

Be Ye Reconciled to God

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2 Corinthians 5, and I shall read verses 18-21.

"But all things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word [or message] of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God. Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Recent events in the life of our own congregation and within the orbit of our awareness of what God has done in the lives of some of our own members and some of our friends in our sister churches have had a very sobering influence upon many of us. For example, it's a sobering thing for me to realize that I stand in the very pulpit where a few months ago a man of God stood preaching to us with life and vigor and with the power of the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, a man in his early forties who now lies on a hospital bed in the Albany Medical Center with his body riddled with cancer, and with the doctors having said that his cancer is incurable. We heard Wednesday night of a 37-year-old servant of Christ, possibly planning to visit us in the spring during an extended vacation, a sabbatical, that he might spend some concentrated period of study in the academy. And just a few weeks ago, with nagging headaches and a feeling of general weakness, he checked himself into the hospital. And by Saturday of that week, he was told that he had a massive brain tumor. And by Monday of the next week, he was in his grave, leaving behind him a grieving wife and four precious children. As we meet here, unless something has transpired in a couple of hours to change the facts, Pastor Barker is by the bedside of his own earthly father, who in his own words, said to his son last night, "The end is near, isn't it?" And oxygen has been brought to help make his breathing easier as he totters on the very brink of eternity. These realities, dear people, have had a very sobering affect upon all of us. They've had a sobering affect upon me.

As I put my feet on the floor this morning and asked myself the question, were my feet still in the bed at the end of relatively immobile legs through the paralysis brought on by the secondary effects of the tumors; if I were lying on that hospital bed as Dean Allen is this morning, and I were to ask myself, looking back upon my years of ministry, what questions would press in upon my own conscience? And I'm confident that the questions that would press in upon me would be such as these: Did I make the issues of life and death plain enough each time I preached? Did I in the course of seeking to have a balanced ministry to edify the people of God frequently enough pause in the course of building up the saints to concentrate all of my energies and powers upon addressing the central issues of life and death in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? I asked myself that if I were that 37-year-old man, having been told I

had a massive tumor and had a few moments of reflection before I passed out of this world, what would I think about the extent to which I had set before my regular hearers the great issues of life and death and salvation through Jesus Christ? And as I reflected upon what it is that a son in his fifties would say to his aging and dying father who's about to breathe his last, what would I wish I had been able to say with clarity when his mind was more clear, when he was more vigorous in health?

What are the concerns when we put everything into focus against the backdrop of the realities of death and of the age to come? What are the issues that really count? And while my mind was reflecting on those matters and my spirit feeling the pressure of them, and I sought to prepare for this morning, I trust, in answer to your prayers and mine, that my mind was directed to the passage that I've read in your hearing, a passage that I have often reflected upon over the years, a passage, portions of which I have quoted probably hundreds of times, but a passage that I've never attempted to open up in the hearing of gathered people of God in the place. And I want to do that this morning with the pressure of these other providential matters exerting, I trust, upon us something of an intensified awareness of the brevity of life, the uncertainty of life, the certainty of death and judgment and heaven and hell. And as we look at our passage, I want you to trace out with me three very vital, three very crucial lines of thought that are contained in the passage.

The first is, I want you to note with me the condition of the world assumed in our text. In this passage read in your hearing, the world is assumed to be in a very specific condition by nature. And I want you to consider with me the essence of that condition from our passage and then the cause that condition. What condition is the world in according to this passage? Well, you will notice that there is a certain word that occurs again and again in the passage. Listen as I highlight it in the manner of my reading:

"But all things are of God, who *reconciled* us to Himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of *reconciliation*; to wit, that God was in Christ *reconciling* the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of *reconciliation*. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye *reconciled* to God."

Do you see the dominance of the word "reconciliation, reconciled"? And seeing that word, we are led immediately to understand that Paul is assuming that the world is in a certain condition. When something is to be reconciled, it assumes that it is in a condition of alienation. The opposite of reconciliation is alienation. It is the reality of alienation which necessitates the intrusion of reconciliation.

Let me try to illustrate it. Try to imagine a young couple who in the providence of God met one another in this congregation. They are both real, serious, earnest Christians. They have been praying for a number of years that God would guide them with reference to a life's partner. And knowing something of Biblical standards absorbed from the Scriptures as to what they are looking for in a mate, they have very carefully and prayerfully established a friendship. They have gotten to know one another; they have come to the conviction that there is a solid basis for the building of a stable and God-honoring relationship. Along the way, they sought counsel from wiser, more knowledgeable people. They have sought to regulate that relationship in the pacing of the level at which they have disclosed their growing affection and esteem and love

for one another. And then the moment of truth has come. When confident of the will of God according to the Scriptures and within the quality control of having sought wise counsel, the evening comes when he's going to pop the question and put a ring on her finger. And we happen to be at the restaurant where he plans to let her know his intentions and seek her hand in marriage. And as they sit there at the table looking back into the retina of each other's eyes, and he asks the question, and a holy blush comes over her cheek. And she restrains herself from jumping across the table, saying, "Of course I will, you dummy. What do you think I've been doing all these months?" But she very modestly says, "I will." And he places the ring on her finger and reaches across discreetly in the restaurant off in a quiet corner and holds her hand. And pools of love are filled up in his own eyes and hers. Can you imagine us sitting there watching all of this and then me nudging you and saying, "You know, I think that couple has a serious problem. I want to go over and offer to reconcile them." You'd look at me and say, "I think maybe I need to take you to the nearest hospital and to the psychiatric ward. What in the world are you talking about? Going over and offering to reconcile that couple? I mean if eyeballs were glued, they'd be glued." It's evident that their hearts are toward one another. Their affections are being poured out to one another. The concept of reconciliation is absolutely foreign to them.

But suppose we looked over the other side of the restaurant, and there's a couple who know nothing of the kind of harmony that's built either upon God's common grace or His special grace, true love that seeks the good of one another. And in desperation to try to patch up a very tortured, fractured, hate-filled marriage, they've got a baby sitter and they're going out to eat. And what happens? Well, no sooner do they sit down when they begin to spat. And the water has been brought and then the menu has been brought, and you sense that there's a growing level of animosity. And you can even overhear the crackling of some of the sharp words. And you see the icy daggers in their looking at one another and the cynicism written all over them. And then if I were to say, "You know, I really think that couple needs some help. I'm going to make an effort to go over and reconcile them," you'd say, "Well, I don't know if they'd appreciate it, but if you're fool enough to try it, go ahead." But you see, though you might question my judgment in trying to reconcile them, you would see in that setting that reconciliation is exactly what they needed. Why? Because there was hostility; there was alienation. Though they were sitting three feet away from each other, they may have well been on different planets. They are alienated in affection and love and esteem and sensitivity.

So when the word "reconcile" comes into our vocabulary, it is assumed that there is a condition of hostility, a condition of distance, of separation, of ill will. And in this passage, when the Apostle says that God has reconciled us, has given to us the ministry of reconciliation, that God in Christ beseeches us to be reconciled to God, all of that is nonsense unless what is assumed in the use of that term is a reality. And what is assumed is that God and man are not holding hands by nature, are not looking into each other's eyes with pools of love and good will. But there is separation, alienation, hostility between God and man and between man and God.

And if that is the essence of the condition assumed--and it is--then what is the cause of that condition? Well, our text tells us by using two words. Notice them. Two words are found in our passage. We read in verse 19, "...that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses." Reconciliation is introduced in the context of trespasses. And again at the end of verse 20: "We

beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God. Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." The essence of the condition assumed in our text is alienation. And what is the cause of that condition assumed in the text? It is trespasses and sin. It is the ugly reality of human sin and trespasses which has caused the alienation. And in this passage, the primary emphasis is on the alienation which sin has caused between God and man, especially the alienation of God Himself with respect to man.

When man sinned and broke covenant with God, it is true that man is alienated in his own heart towards God. But it is more fundamentally true that God is alienated to the sinner. It was God who banished Adam and Eve from Eden. They did not run out of Eden. He banished them from the place of His special presence because of their sin. And it is the reality of that which the Word of God designates trespasses, those steps that are not planted in the way of God, and sins, those missings of the marks of God's standard of righteousness that originally constituted our first parents sinners. And we falling in Adam are constituted without exception as sinners. We are conceived in sin, brought forth in sin. And the Scripture says, according to Ephesians 2, that through our trespasses and our sins, we are brought into a state of spiritual death as well as that of alienation from God.

Now if this is not the condition of the world, a condition of alienation, a condition caused by trespasses and sins, then the work of Jesus Christ is all a cruel joke. Now I want you to feel the logic of that. According to this passage, that which Christ did, He did to reconcile us to God. But if there is no real alienation; if there is no real trespasses and sins which causes God to have a controversy with us, then Jesus did all that He did for nothing. If man is inherently good; if man can pull himself up by his own bootstraps, then I say it makes mockery of the work of Jesus Christ. For as the Apostle concentrates upon the work of Christ in terms of reconciliation, he is assuming that dark, dismal, foreboding backdrop of the Biblical doctrine of the universality of human sin, the tragedy of human sin, that it has cut man off from God and has God in righteousness and justice to turn away from man. There is alienation between God the creator and man the creature.

Now I ask you sitting here this morning, has that truth ever descended out of the realm of general religious talk and theological propositions and come home with burning focus within your own breast? Have you personally, individually, consciously come to the acknowledgement that you through your trespasses and sins by nature are alienated from the Living God? Has that ever become a felt, believed, spiritual truth to you? If not, I'm not surprised you think so little of the death of Christ. If not, I'm not surprised you treat so lightly the Son of God in His person and in His work. For He Himself said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners. They that are healthy have no need of a doctor, but they that are sick."

And don't sit there in your vaunted pride that you've been able to escape joining the ranks of the rest of us groveling sinners who acknowledge that we are in Adam sinners, conceived in sin, born in sin, go astray from the womb speaking lies. Don't pride yourself that when people pray and say, "O God, have mercy upon us for our sins. Cleanse us from our remaining uncleanness, our pride, our lust, our envy, and our greed." Don't pride yourself that you put yourself outside of the scope of such prayers. You're living in the never, never land of self-deception; that is the very murder of your soul if you go on in that land. For in the day of judgment, God will convince you in the presence of the whole assembled universe that you were part of

the world alienated from Him. Convinced of it, you must be either now while the door of mercy is open, or then when that door is shut. But convinced of your alienation from God, you will be. And for those who sink into hell, in once sense, hell is God's eternal affirmation of His alienation from sinners, for He says, "Depart from Me." You see how personal it is. "You wanted to live without Me. You wanted to die without Me. Now go out into hell without Me. Depart from Me into eternal fire."

So the condition of the world assumed in our text in its essence is alienation; in its cause according to our text, trespasses and sins. But now notice in the second place (and this is Gospel), the provision for the world as described in our text. We've seen the condition of the world assumed in our text, but now what is the provision made for the world as described in our text? Notice first of all its author and then its essence. Whatever that provision is, Paul is careful to draw all of our attention to its author. See the emphasis in verse 18: "But all things are of God, who reconciled us." Verse 19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world." Verse 20: "We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us...be ye reconciled to God." Do you see who the author of this provision is? He reconciled, He gave, He reconciled; He committed. It is God who entreats. And in this constant allusion to God, Paul is setting before us this fundamental Biblical truth, that in the issue of rescuing man from his native condition (alienated from God; held in the grip and under the condemnation of trespasses and sins), it is God who is the author of the provision that is made. There is an emphasis here upon the fact that it is God Himself and God alone who has both taken the initiative and made the provision for this world as it is set forth in our text.

And what's the essence of that provision that He made? Two things--look at them. They're repeated in verses 18 and 19. "But all things are of God." And what did He do to remedy this condition? Two things: "...who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation." He reconciled; He gave. Verse 19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word [or message] of reconciliation." You see the parallel in verse 18? He reconciled; He gave. Reconciling, He committed. So the two things that constitute the essence of God's provision are reconciliation based on the cross of Christ and the institution of the ministry and word of reconciliation on behalf of Christ. And that's what God has done to effect a remedy for our state of alienation. Let's look at them for a few moments each.

First of all, reconciliation based on the cross of Christ. And here the emphasis is so clear that one can miss it only if he is determined to do it. What is God's remedy for alienated sinners? It is a reconciliation through Christ. The emphasis is clear that that reconciliation has no substance in reality apart from what is bound up in the words "through Christ." Verse 19: "God was in Christ reconciling." What is "through Christ" in verse 18 is "in Christ" in verse 19. And then in verse 21: "Him who knew no sin [a direct reference to Christ] He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." And here is a direct reference to that awesome reality expounded in a text like Galatians 3:13.

What does it mean that the One who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf? It does not mean He was made to embody the defilement of our sin, to be made personally, individually guilty with our sin. But it means that by imputation, putting to His account and record our sin, God dealt with Him as the greatest sinner that ever

existed under His heaven. And that's why Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us." He is constituted in the court of heaven as the One who is legally charged with all the punishment due to the sins of every man, woman, boy, or girl in all ages who will ever come to trust in Him and form part of that company whom no man can number out of every kindred, tribe, tongue, people, and nation who will worship God and the Lamb forever and ever.

Christ takes our place. And in taking that place, God is not playing games with our sins and our trespasses. He's not blinking at them. He is not simply sweeping them under the rug of general benevolence and kindness and goodwill. He is heaping up all of the legal demands for justice which our sins provoked. And He's charging all of that to His Son. And He is venting in holy, pure, restrained but righteous anger all that our sins deserved. He is being made sin for us in His death upon the cross. And our reconciliation to God is based on the cross of Christ. It is reconciliation through Christ. It is reconciling the world to Himself in Christ. How? Not in some nebulous way that Jesus Christ is made the great figurehead by God. And if you in some way or another like Him and are drawn to Him and lean upon Him, all will turn out right. No my friend! It is Christ hanging upon a Roman cross soaked in His own blood with His contused face dripping with that blood mingled with spit and the heaven shrouded in blackness. And the Father pouring out the vials of His wrath, making Him sin for us until it rings from His holy soul the cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!" That's what God was doing through Christ to reconcile sinners to Himself. That's what He was doing in Christ making reconciliation. That's what it means, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." God's provision for a world of sinners in its essence is reconciliation based upon the cross of Christ.

But then the second thing God did--and it's part of His provision. Remember, we saw it in both verses. The God who reconciled also gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation. Verse 19: "...that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation." And as surely as God is the author of all that Christ does to procure a righteous forgiveness and a righteous acceptance with God, God institutes a ministry from among the sons of men and confers upon mere mortals the privilege of pronouncing this word or message of reconciliation. And to state it in a way that I hope will shock you into alertness, as surely as no sinner (as far as the Scriptures are concerned) can be saved without God's work in making His Son sin for us, no sinner will be saved who does not hear the word of reconciliation. Can you be saved without the reconciling work of Christ? No. Can you be saved without hearing and embracing from the heart the word of reconciliation? No, for God has ordained by the foolishness of preaching to save. "How shall they call on Him whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? How shall they preach except they be sent?" And while the preacher is never in his person and in his work the ground of the sinner's hope or confidence (not one millionth of a gram's worth), nonetheless, God has instituted the ministry to be that of reconciliation.

And how is it constituted the ministry of reconciliation (verse 18)? Well, it's exegeted in verse 19. It is constituted the ministry of reconciliation, not by organizing God's people to have marches in places where there are social problems and be reconcilers by marches--no, that is not the apostolic way. The God who has made a ministry of reconciliation has defined it in verse 19: "...having committed unto us the word [or message] of reconciliation [constituting the servants of God ambassadors on

behalf of Christ]." And what is the function of an ambassador? It is not to go out and to lobby and politically agitate the cause of His country. It is to represent the mind and the will of the Sovereign who has sent him into a foreign country. And here God has clearly defined what means He as ordained by which to bring the news of His provision for needy sinners to men.

Now if that is true (and it is), then let me say by way of application, if you ever hope that your problem of trespasses and sins is to be dealt with Biblically, you must come to the place where the reality of the person and work of Jesus Christ becomes the most focused object of your interests, your desires, your longings, your hopes, your confidence. Until Christ crucified becomes something more than religious gibberish, something more than pious dribble, something more than preacher's official talk; until in the felt awareness of your alienation and God's right to banish you forever because of your sin; until in that context the news that He has sovereignly chosen to make someone else sin on behalf of sinners (He has chosen to impute to an innocent one all of our guilt that we might have the righteousness that is inherent in Him reckoned to our account)--until that becomes indeed good news and you're prepared to listen to it preached and expounded from the Scriptures from men whose only claim is they have been given a ministry of reconciliation (and the essence of that ministry is a word of reconciliation that points you to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world), O my friend, until you count those men your greatest friends who tell you about a crucified Savior, you haven't begun to understand your own need nor God's provision in Jesus Christ. God has instituted the ministry and authorized mere men who rescued themselves by the very work of Christ that they proclaim to herald in the name of the King on behalf of Christ--notice--"as though God [Himself] were entreating" this marvelous message.

Well, we've looked at the condition of the world as assumed in the text: alienated--that's its essence. What's its cause? Trespasses and sins. We've looked at the provision for the world as described in the text. The author of that provision is God. And the essence: a reconciliation based on the cross of Christ instituting a ministry that is a word of reconciliation on behalf of Christ. Now consider in the third place, the personal entreaty which comes to the world as contained in the text. And I want you to consider with me first of all its characteristics and then its substance.

What are the characteristics of the entreaty that comes to you? Look at verses 20 and following: "We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God." The characteristics of this entreaty that comes to you are these: It comes from God Himself. Think of it, the offended God who has righteously turned away from man the sinner, the God who in righteous anger could damn us all, but who in love to sinners has sent His Son to take the room and place of sinners and made Him to be sin--that God has not instituted a ministry and then, as it were, vacated the premises to see how it all turns out. No! The God who was active in reconciling, the God who was active in committing the word of reconciliation, He is now Himself coming to you ("...as though God were entreating...").

Think of it, my friend, the Creator coming to man the creature, we who can give Him nothing, add nothing to Him, He who dwelt in blissful self-containment in the epitome of bliss and happiness from all eternity before there was a speck of created reality--no angel spirit, no seraph wing, let alone no puny little creature called man who rears back on his hind legs and spits in the face of deity. God needs nothing from us and

gains nothing from us. Yet the text says that this personal entreaty in its characteristics is first of all one that comes from God, the offended, alienated God, the God who has done something in Christ and has instituted a ministry. That God is still active, and He comes.

And the second characteristic is, it comes on behalf of Christ Himself. "We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ." There is no separation between the Father's will and action in authorizing this message to come us. It in that sense comes directly from God. But it comes on the behalf of Christ Himself. May I say it reverently, Christ was not content to die to procure the reconciliation alone. He is still following the work of His cross and His open tomb and His glorious session at the right hand of the Father by His present activity as He Himself comes through the message of the ambassadors whom He sent. So it's not that preachers say, "Only go to Christ." It's Christ who says in the word of the Gospel, "Come to Me. Come to Me." The only way you're going to here the voice of Christ in the day of judgment is to hear it through His ambassadors. He's not coming down to speak again. The next time we hear Him speak will be at His second coming when summoning all men to judgment. But He is not distant. Though He is not physically present, He comes through His ambassadors on the behalf of Christ.

But this is what amazed me: as to the characteristics, this entreaty not only comes from God on behalf of Christ, but it comes in most earnest, passionate sincerity. Look at the words: "We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us." This word "entreat" is the word Paul uses when he says, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren." Does God command in the Gospel? Yes, He commands all men everywhere to repent. One of the text I was wrestling with last night that I might preach on, that the truth God commands us to repent, commands us to believe, but He goes beyond commandment. He comes beseeching us like an inferior to a superior. I don't understand such grace. "As though God", the offended, alienated God who has turned to us in Christ, that God has gone beyond the sending of His Son, the bruising of His Son, raising Him from the dead, authorizing a ministry of reconciliation. That God now--I say it reverently--on bended knee with stretched out hand beseeches you. What grace!

And then He goes beyond beseeching. And if you were writing in the Gospels and were talking about a beggar who sat by the roadside begging, you'd use a Greek verb, "deometha". And that word is found right in here: "...as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ." The word "entreat" is "beg." The word "beseech"--I'm sorry--I think I parked on "entreat". That word "entreat" is translated "beg". It's one of the standard usages of it. And then when he says, "We beseech you", that's the word found in Romans 12:1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies...." There's the beseeching, the bent knee, the stretched out hand, but now even more than that, entreating (begging). And if that imagery means anything, it means that the characteristic of the personal entreaty that comes to the world is not only from God and on behalf of Christ, but it comes most earnestly, passionately, and sincerely. The offended God who gives is now the offended God who beseeches and who entreats (who begs).

And what is the substance of that entreaty? Look at it. Here it is: be reconciled to God. God has turned to the sinner in Christ; now He says to the sinner, "Turn to Me through Christ." And in Christ, God and the sinner meet reconciled. You see, God's done something in Christ. His face is turned to sinful man, and He says, "I beseech, I

entreat. Here is My Son. In Him, all that will ever be done that sinners may have a righteous pardon, a righteous access into My favor has been done." And what do His messengers now say? They say,

"You, sinner, with your hard thoughts of God, with your heart that is hard to His person and His laws and His ways. And you think mean and unworthy thoughts of His Son and His salvation. Be reconciled to God. Turn from your disposition of self-pleasing. Turn from your disposition of trying to work out your own righteousness when God has emptied heaven of its best to procure the only righteousness that will be accepted by heaven, the One who came out from heaven in the person of Christ and went back to heaven in the person of Christ."

God said, "Be reconciled." That means we must repent, turn from our unworthy thoughts of God and how to be right with God and how to obtain forgiveness and life and salvation. Turn from all of that nonsense and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Rest the whole weight of your soul upon the work that God has accomplished in His Son. Trust in Him. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourself." That's how we are reconciled to God. And do you see the glory of it? That the nexus, that which holds it all together like the compression ring at the top of this building holds the weight of all of those beams. So in Christ, God has turned to us as sinful men. And now He says through Christ, "Turn to God." And in Christ, the offended God now reconciled, and the offending, guilty sinner now reconciled meet in Christ, and in Christ alone, but in Christ forever.

And in this passage, beseeching, entreating, begging, yearning that you might know that salvation, we say with the Apostle, "We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating [begging] by us." And that's what humbles me. As I pray over the text, and I say, "O God, how can one so natively cold and indifferent to men's salvation rightly represent Your heart?" But that's what the text says we're to do. "As though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God."

O, my lost friend, boy or girl, man or woman, I do not come with the thunders and with the threats and the warnings this morning. I pleaded, "O God, baptize my heart with the genuine felt tenderness of Your own heart in condescending to beg and beseech sinners to be reconciled to Your Son." My friend, give up those hard thoughts of God. If He were the mean being you think He is--and that's why you won't repent and turn to Him through Christ. You really think He's going to rob you of your bag of jelly beans. You really think He's going to steal your lollipops; He's going to be the heavenly killjoy. No! Those thoughts come from the devil. He put them in the mind of our first parents: "God is mean-spirited. That's why He said that tree's a no no." He's been telling you the same lie. We beseech you in the name of that God and of His Christ, be reconciled to God. God bends the knee. God stretches out the hand. God says, "Why will ye die? I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he turn and live." God has no delight that now His wrath hangs over you because of your impenitence and unbelief. And therefore, He says, "Be reconciled to God." Come out from under the foreboding canopy of His wrath and into the bright warm sunshine of His reconciled face. Be reconciled to God. Turn, believe, be reconciled to God. In Christ's stead, on behalf of God Himself, we beseech you, be reconciled to God.

If you ask the question,

"Pastor Martin, I see that you have not imported anything into the passage; you've not involved us in complicated arguments. You've taken the simple, straightforward words of the passage and laid them before us. But what happens if I chose simply to count it as another time when I suffered through a sermon?"

Read on, and the answer is right in the passage: "And working together with Him, we entreat also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." It is the grace of God that has brought the reconciliation to pass. It is the grace of God that has instituted the ministry. It is the grace of God that has brought you into the orbit for another time of the message of reconciliation. And again, someone in the name of God and on behalf of Christ has begged and besought you to be reconciled to God. And now we buttress it by saying, "We entreat you receive not that grace of God in vain." And what is it to receive it in vain? Read on: "For He saith, At an acceptable time I hearkened unto thee, and in a day of salvation did I succor thee: behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." And my friend, if having heard the word of reconciliation today, you do not repent and believe, you've again received the grace of God in vain. And you have no assurance you will ever hear the entreaty of God again.

Though God stoops to bend the knee and stretch out His hand, He will not stoop and stretch forever. "My Spirit will not always strive with man." The only safe day is today. Receive not the grace of God in vain. It is all of grace that I could say the things I've said this morning based not upon my religious philosophy, but upon God's infallible revelation in the Scriptures. How long, my friend, will you trifle with this God? Though He's merciful and delights in grace and mercy, and judgment is His strange work, the Scripture says, "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Dear friend, as I have labored to speak simply and clearly, going back over the fundamental issues--why have I done all of this? That you might receive the grace of God today, receive it to your everlasting profit by being reconciled to God in the way of repentance and faith, dealing with God in the person of His Son through whom God is reconciled to sinners.

And my final word to those of you who are the children of God, may I ask you, how long has it been since the great truth of God's marvelous grace in rescuing the likes of you has brought you to a sense that has made you cry out, "O Lord, what else can I do but give myself away in the light of such condescending love"? In direct proportion to the truth of Christ crucified living in your heart, will you love Him and serve Him, hate your sins and love His ways? May we feed upon Him who said, "He that eats My flesh and drinks my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." What was He saying? "He whose life is sustained by the truth of My death for sinners." That's what it is to eat His flesh and drink His blood. That's what Paul meant when He said, "That life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God [and how does he conceive of him?], who loved me, and gave Himself up for me." As I live in faith of the Son of God, it is always viewing the Son of God as the One who reconciles me to the Father. He loved me, gave Himself for me. So may the Lord not only make His Word effectual to bring some of you to be reconciled to God, but those of us who are reconciled to Him, may we with renewed determination live our lives in the faith of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.