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"BE RECONCILED TO GOD." ⁴⁸

BY REV. HORATIUS BONAR, D.D.

"He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made (or become) the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. v. 21).

"BE RECONCILED TO GOD," was the apostle's message wherever he came. To Jew and Gentile, Barbarian and Scythian, bond and free, to all alike he proclaimed it. As though God did beseech them by Him, he prayed them in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God. This is God's message still to an alienated world. He is still as gracious and as sincere in his proposals of peace and friendship.

These proposals of peace are not mere well-sounding words. There is nothing indistinct or uncertain about them. They rest upon a sure foundation; a foundation deep and broad, laid by God himself, such as to assure us that the reconciliation proposed is as righteous as it is real. It is founded upon righteousness. In it there is no compromise of justice. The law is not annulled, but magnified and made honourable. Thus there is not merely grace for us, but *righteous* grace, grace that condemns the sin, yet justifies the sinner, grace that pardons the transgressor, and yet magnifies the law he has transgressed. Thus God, who before was righteously our enemy, can now be as righteously our friend. That righteousness which was against us, is now upon our side. It is a *righteous* peace, a righteous reconciliation, a righteous settlement of the controversy between us and God, which is now proclaimed to us through the finished work of the Divine Substitute, the mighty sin-bearer, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

I. *Observe the author of the reconciliation.*—It is God the Father. He hath made him to be sin for us. It is in the infinite bosom of the Father that it had its origin. It is from his eternal love that it flowed forth. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us" (1 John iv. 10).

II. *The instrument of effecting the reconciliation.*—The Son of the Father—his *holy* Son, who knew no sin; in whom there was no spot, no stain, no shadow of iniquity. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," infinitely pure, and immeasurably removed from sin. He was "acquainted with grief," but not with sin. He was holy from eternity as the everlasting Son of the Father. It was utterly impossible that any less holy being could accomplish this. And it was thus that God set up the highest possible standard of holiness in the very person of him who was bearing sin, that sin and holiness might be more strongly contrasted with each other, the hatefulness of the one exposed to view, and the beauty of the other set forth in its aspect of most loveable perfection. It was thus, too, that God declared his love of holiness and his hatred of sin, by means of that very instrument through which he was reconciling the sinner to himself.

III. *The manner of accomplishing this.*—He made the sinless One to be sin for us. It was thus he laid the foundation of our peace. He did this, not by passing by sin or treating it with indifference,

but by placing another in our room to bear its penalty, and that other his own holy well-beloved Son. "He made him to be sin for us."

1. *He was made sin.*—This cannot mean that he was in any sense or degree sinful, for he knew no sin. Yet it means more than merely that he was made a sin-offering. This would not be giving the word its natural meaning, it would weaken the expression, it would destroy the contrast between his being made sin, and our being made righteous. Doubtless he was a sin-offering, a trespass-offering, a burnt-offering. He was all offerings in one, the sum and antitype of all. Yet this does not exhaust the meaning. The meaning evidently is that God dealt with him as if he were really a sinner, such as we are. He treated him as if all iniquity was centred in him. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.

2. *He was made sin for us.*—He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification (Rom. iv. 2). He suffered for sins, though just for the unjust (1 Pet. iii. 18). He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. He was treated as a sinner, because he stood as our sin-bearer, our scape-goat, our substitute, our surety. Our guilt, our curse, our chastisement, were all transferred from us to him. Our debts and responsibilities were all devolved on him. He met the law in all its claims, and satisfied them for us. He came under obedience to the law in all its duties, and fulfilled it for us. It was in our room and as our representative that he acted, obeyed, suffered, and died. He bore our sins that we might not bear them; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. All this *has been done*. It is finished. The sin-bearer has accomplished the work which the Father gave him to do.

IV. *The blessed consequences of this*—that we might be made, or simply and literally, that we might *be* the righteousness of God in him. By Christ's bearing wrath for us we are delivered from wrath, and receive forgiveness. But this is not all. Through him we are accepted before God. Through him we are made righteous; nay, divinely righteous, obtaining "the righteousness of God in him." By this exchange between the sinner and the Saviour we get all that is his, and he takes all that is ours. We not merely get a righteousness, but God's own righteousness, a righteousness divinely perfect, divinely fair, divinely precious, divinely glorious. God saw in Christ all our guilt, and he sees in us all his righteousness. He saw in him all our unworthiness: he sees in us all his worthiness. He entirely upholds us in this light. He ceases to see in us anything else than Christ's perfection; and hence we are spoken of as actually *being the righteousness of God in him*. It would have been much to have given us what Adam had before he fell. It would have been more to have bestowed on us an angel's righteousness. It would have been more still to have clothed us with an archangel's beauty and glory; but he has gone beyond all this—ininitely beyond it all! He has bestowed on us Divine glory and beauty; nothing less than the righteousness of his own eternal Son. He looks on us *in him*, blesses us *in him*, loves us *in him*, and will hereafter glorify and reward us *in him*. We are "complete in him" (Col. ii. 10). It is not said we *shall be*, but we *are* complete! Complete in his completeness, righteous in his righte-

ousness, *comely* in his comeliness, perfect in his perfection. "Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee" (Cant. iv. 7). It is our connection with him through believing that gives us this completeness in the Father's eyes. To the end of our earthly course we are incomplete in ourselves; yet from the moment we believed we became complete *in him*. Paul refers to the same high standing when he speaks of being "found in him" (Phil. iii. 9), and explains this as meaning "not having his own righteousness," but "the righteousness of God." Being "found in him," then, is being regarded by God according to what is in him, and not according to what is in us. Here self-righteousness stumbles, and suggests a thousand doubts and perplexities. It says, Were I more holy, more penitent, more earnest, more prayerful, had I more evidences of the Spirit's work in me, I could be satisfied. Now, what is this but seeking to be found, not in him, but in your own holiness, or penitence, or prayers, or graces? What is it but saying, God cannot look upon me as righteous in Christ, except I have something of my own in addition, to recommend me to his favour? If God is to treat us in any measure according to what we are in respect of holiness, or grace, or love, then he must cease to look upon us in the face of his anointed Son. We must either be *wholly* found in Christ, or not at all. We must either be dealt with wholly according to what he is, or wholly according to what we are. There must be no mingling of the two—no adding of the Spirit's work to complete the work of Christ as our righteousness before God.

All this simply in consequence of our connection with Jesus! All this righteousness, this acceptance, this completeness, simply as belonging to him! His mantle is thrown over us, and his beauty covers all our deformity. We become the righteousness of God in him. Thus, in point of acceptance with God, there is no difference between one believer and another, or between the same believer at the beginning and at the end of his career, just as in respect of *condemnation*, there is no difference between one sinner and another. So soon as we believe we are entirely justified, and stand "accepted in the Beloved." The question is not, how far on are you in the life of faith, but are you believing at all? Is Jesus everything to you for pardon and acceptance? All turns on the one point of owning him to be everything—saying Amen to the Father's testimony regarding him. Then "He of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. i. 30).

Such are the grounds on which God's message of reconciliation is founded. Without these, to have spoken of restoration to God's favour would have been saying, Peace, peace, when there was no peace. But with these we can say, Peace, peace to the sinner, when there is peace (Jer. vi. 14). Grace can flow freely forth now, because righteousness has had its due. It is because of this that we are enabled to go up to every man, and say personally to him, "be reconciled to God."

1. *Be reconciled to God, for see how he hates sin.*—Before he could pardon it, he must lay it on his own Son, and when laid on him it must be punished in him. He must bear the infinite wrath of God against iniquity. How infinitely he must hate sin—how certainly

and swiftly he will avenge it! In clinging to sin you are clinging to that abominable thing which he hates, and on which his terrible vengeance is about to descend.

2. *Be reconciled to God, for see how earnestly he seeks to be reconciled.*—What infinite pains he has taken to secure this! At what cost he accomplished it! If he had not been in earnest about this would he have parted with his own Son? Would he have bruised him and put him to grief and shame? Would he have emptied the vials of his wrath on him? Would he have refused to let the cup of agony pass from his holy lips? How much he must have been bent on reconciliation, when he could consent to all this, rather than that we should remain unreconciled! How sincere and true must his entreaties of reconciliation be!

3. *Be reconciled to God, for see what a righteous reconciliation this is.*—Its foundations are laid on righteousness, and therefore they are immovable. You cannot say, We are not sure whether it is a real reconciliation, or whether it will prove lasting. It is righteous, and therefore it is real, and sure, and lasting. What can ever occur to break up a friendship founded upon righteousness? What can ever renew the breach which has thus been healed, or sever the golden link by which the soul is inseparably bound to God?

4. *Be reconciled, for see the blessed effects of this.*—It puts you in possession of such mighty blessings. It accomplishes such a glorious exchange between Christ and your soul. It clothes you with raiment so divine. It provides for you such a righteousness, so spotless, so precious, so divinely perfect—better than Adam's, more excellent than that of angels—the very righteousness of God! What a dignity what a glory is the portion of believers! Not merely to be restored to what we lost in Adam, but to a glory far brighter, an inheritance far richer, a crown far more resplendent! To be exalted above angels, and placed upon the very throne of God's eternal Son: "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness of me, saith the Lord" (Isa. liv. 17).

5. *Be reconciled, for learn the awful consequences of remaining unreconciled.*—If unreconciled, then are you still enemies, unrighteous, condemned, children of wrath, bearing your own sin and sinking under its weight to the lowest hell. No removal of the curse for you! No bearing of the wrath for you! No deliverance from the second death! Great is the inheritance of the saints in light, so great shall be your inheritance of darkness. Souls saved by grace are made heirs of an infinite glory and blessedness; so you who reject this grace must be heirs of infinite shame and woe. Ransomed souls in heaven are raised far above angels; so you who remain unreconciled must go down to a place in hell far lower than the devils. Yours must be the place in hell—lower than Sodom and Gomorrah, lower than Tyre and Sidon, lower even than Chorazin and Bethsaida—for you have rejected the great salvation in a way such as no devil ever could do, and such as none of those guilty cities ever did. O dreadful doom of unreconciled sinners! The lowest place in hell; the very "blackness of darkness," in a region where all is night!

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