

Reconciliation

by James Challen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of reconciliation between humanity and God through Jesus Christ and the role of believers as His ambassadors.

Scripture: Luke 24:46, Acts 1:8, 2 Corinthians 5:18, Ephesians 2:13, Colossians 1:19

Topics: "Reconciliation Ministry", "Ambassadors For Christ"

Description

James Challen preaches about the ministry of reconciliation, emphasizing that man is alienated from God due to sin, but through Jesus Christ, God offers reconciliation to the world. Challen highlights the role of Jesus as the ultimate Ambassador of God, who came to reconcile humanity to the Father through his life, death, and resurrection. The apostles, chosen by Jesus, served as ambassadors spreading the message of reconciliation to all nations, and their work remains a perpetual obligation for believers today.

Transcript

"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to-wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."--2 COR. v: 18-21.

HAT man is alienated from God, and at enmity with him, are truths every-where taught in the Divine oracles; and although many know him not, and are living in ignorance of what he has revealed, yet their whole moral nature and life show aversion to his government, and departure from his ways. The "carnal mind is enmity to God," and "the friendship of the world is enmity with him." The Gentiles, before the Gospel was preached to them, are said to be "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them."

It is not necessary that men shall know God, or be acquainted with his ways, to be alienated from him. As darkness is opposed to light, and error to truth, and sin to righteousness, so the heart and life of man are opposed to his Maker. "The wrath of God is revealed from [131] heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" wherever it is found. His nature is eternally opposed to all that is sinful.

The Gentiles were without excuse; "for when they knew God, they worshiped him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts, and to creeping things." A fearful picture is drawn by the Apostle of the character and condition of the heathen world in his own day, and it is equally as true now as then. (Rom. i: 20-32.)

The Jews, who were blessed with a verbal revelation, were equally inexcusable as the Gentiles. Indeed, they were involved in deeper guilt. They despised the riches of God's goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering. They treasured up wrath against the day of wrath and the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds. The Scriptures have concluded all men under sin. This is the condition of the world, and in this attitude the word of reconciliation is sent us.

The spectacle is an appalling one. If the relation of man to man is one of enmity, that of man to his Maker is of a deeper hue. It is estrangement of heart and life from all that is pure and good; of hostility to the spirit and principles of his moral government over his rational creation. The race of man presents to angels a vast ruin--greater than all the cities of dead empires; a desolation more fearful than the wreck of conquering armies, or the waste of fields and vineyards by the devouring locusts, or by sword and famine.

God sees all this, and remembers whence we have fallen, [132] and what our sins will lead to unless redeemed by the blood of his Son; and in his pity and his mercy he has sent us deliverance.

The Ministry of Reconciliation.

The One Great Minister sent of God on this embassy of reconciliation is Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. He is his special servant in accomplishing this work. He came from heaven with full powers to treat with men on this subject. He represents all the dignity, authority, and glory of the Father who sent him; and all the weakness, poverty and suffering of those he came to reconcile. In his person, we see all that is divine in his Father, and all that is human in his mother. He touches the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, and stoops to the lowest condition of our race upon the earth. His divinity rises as high as the heaven of heavens--over the Bethlehem in which, as a child, he was born, and the Nazareth in which he was subject to his parents. The supernatural shines forth in every stage of his mission, as in the Mount of Transfiguration, and at the tomb of the rich Arimathean. He unites the tears of human sympathy with the voice of omnipotence, and walks with human feet upon the stormy Galilee, while he lays his hand of might upon the turbulent billows, and with divine majesty cries, "Peace, be still." We feel no surprise or astonishment at the "signs and wonders" attesting his mission, as they seem to be the natural accompaniments of it. They appear as his own and proper "works," as fruitage from the tree, or grain from the sower's field, or words and deeds from living men. His mission is "the end of a boundless past, the center of a boundless present, and the beginning of a boundless future." [133]

His life, though human, did not move on the plane of the world's history. He stood apart, and alone, in the grand objects of his mission. He had no popular favor to seek; no worldly plans to accomplish; no honors to gain; no emoluments or earthly ambitions to acquire. He allied not himself with party or sect; with the rich or the poor; with the Sanhedrim or Cæsar. He came not to receive, but to give. He was of the race, and acted for the race. He came as the world's reconciler. The very conception of such a purpose is Divine, and places him incomparably above all who preceded him.

His mission, though to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," was for the benefit of the world. Not a single nation, but the whole race, were the objects of his ministry. He came, not to elevate Judea from its oppressed condition, nor yet to ally himself with imperial Rome; but to gather, out of the families and tribes of earth, a people for his name; a chosen generation, a royal priesthood; and to found an empire of redeemed, regenerated, and reconciled subjects, which should stand forever.

So far was he from conciliating the favor of the leading parties, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians forgot their mutual prejudices in opposing him. Pilate and Herod made friends in plotting his destruction. Both the ecclesiastical and political governments were hostile to him; and the only part of the nation that sympathized with him were the poor and the neglected--the outcasts from society--"publicans and sinners." His poverty and pity drew him to the masses, from whom he could receive nothing; and his princely gifts and his humble garb attracted their attention and won their confidence.

He was "the Divine man" for which the ages had looked; and suffering and sorrowing hearts responded to his tears and his words of [134] hope. He knew that a man was greater than his condition; and that learning, wealth, and position were but as the leaves of the forest, short-lived and temporary, soon to wither and die, and would give place to the foliage of returning seasons. His mighty soul heard the deep moanings of the troubled sea of humanity, and the wall of ages from the four winds of heaven.

He stood in the very heart of the race, the one perfectly developed man; the only full-blown flower on the stock of our humanity. He would draw all men to him, and make them like himself--"holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners"--that he might elevate them higher than the heavens. Though daily in contact with pollution, he was never defiled. Though breathing the tainted atmosphere of a sinful world, he was never infected with its poison. Though walking in the midst of guilt and shame, of pride and selfishness, he was proof against it.

With the world grown old in sin and folly, and in arms against him, he was not only able to meet, but to conquer it. Great as was the temptation of our first parents, it was nothing, when compared with what "the Son of Man" endured, and without sin. He not only realized in person what men have to encounter in striving for a purer life, but he showed what latent virtues, and what powers of resistance the soul of man possesses, and can summon to his aid. His daily contact with suffering did not harden, but softened his heart.

The greatness of our guilt and of our grief did not fill him with despair, but summoned his mighty energies to the work of relief. The tears he shed at the grave of Lazarus, and over Jerusalem, were not the tears of weakness arising from the inability to relieve and to conquer, but from the well-spring of sorrow, in view of the awful ravages of human transgression." "The man [135] of sorrows"--this inheritor of human grief--is the world's reconciler! How deep thy agony! how lonely thy sorrow!

What to thee was the crown of thorns, the scourging and the spitting, the cry of "Crucify! crucify!" the cross, and its shame! These but poorly represented "the man of sorrows." They only gave outward form and expression to the unutterable burden which pressed upon his spirit, in view of the ravages of sin and its appalling consequences.

He saw that sin had made the race "captives;" he came to bring them deliverance. They were condemned criminals; he came to bring them pardon. They were in a state of rebellion; he came to bring them peace. They were dead; he was "the resurrection and the life." They were self-destroyed; he brought good news of salvation. They were alienated from God; he came to reconcile them.

It was the region of the shadow of death into which he entered; the darkness and bewilderment of the race were growing deeper and deeper. To one so sensitive to evil, so averse to wrong-doing, so perfectly in harmony with God and all righteousness, so happy and rich in the memories of the past, so exultant and joyful in the hopes of the future, pity oppressed him beyond the claims of justice, and mercy rejoiced over the demands of violated law. If it had not been for the consciousness of his ability to save, the bloody sweat of Gethsemane would have been the baptism of his life; and the cry, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me," the death-cry of his mission. But "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," and he felt sure of success; and "for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God." [136]

The Ambassadors of Christ.

It was not the design of Christ to leave the world without selecting suitable persons to represent his cause, and carry out his gracious purposes in its reconciliation. He therefore chose twelve men from the humble walks of life, who should be with him during his public ministry, and be fully taught his doctrine. In the early part of his labors, he separated these men from the multitude of disciples, and they were constantly with him in private and in public. They heard his instructions to the people, and his many conversations with the Scribes and Pharisees, and others in Judea. They heard his discourses to the people, and enjoyed the peculiar advantage of his private instruction. They had every opportunity of learning his ways and knowing his will. He kept back nothing from them. They saw his "works"--the signs and wonders which he did. In so many aspects did they view him, that it was impossible for them to be ignorant of his person, his teaching, or his claims. He did nothing in secret. In the synagogue and in the temple, in the open fields, by the seaside, and in the desert, in populous cities and in the villages, and in private houses, they were his daily attendants. They saw his mighty works, and were convinced that God was with him. Diseases in every form departed at his word. The lame, the halt, and the blind were healed, and death, in all its stages, acknowledged his power. The daughter of Jairus, in youth and beauty having just expired, and the son of the widow at Nain, in the strength of his manhood, was being borne to the grave, and at his will they are brought to life; and Lazarus, a disciple, rapidly dissolving in the tomb, awoke and was restored to his weeping sisters. These were the first precursors of the mighty [137] demonstration of his own resurrection. As we see him wading through the floods of great waters to the mount of sacrifice, we hear him saying: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death; O death, I will be thy plague; O grave, I will be thy destruction."

Jesus had informed the disciples of the fact that he should die, and on the third day be raised again. They did not believe it, and, even after his resurrection, it was with difficulty they could be convinced of its reality. But by many infallible proofs he appeared and satisfied even the most incredulous among them. They saw him, handled him, examined his person, conversed with him, and enjoyed such direct and personal intimacy with him as to assure them of his identity and triumphs. They were to be his witnesses: "Ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning." In choosing an apostle to fill the place of Judas, who by transgression fell, Peter said to the disciples: "Wherefore of these men who have companied with us, all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." To be a witness with the other apostles of the resurrection of Christ, it was needful that the person chosen should have known Jesus intimately from the day of his baptism to the hour of his ascension. So much depended upon this great demonstration, that the most certain and unerring testimony, above all dispute, and free from all doubt, must be afforded. Jesus, after his death and

resurrection, said to the apostles: "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at [137] Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things." (Luke xxiv: 46-48.) The apostles declare that they were "witnesses of all things that he did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead." (Acts x: 39-41.)

In order more fully to qualify the apostles for the work assigned them, he promised, in view of his departure, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, and the Advocate, to teach them all things, and to bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever he had said to them; and in addition to their testimony, he himself should testify concerning the Savior. He renewed this promise to them before his ascension, and told them that they should be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence; and to tarry in Jerusalem until they should be endued with power from on high.

On the day of Pentecost the twelve, as ambassadors of Christ, opened the seals of their commission, and spoke with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. Their minds were wholly immersed in all the splendid powers of the world to come. They were brought fully under the influence of "the spirit of Truth," and being filled with his presence, they began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Three thousand enemies were made friends. The betrayers and murderers of Christ were the first to be reconciled to God by the death of his Son. From thence they went through all Judea and Samaria, preaching the Word; and in connection with Paul, called afterward to be an apostle and ambassador by our ascended Lord, they spread the knowledge of salvation to the ends of the earth. [139]

It was with great propriety that the apostles were called ambassadors. No word could more fully set forth their work, and the authority under which they acted.

An ambassador is a special minister, of the highest rank, sent by one prince or government to another, to manage the affairs of state. They are either ordinary or extraordinary. They represent the authority and dignity of the state that sends them. In the Old Testament such officers are frequently referred to, and their functions are known, and have been respected, in all ages of the world.

The apostles were extraordinary ambassadors. They received their commission in person from their Prince; and their names are mentioned in the instrument that bears it. They brought a special message to the world from him, containing the grounds of reconciliation, and the terms on which they should enjoy it. He left nothing to them, but fully declared in what way he would treat with an alienated and rebellious world. In their words and deeds they satisfactorily displayed, through "signs and wonders," the evidences of their commission. They did nothing in their own name, but in the name of the Prince and Savior of the world, they submitted, in the most grave and solemn manner, the ultimatum of their sovereign Lord. They won to his cause multitudes of men and women, and planted churches in the land of the Jews and in the Gentile world. They fully made known the Gospel on every continent then known, and to the islands of the seas; and left on record, for all succeeding ages, the fruit of their labors--the life of their Leader and the conditions of their embassy.

The Gospel they preached did not perish with them. It remained entire, in all its force and in all its elements, for succeeding ages. Others were required by them to "hold fast the form of sound words which they had heard [140] from them, and to keep that good thing intrusted to them by the Holy Spirit that

dwells in us." The things they had heard from the apostles were to be "committed to faithful men, who should be able to teach others also." The Church they established on the earth was to last, with all its institutions, until Jesus should come again. The Savior promised that "their work should remain." The terms of reconciliation they proposed to men in his name, are as binding now as they were then. The Gospel, as the incorruptible word, abideth forever.

As the work of ambassadors in secular matters is respected as sacredly after their death as when alive, so the work of the chosen twelve is of perpetual obligation. The crowned Prince has never revoked the message he sent by them, or superseded their embassy. It is still "the word of reconciliation." It is "the word of faith" to the unbelieving, exhibiting all the great facts of the Gospel, its commands and promises. It is "the word of truth" from him who is the true and faithful witness, and who is "the way, the truth, and the life." It is "the Word of Life" to those who are dead in trespasses and in sins, from him who has brought "life and immortality to light." It is "the Gospel of God," because it originated with him, and displays to us his unutterable philanthropy and good-will. It is "the Gospel of grace," as it shows the benignity of God, and the utter helplessness of man. It is "the Gospel of salvation," as it shows the way of escape, and gives us the means of deliverance. It is "the Gospel of peace," because it proposes the terms of reconciliation to a world in rebellion, and shows that every obstacle is now removed in the way of its enjoyment. This word of salvation was given by the Father to his Son, and by him to the apostles, and by them to the world, who beseech [141] men in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God; for he has made him, who knew no sin, a sin-offering for us, that we might be made "the righteousness of God." They urged their plea under the direction of him who had "all authority in heaven and upon earth."

The terms of reconciliation are an immediate surrender, "body, soul, and spirit," to God, according to the Gospel they preached. To believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, with all the heart; to repent and to bring forth fruits worthy of the new life to which they are called; to confess him openly before men as their Lord and Christ; and to be buried with him in baptism, in order to rise in that new kingdom over which he reigns. These terms are enforced by all the arguments drawn from the love of God, and the helplessness of man; from his guilt, and exposedness to the wrath to come; by the long-suffering of God and his unspeakable pity; by the gift of his only-begotten Son, that we might live through him; by his life of sinlessness, of tenderness and love; by his deep humiliation, sufferings, and death; by the Cross and its agony, the grave and its ransom; by the grace which he offers, and the glories which he promises; by the reconciliation which he sends us, and the eternal shame and dishonor which await those who reject it.

The reconciliation will result, finally, not only in uniting together both Jews and Gentiles here on the earth, "by the blood of the Cross," into one body, but all things or persons, whether in earth or in the heavens; "the spirit of the just made perfect" in all ages; the redeemed of God out of every tribe, and tongue, and people under the whole heaven. Angels who by their purity and holiness have only ministered to us as servants, shall unite with us as friends; and shall, once again and forever, share [142] in our fellowship and partake of our joys; "that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and on earth; even in him, in whom we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." [143]

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