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"We Beseech You... Be Reconciled to God"

by T. Austin-Sparks

Message given on October 7, 1962. Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.

"Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God. Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

That part which says "*We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God*", will engage our attention, I trust of heart as well as mind, in this little while.

If you analyse that statement you will find that there are four things which are indicated by it, and that all those four things centre in and circle round one word, which is the word "reconciliation". Perhaps you noticed that in the chapter which was read earlier (the fifth chapter of the Letter to the Romans) that word occurred three times, and it occurs in other parts of the New Testament. Everything is gathered around this word "reconciliation".

The four things that are indicated by that word, and what is said about it, are these. And it is always helpful, I think, for people to know what we are going to talk about. Very often we don't know what a preacher is getting at until he has got a long way on, and then sometimes we don't know what he

has been trying to get at! So I want to dismiss any such uncertainty by telling you right away exactly what it is we are going to look at, and it is these four things. They are these:

The first thing is that the word "reconciliation" indicates a situation which must exist if reconciliation is necessary.

The second thing - and it is found in the whole statement as we read it - is the work which Jesus Christ came into this world to do: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself".

The third thing: a conception of Christian service - "*We are ambassadors... of Christ*".

And the fourth thing which comes out of the very tone of this utterance is the serious responsibility which is involved in knowing about this. The tone, as you will recognise, is this: "*We beseech you on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us*". 'We beseech you... we entreat you'. It must, therefore, be something quite serious in the way of responsibility if such an attitude, and such a way of expressing it is connected with the great word 'reconciliation'.

Well, let us briefly look at each one of these things.

Firstly, then, the situation which that word 'reconciliation' indicates and implies.

Everybody knows the meaning of that word, or, at least a part of it. Break it in two, and everybody knows what it means to conciliate. Something has happened between two parties which has set them against one another and they are in that state of opposition and antagonism until someone enters into the breach to conciliate, to reconcile. But that little prefix 're' means that there was at one time a condition which did not necessitate conciliation. Everything was all right. But something has happened. There has come about a terrible breakdown, breach and rupture, and now it is a matter of *re*-conciliation, doing something to bring back to a former condition.

Now, you know, it is just upon that very fact and truth that the whole of the gospel of Jesus Christ rests. It is upon that that we can say the Bible rests; the fact of a condition existing which was not always there, but which has got to be removed and the former happy situation recovered, brought back again. Now, the Bible is very explicit about this, and human history bears it out, that the condition which exists between man and God now is one. In the first place, of man's alienation from God. Man's natural condition now is that of being an alien to God, a foreigner to God, belonging to another realm and race, a kind of being which is far from God and altogether contrary to God. But worse than that - rebellion against God. That is in the very constitution of man. And you know that as soon as you get light from God, and more light from God, and still more light from God, the one thing that becomes more and more clear and definite in your consciousness is how the human heart is in rebellion against God. You don't recognise it until the Spirit of God begins to do something. Or you may do; there is plenty today of manifest, obvious rebellion against God in this world, and conscious and deliberate rebellion against God, as well as that far greater realm of natural rebellion of the human heart against God.

Now, many of you may not feel like that, and may perhaps have some doubt as to the truth of what I am saying. But I will go this far and say that if you will put yourself into the hands of God and ask the Spirit of God to begin to work in your heart, one of the first things that you will discover is what a big work has got to be done to bring you into a state of absolute fellowship with God. You will discover

that your heart is not as easily won over as perhaps you thought it would be. You will discover that there are depths in your nature of positive antagonism to God, distance from God, rebellion against God, that you never have suspected. For the time being you are in darkness and blindness about this, and, of course, the great master of the human race, the devil himself, has carried out that master stroke of blinding all his subjects to their own condition where God is concerned. But when God begins to work, the first thing we discover is: 'Oh, there is far more in me to be got rid of and to be got over than I would have believed. The preachers were right when they said that God looks upon us as sinners.'

This word 'reconciliation' - 're-conciliation' - means that something has happened. There has been a breakdown and an alienation; there has come about a great change from the condition in which God at first made man, when He walked with him and talked with him, and had that blessed fellowship which is seen right at the beginning of the Bible between God and His first creation. It has all gone and man is not now a normal creature in that sense. No, we are all abnormal now by nature. You may not like that, but we are abnormal because the normal, from God's standpoint, is of a kind of man that is in perfect oneness with Himself, in fellowship with Him, with nothing whatever between and no need of any conciliation. It is all right. That is the normal with God, what God meant. The abnormal is all that is different from that and contrary to that. What God meant as the normal for human life was perfect fellowship between Himself and His creation. And who will say that that is the normal experience of people today? It takes a mighty thing, as we shall see, to bring that about, to reconcile.

When man disobeyed God and sin entered in, and that fellowship was broken, do you know what the first mark of it was? Man went and hid himself from God. He was afraid to meet God. He did not want to meet God. The presence of God was a terrible thing to him, an unpleasant thought. Oh, something has happened here. It was not like that before. And it says: "*The man and his wife hid themselves*" (Genesis 3:8). God had to search for the man and cry "*Where art thou?*" (Genesis 3:9). He hid himself. And that is a mark of something having gone wrong when it is not pleasant to dwell in the presence of God and be where God is. Man is like that.

Now, Jesus Christ came into this world, and one of the great things that came to light by His being here was this very fact of the abnormal state in human life. It was illustrated by the works that He did. He chose His occasions, His means of revealing this. Here is a poor fellow who had been lying on his back on his mat for thirty-eight years, unable to move or do anything for himself. Jesus sought that man out in that position and made it perfectly clear that this was not God's idea for man. This was abnormal where God was concerned. And Jesus healed him and put him on his feet. And that is the normal.

And then Jesus went on from one case to another. A man born blind; the attitude of Jesus is: 'This is not normal where God is concerned. This is abnormal.' He gave the man his sight. And you can pick out these many things that Jesus did all the way through, and in doing them He is saying: 'Human life is altogether other than that which God meant'.

But mark you, what Jesus did in the physical realm with lameness, blindness, fever and manifold sicknesses and infirmities, He was only doing as an acted parable. He was saying, and He said it quite definitely on one occasion: "This is only a pointer to something else. What you see in the physical is only a parable or a type of man's spiritual condition. *Spiritually* man is lame, infirm, impotent. *Spiritually* man is blind. *Spiritually* man is suffering from all kinds of maladies, and this is

not God's thought for man". This is 'abnormal'. He brought this to light and all is traced back to this: "*Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf.*" Sin is behind all this abnormal state, this alienation, this rebellion, this that makes reconciliation necessary.

I have used the word 'rebellion', and that lies behind this picturesque word that the writer of this letter uses: "We are *ambassadors*... of Christ... we beseech you... be ye reconciled to God". The people who received that letter knew very well what the apostle was meaning, what was in his mind. You see, Corinth, where the letter was sent, was part of the great Roman Empire. There was at that time what was called the 'Pax Romani', the great Roman peace which had been brought over the world, by force of course, but there it was. But sometimes that peace was broken. Some province in the Roman Empire would rebel and try to throw off the Roman yoke. And then, from Rome the emperor would send an ambassador to that province and say: 'Look here, we stand for peace. We have sought to make peace in this world, to establish universal peace. You have broken away and you have upset the peace. We offer you peace again. We just want your prosperity and your good, and we entreat you to accept our offer. It will be all to your good if you do. But we must warn you that if you choose an alternative to our offer then certain judgment awaits you'. And the ambassador went.

Rome was, from some standpoints, quite a benign power in those days. It really did want its whole Empire to be at peace and to be in prosperity. It treated people very kindly when it could. That sort of thing happened from time to time in the Roman Empire, and the apostle lifted right out of that historic happening this, and brought it over to the gospel. He said: 'Now the human race, the human heart, has revolted against the God of peace, whose whole thought for man is peace and blessing, whose one desire for man is good. But man has revolted'. That is the first story in the Bible, isn't it? Everything that God could do and give He gave to Adam. What a wonderful setting He put man into at the beginning! Everything that the heart could desire. It showed what a God He was, what a God of goodwill.

And then man rebelled and disobeyed and broke away, and he took things into his own hands. And the result was that through one man's sin *all* were made guilty, *all* were brought into judgment, *all* were brought into death. Every child of Adam, from then until now, lies under this terrible state that Adam brought in. But God has not given it up. Here is the picture behind the words: "We are ambassadors... as though God were entreating by us". Human hearts are away from God, not in fellowship with God, perhaps rebellious against God, trying to do without God, putting God out of His own realm and His own rights. Human hearts are like that. God says that He sends His ambassadors. These apostles were His ambassadors, but it might just be that the one who is speaking to you now may occupy such a capacity as an ambassador for God; in the first place to say 'In your present condition, if you have not really committed yourself to Him, wholly, in full, complete yieldedness, you need reconciliation. It is a breakdown. It is an abnormal condition. It is a perilous condition. And we say to you, on behalf of God, in the Name of Christ, as ambassadors: "*Be ye reconciled to God*".'

But there is this great work that is the basis of reconciliation. We have read it, the work that Jesus came to do. Here is sin, which has made all this mischief, done all this harm, and made this world and the human race to be contrary to the mind of God. Why, our morning papers, every day that we live, are full of this, and it is growing upon us. We don't like reading even the best of our papers because there is so much in them about delinquency, murder, robbery and rebellion of every kind. So much that is inimical to good, and contrary to God - He being what He is. There it is, and only

utterly blind people would not recognise it. And God knew all about that before this present day and year in the history of this world. He knew all about the depths and nature of human sin, and He sent His Son into the world, "Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf".

Jesus, then, came into this world and took on Himself at the cross the state of the human race. "*Him... He made... sin*". No one here, no one in this world can understand what that meant, what it meant for a perfectly pure, clean, holy, sinless Person to have *sin* - the taint, corruption and pollution of sin - put on Him. We don't understand that because we are not like that, but sometimes, in little ways, if something that is altogether foreign to our minds, to our natures, is attributed to us, something that is wrong is imputed to us, and it is altogether false, how we suffer! We say: 'Oh, fancy thinking that of me! Fancy attributing a thing like that to me! I never thought of such a thing. I never intended such a thing'. And that only may be just one thing. To think of One who is utterly and wholly sinless, having all the sin of *all* time put on Him, and He being made accountable for all that, whereas He Himself is not one whit responsible, that must have been agony! That must have been suffering!

If He suffered a little bit by false charges or accusations, how He must have suffered with the sin of the whole world! John the Baptist cried "Behold, the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). "Made to be sin on our behalf". He was put into our state in that terrible hour of the cross and took the penalty of sin which is full consciousness of what it means to be repudiated by God, forsaken by God. None of you has ever known that yet. That is hell! That is perdition! That is the most awful thing that can happen, to become alive to the fact that God has fully forsaken and abandoned you. In the cross of the Lord Jesus that happened and He cried: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). And when He had yielded up His Spirit a Roman soldier standing by thrust his spear into His side "and straightway there came out blood and water" (John 19:34). And the people who know all about it know that that is the sign of a broken heart. Why? Because He who knew no sin and was not guilty at all, was made sin and suffered the full penalty for sin. And the apostle says: "So making peace" (Ephesians 2:15).

For us the penalty has been borne, the sin has been taken away, "so making peace" by the Blood of His cross, so reconciling us, conciliating, bringing the two parties together. I like to think of those outstretched hands on the cross as one hand taking hold of the poor, sinful human race, and the other hand taking hold of God, and bringing them both together in reconciliation. That is just what He did. In Himself, by His cross, He brought the two divided, alienated parties together. "*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself*", restoring the broken fellowship. You know that everyone who really comes through Jesus Christ and through His work on the cross, accepts that after salvation. The first consciousness that they have is, "Oh, all the strain of relationship with God has gone. All the sense of judgment and condemnation has gone. I am at peace with God. God is at peace with me, I am reconciled. Something has happened!" "So making peace."

I will leave out the third section, the nature of Christian service as ambassadors. When the apostle said "*We are ambassadors*", he did not mean only himself and his fellow apostles; he meant every Christian. The business of every Christian is to be an ambassador and bring this truth of which we have been speaking, of what Christ has done, to the knowledge of men and beseech them on that ground to be reconciled to God.

We come to the last matter, the serious responsibility of knowing about this, for that is a very serious thing. There are no two alternatives in this matter. There is only one alternative to

reconciliation and that is to remain as you are - unreconciled - but when it has been made known what God has done, what Christ has done, what a tremendous and terrible responsibility rests upon us if we remain unreconciled to God!

God has put right at the centre of this world's history as great an illustration and demonstration of this that could possibly be given to the world. Has it ever impressed you how the Jews have been scattered, and are scattered, all over this world? You can find them in almost every country. There are Indian Jews, and there are Chinese Jews, there are African Jews, and there are European Jews and there are American Jews. They are everywhere.

A very well-known Jewish leader once said to me: 'I travel all over the world, and although it may be that they have been in their country for generations, I can always tell a Jew when I meet one'. Now that is universal, you see. But God sent right into the capital of their nation, right to the heart of their national life, His Son. He sent Him into Jerusalem. And there, as God's own great Ambassador, Jesus Christ pleaded with Israel to be reconciled to God, told Israel of what God wanted, and besought Israel to accept the salvation which was in Himself, which God offered. You know what they did. They said "Away with Him... crucify Him" (John 19:15). "We will not that this man reign over us" (Luke 19:14). You read the various accounts of this in the New Testament and you are amazed, bewildered, at the ferocity of their antagonism to the Son of God who had done nothing but good. Moving up and down their streets and about their country, doing nothing but good. And yet they had this awful, terrible hatred of Christ, until at last, when even a Roman ruler would have liberated Him, they said "No, no! Give us this man, Barabbas, this robber and murderer, rather than this man, Jesus. Crucify Him!" And it says: "*Their voices prevailed*" (Luke 23:23). Pilate gave Him to be crucified.

They rejected the Ambassador of God with His message of peace and reconciliation. Look! In every nation under heaven the judgment, as the result of that, is seen. What a two thousand years of judgment! Think of all the terrors that that nation has gone through, even in recent years. We have had it brought so vividly before us in these stories of the millions upon millions who have been in those awful death chambers and concentration camps. But this is not something new. This has been going on through the centuries. The alternative to reconciliation is a terrible thing! And God has put that illustration right at the centre of all the nations to say: 'It is a very serious thing to refuse My peace offer'.

This is only at most a temporary thing, an earthly thing, as you see it in Israel, but think of it in the eternal realm; that it should be eternal, not a time at all, but *eternal!* That is terrible! We understand what the apostle meant when he said, "Knowing the terror, we beseech you" (2 Corinthians 5:11,20). He knew something about this. He knew what he was talking about. He was a member of that race. He had joined in the crucifying of Jesus Christ. He had said, "We will blot out this Man's name from the earth and everybody who bears it shall go to death." Saul of Tarsus had done that. He had come, however, to see the awful consequences for his own nation and for the world, of refusing God's offer of reconciliation. He said "*We entreat... we beseech.*" This is a very solemn thing.

The alternative is too terrible to contemplate. But, dear friends, that is the dark side of the story. It is not necessary, thank God, for anyone here to contemplate such an alternative and its consequences. You can, right on the spot, be reconciled to God. If you will say, "I see that Jesus came to bear my sin. I take Him by faith as my sin-bearer. I accept the work that He has done, making peace for me with God by the Blood of His cross. I thank Him for doing it. I commit myself to Him,

wholly and utterly", you will know peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and this blessed state of reconciliation.