

Alienation and Reconciliation

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon explores the concept of alienation from God, the consequences of sin, and the need for reconciliation through the power of God.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:16

Topics: "Sin And Redemption", "Faith And Salvation"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the journey from alienation to reconciliation with God, emphasizing the need to be firmly grounded in faith and settled in the hope of the gospel. He delves into the painful reality of alienation caused by sin, the divine act of reconciliation through Christ's sacrifice, the presentation of believers as holy and blameless before God, and the importance of continuing in faith to experience the fullness of salvation.

Transcript

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford,

on February 16, 1862, by J. C. Philpot

"And you, who were once alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works; yet now has he reconciled, in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy, and unblameable, and unreprouvable in his sight; if you continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which you have heard." Col. 1:21-23

In opening our text, I shall view it under four different aspects, and shall briefly characterize each by one word, to impress it more thoroughly upon your memory-

First, Alienation- "And you who were once alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works."

Secondly, Reconciliation- "Yet now has he reconciled, in the body of his flesh through death."

Thirdly, Presentation- "To present you holy and unblameable, and unreprouvable in his sight."

Lastly, Continuation- "If you continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which you have heard."

I. First, then, let us consider that painful subject, and yet one which all who are taught of God must learn in their own bosom- ALIENATION. "And you who were once alienated."

A. Let us seek to dive into the meaning of this term, as used by the apostle to describe our state and condition before God by nature and practice. What do we understand literally by it? Strangership. It is only another word to convey much the same idea, though in a more forcible manner, of one who is a foreigner or a stranger in a land to which he has no claim by birth or inheritance. And you will observe there is a distinction between being an alien and being "alienated." Let me show you the difference. Every foreigner in this country is an "alien," unless naturalized, that is, made an English citizen, by renouncing his allegiance to his own sovereign and becoming subject to ours. But if an Englishman, a native of this country, were to go to America and cast off his allegiance to our sovereign by becoming a citizen of the United States, he would be "alienated," that is, from his former country and his former sovereign; and, as has actually occurred in many cases, his love might turn to enmity, and he might actually fight against the country which gave him birth. In this sense, man by nature is not only an alien but alienated.

For was man thus always an alien and an enemy to God? Was there always a breach, a distance, a separation between God and him? Not so. Did not the Lord make man in his own image, after his own likeness? When he had created him, did he not place him in a garden of all manner of delight and pleasure, as the word Eden means? Did he not look down from heaven upon him and pronounce all his works good, and man as the last of them very good? for it was not until the close of the sixth day, when man stood before the Lord, created in his own image, that "he saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good; for the last creation put the stamp of God's approbation upon the whole. And when thus created did not the Lord have sweet communion with him in the garden where he had placed him; for we read of his "walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8), as if he came daily in the cool of evening to converse face to face with the intelligent creature of his hand? There was no breach then, no enmity, no alienation. God and man were friends, and, if I may use the expression, the best of friends, for the One was blessed in giving and the other in receiving.

But, alas! this blessed state did not continue long. How long we know not, but evidently for but a short period. An enemy came stealing into this happy garden, a tempter, once an angel of light, but now a fiend, full of all subtlety and malice, whom God, in his inscrutable wisdom, permitted to carry out his hellish plot and execute his infernal design. Satan, under the guise of a serpent, was permitted to tempt the woman; she was allowed to tempt the man, and he not, as she, overcome and overborne by temptation, but willfully disobeyed the command of God, and thus, with his eyes open, precipitated himself and all his future race into the deepest abyss of sin and misery; for we all fell in him. This may seem at first sight strange, and some have called it unjust; but we were in him as our federal head, in his loins, as Levi was in the loins of Abraham (Heb. 7:10); and thus what he did, we virtually did, in him.

The Scripture is clear here- "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for [I prefer the marginal reading, "in whom"] all have sinned." So again, "By one man's offence [margin, "by one offence"] death has reigned by one;" and again, "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." (Rom. 5:12, 17, 19.) I like to make my points clear, and this is the reason why I thus, from the Scriptures, trace up sin to its fountain head.

But now what was the consequence of this original sin, this act of rebellion and disobedience of our first parent? Alienation from God. A breach was made, estrangement introduced. Those who were once friends now became separated, and, what was far worse, they became enemies. So wide, so deep was

this chasm then made, that, like the fixed gulf of which Abraham speaks in the parable, none could pass over it, nor could it ever have been brought together but for God's eternal purpose of love and mercy in the Person and work of his dear Son.

But you may say, "How is it that this descended to me? If Adam sinned and fell, I was not in Paradise, how could I help his sinning against God? I was not there to hold back his hand from taking the forbidden fruit. Why then should I, an innocent man, suffer for his transgression? If a man now commits theft or murder, the law does not punish the innocent with the guilty." Then, I suppose, you have no personal sins of our own, and can stand before God perfectly holy and innocent? "No," you say, "I don't mean that, for I know that I am a sinner." But how did you become a sinner? Don't you see how in the fall the seed of sin was deposited by Satan in the very nature of Adam; that this alienation was dropped, as it were, from Satan's hand into his heart, as an acorn may fall into the earth, where it struck root and grew, and so filled, so to speak, the whole of his nature that it thrust out, like an overgrown tree, everything that was good.

But you may say, "How could one sin do this?" Cannot a grain of poison, say strychnine, diffuse itself through a whole vessel full of water? So sin spread itself through the whole of Adam's body and soul, killing the life of God therein and corrupting his nature throughout. But still the question arises, "How can this reach us?" Why, as like can only beget like, the alienation that Satan sowed in the heart of man in the fall in infecting him infected the whole of the race that would spring from him. Do we not read that "Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image?" (Gen. 5:3.) A fallen son must come from a fallen father. Thus we come into the world alienated from the image of God, and this alienation is our birthright, our portion, our miserable inheritance; all that we can really call our own for time or for eternity.

1. But look at the CONSEQUENCES of being thus alienated from the IMAGE of God. He who is the fountain of all bliss could not, even if he would, make a creature unlike and estranged from himself really and truly happy; for alienation springs out of sin, and sin is abhorred by the holiness, and amenable to the justice of God. And see how this state of alienation from God goes on, until at last it ends in thorough ruin. We come into the world alienated from God's image, for we lost it in the fall; we grow up still more and more alienated from it, and if we die thus alienated, what must that end be but eternal destruction from the presence of his glory? for there is no reconciliation or regeneration in the grave. There is no possibility of coming into a state of friendship with God when the breath has left the body. As the tree falls, so it lies. If we die alienated from God, we die under the wrath of God.

2. But look a little further into the meaning of the word now before us. In being alienated from God, we are alienated from the KNOWLEDGE of God. Our blessed Lord, in his intercessory prayer, says, "This is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." This alienation, therefore, is an alienation from the knowledge of God; for its leading, its prominent feature is death in sin. So the apostle speaks of the Gentiles "being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." (Eph. 4:18.) If, then, the knowledge of God is eternal life, ignorance of God must be eternal death. He says in his word, "Acquaint yourself with God and be at peace;" but we have no acquaintance with him by nature, and therefore no peace, for "there is no peace to the wicked." There is a veil of ignorance and unbelief spread over our heart (2 Cor. 3:15); and besides this, Satan, the god of this world, blinds our mind and hardens our conscience, so that we neither see the light nor want to see it, for we have an inward consciousness that our deeds are evil. We may indeed by the natural light of conscience and by a notional religion know God in some small measure as a just and holy Lord, whose displeasure we fear; but we cannot know him as a God of mercy, goodness, and truth, for as such he has not been revealed to our soul, nor have we thus beheld his glory

in the face of Jesus Christ.

3. But consider a little more closely the force of the word "alienated." There is an alienation, as the apostle speaks, in a passage which I have already quoted, from the LIFE of God. When the Lord begins a work of grace upon our heart, he makes us partakers of a new, a spiritual, and eternal life. This life is in Jesus as a covenant head, for he is the head of his body, the Church; and at regeneration it is communicated out of his fullness to the various members of his mystical body, whereby, as made partakers of his grace, they then for the first time live unto him, live upon him, and live by him. This life, as being a divine gift and work, the apostle calls "the life of God," not meaning thereby the eternal, essential life of God which he ever lives in himself as the self-existent Jehovah, but the life of grace communicated by him and from him to his people.

Now in our state of nature, we are alienated from this life of God; that is, we are strangers to a life of faith in the Son of God. The life which we had in Adam we have lost, being, as the Scripture declares, dead in trespasses and sins, and thus are unable to quicken our own souls. No, we are not only strangers to it, but alienated from it, as hating it and despising it when seen in others, being dimly conscious that there is such a thing, but filled with bitter enmity to, and proud contempt of it.

4. But look still a little further at the word "alienated." There is an alienation from the WILL of God, that is, his revealed will, for his secret will we know not. This will he has revealed in the Scriptures of truth, and ever and anon there flash forth rays of holiness from this revealed will which strike upon, though they do not enter into or influence the unregenerated heart. But in this light, sufficient to condemn if not sufficient to convince, we often see and feel the will of God to be opposed to our own. Yet, though we see the alienation of our heart from this will, we are determined to have our own way, cost us what it may. This, in fact, is rebellion of the deepest dye. There is, therefore, no submission to God's will in affliction; no desire to know it or to do it, however often the lips may vainly utter, "Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

B. But there is something worse besides; there is even a state worse than alienation. To live and die a stranger to God and godliness must ensure our destruction, for what mansion in heaven can we think is prepared for one who is alienated from the image, knowledge, life, and will of God? But there is even a more fearful, a more fatal condition than this. When Satan dropped the seed of sin into the human mind to take root there, he dropped a more poisonous ingredient wrapped up in it than alienation, and one which struck deeper root- ENMITY. That one word seems to measure the height of man's rebellion and the depth of man's fall; that he is, as our text declares, an enemy to God by wicked works. All man's sins, speaking comparatively, are but motes in the sun-beam compared with this giant sin of enmity against God. A man may be given up to fleshly indulgences; he may sin against his fellow creature; may rob, plunder, oppress, even kill his fellow man; but though such sins are justly condemned by the laws of God and man, yet, viewed in a spiritual light, what are they compared with the dreadful, the damnable sin of enmity against the great and glorious Majesty of heaven?

This is a sin that lives beyond the grave. Many sins, though not their consequences, die with man's body, because they are bodily sins. But this is a sin that goes into eternity with him, and flares up like a mighty volcano from the very depths of the bottomless pit. Yes, it is the very sin of devils, which therefore binds guilty man down with them in the same eternal chains, and consigns him to the same place of torment. The very thought is appalling, because known and felt by the guilty conscience to be true. O the unutterable enmity of the heart against the living God! What! that I, that you, in our state of nature should be enemies to God; that our carnal mind, which is, in fact, ourselves, for it is the whole of that fleshly

image of Adam with which we were born, should not only be the enemy of God, but enmity itself, which is far worse, more deep, desperate, and incurable, because an enemy may be reconciled, but enmity never! How utterly ruined, then, how wholly lost must that man's state and case be who lives and dies as he comes into the world unchanged, unrenewed, unregenerated!

If he were only a stranger to God, an alien from his image, knowledge, life, and will, he could not, it is true, rise up at death into the presence of God in heaven; for what could he or would he do there? God and he would be as much and indeed more strangers there than on earth, because then brought more immediately face to face. Heaven is happiness and holiness. But for whom? For those who can enjoy it. What happiness could there be, then, in heaven for one who is a total stranger to that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord? But, still less, how can enmity be admitted into the realms of eternal peace and love? Will God have enemies in the courts of bliss? Can his enemies sing the songs of praise in sweet unison with his friends? When pride entered heaven in the person of Satan, he and it were cast out together. How then can enmity enter therein? Could it gain admission, it would turn heaven itself into hell.

C. But to proceed a little further into the bosom of our text and into the opening up from it of this deep and dark mystery of enmity against God. Observe WHERE this enmity is and HOW it works. It is "in the mind." That is the worst part of it. If it were merely in the understanding, or if its seat were only in the body, it might haply be weeded out. You can take your hoe and spud out a weed in your garden, or even a stout thistle; but what can your hoe do with an oak that has struck its roots deep into the soil? If a finger is diseased, it may be cut off; but what are you to do with a gangrene of a vital organ, a diseased heart, or an ulcerous lung? So, if this enmity were a disease just in some corner of the mind, it might possibly be gotten out.

But when the whole mind is full of it, so that it is its very breath and blood, what can be done then to it? for the very power that should fight against it is itself infected; and it would be like a person in the last stage of consumption trying to cure one as far gone as himself. We come, then, to this conclusion, that nothing but the mighty power of God himself can ever turn this enemy into a friend. No, even the power of God himself is unable to destroy the enmity of the carnal mind, for we are assured by his own testimony that "it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom. 8:7.) It must die with our bodies, if indeed we are to rise on the resurrection morn, to see the Son of God as he is, and be conformed to his glorious image. Yes, let it lie and rot and forever perish in that grave in which our bones shall turn to dust, when the worm has fed sweetly upon them.

D. But look also at another expression of our text, "by wicked WORKS." We gather from these words the working and the manifestation of this enmity against God. It is not a dead thing in the heart, a mere quiet, passive feeling, which lies as still as a stone; but it manifests itself in "wicked works," in carrying out the purposes and intents of the carnal mind into downright and inevitable action. This you know is the height of rebellion. Thoughts and words, plots and schemes, may be rebellious, but actions are rebellion; and who that sees the wicked works daily perpetrated by the hands of man, or even remembers what he himself did in the days of his flesh, will not own that in this way the carnal mind most manifests its bitter enmity? If we loved God by nature we would do his will and keep his word. But as we despise his will and disobey his word, it is a plain proof that we neither love nor fear him, but really hate him.

But I will not dwell longer upon this gloomy subject, on this sad exhibition of human wickedness and misery, though it is needful we should know it for ourselves, that we should have a taste of this bitter cup

in our own most painful experience, that we may know the sweetness of the cup of salvation when presented to our lips by free and sovereign grace.

II. Our next point then is RECONCILIATION. How sweet the sound as it drops upon the listening ear of the awakened sinner, and is carried by the power of God into a believing heart! The first work of grace upon the soul is to convince us of our sins; and as the Lord the Spirit is pleased to convince us of sin, he opens up by degrees the secret chambers of imagery and shows us what strangers we are by nature to God and godliness, what enemies by wicked works, laying the guilt of this alienation and enmity upon the conscience.

But, together with this work of conviction in the application of the law to the conscience, there is kindled by the same divine power a secret yearning after God, a longing for mercy from him and reconciliation to him. It is a great mistake to think that in the first dealings of God with the soul nothing is felt but conviction of guilt. It may seem so to the convinced sinner, for his mind is too dark to read plainly the writing of God upon his conscience; but it is not all doubt, fear, and bondage. In most cases, for I do not deny that there may be exceptions, the Lord is pleased from time to time to soften and melt the heart, to excite yearnings after reconciliation, longings to be brought out of that state of carnality and death in which the law finds us. The Spirit of God produces this yearning after pardon and peace by being poured out upon the soul as a Spirit of grace and of supplication. "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them." (Jer. 31:9.)

So it was with the tax-collector in the temple, with the prodigal in the parable, with the thief upon the cross. Conviction of sin and prayer for mercy in their cases went hand in hand. Reconciliation, then, becomes a very sweet sound to a heart that can, as thus taught and led by God, lay hold of any way or plan whereby it may come into a state of friendship with God. The mind may be very dark, unbelief may much prevail, the conscience be full of guilt, great doubt and fear may possess the soul, causing the whole inward work of the Spirit to be enveloped in thick obscurity. Yet through all this thick darkness rays of divine light will, from time to time, beam upon the mind, either under the preaching of the Gospel, or in reading the Scriptures, or by some gentle movements of the Spirit upon the heart in secret prayer. But all these internal sensations are "cords of love and bands of a man" whereby the Lord is drawing the soul into friendship with himself; for his own words are, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you." (Jer. 31:3.) This leads us to consider more at length what reconciliation is as revealed in the word of truth and in a believing heart.

A. Reconciliation was, in its first rise and origin, a free, voluntary, spontaneous act upon the part of God. He never consulted the mind of man or angel upon the matter, or left it in the slightest degree to hang or hinge upon the will of either. He devised no plan in which he permitted the 'creature' to share the wisdom of the plan with himself. It was planned in eternity by himself and by himself alone in his Trinity of Persons yet Unity of Essence; and when so planned was ordered in the everlasting covenant, which, as specially fixed between the Father and the Son, is called in Scripture "the counsel of peace between them both." (Zech. 6:13.) In heaven the plan was laid, there the eternal decree fixed, there the mode of its execution unalterably determined. And O, what a plan it was! It was nothing less than that God's dear and only-begotten Son should come into this world, take our nature into union with his own divine Person and Godhead, and in that nature, which by this intimate union personally became his own, to suffer, bleed, and die in our room and stead.

But you may say, "What need was there for all this? Could not God have forgiven man without this sacrifice? Was it needful his own Son should die that man might be saved?" What did our Lord say to his Father in the garden? "O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me- nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." It was the will of God that his Son should take the cup of sorrow and of death, and drink it to the very dregs. Do you think that the prayer of Christ in his agony would not have moved the Father to contrive some other way, if any other way had been possible? No! there was, there could be, no other way, for, as Deer truly speaks,

"Sin to pardon without blood,

Never in His nature stood."

As far, then, as we are enlightened from the Scriptures of truth to see into the mind of God, there was no possibility of man being saved without a full and adequate ransom price being paid, without the law being perfectly obeyed, without atoning blood being shed, and a perfect satisfaction rendered. But all this could only be done by the Son of God being made flesh and suffering for our sake. We must be content with believing this, for our reason cannot penetrate into this heavenly mystery; and, when we are led into it by the teaching and testimony of the Blessed Spirit, we shall not only be content with believing it, but thankfully receive what God so freely gives.

B. Looking, however, a little more closely into this heavenly truth as revealed in the Scriptures, we may draw a distinction between reconciliation as effected by the blood of Christ, and reconciliation as made known by a divine power to the heart. These are two distinct things, though closely connected; and, in fact, the latter flows wholly out of the former. Thus, Christ by his death upon the cross reconciled the PERSONS of his people unto God, for he suffered in their stead that punishment which was due to their transgressions. So speaks the apostle, "And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross." (Eph. 2:16.) So again, "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10); and again, "And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself" (Col. 1:20); once more, "And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 5:18.) I quote these texts, as I wish to impress it deeply upon your minds that reconciliation to God, that is of our persons, is wholly through the atoning blood of the Lamb.

But there is another reconciliation, not of our persons, but our hearts, of which the apostle speaks (2 Cor. 5:20), "We beg you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God." He cannot mean there the reconciliation of their persons, for that he tells us was already done when God reconciled us to himself by the blood of the cross; but he means that inward reconciliation of heart and affection which is produced by the application of atoning blood to the conscience; as we find him elsewhere expressing himself, "By whom we have now received (that is, inwardly and experimentally received) the atonement;" as we read in the margin, which is the right translation, "the reconciliation." (Rom. 5:11.) These two things are to be carefully distinguished, for there is no true peace of conscience as long as we confound them.

C. But as I have shown you the reconciliation of our persons, I will endeavor now to show you the reconciliation of our HEART and AFFECTIONS.

1. The first step toward it is the reconciling of the CONSCIENCE. We know, painfully know, what a guilty conscience is. This guilty conscience, the Scripture calls "an evil conscience" (Heb. 10:22), not because it is evil in itself, but because it testifies of evil to us. Now until this conscience is purged, or purified, by the blood of Christ, there is no reconciliation of the heart unto God. The apostle, therefore, says, "How much

more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." (Heb. 9:14.) We cannot, therefore, "draw near unto God with a true heart, in full assurance of faith," until our heart is "sprinkled from an evil conscience." (Heb. 10:22.) But when by the blood of sprinkling, which speaks better things than the blood of Abel, the conscience is thus purged from guilt, filth, and dead works; when the guilt of sin is removed and pardon proclaimed, then the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, and his mercy revealed to the soul. This guilty conscience is now reconciled, for there is no longer law, wrath, and terror to produce enmity and division.

2. But next comes the reconciliation of the HEART and AFFECTIONS. "My son, give me your heart." (Prov. 23:26.) "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise." (Psalm. 57:7.) "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2.) But our heart and affections by nature are alienated from the love of God, ever wandering after strangers, going out after idols, and seeking their gratification in earthly objects. These affections, then, of ours need to be reconciled, that is, brought home, gathered up into the bosom of the Lord, made to flow in sweet harmony with the love of God, so that they may be fixed where Jesus sits at his right hand. But this reconciliation of the affections only flows into the soul with the love of God shed abroad in the heart. Love begets love. "We love him because he first loved us." "The love of Christ constrains us." Thus, when the Lord is pleased to drop a sense of his goodness, love, and mercy into the soul, it constrains us to love him with a pure heart fervently. Without some measure of this heavenly love all religion is but a task and a burden, the wearisome service of a slave, not the loving obedience of a child. But "love is of God, and every one that loves is born of God and knows God. He that loves not, knows not God, for God is love." (1 John 4:7, 8.) Blessed is he then who can say, "We have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him." (1 John 4:16.)

3. But as a necessary consequence of this, there will be next the reconciliation of our WILL of that powerful principle in the mind which Bunyan well calls "Lord Will-be-will," for, whether lord or lady, it is the ruling master or mistress, the grand director or directress of every other faculty; for it is, to use another figure, the motive-power of both soul and body. But in a state of nature, this will, with all its strength and power, with all the train that it drags submissively along, is directly opposed to the will of God. What God hates, it loves; what God loves, it hates. And as this will influences our words and actions, the things which God has forbidden us both to say and do, we both speak and practice. In this state, therefore, our will and God's will are at thorough variance. But what reconciliation can there be unto God inwardly, feelingly, experimentally, as long as our will is opposed to his? In order to be one they must be brought together, to harmonize mutually with each other; and as our will is by nature evil, God cannot and will not change his good into our bad. Therefore our will is to melt into God's will, otherwise we are not one with God nor fully reconciled to him.

But as I cannot do this myself, I need a power to be put forth in my soul to reconcile my will to the will of God, which is and only can be done by the grace of the Spirit showing me what God's will is and constraining me by every godly motive to submit to it. But his will may be in many cases very contrary to my will. The road I may have to travel may be a thorny road, a path of tribulation, temptation, and deep affliction; and things may occur continually which may very much fret and gall my natural disposition, sadly mortify my pride, cut my flesh, and wound my feelings. How, then, under these painful circumstances, my carnal mind still remaining as it was full of enmity and rebellion, is my will to submit to God's will? By the power of his all-sufficient and all-powerful grace melting my will into submission to his!

Is this an impossibility? It often seems so. But did not the Lord say to his apostle, "My grace is sufficient for you." (2 Cor. 12:9.) And is not that grace sufficient for us? Surely it is, if the Lord puts it forth. There is then a reconciling of our will even to afflictions, troubles, and the thorny path of tribulation in which the Lord is pleased to lead his saints. But when their will is thus reconciled to the will of God, then they see that the way in which he is leading them is a right way, though a rugged way, for it is bringing them to that "city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

I have enlarged upon these points to show you more plainly that reconciliation has two very different aspects, which we must keep carefully separated, or we shall get into sad confusion, for we shall confound together the "work of Christ upon the cross" with the "work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart." There is, then, a reconciliation of our persons by the blood of the Lamb, and a reconciliation of our conscience, heart, and will by the inward operations of the Spirit of God, specially as revealing Christ, making him precious, and constraining us, by every godly constraint, to move, walk, and act in the fear and love of God.

It is of the reconciliation of our persons chiefly that the apostle speaks in our text. This is and ever must be the foundation of the other; for it was only because Christ has reconciled us unto God in the body of his flesh, by taking our nature into union with his own divine Person, offering that pure and sacred humanity upon the cross, and then dying as a sacrifice to God's offended justice, that any discovery of mercy can flow into the heart, any peace be experienced in the conscience, or any love be revealed with power to the soul.

But do observe in connection with this how the cross of Christ, the blood of the Lamb, opens a way for the vilest sinner to approach unto God. None of his sins, if he is enabled to believe in the name of God's only-begotten Son, shall be brought against him; they are all cast behind God's back, all washed away in the fountain of atoning blood, all covered by the robe of Immanuel's righteousness. "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Rom. 8:1.) But as we feel our lost, undone condition, and get a view by faith, of Christ's blood and righteousness, we want to enjoy the mercy, to live under the sweet manifestations of the grace, and to have our souls brought under the operation of the Spirit, revealing those things with a divine power and sealing them upon the heart with a liberating, saving, and sanctifying influence. Thus reconciliation by the blood of the Lamb is not an unfruitful doctrine or dry speculation, is not a mere article of a sound creed that we may receive upon the testimony of Scripture, but is a truth pregnant with every grace, a tree loaded with gospel fruit, a fountain of all inward and outward holiness.

The more, therefore, that we know of being reconciled to God by Jesus Christ and brought near by the blood of the Lamb; the deeper insight we have into the mystery of the cross, the more freedom of access to God shall we experience and the more shall we rejoice in the hope of his glory. If then a man looks upon these things as a mere speculation, it plainly shows he is not under the teaching of the Spirit. Were the Spirit to bring the blood of the cross into his conscience and the love of God into his soul, he would feel the blessedness of these heavenly truths, and find them a most gracious and blessed fountain of life and peace in his inmost spirit.

III. Now comes our next point, which is PRESENTATION; "to present you holy." We must all one day stand before the judgment bar of God. But how shall we stand before that bar? In our own righteousness or in Christ's righteousness? You know what was the end of that guest who was found at the wedding feast without the wedding garment on. You remember the words which dropped from the master of the

feast- "Bind him hand and foot and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness- there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Such will be the sentence of the master of the house against all who present themselves before God without the wedding garment. But our blessed Lord, it is said in our text, presents his people "holy and unblameable and unproveable in the sight of God."

A. If we examine a little more closely this divine mystery of presentation, we may say that on three different occasions the Lord thus presents his people before God.

1. When his people first appeared in him as the chosen members of his mystical body, there was a presentation of the church before the eyes of God as she would shine forth in all her beauty and luster in her future glorified condition. Thus was she lovely in his loveliness (Ezek. 16:14); beautiful in his beauty ("Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us," Psalm. 90:17); holy in his holiness ("For both he that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of one," Heb. 2:11); and perfect in his perfections ("That they may be made perfect in one.")

2. Again, when he died upon the cross, rose from the dead, went up on high, and sat on the right hand of the Father as her Head, Representative, and Surety in the courts of bliss, then in a mystical sense the ascended Savior presented his Church before the eyes of his heavenly Father, as washed from all her pollution in the fountain of his precious blood, and justified by the imputation of his perfect obedience. Upon this presentation the Scripture especially dwells as a truth so blessedly adapted to our present state as feeling ourselves defiled by sin. Yes even now the saints can sometimes sing, "Unto him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his blood." (Rev. 1:5.) So also the saints are said to have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev. 7:14.) Thus, in a mystical sense, our blessed Lord presented his people when he went up on high before the eyes of the Father as so washed in his blood, and clothed in his righteousness, that they appeared in him without spot or blemish.

3. And then will come that crowning transaction in the great day, when he will present them before the throne of his Father in all the beauties of holiness, not only as redeemed by his blood but as sanctified by his Spirit, glorious in soul as perfectly holy, and glorious in body as conformed to his glorified image. Then will he be able to say to his heavenly Father as he thus presents them in glory, "Behold, I and the children which you have given me."

B. But as our text speaks of presentation as following upon reconciliation, it is doubtless this last presentation that the apostle means, when he says "to present you holy, and unblameable, and unproveable in his sight." He seems also in it to direct our thoughts to two different ways in which the people of God are finally to be presented before the throne of the Most High. The first seems to regard their external, the other their internal state.

1. Their EXTERNAL state. First, then, they are to be presented "unblameable and unproveable." I understand by these words their perfect justification before the throne of God in the great day. For just consider what must be the condition of a man in body and soul for the eye of God to see no fault in him, when in his sight the very heavens are not clean and he charges his angels with folly? What must that man be, or in what state must he stand, to be absolutely without blame before the eyes of infinite Purity? Surely no man can have the presumption to think he can stand before God thus without blame in his own obedience. Have not you, the very darkest and most ignorant among you, sufficient light of conviction in your own conscience to tell you this, so that even you who are without divine teaching are sufficiently convinced of sin to oblige you to flee to some general idea of God's mercy to give you hope?

How, then, can any man who has the light of life in his bosom think for a moment he can stand before the throne of an all-seeing God, unblameable, unreprieveable, if he has to stand there in his own righteousness? No! no man can ever stand the scrutiny of a just and holy God if his own good works are his only acceptance. It is only as washed from all our sins in the blood of the Lamb, only as clothed in his spotless righteousness, that we can stand before the throne, as John says, "without fault." (Rev. 14:5.) The holiest man upon earth must sink under the wrath of God if he has no other title than the obedience of his own hands.

2. Their INTERNAL state. But the apostle uses the expression "holy," which I understand, not merely in the sense of being sanctified by virtue of union with Christ, as "of God made unto us sanctification," but also of that inward holiness which is wrought in the heart by the grace of the Spirit. The apostle bids us in this very chapter "give thanks unto the Father who has made us fit for the inheritance of the saints in light." Thus we see, that there is not only an external beauty in which the church stands as adorned with the wedding robe of Christ's righteousness, but an internal beauty as sanctified by his Spirit. Both of those are expressed in the words of the Psalm, "The king's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold." (Psalm 45:13.) The clothing of wrought gold is Christ's righteousness; the glory within is her perfect sanctification of the Spirit. These are "the beauties of holiness" in which she will appear. (Psalm 110:3.)

Thus we find, also, the apostle bringing together justification and sanctification, "But you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11.) Without this inward holiness there is no entrance into the courts of bliss, for without it there is no fitness for them. Can a bird live in the water or a fish in the air? The air is the element of the bird, the water the element of the fish; but each dies outside of its own element. So an unrenewed, unregenerated, unsanctified sinner could not live in the presence of God. The very brightness and splendor, the infinite purity and unspeakable majesty of the God of heaven would kill him; would strike him down to hell as it were with a thousand thunderbolts!

But the question may occur even to one who truly fears God, "Am I fit for heaven? I do not feel to be so; I am not holy, but corrupt and vile." Now we must bear in mind that in this present life our holiness is imperfect; it is not imperfect as regards its nature, but its development. Immediately when the Holy Spirit plants divine life in the soul it is fit for heaven, for he communicates in that divine operation a seed of perfect holiness. Was it not so with the thief upon the cross? On that very day when the Holy Spirit quickened his soul he was with Christ in paradise; as perfectly holy in spirit as ever he will be.

We may compare this seed of holiness, perhaps, to a seed in the husk. The seed germinates and expands, yet it is still surrounded by the husk. But when the husk falls off by the body dropping into the grave, then that seed of holiness which the blessed Spirit has implanted will expand all over the soul, pervading, and, so to speak, fully sanctifying every faculty. And finally, when the body is raised up from the grave in glory in the resurrection morn, both soul and body will be perfectly holy, as being both fully conformed to the glorious humanity of the Lord from heaven. Then will come the glorious presentation of the saints of God before the Father's throne without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

IV. Now to our last point, which is CONTINUANCE, or, as I before named it, Continuation- "If you continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which you have heard."

A. How personal is the appeal- how direct the challenge! "If YOU continue." All religion must be personal. You may have faith- your faith won't save me. I may have faith- my faith won't save you. I must live for myself; I must die for myself. My religion, to save my soul, must be one wrought in my heart by the power of God. Your religion, if it is to save your soul, must be wrought in your soul by the same divine power. Here, then, is the proof- Continuance, abiding. "He that endures to the end," and he only, "shall be saved." If you have the faith of God's elect, if it be but as a grain of mustard seed, you are saved already in the Lord Jesus Christ with an everlasting salvation. But if you depart from your profession, give up your religion, go into the world, fall into error, abandon the things you professed to love, and return like the dog to your vomit again, and, like the pig that was washed, to your wallowing in the mire, what will it prove? That a saint of God may fall away and perish? No! but that you are not a saint; that you really never received the truth in the love of it by the teaching and testimony of the blessed Spirit; that your faith is not the faith of God's elect, but a mere natural persuasion of your mind, a mere doctrinal speculation. For if were you possessed of a true and living faith, "the end" of it would be, as Peter declares, "the salvation of your soul." (1 Peter 1:9.)

This is the reason, then, why the Scripture lays such stress upon enduring and continuing, not as expressing any doubt whether the true saint of God will persevere to the end, but to show that where there is not this continuance, there the faith is not the gift or work of God, but a mere 'natural belief' of the word of truth, without any application of it with power to the heart. To continue, then, in the faith, and that faith such as I have described as the gift and work of God, is an evidence of it being real.

But sometimes for the past, we may take hope for the future. It may be many years since the Lord first called you by his grace. What has enabled you to continue up to this day? How has your faith been preserved amid so many temptations and trials, so much internal and external opposition, so many fightings without, so many fears within? You well know that it is not by your own exertions, your own striving, but by the pure grace of God that you still stand. "Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day" (Acts 26:22), was Paul's language, and will be the language of all who have his faith and his continuance.

B. But observe also that the apostle speaks of their being "grounded and settled," that is, in the faith which they not only professed but possessed.

The expression "GROUNDED" signifies being firmly built upon the foundation. God has laid a foundation in Zion, even the Person of his own dear Son. To be "grounded," then, is to be firmly built upon this foundation; not only to have a standing upon it but a strong standing.

The word "SETTLED" seems to signify such a settling down upon the foundation as never to be moved off it. You know that a building, say a bridge, must settle before we have any security that it will stand. When the scaffolding of the arch is taken away, it is an anxious time with the architect to ascertain whether the bridge will settle well, and how much.

So in grace- people make a profession, seem to run well, are full of zeal, ardor, and earnestness. But let us wait and see whether they will stand against persecution, temptation, the strength of sin, the corruptions of their heart, and the wiles of the adversary. Sooner or later all will fall into ruin- except those whom the Lord keeps by his mighty power through faith unto salvation. The blessedness, then, of having a living faith is, that the Lord will surely carry on the work he has begun. But how needful it is to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith, and whether by the continued operations of the Holy Spirit we are

well grounded and settled upon the Rock of Ages!

C. But the apostle adds another evidence of our being among the number of those whom the Lord will present holy, and unblameable, and unreprouable in God's sight, which is "not to be moved away from the hope of the gospel which they have heard." The gospel, when it becomes the power of God unto salvation to a believing heart, raises up what the Scripture calls "a good hope through grace."

You have heard the gospel for many years from my lips. It is my desire to preach the gospel, and nothing but the gospel, and, if it be the will of God, with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, that it may be attended with a divine power to your soul. With God's help and blessing, may I never keep back part of the price, but preach the gospel, the whole gospel, and nothing but the gospel, whether you will hear or forbear.

But when you have received the gospel as a message from God, it has been a sweet sound in your heart, for it has come, not as the word of man, but as the word of God, "in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance." You have seen and felt its freeness, its sweetness, its blessedness, its power, for it has at times broken your heart, melted down your soul, softened your spirit. Pardon and peace, light, life, liberty, and love have come with it; and thus as you embraced and felt the power of the gospel in your soul, it enabled you to cast anchor within the veil.

Now if ever you felt this power in your heart, you must never "be moved away from the hope of the gospel;" that is, from the hope in your soul which the power of the gospel has thus raised up. Whatever temptations then assail you, whatever doubts or fears trouble you, never, never give up your hope. By the mighty power of God, in spite of every foe and every fear, you must still believe against unbelief, still hope against despair, still love in spite of coldness, darkness, and death. But you say, "I cannot do this nor any one of them, for I am a poor, helpless creature." So are we all; but Christ's strength is made perfect in weakness. "As your day is so shall your strength be." For remember this, that if you do not "continue in the faith grounded and settled, but are moved away from the hope of the gospel which you have heard," it will prove that you never received it in power.

But so far as you do thus continue, it affords you a blessed evidence that you, who were once alienated, are now reconciled to God. And as you are enabled to believe this, and to feel the comfort of it, it will strengthen you to look forward to that blessed day when Christ will present you to his heavenly Father, not as now, a poor, feeble, wretched sinner, but arrayed in his perfect righteousness, with a body, not like your present, enfeebled by sickness, impaired by age, and encompassed by infirmity, but raised up by the power of God and perfectly conformed to the image of the glorified humanity of his dear Son.

Now if these things are old they must continue to be so, for I have no new doctrines to bring forward; if they are old, the Lord can soon make them new by applying them with new power to your soul, for he sends forth his Spirit, and renews the face of the earth. I need for my own salvation and consolation no new doctrines, but I do want to feel their power more, and live day by day more and more under their influence. And as I hope to live, so I hope to die by these doctrines. I shall desire nothing else upon a deathbed but a sweet experience of God's love, mercy, and truth to support me when my eye strings break, and heart and flesh fail. Then to find the Lord the strength of my heart here, and my blessed portion hereafter will make me willing to yield up to him my departing spirit. I commend this gospel, then, to you with all my heart. You cannot say that you have not heard it from my lips. The Lord bless it to your soul, and seal it with his own heavenly power upon your conscience.

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