). He was to be “the Apostle and High Priest” (Heb 3:1): God’s Apostle unto us and our High Priest with God; for He must both pacify God’s wrath and remove our enmity.

But the question was: How could one Person become this Mediator? How could one Person become partaker of humanity without contracting its corruption? How could one Person unite Godhood and manhood, the Infinite with the finite, immortality with mortality, omnipotence with weakness? How could such a union be produced in one Person that two natures be perfectly wedded together and yet preserve their distinction?—conjoined, yet not confounded; so that Deity was not changed into flesh nor flesh transformed into God?

Oh, hear and weep for joy! By incarnation God would be manifested in the flesh. God would provide a body from the very substance of the virgin Mary’s womb, the implanting of that holy seed, forming there that holy thing, the body of our Lord, the Holy Spirit’s generation (Luk 1:35). That holy thing born of the virgin, Mary, without human father, was Jesus of Nazareth, Who was the God-man. He had a human nature and a Divine nature but only one personality, and that of the eternal Son of God.

So with this body our blessed Lord became the great substitute for sinners that He might bring us back to God and make reconciliation possible for poor sinners.

We ought to all proclaim like the Apostle Paul, in Romans 11:33: “O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” to bring to pass such a marvelous thing as this: that by incarnation God would become one of us so we might be reconciled unto Himself in the death and resurrection of His Son. Praise God from Whom all blessings flow, that He did this for sinners, even for me.

4. Christ’s Substitution: the Ground of Reconciliation

We conclude this booklet on *reconciliation to God, man’s greatest need*, with a study on the precious, eternal fact that reconciliation has been made. God’s justice, holiness, and righteous Law have been satisfied, and now God can “be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:26).

Hear it again and rejoice! Christ has “made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth,

or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight" (Col 1:20-22).

The question which is always asked concerning such great statements of truth is: "How can this be done? How can God be just in allowing poor, guilty, hell-deserving sinners into His presence?" The answer is found in the very nature of the gospel, in the very heart of the gospel: it is *substitution*. Yes, the great ground upon which the reconciliation to God rests, the taking of poor sinners into His holy presence and speaking peace to their souls, is the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ in His substitutionary work upon the cross. Listen to 2 Corinthians 5:18 and 21! God has "reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ"; for God hath made Christ "to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

This, dear friend, is the heart of the Gospel: *substitution*—Christ, the Mediator, taking our place so that we can be reconciled to God. Yes, He came in between the two parties; He is the daysman⁸ between our sinful souls and God. He can lay His hand upon both of us as the Mediator and bring us together in that glorious union of love in reconciliation.

You see, dear friend, we must ever remember that it is on the ground of Christ's atonement that this reconciliation rests. The death of Christ has satisfied the claims of God's justice. His blood has been shed. Life has been poured out—Christ's life—so God's justice has been satisfied; therefore peace has been made, and peace hovers over the believing soul who puts his faith and trust in Christ and His perfect work of redemption. Yes, we enter into the greatest of all blessings by faith in the Person of Christ.

Oh, how the Scriptures abound with the truth that by the blood of Christ poured out in death at the cross our offended God has been satisfied and we who have believed in Christ have come into a reconciled state with Him! Listen as we open up these verses and let us believe, repent, rejoice, and follow the Lamb of God all the days of our lives in holy wonderment and praise that our great God has given us so great salvation!

In Ephesians 2:12-13, the apostle tells us that we who have been reconciled by faith in Christ were at one time "strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Did you hear that?—"made nigh," that is, reconciled to God by the blood of Christ which was poured out in death at the cross.

Then in Hebrews 9:12 we read: "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Dear friend, here the Apostle Paul is contrasting the Lord Jesus Christ and His work with all that was true of the Old Testament, the Levitical priesthood, and all its ordinances. He is looking at this great High Priest, the Son of God, and he says: He has not gone in by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once and forever into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. And in the

⁸ **daysman** – mediator; go-between (Job 9:33).

14th verse he says: “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” How precious and how gracious this truth is, that Christ entered into the Holy Place for this sinner!

Yet another example is found in Hebrews 10:19. Listen to it and see if you do not agree with me that it is one of the most blessed Scriptures in the Bible! It reads: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.” Think of it: ungodly, unholy, unrighteous, guilty, hell-deserving sinners who are now washed and sanctified, justified and reconciled to God by the death of His Son, having access by faith in this blood into the very presence of God! These have found the secret of prayer, that is, to enter in boldly on the basis of the shed blood of this divine substitute and there commune with God face to face. There they pour out their hearts to God in praise, thanksgiving, petition, intercession, confession, and rejoicing. My dear friend, is not this precious? I have found it so.

Another portion is found in 1 Peter 1:18-19 where we find that all of God’s children have been *redeemed* not “with corruptible things, as silver and gold...But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” Also Ephesians 1:7 tells us that “we have redemption through his blood, the *forgiveness* of sins”⁹ (see also Col 1:14). What words! What expressions of grace and love! Redeemed! Forgiven! And then as Revelation 1:5-6 puts it: He “*washed* us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God.” And if redeemed, forgiven, and washed were not enough, Romans 5:9 tells us that we have also been *justified* before God by the blood of our blessed substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. Think of it: justified by the blood of Christ, counted just as if we had never sinned; washed by the blood of Christ and standing clean and righteous before God in Christ; forgiven by the blood of Christ, all our sins blotted out as a thick cloud before God in Christ. And then redeemed by the blood and brought as ransomed souls into the reconciled presence of the thrice Holy God.

No wonder the song writer broke into such praise when he penned these words:

*Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it!
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;
Redeemed thro’ His infinite mercy,
His child, and forever I am.*

*Redeemed and so happy in Jesus,
No language my rapture can tell;
I know that the light of His presence
With me doth continually dwell.*

*Redeemed, redeemed,
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;*

⁹ See *Forgiveness* by J. C. Ryle, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

*Redeemed, redeemed,
His child and forever I am.*

My dear friend, we could just continue on, showing that it is through faith in Christ and His blood that His righteousness has been imputed to our account (Rom 3:25). It is by the “blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 12:11) that we overcome daily the wicked enemy of our souls, the devil himself. It is by walking in the light as our reconciled God walks in the light that the blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son cleanseth from all sin (1 John 1:7). It is by spiritually eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:55-56) that we have part in Him and commune with Him in that fellowship of love.

But I believe one of the greatest things to behold concerning the blood of Christ is to view the scene in heaven and the attitude of the redeemed there toward the blood of Christ. Come, go with me to Revelation and see the rejoicing of all the blood-bought ones there. In Revelation 5 we have the picture of a throne, and He Who sat upon that throne had in His right hand “a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals” (v. 1). John, to whom the book of Revelation was given, began to weep when no one was found who was worthy to open that book, for this book contained the eternal plan of God for the ages: His book of decrees, His book of predestination. But listen, beginning at verse 5, as the elder speaks! He said, “Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.” And John said, “I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne” (vv. 5-7). And what happened? Well, all the redeemed in glory began to sing “a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (vv. 9-10).

Yes, the song of heaven shall be the song of redemption, singing praises forever unto Him, because He alone has reconciled us unto God by His own blood poured out in death at the cross. As Romans 4:24-25 puts it: “We believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”

My dear friend, will you be in that number singing praises unto the Lamb? Have you been reconciled to God by the “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1Ti 2:5)?

You may ask, “How can I be reconciled to God by Christ?” Dear friend, as Romans 3:25 tells us, it is “through faith in his blood”; it is being justified by faith in His blood, that “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). It is by coming to God in repentance as a helpless sinner, doomed and damned, like the thief on the cross (Luk 23:42) and looking only “unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:2), that we are brought into a reconciled state with God.

It is Christ Who has accomplished this work, for God “hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). Dear friend, have you repented? Have you believed in Christ? Are you resting your all upon Him for time and eternity? 