

**God Reconciled Himself with His enemies,
by the Death of His Son**

Romans 5:1-11, Sexagesima Sunday

January 27, 2008

Beloved of the Lord.....Occasionally in the news we hear of American soldiers who die in the Iraq war, usually at the hands of Al Qaeda or Sunni Muslims. There are many terrorists in the country who hold no limits or bounds to their evil. We have heard many heroic tales of American soldiers who have done great deeds for the sake of the Iraqi people, and from time to time some soldiers make the ultimate sacrifice, giving their life for a fellow soldier. The Bible says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Such a sacrifice is commendable, and every war has its heroes. But one thing we never hear of in a time of war, is an American soldier laying down his life for the very enemy he fights against. Can you imagine the outcry of the American public if they learned an American soldier gave his own life to spare the life of a captured terrorist?

Now we might argue and say, "Well that would be an unjust thing to do, to give an innocent life in the place of the guilty." And that argument would be true from the side of justice. But on the side of mercy and love, it is quite acceptable for one man to volunteer to take the place of another. If he willingly volunteers, being moved out of mercy, no man can condemn it. Sacrificial love cannot be forbidden or condemned. And if you or I were the condemned terrorist, about to be hung on the gallows for our crimes, and suddenly an American out of love volunteered to take our place, and hang and suffer and die for us, wouldn't we stand in awe and amazement of this man? Being the terrorist, how would we feel if suddenly we discovered that the enemy we hated, was actually our friend? And he was such a friend, that he lay down His own life so that we would could live and not die? Fellow Redeemed of the Lord: that is what your Lord Jesus has done for you. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" and "being reconciled we shall be saved by His life."

If we are to understand this precious truth, we must first understand first that God and man are natural enemies, because of man's sin. God is not to be blamed for the enmity which exists between the two. For His part, God is holy and just, righteous and true. God is not the author of evil, but God is the enemy of all things evil. Evil came into existence by the devil, who then led our first parents into sin. All men then, by Adam and Eve are inherently evil, and this is not God's fault, though many like to think so. And since God is holy and just, God must punish sin and all who sin. The Bible says, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Rom. 1:18 God hates sin and also the sinner, and God is just in His hatred of sin.

But now let us look at things from man's perspective. For the heart of every man from birth, holds a natural

enmity toward God, even hatred of God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." For this reason, all men experience anger in their heart against God. Because we were born in sin, it is in our nature to view God as evil, as if He is the source of the world's problems, and not we ourselves. Even Christians at times will find hatred in their heart towards God, because of the Old Adam. For example, when we suffer for one reason or the other, in our hearts we often find accusations against God, as if He is being unfair with us. Also, when we suffer trials or tribulations we might say in our heart, "God, I thought you loved me?" In any case from the Scriptures it is clear that by way of man's sin, there is a natural enmity between God and man. God's enmity toward man is just. Man's enmity toward God is evil and unjust. All such sins of anger against God must be repented of, lest the soul perish.

But our picture of God would be incomplete, if we considered only His perfect justice. Praise God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, that God is also MERCIFUL, GRACIOUS, SLOW TO ANGER AND PLENTIFUL IN MERCY! "God is love" and love knows no law. Though the law condemns every sinner, love says "There is no law against Me volunteering to take the place of every sinner." Though man was unworthy of such love, God by love was moved to give and sacrifice Himself, for the sins of the world. God's love is pure and holy, selfless and sacrificial. "God so LOVED the world that He gave His only-begotten Son." "In due time Christ died for the ungodly....God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The beauty of our text is that once we realize we are ungodly sinners, enemies of God, from this text we see those are just the people Christ came to save! Christ did not come to save good or righteous people. There are none! Rather Christ came to save ungodly sinners. He came to save you! The heart is won for Christ, when the heart discovers Christ came as a friend, and not an enemy. "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

It is in this way, and in this manner, that God reconciled all sinners unto Himself, through the blood atonement, the death of His own Son, some 2000 years ago on the cross. Then and there, God in His heart was at peace with every sinner. Verse ten says, "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." Because Christ died for all His enemies, all enemies of God are forgiven. And even if you searched the world over, and found the worst terrorist of them all and stood him before your eyes, your eyes would look upon a man who was redeemed from all sin, by the blood of Jesus Christ. God wants nothing more than that man to believe in Jesus' merits, and be saved. For "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." You see Christ has already brought about the reconciliation between God and man. Through Christ

God now looks with favor upon all of His former enemies. Through Christ, God now counts all sinners as friends.

The Word of reconciliation then which God declares, is the Gospel Word. God wants all to know He is reconciled with every sinner. And so wherever the Gospel is rightly preached, or spoken, or read, or even perceived through pictures, there the Holy Ghost is working to convince the enemies of God, that God is no longer their enemy, but their friend. This reconciliation means that God no longer counts our sins against us, nor does He hold us guilty. Our sin, our guilt has all been removed by Christ. In the Gospel, God is not saying the forgiveness of sins is a possibility, He is truly through the Gospel forgiving, and absolving His own enemies saying, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." Hence in the preaching of the Word and the distribution of the Sacraments, a solid stream of forgiveness constantly flows from God's heart. Truly, God on His part, is already reconciled and at peace with all men, to the point where Jesus calls sinners His friends.

But, if this is true, why then do not all go to heaven? It is because this gift of salvation is to be received by faith...believed. For if a rich man sets a pile of gold before you saying "Here, it's yours", and you don't believe His Words, you will not benefit from that gold at all. You must first believe the gold to be yours, before you will use it to pay off your debts. Thus the true message that God through Christ has justified and declared the sins of all men forgiven, can only be received by faith. And without faith, no man will benefit from it. Luther explained justification by faith this way (and I'm paraphrasing here)..."Let us pretend the Prince of the kingdom came to his serfs and said, 'I am giving my castle up there on the hill to you. It is my free gift to you and here is the key.' Now the serf who believes the message of the Prince, such will joyfully take the key and live happily ever after in the castle. But the serf who assumes the Prince is lying, he will not accept the key but walk away in unbelief. His unbelief alone causes him to lose the benefit of the castle."

From this we ought to understand that forgiveness, salvation, and everlasting life are a free gift from God to man, through the holy, precious, and innocent sufferings of Christ! And through this gift, God no longer counts us as enemies, but beloved friends. But this promise can only be received by faith, for our eyes cannot see God, nor heaven, nor forgiveness of sins. Spiritual gifts are perceived only through faith. But if any man refuses to believe the Gospel, these gifts from God will not benefit them at all, but such will continue to live as slaves to sin. Such unbelief is the greatest tragedy of all, for truly God is His heart has already forgiven all sinners, but those who spurn the gift will not inherit everlasting life, though truly it had been earned and given to them.

Dear friends, let us rejoice then and take firm hold of Christ Jesus by faith, and believe the Word of God to be true, for "God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." God cannot lie, nor speak anything less than the truth. For when we were yet "without strength" to believe, "Christ died for the

ungodly." Our justification took place long ago, upon the cross, and so our faith or lack of faith cannot change the fact that God in His heart is already reconciled with us. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." When you feel the weight and burden of your sin, understand that by the merits of Jesus Christ, God has removed all sin and blotted them all out, each and every one!

Since God then has justified us completely by and through Christ, the blessed consequence of our justification is a joyous peace with God. By the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, we now see God as our friend and not our enemy, so that we say "Jesus is a Friend of sinners, He is my Friend, and my Friend will do me no wrong." Therefore we will gladly live and suffer all things for our Friend, as our Friend gladly lived and suffered all things for us. "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope." We glory in tribulation because we know it leads to heaven. We run our race with patience, for the joy that is set before us. "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." By His selfless sacrifice of love, Jesus has won us over heart and soul. All we have, we give to Him. God is at peace with you, dear friend, you too can be at peace with Him. Amen.

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