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## The Great Reconciliation

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## The Great Reconciliation

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The Great Reconciliation is truly the core and center of the entire system of Christian doctrine. All other teachings of the Bible either lead up thereto, or they proceed therefrom. Thus the doctrine of the Law and of sin shows us the need of a reconciliation. The doctrine of grace and of the redemption through Christ shows us how this reconciliation was effected. The doctrine of the means of grace and of faith teaches us how this reconciliation is made known and offered to sinners and how the individual personally apprehends the same. The doctrine of the Church shows that all those who through faith have accepted this reconciliation constitute one large body in this world, the family of God's children among men. The doctrine of sanctification shows us that all those who by faith are personally reconciled to God will gratefully consecrate their lives to His service. The doctrine of the last things, finally, tells us that all who have remained faithful unto the end will enter into the full communion with their heavenly Father.

A correct understanding of this doctrine of reconciliation, therefore, is necessary for our personal faith and also for our public teaching, and a wrong conception one may have on this point will affect his faith, his life, and his hope and will also be reflected in his presentation of the other teachings of the Bible.

*Definition.* — Reconciliation presupposes an estrangement, a separation. Where such does not exist, a reconciliation cannot take place. But such an estrangement presupposes a former union and harmony. To reconcile, therefore, means to reestablish friendly and harmonious relations between parties who for some reason or other had separated.

Speaking of the Great Reconciliation we have in mind not such a one as may happen between men, as we read Matt. 5:24: "First be reconciled to thy brother," but we intend to speak of the reconciliation between man and God, the reconciliation of which we read in 2 Cor. 5:19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." Also this reconciliation presupposes an estrangement and separation of God and man, which, in turn, presupposes original harmony and union.

*The Original State of Harmony.* — God created man in His own image, Gen. 1:27, which image was not a physical likeness but a spiritual one, consisting in blissful knowledge of God, Col. 3:10, and in perfect righteousness and true holiness, Eph. 4:24. Man knew his Creator, and his mind, heart, and will, and therefore also his life, were in full accord with the will of his God. Man was as God wanted him to be, and man was exceedingly happy in being



that way. There was no disturbing element, no jarring discord in their relation to each other, but perfect harmony, blissful communion, which, according to the will of God, was to continue forever.

*The Rupture.*—To test man whether he would willingly continue in this harmonious relation to his Creator, God tried his obedience by forbidding him to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Gen. 2:17. And man fell. Tempted by Satan, he disobeyed his God, thereby departing from Him and disrupting that relation which had heretofore existed. It is well to bear in mind that it was not God who by a change of heart broke up this union. It was not He who withdrew from man; the defection was solely and entirely on the part of man. God is unchangeable, Mal. 3:6, and faithful, 2 Tim. 2:13; He never wavers, Jas. 1:17. If man had remained loyal to his God, this blissful relation would finally have become permanent. But man sinned; he departed from God and thus broke up the original union and fellowship with his Creator.

This rupture was of disastrous consequence to man. He had separated himself from God, who had been the Source of all his happiness, and he joined himself to the devil, 1 John 3:8. God is unchangeably holy; He cannot connive at sin; much less can He sanction it. He hates the workers of iniquity, Ps. 5:4, 5. Therefore, when man sinned, he brought down upon himself the wrath and curse of God, and all this implies for time and eternity, Gen. 2:17; 3:17; and because he feared the judgment of God, his heart was full of despair and hatred. Thus there was a deep, wide cleavage between man and God. In order to bring the two together, a reconciliation was necessary.

*Who was to be Reconciled and to Whom?*—It is not the straight ruler that must conform to the crooked line, but the latter must be brought into alinement with the ruler. Thus the holy God must not be reconciled to the sinful world, but sinful man must be reconciled to God. The word "reconcile" means to reunite, and the basic conception is that two who were at one time united, but later separated, are brought again into harmony. So here; by sin man separated himself from God; reconciliation, therefore, means that man comes back, or is brought back, to God, and that thus the original union is reestablished.

The Greek word *καταλλάσσειν*, 2 Cor. 5:19, means to "change thoroughly." It implies that, where two are at variance with each other, a thorough change must take place in order that they may again agree. In whom must this change take place? If both are at fault, both must change, each righting his wrong. But where only one is at fault, it is he that must change and do what will



bring him again into harmony and agreement with the other. Thus in Matt. 5:24: "Be reconciled to thy brother." The brother, who has done nothing amiss, is not to be reconciled to the evil-doer; he is not to change over to the other's side, approving by acquiescence the evil deed. But the evil-doer must reconcile himself to the brother, must set himself right with him by making amends for the evil he has done. It is the guilty party that must be reconciled to the innocent party, and not the other way around.

Thus in the reconciliation between man and God. Our great God is unchangeable also in this, that He hath no pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with Him, Ps. 5:4. Nor is He to meet us half-way. He has done nothing amiss; He has not disrupted the original relation between Himself and man. But man changed away from God to sin; hence, man must likewise change back from sin towards God. Man departed from God; hence, man must return to God. Whatever change is necessary to reunite man and God must be on the part of man. For this reason the Bible does not say that God reconciled Himself to the world, but that He reconciled the world unto Himself, 2 Cor. 5:19.

We sometimes use the word "reconcile" in the sense of "appease" (Greek: *λάσκεισθαι*, Heb. 2:17), or in the sense of "atone" (Hebrew: *כָּפַר*, to cover, Lev. 8:17; Dan. 9:24). But the Greek word *καταλλάσσειν* is always used in the sense of reconciling the guilty party to the innocent party. See Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20, 21; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19; 1 Cor. 7:11.

Now, what does this mean in our case? If a reconciliation between man and God was to be effected, a thorough change had to take place; however, not on the part of God, but on the part of man. The Holy One cannot be reconciled to sin and rebellion; He cannot change and come to an agreement with man by approving and sanctioning his disobedience and defection. But man must come to an agreement with God; the things whereby he separated himself from God must be removed; amends must be made for his transgressions; and his attitude toward God must be changed. This, however, does not mean that there was not also a change in the attitude and sentiment of God toward man, "*Umstimmung Gottes.*" By nature and because of their actual transgressions all men are under the wrath and the curse of God, Rom. 1:18; Gal. 3:10. Yet because of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who has made full satisfaction for all our shortcomings and thus reconciled us to God, the attitude of God towards men is now changed. There is no longer wrath and anger but love and grace; no longer the curse and condemnation but rather forgiveness of sins and justification unto life, Rom. 5:8-10; 3:24. However, this change in God did not take place prior to, and independently of, the re-



demption in Christ but rather in Christ and for the sake of His sacrificial life and death.

*The Need of a Reconciliation is Universally Recognized.*— All men know that there is a God, Rom. 1:19, 20; they also know that they are guilty and worthy of death, Rom. 1:32; therefore they also know and feel that there must be a reconciliation if ever they are to live in blissful communion with God. But they also realize that, since they are responsible for the rupture of the original relation and have forsaken God by following the ways of sin, they must return to God; they must do something to square themselves with God. Even the Gentiles understand that it is not God who must reconcile Himself to man, conforming to his wicked ways or conniving at his transgressions, but that man must reconcile himself to God, conform to His standards and make amends for his defection. On this basis are built all the various religions of men. No matter how much they differ in detail and how crude and abominable they may be in practice, basically they all agree in this, that, since man sinned, man must make amends; since man departed from God, man must return; since man did the first, he must also do the second. The Gentile, whose conscience holds him amenable to God, Rom. 2:15, feels that he must do something to right himself with God. Thus the heathen brings his sacrifices, and the self-righteous brings his works, both hoping that thereby they can put themselves into the good graces of God and escape their just punishment.

And according to our way of thinking this is the only sensible thing to do. It is contrary to all reason that it should be otherwise. If I owe a debt, it is foolish to assume that my creditor or any one else will pay it for me. As I have sinned and am guilty before God, I must reconcile myself to Him by satisfying all the demands He may have against me.

*Man Cannot Reconcile Himself to God by His "Good Works."*— Does the fact that in 99 cases out of a 100 I am correct blot out the one mistake I made? Does the fact that I pay 99 per cent. of my debt also pay the 1 per cent. in which I default? Since God demands a 100-per-cent. obedience, how can I expect that a 99-per-cent. obedience will cover the 1-per-cent. deficiency? God is perfect and holy, and He wants man to be likewise at all times. Hence, there is no time and opportunity left where any one could by some extra work make up a previous failure. If, after the Fall, Adam had lived a perfect life, this would not have blotted out his first transgression; the fact that he sinned would still stand against him. When Zacchaeus repaid fourfold those whom he had overcharged, this did not cancel from his record the fact that he had defrauded them. Men simply deceive themselves thinking



that by their "good works" they can atone for their evil works. There is no such thing that by some reputed *opera supererogationis* we may acquire a superfluous merit that will offset our shortcomings and failures. "When you have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do," Luke 17:10. Where a life of perfection is required, there is no opportunity to make up one imperfection.

*Sacrifices Offered by Men Are Ineffective.*—It is true, God Himself appointed sin-sacrifices in the Old Testament, whereby atonement was to be made. However, we read: "It is impossible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins," Heb. 10:4, 11. "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sins of my soul?" Micah 6:7. The constant repetition of the Old Testament sacrifices proved their ineffectiveness, Heb. 10:3; but they did again and again remind the people of the need of an atonement, and they foreshadowed a reconciliation which God Himself would effect in the fulness of time. While, therefore, guilty man ought indeed to reconcile himself to God, it is absolutely impossible for him to do so. "None of them can by any means redeem his brother nor give to God a ransom for him, for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever," Ps. 49:7, 8. People who still think and teach so, simply do not understand the righteousness of God nor the righteousness He demands of men whom He is to receive into communion with Himself. "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven," Matt. 5:20.

*The Reconciliation of Man Is the Work of God.*—What man ought to have done but could not do God did for him. "God, who hath reconciled us to Himself," 2 Cor. 5:18; "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself," v. 19. While this reconciliation indeed vitally concerns man, he had no active part in it. We did not reconcile ourselves to God, nor did we help and cooperate with God in this matter. God purposed and planned it without our knowledge and consent, and He alone, without our assistance, carried it through to a successful end. "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," Col. 1:21, 22. The world at large was not only ignorant of what God was doing for them, but they were His enemies while He was reconciling them to Himself.

Nor was this reconciliation motivated in the least by any merit or worthiness of man. Man had sinned, had offended God,



and had become His enemy. What was there that might possibly have induced God to reconcile this guilty, cursed man to Himself? Surely not human merit and worthiness. But the present and future misery man had brought on himself by his sin moved the compassion of God to save mankind. "But God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son," Rom. 5:8,10; John 3:16. Reconciliation, therefore, is in every respect a work of divine grace.

That God intended to, and did, reconcile the world to Himself is a fact natural man does not and cannot know of himself. By no manner of scientific research, philosophic speculation, and dialectic reasoning is man able to discover this truth. It is "the hidden wisdom of God, which none of the princes of this world knew, but which God hath revealed to us by His Spirit," 1 Cor. 2:7-10. For the very idea that God should reconcile the sinful world to Himself runs so contrary to our way of thinking that, even when we are told so, it is "foolishness" to us. For reason tells us that, since man has sinned, he must make amends and reconcile himself to God. The thought, therefore, that God has reconciled us to Himself can never originate in the mind of man. In no system of religion or philosophy do we find an inkling thereof. Without divine revelation, man could have no knowledge of this truth.

Thus the reconciliation is indeed the work of God, planned and perfected without the cooperation, assent, and knowledge of man.

*Reconciliation by Jesus Christ.*— God "hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ"; "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself," 2 Cor. 5:18,19; "we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son," Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:13-16. It was the Son of God in whom and by whom this reconciliation was effected.

As man was to be reconciled to God, it was necessary that he who would attempt to do this be a man himself, doing what man should have done and suffering what man should have suffered. Therefore we read of Christ: "For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation (propitiation) for the sins of the people," Heb. 2:16,17. Thus "the Word was made flesh," John 1:14; the Son of God was made of a woman, Gal. 4:4, He partook of our flesh and blood, Heb. 2:14.

The Son of God did not merely become man, but more than that: He became our Substitute to take upon Himself our burden, to do in our place what we should have done, and to suffer in our stead what we should have suffered. This substitution is



clearly taught in all those texts which speak of the work of Christ as being done "for," Greek, *ὑπέο*, man, as in John 10:15; Gal. 2:20; 3:13; Heb. 2:9; 5:1; 9:24.

There were two things our Substitute had to do in order to reconcile us unto God: He had to fulfil the Law for us, and He had to suffer our punishment for us.

To continue that harmonious and blissful relation with his Creator, it was necessary that man should have perfectly fulfilled the Law of his God. But in this he failed, and this failure stood between man and God, even as the failure to meet an obligation, to pay a debt, stands between the creditor and the debtor. To reconcile man to God, the first thing necessary, therefore, was that this obligation or debt be paid, that the Law be fulfilled to the full satisfaction of God. For as He Himself is holy, He demands that we likewise be holy and perfect, Lev. 19:2; Matt. 5:48. To satisfy this demand of God's holiness, our Substitute did what we should have done, He fulfilled the Law for us. "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons," Gal. 4:4, 5. The fact that the Son of God was made man does, in itself, not mean that He is also under the Law; for God might assume a human nature and still remain *exlex*. But in this case the Son of God was also "put under the Law" to fulfil it, not for Himself, but for those who were under the Law. And He did make an end of the Law, Rom. 10:4, by fulfilling all righteousness, Matt. 3:15; 5:17. No one could accuse Him of sin, John 8:46; 1 Pet. 2:22; Rom. 14:5; even His Father was well pleased with Him, Matt. 17:5. This active obedience, by which in man's place Christ perfectly fulfilled the whole Law, was, as it were, the first instalment He paid toward our reconciliation with God. What God in His Law required of us, Christ as our Substitute rendered for us, fully satisfying the demands of God's holiness.

However, there was another matter that had to be righted before we could be reconciled to God. Man had actually sinned and deserved punishment. And the eternal justice of God demands that the penalty be paid, Gen. 2:17; Ezek. 18:20; Deut. 27:26; Rom. 6:23. It is a wrong conception of God, conflicting with the majesty of His justice, to think of Him as of an Eli, who "frowned not" upon the wickedness of his sons. No; our God is a jealous God, who will visit the iniquity upon them that do evil, Ex. 20:5; He is a consuming fire, Deut. 4:24; He hates the workers of iniquity, Ps. 5:4, 5. It was, therefore, not enough that the Law be fulfilled for man; there still stood against him the fact that he had actually sinned, had offended God, and had merited punish-



ment. Even as he who fails to pay his taxes must not only pay them in full but must also pay the penalty, so there could be no reconciliation with God unless the penalty of our sins be paid to the uttermost farthing.

Here again Christ takes our place. All sins of men were charged to Him, Is. 53:6; John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:20, and were also punished in Him, Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24. He was made a curse for us, Gal. 3:13, tasted death for every man, Heb. 2:9, died for all, 2 Cor. 5:15, and was the Propitiation for the sins of the world, 1 John 2:2. Thus it was that we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:14-16. This passive obedience was the second part of the ransom Christ paid toward our reconciliation with God.

Lest any one should think that this redemption by Christ was limited to certain ones, a select few, the Bible is very explicit in stating that Christ gave Himself a ransom for all, 1 Tim. 2:6, that He bore the sins of the world, John 1:29, and that in Him the world is reconciled to God, 2 Cor. 5:19.

That by the work of Christ the reconciliation of the world was actually accomplished is evidenced by the fact that God was in Christ, 2 Cor. 5:19. Christ, indeed, was true man, taking man's place and carrying man's burden. But He was not merely man; He was God, 1 John 5:20. What Christ did, God did. In Christ God Himself fulfilled the Law for us; in Christ God Himself paid the penalty of our guilt. God did not merely assist this man Christ in His efforts to reconcile us to Himself, but "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." Let us be very sure of this point, lest it may still be doubtful whether the life and death of Christ really was sufficient to accomplish the task. But the text is very clear. There can be no doubt about it that it was God Himself who in Christ reconciled the world to Himself. This being the case, it necessarily follows that the reconciliation must be perfect and complete and absolutely satisfactory to God, who certainly would not effect a reconciliation which did not fully meet all His demands. And in order to assure us that the reconciliation was indeed accomplished by the life and death of His Son, God raised Him from the dead, Rom. 4:25. For if the least were still wanting, Christ would not have risen, 1 Cor. 15:17. But God did raise up Christ, Acts 2:32; hence our Substitute must have done, to the full satisfaction of God, all that was required of us.

*Objective Reconciliation Is an Accomplished Fact.* — The Scriptures do not speak of reconciliation as of a future eventuality, depending on something man still must do, but as of a fact, finished and completed in the past. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself"; "God, who hath reconciled us to Himself,"



2 Cor. 5:19, 18. "We *were* reconciled to God by the death of His Son," Rom. 5:10. Even as the redemption by Christ is an accomplished fact, which the unbelief of man cannot undo, so the result of this redemption, namely, the reconciliation, is an accomplished fact, which is not dependent on the faith or the unbelief of man. "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself," 2 Tim. 2:13. A person may deny that Christ redeemed him; still this does not undo the fact that he was bought by the blood of Christ, 2 Pet. 2:1. He may not believe that he is reconciled to God; nevertheless, the fact remains that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, 2 Cor. 5:19. By his unbelief a person will make the redemption and reconciliation without effect as far as it concerns him personally, but he can thereby not annul the fact. Personally the reconciliation benefits us only when it is accepted in faith; objectively all men are reconciled unto God by Jesus Christ, whether they believe it or not.

*The immediate result of this reconciliation* is expressed in the words of Paul "not imputing their trespasses unto them," 2 Cor. 5:19. "Them" refers to the world, the people in the world. Therefore, as far as God is concerned, He *has* forgiven all sins to all men. The act of forgiving sin on the part of God is not held in abeyance, pending the repentance of man. The effect of Christ's work was not merely this, that God would now be ready and willing to forgive if man should ask for forgiveness; but because of the redemption in Christ all sins are even now forgiven. Because Christ is the Propitiation for the sins of the whole world, 1 John 2:2, therefore by His righteousness the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life, Rom. 5:18.

While it is true that only the believer *has* the forgiveness of sins, his faith does not contribute anything towards the objective forgiveness on the part of God; it is only a means by which the individual applies to himself personally what is objectively ready for him. Even as the food is ready before it is eaten, so the forgiveness of sins is ready before it is believed. The act of forgiving sins on the part of God is not a future contingency or possibility, pending certain requirements we must fulfil; but it is an accomplished fact that happened in the past, when God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.

There are some very erroneous notions afloat concerning this point, some holding that God is indeed ready to forgive but that He will not do so until a person repents and believes. The idea seems to be, first man must repent of his sins, then he must believe and ask for forgiveness, and, following this, God does forgive. Quite naturally we ask, What should a man believe? Should he first



believe that God *will* forgive, and must he then, when God has forgiven, believe that God *has* forgiven? The fact of the matter is this: for Christ's sake God has forgiven all sins, and this fact the individual must believe and thus make the objective forgiveness his own. Faith does not achieve, effect, forgiveness, nor does it move God to forgive; it merely puts us into possession of the forgiveness that is there and ready for us. With respect to the forgiveness of sins the words of Christ apply "Come, for all things are now ready," Luke 14:17. Forgiveness of sins is not promised to us as a future blessing, to be hoped for; but it is proclaimed as an accomplished fact, to be believed. It is a grievous mistake to think that our repentance and faith is the final thing that determines God to forgive us our sins. No; they were forgiven, not imputed, when God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. There is nothing man can or must do to complete this reconciliation, no condition which he must fulfil before God will blot out and forgive his sins. Christ has done all that was necessary. The work is finished. The handwriting that was against us is blotted out, Col. 2:14. Reconciliation and forgiveness are objective facts that cannot be affected, changed, invalidated, or canceled by the personal attitude of man; they remain facts whether we accept and believe them or ignore and reject them, Rom. 3:3. The sun shines no matter what men think about it.

This objective reconciliation, forgiveness, or justification, is a fundamental truth, and any error in this is necessarily reflected in the doctrines of the means of grace and of salvation by faith.

*Reconciliation Revealed in the Gospel.*—While this reconciliation vitally concerns man (for it was man that was reconciled to God), no human being has of himself any knowledge thereof, it took place in the heart and the court of God. Study and research and philosophic thinking will not lead man to discover this truth. Concerning this point Paul writes: "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory, which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of man save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God," 1 Cor. 2:7-11.

God must reveal to us what He has done for us; He must tell men that He has reconciled the world unto Himself and does not impute their trespasses unto them. And this He has done in the



**Bible.** In none of the so-called sacred books of the world do we find this truth except in the Gospel of Christ, which Paul therefore calls "the Word of Reconciliation," 2 Cor. 5:19. This Word of Reconciliation is based on the fact of reconciliation. It does not inform us how we may reconcile ourselves to God, prescribing various means and methods by which this may be done. This would be making a new Law out of the Gospel. But it proclaims the fact that in Christ the world is reconciled to God, the fact that for Christ's sake God does not impute sins but has forgiven them to all men. Preaching the Gospel, therefore, does not mean telling men that, pending the fulfilment of certain conditions on their part, a reconciliation will be effected and sins be forgiven; but it means to proclaim the reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins as accomplished facts. Whoever hedges in the proclamation of this fact with all manner of conditions virtually destroys this fact.

Even faith must not be regarded as a condition of the message. For the act of forgiving our sins and the message that they are forgiven do not follow our faith, nor are they contingent upon it, but they precede our faith. Our sins were forgiven in Christ before we believed, yea, before we were born. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," 2 Cor. 5:19. The past tense of the verb shows that the entire action does not take place in the present, that it will not take place in the future, but that it has taken place in the past. If, therefore, we tell sinners, no matter who they may be, "Your sins are forgiven," we are simply stating a fact. The act of forgiving precedes the proclamation of this fact, and this, in turn, precedes the acceptance of this fact by faith.

This proclamation of forgiveness is at the same time, just because it is a proclamation, an offer. Proclaim and declare a prisoner free, and you thereby offer freedom to him. Likewise the Gospel proclaims to the world the great reconciliation with God; it proclaims forgiveness, deliverance, and freedom to all that groan under the burden of their guilt; and thereby it actually offers and confers all these blessings to them. Let us beware that we do not encumber this offered pardon with all manner of conditions, but let us preach the glad tidings of joy to all people, telling them: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

*Reconciliation Must be Accepted by Faith.*—What God has prepared in Christ and is offering in the Gospel He wants all men to have and enjoy. "God will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth," 1 Tim. 2:4. However, He will not force His blessings upon any one against his will, Matt. 23:37; Acts 7:51. The fact that dinner is ready and that all the



members of the household are called to come does not prove that all will come and partake of the repast. The fact that a general amnesty is proclaimed does not prove that each individual will also enjoy the blessings thereof; for he may still retain and nurse in his heart the same old rebellious and hostile spirit. The fact that in Christ all the world is reconciled to God and that in the Gospel forgiveness of sins is proclaimed and offered to all men does not mean that all men will also have and enjoy this forgiveness; for there are those who for some reason or other will spurn this offered gift, and through unbelief make the promise of God of none effect as far as it concerns them, Heb. 4:2. Whatever God has done and is doing for the salvation of man becomes unprofitable to him who does not believe.

However, when God tells us: "Come, for all things are now ready," Luke 14:17, He certainly wants each individual to come and personally to take and to receive what is prepared for him. A meal is prepared that it should be eaten; reconciliation and forgiveness is prepared and offered that men should accept it. For this reason Paul says: "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," 2 Cor. 5:20. If God had not first reconciled the world unto Himself by the life and death of His Son, it would simply be impossible for any sinner personally to "be reconciled to God." For his failure to keep the Law and his many transgressions of the Law would always stand between him and God, and the consciousness of his guilt would prevent him from having any other feeling in his heart than fear and hatred of Him whose just punishment he has deserved. But since God has in Christ reconciled the world unto Himself, the way is cleared that also the guilty sinner may now "be reconciled to God." And that this be so is the will of God. For this reason He beseeches, entreats, and prays us through His ambassadors, "Be ye reconciled to God." Man should, on his part, now change his inimical attitude toward God, should accede to the reconciliation Christ achieved and rejoice in the reestablished communion with his God.

But how is man to accept this reconciliation and forgiveness? The means whereby man accepts must be a correlate to the means whereby God offers these blessings. And since they are offered to us in the Word of Reconciliation, the unconditional promise of the Gospel, there is no other possible way of accepting them than by faith. "For just as we have above said that the promise and faith stand in reciprocal relation and that the promise is not apprehended unless by faith, so we here say that the promised mercy correlatively requires faith and cannot be apprehended without faith." Apol., Art. III, 203, *Trigl.*, p. 209, 210.



We must clearly differentiate between these two statements, that all sins of all men *are* forgiven and that the individual *has* the forgiveness of all his sins, even as we distinguish between a meal that is prepared and a meal that is actually eaten. It is one thing that God reconciled the world to Himself and forgave all sins, and it is quite another thing what manner of attitude man takes toward this fact. He either accepts this reconciliation or he declines it; he either wants forgiveness of his sins, or he does not. Whoever is confronted with the promise of grace and forgiveness cannot remain neutral; he either believes it, or he does not.

A man who will not partake of the food that is offered him is not benefited thereby; likewise the fact that God reconciled the world to Himself, forgiving their trespasses, does not profit any man who for some reason or other will not accept and apply it, to himself. "For unto us was the Gospel preached as well as unto them; but the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it," Heb. 4:2. By his unbelief man cannot invalidate the fact and the promise of his forgiveness (Rom. 3:3); but thereby he does exclude himself from it, and thus he makes it ineffective as far as it concerns him. At my refusal to eat the food does not disappear, but I do not get the benefit thereof.

*Subjective Reconciliation by Faith.* — When Paul beseeches us, "Be ye reconciled to God," he does not mean to say that, after God has done His part, we must now do our part to perfect this reconciliation. No; God has done all that was to be done, and He freely offers reconciliation and forgiveness to all men. Even the faith by which one accepts this offer does not supply some lack or deficiency in the reconciliation Christ has wrought, nor does it in any sense merit the offered gift or make us worthy of it. Faith is only a *means* by which man apprehends and applies to himself personally what God offers to all men in general. And faith is the *only* means by which this can be done.

The very moment that a person believingly and trustingly lays hold of the objective reconciliation, which God wrought in Christ, he is *personally* reconciled to God; the moment he accepts the forgiveness of sins as offered in the Gospel, he *has* this forgiveness; the moment he believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, such as he knows himself to be, his faith is counted for righteousness, Rom. 4:5, and he is *personally justified*, Rom. 3:28. As far as my sins are concerned, they were fully atoned for by Christ and completely forgiven by God long before I believed, but by faith I lay hold of, and possess myself of, this forgiveness. Therefore he that believes the words of God's offer *has* what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins. And he has it as long as



he believes, but he forfeits everything the moment he loses faith. Justification by faith, then, does not mean that my faith contributes something towards my justification before God, but it merely means that I apply the proclamation of universal justification to myself. And this is exactly what God wants all men to do when He calls upon them, "Be ye reconciled to God."

*Faith in the Message is Produced by the Message.*—When thus by faith a man is personally reconciled to God, a great change has indeed taken place in his attitude toward God. There is no longer enmity, fear, and distrust, but trust and confidence, hope and joy. However, such change of heart is not in any sense produced by man's own thinking and willing. Emotions are not the product of reason and will, but of ideas and thoughts. And the ideas and thoughts which create in us the faith that our sins are forgiven we get from the Gospel. These truths appeal favorably to him who realizes his lost condition. Thus it is that the message which offers forgiveness creates the faith by which we accept this forgiveness. For this reason Paul says: "So, then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," Rom. 10:17. And Christ says: "Which shall believe on Me through their word," John 17:20.

But more than this. Not only do the offered blessings induce man to accept them; but since they are offered in God's Word, there is operative in this Word the power of God, Heb. 4:12. Hence the faith by which man is personally reconciled to, and justified before, God is "of the operation of God," Col. 2:12.

*Such Faith Presupposes Repentance.*—He who does not know his sins or who does not repent of them is not ready to accept the promise of forgiveness. He believes himself to be whole and sees no need of a physician, Matt. 9:12; he is not hungry and therefore desires no food. His heart is like a hard-trodden path, where the seed of the Word cannot strike roots. The necessary prerequisite for faith is sincere heartfelt sorrow, Ps. 51:17; for faith cannot exist in an impenitent heart. Therefore Christ says: "Repent and believe the Gospel," Mark 1:15. Only those who are of a "broken and contrite heart" will appreciate the offer of forgiveness and be ready to be reconciled to God. Where the Law has not prepared the way, the Gospel cannot enter. The Law must crush the proud and self-righteous heart and drive it to despair, that the Gospel may comfort and strengthen and establish it in faith.

But such repentance does not contribute anything towards our reconciliation with God. The tears one may shed over his sins do not move God to forgive these sins, nor do they make the sinner worthy of the gift of forgiveness. There is no merit whatever



in man's repentance. Our reconciliation was effected by Christ before we repented. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son," Rom. 5:10. Neither is repentance a condition (*Bedingung*) of the Gospel-promise; God does not promise and offer forgiveness on the condition that man first repent and believe. The promise of grace is free and universal, addressed to all men, penitent and impenitent, believers and unbelievers, Mark 16:15; Heb. 4:2. But repentance is a necessary condition (*Zustand*) of the heart, without which faith is impossible. Man simply cannot from the heart believe that God has forgiven him all his sins while at the same time he loves his sins and intends to continue therein.

This also answers the question whether it is not dangerous to teach that all sins are forgiven, that forgiveness is freely offered to all men in the Gospel, and that it is ours by faith. May not men say, "Surely we gladly believe this and assure ourselves of this forgiveness, but at the same time we intend to continue in our sinful ways"? Rom. 6:1. This is impossible in those who through faith have been personally reconciled to God. For while it is true that by the objective reconciliation God has wrought a change in the relation between Himself and man,—for by the obedience of One many were constituted righteous, Rom. 5:19,—it is also true that by the personal reconciliation through faith the individual also changes his attitude toward God. Man cannot accept the reconciliation God offers to him in His Gospel and at the same time continue in his enmity against God. One cannot truly appreciate the love of God while he continues to hate Him. The sins of all men are indeed forgiven, and this forgiveness is ours by faith; but this faith cannot live in a heart that loves sin. One may have learned from the Gospel that his sins are forgiven and still continue wilfully in his evil ways; but no one can do this who from the heart *believes* that his sins are forgiven.

Because of his Old Adam also a believer sins daily; but, like Paul, Rom. 7:14, he grieves over this; with respect to his daily sins his life is a constant repentance. However, love of sin is quite a different matter; it is an attitude of the heart that cannot coexist with the attitude of trust and confidence in the forgiving grace of God. It is enmity against God, Rom. 8:7, the very opposite of what is expressed in the words "Be ye reconciled to God." To be personally reconciled to God by faith necessarily includes this change of heart that man will avoid sin and follow after righteousness.

*Results of Personal Reconciliation.*—By such faith in the reconciliation effected by Christ we have become personally reconciled to God. There is in our mind no longer that enmity against



God, Rom. 8:7, but we love Him who loved us first, 1 John 4:19. Spiritually we have reentered into that original harmonious relation to God which was broken off by sin. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we also have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God," Rom. 5:1, 2. We are again God's children, Gal. 3:26, and there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God, Rom. 8:38, 39. Being children of God, we are heirs of God, Rom. 8:17, looking forward to the consummation of a glorious hope, 1 Pet. 1:3-5.

In appreciation of what God has done for us, reconciling us to Himself and forgiving all our sins, and of what He will still do for us, delivering us from every evil and preserving us unto His heavenly kingdom, we consecrate our lives to His service, avoiding what may displease Him and following after those things that please Him. This faith will so permeate our thinking, wishing, and doing that also in our lives there will be an initial renewing of the image of God in righteousness and true holiness. Indeed, we shall not be as perfect in our lives as Adam and Eve were before the Fall; for that sinful corruption which is ours by the fall of Adam clings to us until death. But as long as the assurance that we are reconciled to God by Christ lives in our hearts, there will also be that urge, drive, and power to overcome sin and to abound in good works, for invariably faith worketh by love, Gal. 5:6.

And finally, in the moment we "die in the Lord," Rev. 14:13, we shall receive the end of our faith, 1 Pet. 1:9, and in the presence of the Lord we shall enjoy unspeakable bliss, Ps. 16:11. Then, at last, shall the purpose of the reconciliation be fully consummated, and the union and communion with our God, once so cruelly disrupted by sin, will be perfectly reestablished, and we shall be with the Lord forevermore, 1 Thess. 4:17.

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