

Charles G. Finney:

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

An ambassador is an agent or representative of a government. In ancient times, they were employed only in regard to matters of war and peace. In those times, commercial relations were of small account, compared with what they are now. Now it is common to sustain ambassadors at all the foreign courts, to look after those numerous relations that obtain between nations at peace with each other. No such thing was thought of in New Testament times. Our Savior speaks of ambassadors being sent, but it was only to "offer conditions of peace." In this sense, God sends his ambassadors to guilty men.

The church, and especially her gospel ministers represent Christ on earth, and are engaged to do his work. The world being in revolt against its own Maker, Ruler and Father, he sends his ministers as ambassadors to plead with men to be reconciled to God. Ministers are divinely appointed and commissioned for this express purpose. Holding their credentials from the Lord Jesus Christ, they are authorized to offer men free pardon on condition of unqualified submission to God's will and acceptance of pardon in the name of Jesus only. I need only say, on this point, that a duly appointed ambassador holds such relations to both parties, that, while acting within his commission, his acts bind the government he represents, as truly as their own acts can do. His business is to keep within his commission and instructions, and report what he has done. Then his action is conclusive upon his employers.

The text assumes that sinners are not reconciled to God. This is, of course, true of every sinner. It is indeed only an identical proposition--a mere truism--only another way of saying the same thing. Sin is transgression of God's law, and, of course, is opposition and not friendship towards God. This is the very idea of being a sinner. To say that a sinner is unreconciled to God is only to say that he is a sinner. The being a sinner, implies an unreconciled state.

It is plain that God looks on sinners as being unreconciled;--else how should he call on them to be reconciled? I am aware that sinners often say,--"I have nothing against God,"--but this only shows that they know not what spirit they are of. They really act towards God as if they had the utmost reason for disliking him; and if they were carefully to search their own hearts, they would find real enmity against God--a spirit that loves to find fault, even where there is not the least occasion.

It is a simple and notorious fact that sinners are at variance with God. There is not another fact on all the face of this world's history more patent than this.

But what is implied in being reconciled? That we cordially approve his character, and not his character only, but his government, so that we practically consent to obey him. This implies supreme love to God, for he requires of us no less than this. It implies submission to his providence also--that is, to his actual administration of the affairs of this world. It includes a cordial embracing of his whole will--in every department of his government and providence. A cordial and constant co-operation with him in all his ways, must be embraced; for, as he holds the position of Supreme Ruler, nothing less than this can be commensurate with our obligations.

There are many reasons why you, who are in sin, should be reconciled to God.

(1.) Because everything he has done is perfectly right. There is no fault to be found in his law--all there, is holy, just and good. There is no fault to be found with the gospel; that is ineffably condescending and compassionate--gloriously good and wise. You can find no cause of fault in any thing he has done. What reason, then, have you to be otherwise than reconciled?

(2.) It is utterly useless for you to persist in this controversy with God. You know he is right, and yourself wrong; and you also know that no amount of debate and controversy will ever make your case any better. Why, then, should you prolong such a controversy, so unjust to God--so unreasonable; and to yourself as ruinous as it is unreasonable?

(3.) You ought to yield because you cannot afford to live so. You can find no happiness, no good of any sort in prosecuting this controversy.

(4.) God can never yield to you. You must yield, or there must be an everlasting antagonism. And can you look upon such a result with any other feelings than dread and horror?

(5.) That you should yield is intrinsically right--a reason which ought to be sufficient alone, if there were no other.

(6.) Of course, it is safe to yield--perfectly safe. You lose nothing--run no risk of losing anything.

Suppose you were at variance with any other person, and there were only this one reason urged for your becoming reconciled, that it would be on your part simply right--would you not be a knave if you were to resist? And ought you not to be so esteemed by all the world unless you would yield? In all controversies, the first thing enquired after is--Who is in the right and who in the wrong? In the case between you and your Maker, this is perfectly plain. Not one unprejudiced judge in all the universe will ever decide in your favor.

Again, it is expedient. It will cost you nothing. It will deprive you of no good. In every point of view, expediency demands that you submit to God. I know sinners are often ashamed to admit that themselves are wrong; but which is most honorable; to maintain a position which everybody decides to be wrong; or to recede from that position--nobly come out, and confess and avow what you know to be right, though it condemn your own past course? What do men say of those who doggedly maintain a wrong position because they are too proud to confess their known wrong? Do they honor such a spirit? Nay, verily, but , on the contrary, men always say if you have done wrong, it is noble and generous to admit it. What a wonderful thing to have a controversy with God, and maintain it, because you cannot brook the humiliation of confession and repentance! What! to contend with God, knowing that you are utterly wrong, and God altogether right; yet you maintain the controversy and go into it deeper and deeper every hour! What would you think of a child that should have such a controversy with its father, the child totally wrong in every point, the father perfectly right, and yet the child persists in maintaining the controversy?

Again, consider, God seeks a reconciliation--seeks it although he is the offended and injured party, and although your course has been utterly and unreasonably wrong, and only wrong continually. Yes, the offended party comes and seeks reconciliation. He would live in peace with you. Not that he wants your help;--for, is he dependent on you? No; but he seeks your peace and welfare--seeks it simply and only because he is kindhearted and really benevolent.

You can have no peace, either within or without, until you yield to God. If you have a controversy with a neighbor, it is perpetually rasping and chafing your feelings; how fearful, then, to have such a controversy with God? How fearful to have an enemy who is present everywhere;--so that, if you ascend into heaven, he is there; if you make your bed in hell, he is there; or if you take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth, even there you find your adversary--a fearful Presence to blight your peace! The chariot-wheels of his government will roll on and on; and if you throw yourself in their path, they tarry not and turn not, but must "grind you to powder!" Where can you find a place to live, unreconciled to God? Why then, will you prolong this controversy?

God seeks to be at peace with you, not because he fears you; not lest you should destroy or even mar his happiness; no; you are to him so small and so contemptible an enemy, he has only to withdraw his sustaining hand from underneath you, and you sink at once to hell by your own gravity. It is only because he loves you that he should ever care to bring you from your wretched rebellion to be at peace with him.

He cannot be at peace with you unless you change. There is no possible way to restore a good understanding between yourself and God, unless you consent to become reconciled to him. He cannot change and come over to you; you must consent to change your position and return to him. And you must do this voluntarily. For God to force you, implies a contradiction. Omnipotence cannot force a sinner to be reconciled. Any thing that should make this change irresistible, is simply absurd,--overlooking the intrinsic nature of the change itself.

God is your nearest neighbor, and always will be. You cannot move away from him; he will be your nearest neighbor wherever you go or wherever you stay. Why would you keep up a controversy with your nearest neighbor--with one who held the same room with you? Would you like a perpetual quarrel with your roommate? How much less should you, then, with one so all-present, so all-wise and powerful as God!

You cannot deny the fact of the controversy, nor the fact that you are wrong in it. How bad, then, to persist in your rebellion, and refuse to yield yourself implicitly to his will!

While God might command and might threaten, he yet for the most part, appears in a very different attitude. Laying this aside, he comes down to beseech you to be reconciled. Just as if your neighbor, who had all law and right on his side; who might prosecute you at law, and might prove you in the wrong, and make you suffer the consequences--should, instead of this, come to you in a modest and quiet way, entreating you and saying--"Now let us be at peace." So God comes in tones of most tender entreaty, and beseeches you to be reconciled.

If you do not come, you sin against your own soul. You impose on him the hard necessity of destroying you. The feelings with which he views this hard necessity, you may see in his language when he cries out--"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together." O sinner, hear that! "How shall I give thee up!" He bursts out in the language of grief, as if his very heart would break! Long time, and with every means in his power, he has followed the sinner, beseeching him to turn and live; how sad, then, to a heart of infinite love, to see that, probably--yes, certainly, all these compassionate labors must fail! O, to follow a sinner so, in the fulness of an aching heart, for years and scores of years--and then have it come utterly to nought!

And is this God's bearing towards thee, O sinner? Precisely so; these are God's own words. And he feels thus and speaks thus only because he so dislikes to take vengeance. Therefore, it is that he waits so long and so patiently, and still comes forth in mercy to entreat and beseech wayward sinners to be reconciled to God.

Consider yet, that God has taken the greatest pains to put things in the best position for entreating you. Think of this--that God should take the attitude of a suppliant--and before whom? Not an equal--not a lofty angel even; but before a poor, weak and mean sinner! To even such, he sends his ambassadors praying and beseeching! And is this really so? Suppose you should meet the Lord Jesus Christ, as he once had sinners meet him on earth, and, instead of reproaching you, he should look you in the face most tenderly, and ask you why you had been abusing him so long and so grievously. Suppose he presses you to say why you have ever had it in your heart to abuse him at all. What could you answer? That he should come and really beseech you--would not this break your heart as a potter's vessel?

God loves to do this when he can do it safely. It is only when he knows that he can spare no longer, with safety to his kingdom, that he changes his attitude, rises in his majesty to maintain the honor of his throne, and hurls the sinner down to eternal ruin!

REMARKS.

Sinners often pretend to think the difficulty is on God's part. They say--"I have nothing against God; I am reconciled to God."

What does that mean? Do you really mean that you yield obedience to God, and in every way, take your own proper position towards him? How can you say that while you are in conflict with him at every point?

What base hypocrisy it is for sinners to set aside the whole question by saying--I have nothing against God. But you have something against God. Your heart is full of prejudice against him. You utterly fail to love, honor, or obey him! Not one thing, appropriate to your relations to God, have you ever done! How basely hypocritical, then, for you to claim that you have nothing against God, and that all is right on your part!

Sinners seem to think that they must move God. They will have it they must persuade God to make up with them, and almost, if not quite, confess, that he has been in the wrong. Instead of praying that they may themselves come back to God and feeling that they ought to, they insist that God ought to come back to them. You may have heard of the little girl who became convicted of her sins, and who prayed for a long time with great agony; but, at length, got hold of the true idea of her relations to God and of God's to her, and running in, she cried out to her mother, "Ma, ma, I have made up with God!"

The world has gone off into rebellion against God, and is utterly removed from all sympathy with him. Upon this state of things, God has ordained an economy of proceedings, all arranged for the one purpose of restoring man to love and obedience. It aims to illustrate God's government and yet to demonstrate his love. In the development of this great plan, Christ came in person to his own chosen people; when they reviled, he reviled not again; when they cursed, he only blessed; when they blasphemed, he prayed for them; and when they plotted and perpetrated his murder by most wicked hands, he prayed, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do, and proceeded at once to offer them pardon through the very blood they had shed, "beginning at

Jerusalem." In how many ways did he strive to teach men, even sinners, that God is their friend, displeased, indeed, with their sins, yet earnestly seeking their welfare and ready at once to blot out all their transgressions, if they will repent and accept of mercy. See how beautifully all this stands revealed before us in the last scenes of the Savior's earthly life. You know how he finally died under their hands; how he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, meekly and unresisting; how they mocked him, put on him a crown, not of pearls, but of thorns--a reed in one hand for a scepter; how, when the Roman Governor would release him, they preferred the scandalous Barabbas, as if glad of an opportunity to show their appreciation of the Son of God! You know how this mobocrat and murder was released instead of Jesus, and how they heaped on him every form of abuse and of insult they could devise. And did he lose all patience? Does he call for twelve legions of angels to sink that guilty city a thousand fathoms deep in the gulf of destruction? No; far from this as can be! After he has comforted his disciples, the first thing he does is to say--"Go, preach my gospel among all nations, but begin at Jerusalem!" Go, first of all, to my murderers!

And now, after this demonstration by "God manifest in the flesh," can you suppose that the difficulty is on God's part, and that he cannot consent on reasonable grounds to be reconciled to you?

How can this difficulty be settled? God on his side says--"What can I do more that I have not done" to you? As one of Christ's ambassadors, I ask--What more shall God do for you? Can you suppose anything short of your yielding up the whole controversy can save you? Indeed, if God were to change ever so much, and recede from his claims ever so fully, your conscience would wage everlasting war against you and you could get no peace! I said to a young lady--Are you a Christian? She replied, "I believe God deserves better treatment than he has ever received from me." What sinner does not know this? And who would not be compelled to say it if he were shut up to the truth? You know you have no occasion to treat him with any, even the least, contempt.

If he deserves better treatment at your hands, shall he have it? What do you say to that? Shall he have it from this time and onward forever? God being your helper, and by his grace, will you yield entirely to his claims? This is implied in being reconciled to God; have you any reason why you should not do it?

Suppose God should abandon all efforts to make peace with you! This is more than supposable; it will certainly take place ere long. He has plainly told you that he will not always strive with you. And, besides, it is every way reasonable that he should at some time desist from all further effort. You could not think it strange if he were to desist now. It should even be expected. Suppose, then, that his compassion should fail--his forbearance go no further--the Spirit be withdrawn, God give you over to hopeless impenitence and endless woe--to let your enmity rage on forever--what then? Suppose this result which surely must be reached in time, were reached to-day? There remains no more hope for you. You can look back on a hopeful past--a period when you sat near the very gate of heaven, and almost without effort, you might have pressed your way within the strait gate; but that time has forever past. O, how you wish you could have one more gospel Sabbath, and have another gospel sermon, and have once more a waiting Savior and a striving Spirit! O might it only be! But with you it is all too late!

Are you not afraid of this result? You know God will not wait long. You know you have abused his patience already, past all human endurance, and how long can you presume that even divine forbearance and compassion will hold out?

Having made you proposals from my Master, and in his name, I come now to demand from you an answer. What shall I say from you to my Master? Suppose I come to you individually--for this business is all to be done with you as individuals--I come to you, then, as individuals, and would fain know what you reply to my Master. I am going to report the matter; what shall I report? Do you say that you have no report to make--that you take no action in the case? But this is impossible. To try to do nothing, is to neglect this offered salvation, and insult your Redeemer, and say back to God--"Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways!" It is scarcely possible that any action can be so fatal as this.

Suppose Christ should appear--in this very place and hour--and with a voice that should shake this house, should say, "I come to demand a decision! Tell me now, once for all, whether you will or will not repent--whether you will or will not have salvation through my blood! Now, therefore, let every sinner choose the ground he proposes to stand on forever. As you say now, so it shall be at the judgment, and so shall stand through eternity!"

So Jesus does beseech you to choose this day whom you will serve, and so he may accept your virtual decision as final, and set his seal upon it forever!