

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Reconciling Gospel

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:11-20

Code: TM11-7

Truth Matters 2011

We've been talking about Paul's gospel, the gospel according to Paul, and I confess to you that this is a great challenge for me to try to narrow this down to a few subjects. In all honesty I'm kind of vacillating a little bit, I'm changing my mind, if it's okay here and there, so you'll have to bear with me a little. Tonight I want you to open your Bible back to 2 Corinthians and I want to go to chapter 5. We have talked about the glory of the gospel, we have actually talked about the nature of the gospel in our two sessions this morning digging down into the doctrine of justification with the nature of the gospel is that the righteousness of God has to come down, and it is received by faith, and it is a gift of grace, and that's how salvation takes place. We've talked about that.

It is glorious gospel. It is a substitutionary gospel as we saw this morning. We're going to see a little more about that tonight. But I want you to understand this concept of reconciliation. It is a reconciling gospel. The gospel reconciles the sinner to God. There's a passage here at the end of chapter 5 that is a critically essential passage in understanding Paul's gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of the blessed God, the gospel of peace and grace and salvation, that Paul called my gospel and even our gospel.

I want you to begin by looking with me at verse 18. "Now, all these things are from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were making an appeal through us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Five times in that passage the word reconcile appears. You saw it. Verse 18, "God reconciled us, gave us the ministry of reconciliation," verse 19, "God in Christ reconciling the world, committing to us the word of reconciliation." Verse 20, "Be reconciled to God." This is about reconciliation.

Reconciliation assumes alienation, does it not? It assumes enmity, hostility. It assumes that people are enemies or worse, violent enemies. And reconciliation needs to take place. Now, you will notice that Paul says we have been given the ministry of reconciliation. And we have been given to affect that ministry the Word of reconciliation. Our message is a message of reconciliation, a message of reconciliation. How are we to understand this reconciliation? Well, in this passage, not only in verses

18 through 21, but backing up a little bit, we have, what I think is the essence of an understanding of the message of the gospel as reconciliation. We are given the ministry of reconciliation. We have received the message concerning reconciliation and this constitutes, according to verse 20, the nature of our ambassadorship. An ambassador was a representative of a monarch who was set into an alien culture to represent that monarch. And so it is with us: we represent the King of kings and we are in an alien culture. And our responsibility is to tell the people in this alien culture, who are enemies of God by nature, that they can be reconciled to God. That's our message. That's our message.

I have on occasion been flying in an airplane and had people sit next to me and ask me what I do. I remember answering the question on a flight from New York to LA, and I said, "Well, I'm a preacher of the gospel." And the guy that I was sitting next to who was pierced every way you could be pierced, must have been frightened because he got out of his seat and never came back. And that's a five-hour flight. So I've learned maybe not to just be so blunt. On the other hand, on occasion I say this. "Oh, I have a great job. I tell sinners that they can be reconciled to God. Are you interested?" I mean, that is what's called cutting to the chase. But that is exactly what I do. That is what we do. Our message is that sinners can be reconciled to God. That God is a reconciling God who has provided a means of reconciliation and a message of reconciliation is the responsibility of every ambassador of Christ. It assumes alienation, hostility, an enemy kind of relationship, but one that can be turned into a full and complete reconciliation.

Now, as we look at this passage, I want to show you several elements to the ministry of reconciliation. Several elements to the reality of reconciliation. And in order to do this, we have to back up to verse 14 and pick up some things that are there. And backing up to verse 14, I want to say the first component of reconciliation is that it is motivated by the love of God. It is motivated by the love of God. I shouldn't need to deal with that very much because you're all very familiar with the fact that God so loved the world, right? That He gave. Hearing His love, not that we love God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. While we were enemies, Paul says He loved us. In verse 14 Paul identifies this, "The love of Christ controls us." That's a verb that means put pressure on something to create an action. It could even be translated: the love of Christ rules us. I love the word "control" actually in the NAS. Paul is not talking about His love for Christ; he's talking about Christ's love for him. What drives him, we saw he understood the glory of the gospel, right? From 2 Corinthians we talked about that. We understood the transcendent glory of the gospel and was motivated by its unparalleled and unequalled grandeur. Well, he also experienced the love of Christ. Christ had laid a saving claim on the life of Paul so that he was so overwhelmed by this saving love that he could never live for anything but the proclamation of the gospel of that saving love.

Christ's saving love for Paul controlled him, dominated him, motivated him, ruled him. And he didn't see it in a personal way. He didn't see it in a selfish way. Didn't see it in an isolated way, because he says in verse 15, "And He died for all." What God has done for me through His love, what Christ has

done for me through this magnanimous saving, forgiving, gracious love is not just for me. He died for all so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

What drove him? What compelled him? What motivated him? It was not only the glory of the gospel in a broad sense, but the glory of the gospel was bound up in the fact that the gospel was such a magnanimous expression of divine love toward an unworthy sinner, such as he was who confessed himself to be a blasphemer. And he realized that this love which God had given to him in Christ which had so totally transformed his life was not just for him, but that Christ died for all so that they who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. He died for all.

What do you mean for all? He died for all who believe in Him. All who believe in Him. He died and rose again on their behalf. The end of verse 14 says, "One died for all, therefore all died." I don't want to get technical here; He died for all those who died in Him. He died for all those who died in Him. It doesn't mean that He died for the whole world. If Christ died for the whole world, the whole world would be saved. Do you understand that? If Christ actually paid the penalty in full for the whole world, then the whole world would have to be saved because the penalty was paid. There are people who teach that He died for the whole world and if you teach that He died for the whole world, everybody who has ever lived, then His death was a potential death and not an actual death. It was a potential atonement and not an actual atonement. If you say He died for everybody in general, then He died for nobody in particular.

That's a problem. He died for all who died in Him. He died and rose again on behalf of all who died in Him, who are made manifest by faith. This is an actual atonement. Christ actually bore our sins in His own body on the cross, actually paid the penalty in full. His death is not a potential, it is an actual death. It doesn't make salvation possible; it makes salvation inevitable. Christ's death was the death of His people, His elect who would believe. The penalty for whose sins He paid.

You say, "That sounds like predestination." Exactly. By the way, I know you want to ask that question. Everybody has that question, so tomorrow I'm going to talk about how Paul's view of predestination fits into His gospel passion. Okay? We do that in the morning. All right.

Paul understood that this love gift of salvation that had been given to him, that controlled his life, couldn't be kept by him. Because Christ had died for all who died in Him, who were yet to be born in some cases, yet to hear the message of the gospel, but would hear in the future and believe and be saved. What controls his life was the love that God showed him in Christ to redeem him from his wretchedness and from eternal damnation, and that love took control of his life because he knew he was to be an instrument to take the message of that love to everyone he could possibly reach.

So, his whole life changed. Verse 16, look what he said. "From now on we recognize no one according to the flesh." Do you understand that? What happened in his life? Well, all of a sudden he didn't view people as external. He didn't view people as physical beings. He didn't just see the outside of it. He wasn't particularly interested in what they looked like. He wasn't particularly interested in their external behaviors. That's not how he viewed people. He says it in verse 16, "From now on, from the moment of his salvation on, we recognize no one according to the flesh." We don't judge people by what we can see and experience of their physical life. Then he said, "I did that once, did that to Christ, we've known Christ according to the flesh." There was a time when I knew Christ only according to the flesh. And you know what I determined? He was a blasphemer. He was a fraud. He was a false messiah. He was a problem to Judaism. He deserved to be crucified and his preachers deserved to be killed. Do you remember in the stoning of Stephen who was standing there and had the cloaks of the people who stoned Stephen placed at his feet? Paul. He had made an external evaluation of Christ and it was totally wrong. Yet now, we know him in this way no longer. My entire opinion of Christ has changed since the Damascus Road. I don't view people anymore externally. The most horrible result of my doing that, which is what Pharisees did and all false religionists, and all the lost people, the most horrible expression of that kind of judgment was the way I judged Christ. Boy, was I wrong. I just see everybody from a spiritual viewpoint now, don't you? You understand that?

You know, if you have children who don't know the Lord, they can get all dressed up and look good and walk out of the house and your heart can break. Everything might be coiffed exactly the way it should be, all you care about is the heart, right? You may have a spouse that's attractive, doesn't know Christ, you see right past that. We don't view the world the way the world views itself.

I was in the White House some years ago, talking to the White House staff and I said, "You know, you guys got a problem here." I said, "And it's not the kind of problem you think it is." I said, "You guys are so bent," this was in the Bush years, "you are so bent on making sure that you attack the Democrats, that you attack your adversaries, that you have turned the mission field into your enemy. You can't do that. You might not like their politics, but you can't look at them after the flesh. That's a mission field." That's how Paul viewed the world. That's how every believer has to view the world. And Paul says this in familiar words in verse 17, "Therefore, I love this, if anyone is in Christ, he is," what? "A new creation, old things have passed away, new things have come." And the "anyone" is the operative word here. Anyone, I don't know who the all are who died in Christ, for whom He actually paid in full for their sins, I don't know who they are but I do know that anyone who believes fits into that category and anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.

Paul thus is catapulted into the ministry of reconciliation 'cause he has a personal first-hand experience of the love of God in Christ given to him that brought about the spiritual transformation of his own soul, changed his eternal destiny and granted him the very righteousness of God in the place

of damning human righteousness. That became the passion of his life. It is that love of Christ which controlled him and everybody with him, us. You see the pronoun there in verse 14. We're all controlled by the reality that we have been made new creations by the love of God in Christ and it can't be limited to us, anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. We don't see people the same anymore. If you ask Paul, he would say, "In Christ there's neither male, female, bond, free, Jew, Gentile." There's no distinction. He saw everyone as an eternal soul.

I'm sure you experience this. I do. I see myself looking through the person whoever they are, whether I know them or don't know them. When I'm exposed to people, it's their soul that captivates my thinking. It's their soul. We don't know people any longer, purely on the superficial level. We live in a world of lost souls. They're all around us. You might not like their politics, might not like their behavior, might not like their social status, might not like their personality, you've got to see past it, because for some of those people, Christ died and paid the penalty for their sin in full and you may be, if available, the instrument that He uses to bring them to the point of the salvation plan for them before the foundation of the world. We have been given the ministry of reconciliation. That's the heart and soul of our responsibility as believers and that was the way Paul viewed his life. Our ministry is to reconcile men to God, to reconcile women to God, to preach the good news that the relationship of enmity, hostility, hatred, alienation between God and men can be totally changed. And part of that, of course, is defining the fact that there is alienation between men and God. That's the good news. It is possible for sinners to be reconciled to Almighty God.

I always think about this. You may have heard me say this somewhere on a tape or something. I was riding on an airplane, Southwest Airlines to El Paso, sitting in the dreaded middle seat. I'm squeezed in there and I was preparing for a men's conference in the El Paso Civic Center. And just got my little New Testament open and was making some notes of what I was going to talk about, and there was sitting next to me an Arabic man, clearly I could tell. And I'm looking at my New Testament and we're just barely up in the air and after a few minutes go by, he looks over at me and he says, "Excuse me, sir. Is that a Bible?" I said, "Yes, it is a Bible." He said, "May I ask you a question?" I said, "Of course you can ask me a question." He said, "Well, I'm from Iran, I'm new in America. I'm in the process of immigrating and I don't understand American religion. I don't understand. In My country everyone is a Muslim, everyone. But I don't understand American religion." He said, "Could you, sir," and this is exactly what he said, "tell me the difference please between a Catholic, a Protestant, and a Baptist." A Catholic, a Protestant and a Baptist, so he had been exposed to at least those three categories. So I said to him, I said, "Yeah, I can tell you the difference." And I just gave him a simple way to understand Catholicism as a sacramental form of ceremony, et cetera, et cetera. And Protestantism is a protest against that, and a regripping of a personal relationship with God through Christ, and we went through that. And I put the Baptist in the Protestant category where they belong.

So, he said, "Thank you, thank you very much, thank you very much." I said, "Can I ask you a question, sir?" He said, "Of course, of course." And I knew the answers but I wanted to hear them

from him. So I said, "Do Muslims have sins?" And I knew the answer but I wanted to hear him say it. He said, "Oh, do we have sins? We have so many sins; I don't even know all the sins." I said, "Well, do you do them?" "All the time." Then he said this. "I'm flying to El Paso to do some sins." "You are?" This is a pretty honest guy. Flying to El Paso, "Yes," he said, "I met a girl when I was immigrating, that's an immigration point, and we will meet and do some sins." "Oh," this is more information than I really require. I said, "Well, can I ask you another question?" "Of course." I said, "How does Allah feel about your sins?" "Oh, very bad. Very, very bad. I could go to hell." I said, "Well, why don't you stop doing them?" "I can't, I can't." I said, "So you keep doing sins that could send you to hell, everlasting hell?" And then he said this, "I hope the God will forgive me. I hope Allah will forgive me." And then I said something that afterwards I know, I didn't think about it. I said, "Well, I know Him personally, and I can tell you He won't."

He looked at me, He looked at me and said, you know, in his mind he was saying, "How could you know God personally and wind up in the middle seat on Southwest?" That doesn't make sense. I said, "I do know Him personally and He will not." He said, "Well, I hope He will." I said, "I have some good news for you. I know how You can be fully reconciled to God, how You can be completely forgiven and become a friend of God and a son of God, and receive all that God possesses as a gift from Him to you." He had never heard anything like that in his life. There is no redemption in Islam. And I went on to give him the gospel. He did not respond to Christ, but I think I messed up his weekend. Some girl got very confused. I'm sure she didn't know what happened. I gave him a bunch of material, sent him much stuff, told him where to go to church in the place he was living, but I never have gotten any follow up. But that's the truth, isn't it? Isn't that what we do? Don't we tell people they can be reconciled to God?

Go back to chapter 5 here, He's committed to us the Word of reconciliation, literally placed in us the *logos* as opposed to the *mythos*. *Logos* is the word that is true, *mythos* is the word that is not truth. He has placed in us the logos of reconciliation. We've been called then to preach the ministry of reconciliation, to tell sinners they can be reconciled to God. And it assumes that we have to help them to understand that they are currently alienated from God. In other words, you can't tell people they can be reconciled until you've made it clear that they need to be reconciled, 'cause you don't want to be the enemy of holy God.

Now, as we think about this ministry of reconciliation, I want to give you just a few things that will help you understand the nature of this great truth, okay? Number one, reconciliation, this is so important, is by the will of God. Reconciliation is by the will of God. Please go back to verse 18; let's pick up our original text. "Now all these things are from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ." All what things? All the things that He's been talking about from verse 14. Salvation, the provision in the death of Christ, being made a new creation, having the old pass away and the new come. This is speaking not about justification but about regeneration. This is by the will of God. All these things are from God. Verse 19, "It is God in Christ reconciling us." Verse 20, "It is God making an appeal

through us.” Reconciliation is by the will of God. That is the foundational reality. We cannot decide to be reconciled to God. We have no power to satisfy God’s anger. We have no ability to set aside His justice, to achieve His righteousness. We’re the offenders. We have been banished from His presence forever. Any change in our relationship with God has to come from Him. Any reconciliation has to be by His design. And this is at the heart of the gospel.

God loves sinners and seeks to reconcile them. He designed a means to reconcile with sinners, to make sinners into sons. It is God who reconciled us to Himself. It is God who is the reconciler. That is just such a profound point. If you go back and study the religions of the world, you will not find, as we said the other night, you will not find a reconciling deity in the history of religion. You will not find a God who is by nature a reconciler. First Timothy 4:10 says, “God is the Savior of all men, especially those who believe.” What does that mean? What do you mean He’s a Savior of all men? Especially those who believe?”

Well, there is a sense in which He’s the Savior of all men. In a very generic, a very comprehensive, a very wide sense, He’s the Savior of all men. What do we mean by that? Physically and temporally, physically and temporally. The Bible says, “The wages of sin is,” what? “Death.” The Bible says, “The soul that sins, it shall die.” The Bible says, “Violate one law and the full weight of the Law will fall upon you.” The Bible says that, “In sin, my mother conceived me; I have been a sinner from conception.” Why am I alive? Why am I here? Because God is by nature a Savior, and every sinner who takes another breath is living proof that God is by nature a Savior. And it is, as Romans 2 says, the forbearance and patience of God with sinners that is intended to demonstrate that He’s the Savior and lead them to repentance.

The very fact that we experience as sinners come in grace, smell the coffee, kiss the one we love, have children, enjoy a sunset, eat a wonderful meal, take a beautiful vacation, have success, appreciate music. Sinners do that. And everyone who ever does any of that, who takes another breath, gives testimony to the fact that God is by nature a Savior, and if He wasn’t, He would destroy sinners before they took another breath.

So, the good news is you don’t have to try to convince God to save; you just need to convince the sinner to receive. One of the things that irritates me about Roman Catholicism, a lot of things do, but one of the most irritating things, one of the most God-dishonoring things, one of the most blasphemous elements of Roman Catholicism is this: look, if you want God to come and rescue you out of your plight, if you want God to deliver you, if you want God to pay attention to you, don’t go to God. He’s really busy. And He’s really holy. He’s holy, holy, holy. And He hasn’t got time for you and He’s hard and harsh. You don’t want to go to God. You don’t want to cry out to God.

Now, you could go to Christ. You could go to Christ because Christ having been a man, and having experienced all the things that humans experience, being in all points tempted like as we are, He’s

liable to be a little more sympathetic, but, you know, He's pretty tough, too. He's pretty harsh. So if you really have a problem and you really have a need, go to Mary. Go to Mary. Why you go to Mary? Because Jesus can't resist Mary. He can resist you, He can't resist His mother. Go to Mary. That is a blasphemy against the nature of God who is a reconciling, loving God waiting for the sinner to come into His presence and ask His forgiveness. You don't need to go to Mary. Mary never has heard a prayer from any human being since she arrived in heaven. And neither has anybody else in heaven except the Trinity. God is by nature a reconciling God. You say, "Well, look at the Old Testament, how can you say that God is, how can you say He's a loving reconciling God when some young guys say, "Hey, O Baldy, Baldy, Baldy," to a prophet, and God sends bears out of the woods and rips them to shreds, what kind of a God does that? What kind of a God sends bears out of the woods to shred a bunch of young men who are yelling, "Baldy, Baldy" at a prophet?

That's not the question. You say, "What kind of a God opens up the ground and swallows some guys?" That's really not the question. What kind of God brings down the house on the Philistines? What kind of a God does that? What kind of a God instructs the Israelites to kill the Canaanites? What kind of a God is that? That is not the question. The question is not: why did God take the life of sinners in the Old Testament in those cataclysmic ways? The question is why did He allow most sinners to go on living? That's the question. The wages of sin is death, death is what they deserve. You know, in Luke 13 they came to Jesus and they said, "You know, we don't understand, we don't understand. Some Galileans came into the temple, they were in there worshiping and Pilate's guys came in, took some knives and sliced them up and killed them all. Why did that happen?

You know, the question is: they're worshipers. They're in there doing what they're supposed to do. How can God let that happen? And Jesus' answer was, "You're going to perish, too." And then they asked a second one, they read in the Jerusalem Gazette that a tower fell over and crushed a bunch of people and killed them. What kind of a God lets that happen?" That's not the question. Periodically through human history, it all points in times through cataclysms and events like that, God gives testimony to what all sinners deserve that the mass of sinners who go on living and enjoying all the benefits of common grace give evidence to the fact that God is by nature a saving God. He puts His compassion and His mercy on behalf of sinners on display through common grace as a warning to sinners to repent. He is in that sense a Savior of all men, but He is especially the Savior of those who believe because He saves them not physically and temporally, but spiritually and eternally. God is the source of reconciliation. I'm so glad I don't have to talk God into being willing to accept a sinner.

You know, when Jesus died on the cross, there was a veil, wasn't there, in the temple that separated God from everybody, or the symbol of God's presence. God ripped it from top to bottom and threw it wide open. And all sinners who will come have access to one who is by nature a reconciling God. Back to the text. It is God who reconciles us to Himself. It is God in Christ reconciling the world. It is God begging, appealing. Never are you more in line with the will of God than when you preach the word of reconciliation.

Reconciliation, then, is, first of all, by the will of God. Secondly, it is by the act of forgiveness. It is by the act of forgiveness. How in the world can God do this? Well, it comes in verse 19. The only way that God can reconcile with sinners, here it comes, verse 19, is by not counting their trespasses against them. That's the only way. How is reconciliation possible? How can He reconcile the world? That means all people from all nations who will be reconciled. How can He reconcile them? By not counting their trespasses against them. That's the issue. He has to set their sins aside.

Now, we already know, don't we, we talked about it. Micah 7, "Who is a pardoning God like You?" Exodus chapter 33, "God is by nature compassionate, merciful. He is a forgiving God." The Old Testament is full of that. The New Testament is full of that. God is an eager forgiver of penitent sinners, not counting their trespasses against them. It is the thing that we need to say to sinners. Here's the question. You can be reconciled to God. God will forgive you all your sins forever. Are you interested? That's the issue. When people evangelize often, they say, "Do you want to have purpose in your life?" "Do you want to have a better marriage?" "You want to straighten out your slice on the golf course?" "You want to score more touchdowns?" You know. What are you looking for in life? Happiness, contentment, sense of well-being? That is not it. Do you want to die in your sins and go to hell forever? Or, are you interested in full and complete and eternal forgiveness? That's the message.

Psalm 32:2, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity." That's what's behind this verse. Paul probably thought about it here because he said it, actually, in Romans 4:8, "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." That's a paraphrase of Psalm 32. God is willing to erase the sin. In fact, the Old Testament says He'll remove it as far as the east is from the west. He'll bury it in the depths of the deepest sea and remember it no more. Colossians 2:13 says that it is God who has forgiven us all our transgressions. And, friends, as we're faithful to the gospel and faithful to the gospel that Paul proclaimed, what we're telling sinners is about the forgiveness of their individual sins. This is the good news, that God will forgive all your sins. This is the message of reconciliation. Let's get past all the superficiality, get past all the prosperity garbage, that Jesus wants you healthy, wealthy, and rich, successful. What He offers is none of that. You may be sicker after you're saved than you've ever been. You may be poorer after you're saved than you've ever been. But you are in the care of the sovereign God who is determined that that is for your good and His glory. But what you will be able to count on, is that you are on the way to heaven because He does not credit your sins any longer to your account.

In fact, I love the language of Colossians which says He blots out the transgression that was written against us. Taking it out of the way, removing it. It's a reconciliation Paul knows because He's personally experienced it. It is by the will of God, by the act of forgiveness. Thirdly, it is by the obedience of faith. Now, we talked about this. I don't want to spend a lot of time on this. It is by the obedience of faith. That's implied in verse 20. To make this happen, the sinner must respond, so here

we go. We're ambassadors for Christ. We're the representatives of the great King who wants to be reconciled with His alienated subjects. We gave good news to tell them. God will be reconciled to you. God will not impute your sins to you, He will forgive you. Please accept this gift. That's what verse 20 is saying. It is as if God, through us, is making an appeal. We are begging you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Now, that doesn't sound very Calvinistic, does it? You don't think we go around begging people, please be reconciled, repent, believe, confess your sin, turn from your sin, embrace Christ. Oh, you know, we're Calvinists. If it's going to happen, it's going to happen. Really? Listen, not only should we be begging sinners to be reconciled to God as an act of faith, but listen, it is God making the appeal through us. He might conclude that God isn't even a very good Calvinist. What? God begging sinners to be reconciled? That sounds absolutely Arminian. What do you mean? That's what it says. We're going to look at that dilemma tomorrow.

There is no salvation apart from faith. There is no salvation apart from the willingness of the sinner. What does it say in John 1:12? "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." And yet, "They're not born of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God." We know it's a work of God but still it's not apart from the sinner. It's through the sinner's expression of will. God is a beggar pleading with sinners.

Look at Jesus, "You will not come to Me that you might have life. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. How often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her brood, but you would not. Your house is left to you desolate. And He wept." You remember that? He wept. Jeremiah weeps the tears of God in his prophecy. "My eye will run down with tears 'cause you will not believe." God Himself is pleading through you with sinners. We are the representatives of a pleading God, a begging God, crying out to sinners, asking them to please believe, and be saved, and be reconciled to Him.

So, the ministry of reconciliation, the work of reconciliation is by the will of God through forgiveness, by the means of faith. That takes us to the fourth and final point, and this is going to capture what we've been saying all day. It is by the work of substitution, by the work of substitution. 'Cause the question then comes immediately: how in the world can God just decide not to impute our sins to us?

To borrow the language of Romans 4:5, how can He justify the ungodly? That frankly, that statement that God justifies the ungodly would be the most, the most unacceptable sentence that Paul could utter in a Jewish context. God determines that the ungodly are righteous? God justifies the ungodly? That is an absolute outrage. How can He do it? As we said today, you know, if a judge sitting at the bench and a criminal came in and he had been accused of multiple murders and he said, "I did it all. I killed all those people, you know, I killed them, and then I dismembered them, and I buried them all over the place. Yeah, I did all that. I feel really bad about it. I'm so sorry for the family. And judge, I'm so sorry, I really am sorry, and would you please forgive me and let me go?" And the judge said, "You

know, because you've asked, I forgive you, you're free to go." You wouldn't be a judge anymore 'cause he's not upholding the Law. It would be an outrage. Is that what God did? Did God just say, "Oh yeah, sure, on your way?"

No, He didn't. His justice had to be satisfied, and that's verse 21. That's the work of substitution. This will wrap up what we've been hearing about that really all day. It was BB Warfield who said, "Substitution is the heart of the heart of the gospel." Let me help you understand verse 21. 15 Greek words. The most condensed, clear, comprehensive statement of the meaning of substitutionary atonement on the pages of the New Testament, verse 21, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." If He is not going to impute our trespasses to us, but rather is going to impute righteousness to us, how can He do that and still be just? Here's how. "He," that's God, "made Him who knew no sin." Who's that? Very short list. Right? The only one with no sin. "He made Him who knew no sin, sin." Oh, what did he mean by that? What do you mean He made Him who knew no sin, sin? Well, Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagen, the Word of Faith people tell us, and I've heard them say it many times with their own lips that on the cross Jesus became a sinner, He became a sinner, and He had to go to hell and suffer for His sins for three days. And then the Lord let Him be raised from the dead because He had pay for His sins.

That is blasphemy. He was a Lamb without blemish and without spot. He was as sinless hanging on the cross as He ever is eternally. That is why He said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" If He's a sinner, there's no "why". On the cross, Jesus did not become a sinner. In what sense was, did He become sin? In this sense and this sense alone. God treated Him as if He were a sinner though He was not.

Now, follow carefully. On the cross God treated Christ as if He had committed personally every sin ever committed by every person who would ever believe, though in fact He committed none of them. Did you get that? On the cross, God treated Christ as if He personally committed every sin ever committed by every believer who ever lives and though He committed none of them. Let me say it in a more personal way. On the cross, God treated Jesus as if He lived your life. He didn't, but God treated Him as if He did. He treated Christ as if He lived my life. He poured out the full fury of His wrath against our sin as if Christ was the guilty one. Isn't that what's pictured in the sacrificial system, going back to Leviticus chapter 1 verses 1 to 9?

So, we say it this way: on the cross God treated Jesus as if He was a sinner though He was not a sinner. Why did He do that? On our behalf, for us. Because His justice had to be satisfied. And I told you this morning that in three hours of darkness He was able to bear the infinite punishment, the eternal punishment of all the collected people who will ever believe, because He is an infinite person with an infinite capacity, and His capacity to bear the punishment had no boundaries.

That's only the first part of it. God treated Him as if He committed every sin ever committed by every person who would ever believe, and then the flipside of the doctrine of substitution, at the end of verse 21, "So that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. So that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Now, listen to this, this must be understood or you don't get the full picture in this great verse. Are you righteous? Before God you stand righteous, but are you righteous? If you're having any question about it, just ask the person sitting next to you, you'll get an honest answer. Are you righteous? No. Paul said at the height of his spiritual maturity, "I am the chief of," what? "Righteous people?" No. No. "I'm the chief of sinners." You're not righteous. What does this mean? It means that God treats you as if you were righteous. Let me go a step further. On the cross, God treats His Son as if He lived your life so that He could treat you as if you lived His Son's life. That's how God sees you. He looks at the cross and sees you; He looks at you and sees His Son. That's why there's no condemnation.

Now, you know, somebody might say, "Oh well if I were God, I think I would have designed this deal differently. Why does Jesus have to be here for 33 years for and go through all that hassle? I mean, why didn't the Father just go to Him and say, "Can I use you for a weekend down on earth? You go down on a Friday, they'll kill You. You rise from the dead on Sunday, be back by late Sunday evening after a few appearances. Redemption will be accomplished. I just need you for the weekend." What's the 30 years about? What's that for? Scripture tells us what that's for. He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without what? Sin. At all points means chronologically, from birth. At all points without sin. He lived a complete life without sin. Infancy, childhood, teenage years, young adult, mature adult, full life, He fulfilled all righteousness. Why? Because that life would be credited to your account. That is the active righteousness of Christ that we talked about.

So, on the cross God treats Jesus as if He lived your life, and now He treats you as if you lived His. That's pretty generous, isn't it? He looks at the cross and sees you. He looks at you and sees His Son. That's good news to the sinner. Paul says, "I can't view anybody any other way than as a spiritual entity, desperately in need of the message of reconciliation. We have been given this ministry, we've been given this message, we are here as ambassadors in an alien world. We can't look at people externally, we have to see them for what they really are, eternal souls who will spend that eternity either in heaven or hell and the message that we must deliver to them is a message of reconciliation that God loves them so much, He is such an eager forgiver, that He is willing to remove their sins from them and replace them with His own righteousness as demonstrated and manifested in the perfect life of His Son. He judged His Son as if He lived your life, so that He could reward you as if you lived His life. This is the glory of the gospel.

Father, we thank You for Your truth. These are just almost beyond our comprehension, these wonders. We are so insignificant, so utterly sinful and unworthy and undeserving. And yet You have granted us this great salvation. May we be like Paul, ruled by such love, realizing that You didn't just do this for us, but You died for all. And may we give our lives relentlessly and eagerly to the ministry

of reconciliation to tell sinners they can be reconciled to a loving, forgiving God who will treat them as if they were as righteous as His perfect Son. This is available through faith in the name of Christ. Thank You for a wonderful evening of fellowship. Thank You for the privilege of worshiping You. We know that You want us to worship You in spirit. We've done that as we've sung, but also in truth. And now that we're more enriched with the truth, fill our hearts with joy as we continue to worship You in the name of Your Son. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).