

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
“THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION” PART 2
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Let’s quietly go before the Lord, and know that He is God, and prepare our hearts for what He might have for us today. (A verse from “Jesus Loves Me” is played and sung.)

And all the brave men said, “Amen!” Amen. Thank you, brothers. Thank you.

We’ve been studying some passages in the Scriptures that really deal with a Biblical gospel, as opposed to a cultural or Americanized version of the gospel. We’ve been talking about the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith. As we’ve done that, we’ve realized that Satan has a lot of WMDs—weapons of mass deception. In wartime, they are called weapons of mass destruction. But there is a great destruction going on in the church, and it has been going on historically for generations. I would call them the weapons of mass deceit. And so I’ve asked Bishop Rodgers if he would give us a brief history lesson on what is known as a different gospel that has been preached. We see a lot of gospels being preached in our culture today, but they have their roots in history. Now we need to understand that, so that we can understand the Biblical gospel that we have been attempting to study. So Bishop Rodgers, if you would be kind enough to give us a little history lesson for us about some things that are very, very important for us to understand, as we understand the history of what we’ve been dealing with. The issues centuries ago are the same ones we’re dealing with now. So Bishop Rodgers, thank you, sir.

Bishop Rodgers: Thank you, Bruce. Good morning, gentlemen.

Men: Good morning.

Bishop Rodgers: I’ve decided to focus on man’s place in the initiation of our salvation. So, first of all, keep in mind that sin and salvation relate to each other. That is to say, a more radical view of sin requires a greater Savior, a weaker view of sin, then we can contribute something in that. So, you have to kind of figure out the correlation of the two.

The Bible, it seems to me, is very clear. Bruce has been teaching us on this. The Bible says that we are dead in our trespasses and sins. Now if you’re dead, you don’t do a whole lot. We’ll come back to that; that’s the point.

Now the point is that the natural man does not believe he’s dead. So therefore, the tendency, in world religions, and also influencing constantly at various points the church, is a temptation for us to think we can make a major contribution to our own salvation.

So I just want to mention three high points where this issue comes to clarity in the history of the church, and shapes the scene. So we’re going to move all the way from the early church right to the present in these three steps. It takes a while for the early church to hammer out what the Bible actually teaches, to systematize it, to bring it to clarity. And these are the three points where the options become very clear.

The first high point is roughly in the 400’s, and the two protagonists, the two discussion points, are a man named Pelagius, who was an Irish monk, teaching in Rome,

and quite influential, known for his piety and for his holiness, his sanctity. And the other is St. Augustine, one of the church's great, and some would say the greatest, of the ancient church's theologians, a North African bishop.

Pelagius was very upset by Augustine's theology. This is what Pelagius basically held. When Adam sinned, he did not damage the human race. It was simply an act of sin. It didn't even damage his own human nature. It was simple an indiscrete act of sin. Consequently, all of us are born, when we're born, unfallen. Pelagius really didn't take the Fall seriously. We need no help from God to be perfect, because we are not fallen. Therefore, the answer is simply, Shape up! This is what Pelagius taught. He thought that Augustine's view of the Fall and damaged human nature was a copout from our responsibility. And so he taught that, once you are baptized, you shouldn't sin anymore. Stop it! Just stop it! You can do it! Why else would Jesus have said, "Be perfect?" If you can't be perfect, why would He tell you to be perfect? And so, he held that Augustine's teaching of the Fall and the damage of human nature, (not only Augustine, but of course St. Paul, to a great extent), was simply an avoidance of our responsibility to live a holy life, a perfect life. That's one side of this discussion that went on.

Now St. Augustine believed that St. Paul teaches that when Adam fell, we all fell, and that when we are born, we are born with a fallen human nature. He would say that we are not able not to sin. That's just who we are. Therefore, St. Augustine said that we have a double problem before God. One is that we are guilty, and the second is, we're in bondage. And so, you have Toplady's famous hymn:

"Be of sin the double cure;
Save me from its guilt and power."

What a contrast between these two! Now that's an issue that's so clear. Do we have free will, for instance? Well, what do you mean by free will? Does it mean are we able to make decisions? Absolutely! We are able to make decisions that reflect what's in our hearts. But what is in our hearts? Well, it's a fallen heart, according to St. Augustine, so we are free to sin, if you want to put it that way. But we are not free not to sin. And it permeates all that we do, one way or another. None of us has perfect motives. None of us does everything really wholeheartedly for the grace and glory of God. Now this is just the opposite of what Pelagius taught. We can do it perfectly, and indeed we must! So shape up! Don't be copping out.

So here are two clear views for the church. Where are we going to go? Well, the church had to deal with this, and they said, We reject Pelagius. The Council of Aurles and the Council of Orange rejected Pelagius's teaching, because it was so clearly in violation of so much of the Scripture.

But, when they rejected Pelagius, they didn't affirm all of St. Augustine's teaching. They were silent about irresistible grace. They left the door open for a kind of cooperation model which we'll see come up very shortly.

So then, the next high point where this issue comes up is at the Reformation—the Council of Trent, the classic reformers, and the great confessions of the Reformation. Now we're looking at the late 1500's and early 1600's. We have the Lutheran and the Reformed teaching on one side, and we have Trent on the other side.

The classic reformers of the Reformation creeds basically took the Augustinian position. We are fallen. We need a Savior to come and save us, because we cannot save ourselves. We can't even take the first steps toward salvation, because we have fallen hearts. That is where our hearts are.

Trent, on the other hand, took another position, following that little cooperation model. They said that we make the first step. By our own decision, we choose to do what we can, which is to ask God, to desire from God his saving grace. And then God comes alongside, and brings the saving grace into our lives. But it's up to us to take the first step. And so again, that is called semi-Pelagianism. So there we have us making the first step, and then God coming alongside to enable full salvation.

And so that is the Reformation, again posing this issue, one side saying God has to do it all in the initiation, the other saying that we take the first step. We can't get all the way there, but God will come and lead us after we ask Him, leading to repentance and faith.

Participant: The Council of Trent. Was that the Roman church?

Bishop Rodgers: That was the Roman tradition. Yes, that's right. And, so far as I can see, in the present catechism, the big thick catechism of the Roman tradition, it still is the teaching of the church. It's difficult, once you've declared yourself infallible, to repent. (Laughter.) That's part of the problem. I mean, it really is a serious problem for us ecumenically. We chuckle, but it's also difficult. We keep working with each other, though.

The third high point, (and that leads us really to the present), is the Arminian situation. That was in 1618 and '19. The followers of Jacob Arminius wanted to change the Reformed confessions, which put the sovereign grace of God so much to the forefront. Now this is a fight within the Protestant ranks. Arminius had died, but his followers appealed to the Lutheran and Reformed churches to change the confessions at several points. So the Synod of Dort was held in 1618 to '19. There was some debate whether Arminius was really Arminian, but we don't need to get into that. It's certainly a tradition that is very widespread in the church today. And, as Bruce has been saying, it's the popular kind of view for many.

The Arminians had two basic assumptions. First, if God is sovereign in an issue, then human freedom is canceled. In other words, if God sovereignly moves, our choice is simply excluded. God's sovereignty and human freedom are contradictory to each other; they are incompatible. And the second is that, if man is responsible to believe the gospel, then he must be free to believe the gospel, and therefore God is not sovereign in the matter of faith.

Now these have great consequences if you take them seriously. First, if faith is an act of human freedom, then it cannot be God's gift to us. It's ours. In fact, it's our gift to God. That's one consequence.

Second, election cannot be God's sovereign choice, initiating regeneration. Election can be His observation of how we, in our freedom, will choose. So that changes that.

Third, Christ, when He died on the cross, did not actually save anybody. He potentially saved the whole world, because, in so doing, He doesn't guarantee that we'll come to faith. So it affects everything then, you see, when you start with these

assumptions. They are not Biblical assumptions, but people start to think that this is common sense. They tend to put God on the same level as the rest of us, and that's wrong. God can both be sovereign and still move in such a way as not to violate our choice. "You meant it for evil," Joseph said to his brethren, "God meant it for good." God didn't cancel their choices; they did something they meant for evil. But God was sovereign in that. So these assumptions, you see, are all unbiblical, and they have quite a consequence for us.

And the fourth thing is, there is no final assurance, because, if I'm in salvation by my choice, I can fall out by my choice, if my choice is simply in my own hands, and not in the sovereign grace of God.

Well, the Synod of Dort rejected Arminianism, because it was simply contrary to so much of Scripture. On the other hand, Arminianism did not go away. As a matter of fact, it grew. Wesley picked it up, and so the whole Methodist tradition, and much in the Holiness tradition, is Arminian to this very day. I had one person say to me, when I was talking about the Five Points of Calvinism—TULIP—that reformed theology is of the devil, because it takes away human freedom to choose.

So Wesley was a little more sophisticated. He had to deal with the fact that he took the Fall seriously. So how do you get this human freedom to choose, to get out of the bondage? And he said this. He said, I've got it right. It's in my mind, but I can't remember where I read it. If I remember correctly, he said that, at Pentecost, when Peter is preaching, he says that God poured out His Spirit upon all flesh. Now, it seems to me, if you look at the text, he's talking about men and women, and so forth, all sorts of people. But he thought it meant that all human beings had received a gift of the Holy Spirit to such an extent as to bring them back to the freedom to be able to choose Christ when they hear the gospel automatically. In other words, they are free now, and out of bondage, and in a kind of a semi-freedom.

So, within the church, now we have this division. It's a very serious division, and it continues on to this day, and it affects all of our ecumenical discussions, as well as our relations with each other. Are we dead in our trespasses and sins, or are we just sick? If we're sick, we call the doctor. If we're dead, we don't do anything in the initiation stage. Is that enough, Bruce?

Bruce: That is. Thank you, sir.

Bishop Rodgers: That goes on today. That's a division that may well be with us right here at this meeting. (Applause.)

Bruce: Let's turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter five. I wanted you to understand this historically, because the issues that we're dealing with are issues that have been going on for centuries. It all has to do with the Person and work of Christ, and the sovereignty of God. You see, modern evangelism today basically takes the anti-position, which would be Arminian, or semi-Pelagian, which basically says that what God initiated on the cross Christ did not accomplish, because He accomplished it for everybody. The real issue is, what God ordained, the Son accomplished, and the Holy Spirit applies. That would mean this: Did Christ accomplish your salvation, or make it possible? You see, the Arminian, or Semi-Pelagian position is He made it possible,

because you now have the freedom to choose. The Reformed position, or the Biblical theological position would say that what God initiated Christ accomplished. Christ accomplished your salvation; He didn't make it possible. That's why He says, "It is finished." He didn't say, It is possible. And the real issue is who accomplished my salvation? Did I do that, or did Christ do that? That's the real bottom line.

And so there are weapons of mass deception going on in the church. A classic example would be at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Center in Wheaton, Illinois. You'll see a statement by Charles Finney, which says that "revival is not an act of God, but an act of man," meaning that man can do this to cause revival to happen.

Now I want you to see this. Go to 2 Corinthians chapter five, the passage we've been looking at. We've been talking about the ministry of reconciliation. Now let me read this in its entire context, beginning at chapter five of the book of 2 Corinthians. Let's pick it up at verse 16. "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh." That means from a human perspective. "Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh," (from a human perspective), "we regard Him thus no longer." In other words, something happens so that you change your view of Christ. Your view of Christ changed. Because of this change in view, of how you view Christ and how you view God, something changes. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Verse 18: "All this is from God."

Now that is a wonderful summary statement of Biblical theological evangelism. "All this is from God." Who initiated it? God did. The Pelagians and the Arminians would say, No; man initiates that and God responds. It's basically this. In the matter of election, they would say this. God knows who will choose Him, therefore He doesn't elect them in saving grace. He just knows that they will one day choose Him, and accept His saving grace. There's a difference, you see. Who initiates it? The modern church position is that man initiates this by choosing to believe. What we're saying is that the Scripture teaches that "all this is from God." What is from God? Your view of God changes, therefore, you are a new creature, and that is something that God initiated Himself

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

All of life is about relationships, men. And when we talk about ministry, it's rather obvious then. If life is all about relationships, God is going to change our relationships with Him, and change our relationships with each other, so that the ministry really flourishes, because He is the author and the initiator of what ministry is. Last week, we saw two aspects of this verse, this particular portion of Scripture, that is, the preparation for ministry, and the presentation of ministry—two sides of these verses. The preparation—God prepares us to be ministers, to be ambassadors, what it is that He does to us, so that we can be presenters of the ministry of reconciliation. He prepares us by doing

something to us, and what He does is He reconciles us to Himself. That is what we see in these verses.

And last week we looked at this passage by observing how God prepares us for ministry. That's verse 18. And He prepares us for ministry by removing the alienation that He has against us because of our sin. That is something that God does. He removes that alienation as a means of preparing us to be the messengers of that reconciliation.

We saw last week what God initiates from Himself—He initiates this; all this is from God. He accomplishes it in Christ, and He completes it in us. You see how that works? He initiates it from Himself, He completes it in Christ, but then He completes it in us. Notice this. We, the ones who offended God, become the ones who prepare the ministry for God. The ones who are the offenders are now the ones who are the messengers. That is what has to happen to us. We have to be prepared for ministry that God gives us. He has got to do something to us before we can do something for Him.

Well, the world always tells us, Go do something so you can become someone. You've got to go do something. You've got to go to the right college; you've got to read the right book. Do the right thing, and then you'll become somebody in the eyes of the world. The Scripture reverses that and says, Become someone, so you can go do something. Now we become someone through this ministry that God does to us, which is the ministry of reconciliation. What He initiates in Himself He accomplishes in Christ, and He completes it in us.

So how does this process of reconciliation work? If you do a word study of the word reconciliation, you will notice that there are two aspects of the word. First of all, it means to restore harmony. He restores harmony to us. Those are verses 19 and 20. And that is done on the basis of the cross. Harmony is restored between sinful man and a holy God, through the ministry of His doing something to us, which is removing the alienation of our sin against Him, because we have offended Him in our sinfulness. He removes that from us. And so He restores the harmony of the pre-Adamic fall relationship.

And then the second thing is, he restores purity. He restores the harmony, and He restores the purity. The purity would be in verses 19 and 21. Purity in the Scripture is always a function of cleansing. Purity signifies a cleansing activity. Notice Psalm 51:7. "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." Now to cleanse something means to purge or change something. God does this by returning us to a standard of purity. Whose standard? His standard, because He alone is the standard. In verse 21, Jesus became what we are, so that we might become who He is. Jesus became what we are. He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God. He became what we are, so that we might become who He is. By the cross God has reconciled us by—notice—returning the harmony with Himself, and restoring the purity by giving us His righteousness. Two things that happen in reconciliation is that God restores the harmony in a relationship with us to Him, that has been removed because of the alienation of our sin, and restores purity. And that is what He does to prepare us for ministry. What do you think we're supposed to do? We're going to find that out in a moment. That is what God does to us. That is His ministry of preparation for us to be ambassadors. He does that to us. He

reconciles us to Himself and restores the purity. He restores harmony, and He restores purity.

A minister, a person who is redeemed, (and by the word minister I do not mean somebody in the pulpit.) I mean somebody who is a new creature. Verse 17 of 2 Corinthians 5. Anybody who is in Christ is a minister. We need to get over this idea of going into full time Christian work. Well, what do you think you are? When God redeems you, you *are* in full time ministry. That is what this passage is teaching us. Regardless of where you are, if you are in Christ, you're a new creature. You have been reconciled to God and you're being prepared to do something. He's making you into someone, so that you can go do something. And that does not cross borders; it means anything, wherever we are. It's not just the professional. I get so frustrated when somebody says, I'm going to quit my job because God has called me into full time work. Well, where do you think you are when you're a believer, in your work? You're in full time work, wherever you are. Ministry is who you are, where you are; it's not some profession! Paul is not talking about seeking a career path as a minister. There are those who are called to preach and to teach, who are a gift from Christ to the church. I'm not suggesting that. But what I'm saying is that we need to eliminate this idea that ministry is something that is done by the professionals. It's done by us, because we've been prepared for it, to change the way that we relate to people by being reconciled to God.

So, a minister is a person who is in harmony with God, pure before God, and dependent upon God. That is how God prepares us. So what are the qualifications for you and I to be ministers of the word of God, to witness to the Person and work of Christ? There are three things—harmony, purity, and dependency. That's how God prepares you to be a minister. Now when I use the word minister, I mean somebody who gives away to somebody else what God has given him, and that happens wherever you are. Ministry is who you are, where you are. I'm not talking about a profession. Do you understand that? Are you sure about that? So what are the qualifications for you and I to be ministers for the kingdom of God? Three things—harmony, purity, and dependency.

If you are in Christ, you are reconciled. That alienation has been removed. You are now in a harmonious relationship to God because you are a brand new creature, and all this is from God. It is something that God initiated, Christ accomplished at the cross, and He completes it in you and me by preparing us to be the ones who are going to go out and talk about it. You see, all ministry is preparation for us to do a presentation. So, if you are in Christ, you are a new creature. You are reconciled. You are qualified.

Preparation for ministry is what God does *to* us. Seminary does not make a minister. God makes a minister. Seminary doesn't do that! In fact, seminaries confuse a lot of people. (Laughter.) God is the One who prepares you for ministry. If He has called you to be a teacher and a minister through the ordination of the church, that is a unique calling He gives. But He is the one who prepares the heart of a minister. A seminary doesn't do that. A seminary can educate you on how to communicate that. But it doesn't prepare you. God prepares you for ministry, just like He does everybody else, through the ministry of reconciliation.

Today, I want us to look at the second phase of ministry, and that is the presentation of ministry. Now do you understand what God has done to you? He has restored the harmony of your relationship by removing the alienation. Remember the three words we talked about last week—propitiation, reconciliation and expiation? Remember, propitiation has to do with God being appeased. God is being appeased by the sacrifice of Christ. Secondly, reconciliation is God removing the alienation from the relationship, because God has been appeased through Christ's propitiation. And, thirdly, expiation is the forgiveness of sins. So God has been appeased by the propitiation of Christ. Reconciliation now occurs because He removes the alienation from that, because God is appeased, and the result is that you can be forgiven. Three key words we need to understand—propitiation, reconciliation, and expiation. Those are critical in your preparation to be a servant, to be an ambassador for Christ, and to go out and talk about the kingdom of God and the Person and work of Christ. So God does something to us to prepare us, so we can be presenters of the gospel.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes?

Participant: A question for you, Bruce. If Christ's propitiation is the payment of the debt we've incurred that alienates us from God, how can we be forgiven if the debt has been paid for Christ?

Bruce: How can you be forgiven? Because God said you are.

Participant: But isn't that, from a logical standpoint, (and I understand once again that is where different brothers say that logic is a problem, denying God's revelation), but, is once again the debt is paid, there is nothing to be forgiven, because it's already paid by Christ.

Bruce: That's correct. But you and I need to understand what that means. The forgiveness has been achieved for us. We receive that forgiveness. We don't go accomplish it; we receive it. So that is something that Christ has achieved for us. Now we are wrapped in the blood of Christ, and in the robes of His righteousness. We received something that God accomplished. God accomplished your forgiveness; you and I didn't achieve that. It's something He accomplished. You and I receive that.

Now the other thing is—remember this, guys!—this is not logic. This is supernatural. It's a mystery. And one of the things we need to realize is, let salvation be a mystery! When you lose the mysterious elements of salvation, you become too logical and you take it down to a human level. That's why we bring it down to our level. That is what Pelagius and Arminius did. They brought it down to the human level of saying, That's not logical. We need to let it be a mystery.

Look at the book of Ephesians. You know, when you look at the book of Romans, that is probably the purest declaration of the gospel. The book of Romans is the purest description of that, because it talks about justification by faith alone. But I think the most glorious description of the gospel is the book of Ephesians, because it talks about it being a mystery. Let it be a mystery. Don't bring it down to logic. Yes, God has accomplished our forgiveness. That's when the alienation has been removed because of reconciliation, and now you and I can receive that harmonious relationship because Christ has

accomplished that for us. That's not something I achieve. I'm not forgiven because I ask for forgiveness. I'm forgiven because Christ has already accomplished that.

Participant: Amen!

Bruce: Now that doesn't mean that I don't ask for forgiveness. We do, because the Scripture says to do that in 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins .." Now the word confess is an important word. It doesn't mean to profess. The word profess means to make a declaration or statement. The word confess means to agree with somebody else has already said. When you and I are confessing our sins, we're agreeing with God that what we've done is sinful. It's when you confess your sin, not profess it. It's not saying, I'm a sinner. It's saying, God, I agree with you. Repentance is taking sides with God against yourself. So we receive God's forgiveness, because of the propitiation that Christ accomplished, and removed that alienation from us so we're reconciled.

So that's all preparation. Now God has prepared us, and notice: He gives us the ministry of reconciliation. Look at your passage. Our ministry is the ministry of proclamation, not manipulation. "And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation." What is it that we are to talk about? We are to talk about the message of reconciliation—propitiation, reconciliation, expiation. The whole concept of this is that all is from God. What God initiated, He accomplished in Christ and He completes in us. We now go talk about the ministry of reconciliation that occurred to us. That's your personal testimony. That is what happened to me. Let me tell you how God created a harmonious relationship between myself and Him. He did it through this. And you talk about the Person and work of Christ.

Now the idea here of the Scripture that says, "committed to us" is a concept of placing inside, or making a deposit into. And deep within us has been deposited, or placed within us, a message. We've been given the message of reconciliation. And that message is the announcement to the world of what God has done in His royal grace, to bring a radical change in my life by reconciling myself to Him. That's our message. It's the announcement to the world of what God has done in His royal grace, to bring a radical change in my life, by reconciling me to Him. That's your message. And all of us have been prepared to give the same message. We don't change the message. We give the message that has been given to us, because that is the deposit that has been placed deep within us. And guys, you and I have deep within us the understanding of what I just said, to one degree or another.

Participant: Can you say it one more time?

Bruce: Sure. Our message is this: the announcement to the world of what God, in His royal grace,--mystery!--royal grace; divine work—has done to bring about a radical change in my life, by reconciling me to Himself. That's your testimony. Now how you put that in phraseology is up to you. That's where you trust the Holy Spirit to give you the right words to say. But you don't go and make up something just to get a response from somebody. You've been given a message. It has been put deep inside of you, and you have experienced that. And all you do is, you give away what He has given to you. You've been prepared for that. God has removed His anger, and God has removed His

wrath, and God has restored the harmony through what Christ accomplished on the cross. You talk about that.

Remember verse 18? “All this is from God.” What is from God? All this is from God, this message that you’ve been given. He has placed it deep within you, and you just give that away. You put that in your own words, using your own personality, your own temperament. But you don’t change the content! That is what Pelagius did. That’s what Arminians do. They change the content of the message of reconciliation.

Committed to us, or deposited within us, means a couple of things. It means this: that those who are ministers, (and when I use the word minister I’m talking about somebody reborn)—verse 17, a new creature—those who are new creatures have been made recipients of the grace and reconciliation of God. And we’re under obligation to proclaim that same message to the world. That’s our obligation, in the sense that you’ve been given this; it’s placed within you deeply. Just go give it away.

That’s what verse 20 means. We are messengers of grace. Now notice. We are not the agents of grace. We are just the messengers of grace. God is the agent of grace. We are the messengers of grace, so that people will understand the grace of God. Ministry for us is the overflow of what God has placed deep within your soul, because He has made you a new creature, because you understand this. “All this is from God.” You understand that, because you’ve experienced it ,if you’ve been reconciled. All of this is from God, and deeply placed within you is the understanding of what we were just talking about. And that is what you go and talk about, because you’ve been given that message to give away, because you have experienced the gracious ministry of reconciliation. You’ve experienced that personally, if you’re in Christ. You’ve been reconciled. You’re in a harmonious relationship, purity has been restored in your life, and you are dependent upon Him. Harmony, purity and dependency are the qualifications for us to be servants of Christ.

And because this message is placed deep within us, our mission is not to go and invent a message. But our ministry is to go and give away the message we’ve been given. You don’t go invent one, and change it around just to get a response, so people will like it and respond to you. You go and give away the one you’ve been given, and the one you’ve been given is right here in verses 12-17, all the way down to verse 21.

That’s why we talk about this, in summary: the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith. That is the whole concept of reconciliation. All those six elements include propitiation, reconciliation, and expiation. The holiness of God, the sinfulness of man. You’ve been reconciled, because of the propitiation of Christ. The accomplishments of the cross have removed that alienation. You have to understand that God is holy, and we are not. So you talk about the holiness of God, and the sinfulness of man. You talk about the Person and work of Christ—His propitiation, His expiation, the reconciliation that He accomplished. And then you talk about repentance and faith, our responsibility.

And so, when I look at this passage, I see three great features underlying the message of reconciliation that we’ve been given. Remember, we are messengers’ we’re proclaimers; we’re not manipulators. You don’t go and manipulate somebody to get a

response. You go and give them a message that has been given to you. You don't change the message. The power is in the message. That's what Paul says in Romans chapter one. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power." It's not your presentation that is the power. It's not your creativity that is the power. It's the power of the words of the message of truth. The Holy Spirit's job description is what? To guide us into all truth. And the minute you begin to invent your own message of the gospel, you lose the power of the Holy Spirit, because His role is to call attention to the Person and work of Christ by guiding us into all truth, and when you mess around with the truth of the Scripture, you've lost all power. The power is in your message, not in your manipulation or your presentation. You've been prepared for a message to be given. It's deep within your soul. Go give that which you've experienced.

And I see three great features underlying this message. First of all, it's a message about God. Salvation is about God; it's not about you. It's not about your needs. It's not about the situations you want to alleviate. It's about the holiness of God.

Notice, the message starts with God the Father. Let me give you a quote from one of the Puritans. G. S. Barrett was his name, a rather unknown Puritan, but he had some wonderful theological thoughts, and here is one of them. "The Fatherhood of God is a greater thing than even His sovereignty. For it contains in it all that sovereignty means. The Father must be a ruler, but the ruler need not be a father. But the eternal Fatherhood of God is as awful in its justice as it is tender in its pity, as infinite in the wonder of its love as much as in the dynamics and the threat of His holiness." You see the message is about God. It's not about us. That's what God has deeply put into your soul.

Secondly, it's a message about Christ. Look at verse 21. He became sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ. It's a message about Christ. You start with the holiness of God. You talk about the sinfulness of man. Then you talk about the Person and work of Christ. You see, the message is about Christ. It's not about eternal life. It's not about your needs. It's not about the alleviation of your illnesses. It's about the glory of God. It's about propitiation. It's about reconciliation. It's about expiation. Now you don't need to use those words per se. But you've got to understand those concepts, so that when you're communicating the message you're talking about the truth.

So it's a message about God, it's a message about Christ, but it's also a message about man. The message about Christ is verse 21. It's about the message of the substitutionary atoning work of Christ. It's a great, great summary, and we'll be talking about that in a couple of weeks. "For God made Him who knew no sin to become sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ." Yes?

Participant: Will you speak real quickly to the end of verse 20? He says, "as though God were making His appeal through us. We beg you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." It almost seems like an appeal to the individual. Will you speak to that?

Bruce: No, he's speaking to people who are already reconciled. He's reminding them of their reconciliation. He's basically saying, Look! This is an appeal, certainly. What is our appeal to the world? We don't say, Invite Christ into your life. We say what? Be reconciled! Explain what that means. You see, if somebody says, How do you know

you're a Christian? Well, I invited Christ into my life when I was twelve. Now that may be true. I'm not saying it isn't. But do they understand what that means? It was not their invitation that saved them; it was the reconciliation that God prepared that saved them. When they trusted Christ, that's their response of repentance and faith. So Paul is saying, Yes. This is an appeal. Be reconciled. Make sure that you're reconciled. Has harmony been restored? Has purity been restored? And are you dependent upon Him? That's what he's appealing to. There is an appeal. But the appeal is for reconciliation, not for personal choice. Be reconciled; it's a bigger concept. Don't?

Participant: Henry David Thoreau, the author from the 19th century, had a Calvinistic aunt, and she was constantly saying, "David, be reconciled to God." But David said, "I don't need to be reconciled; I'm not at war with him." And, of course, the Holy Spirit has to awaken that person to realize that yes, you are at war with him.

Bruce: You see, that's the message of reconciliation. That is what propitiation means. God has been appeased by the accomplishments of Christ on the cross, and therefore, by reconciliation, the alienation has been removed. And that is because you're at war with Him. You see Bishop Rogers' point about what happens when reformed theology and the doctrines of Biblical theology were changed, because people began to look at it logically. Well, I'm not at war with God. You see, your view of sin is going to determine the degree of God's sovereignty in your salvation. If you think that you're sick, you've got a choice.

How many times have you heard this? You're a sinful man. It's like being in the ocean, and somebody throws you a life jacket, shows you a life ring, and you in your last breath reach out and grab it, and you're saved. I'm saying, No, no, a thousand times no! What really happens is, you're dead. You've sunk to the bottom of the ocean, and God, in His grace, dives down and gets you, and He pulls you out and He breathes life into you. There's a different concept. Is it of me, or is it all of God? That's what Paul is writing to the church at Corinth. "All this is from God." It's a mystery. Guys, let it be a mystery; don't try to figure it out. Just rejoice in the fact that God is sovereign, and He chose you for salvation, and He has accomplished that by giving you harmony. He has restored your purity, and He is putting you in a position to be dependent.

So the third part of this message—it's a message about God, it's about Christ, but also it's a message about man—the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith. And this message is as sad about the message of man, as the other two elements are so glorious. It is so glorious to talk about God. It's so glorious to talk about Christ. But when you start talking about man, it's sad. It is as sad about the condition of man as much as the glory of God and the glory of Christ in the other expressions.

So those are the three elements that I see in this passage. It's all about man being dead in his sins. It's about man being unable to save himself. All of the appeal to people depends upon our first words about God in Christ, not our words about man. One word about God is more powerful than any word about man.

Let me read another Puritan for you. "The tides which sweep around the shores of this earth are all moved by attractions far up in heaven. And the great tides of emotion, which

carry the soul back to God, are all lifted by the cross of Christ.” One word about the holiness of God and about the sinfulness of man is far more powerful than any description about man. One word about God in Christ is far more powerful than a word about man. It is not about us; it’s all about God.

Now we’re going to pick this up next week, because the time is running out. But we’re just being prepared for a message. Yes, dandy Don?

Participant: We always try and put things into a way of viewing that we feel more comfortable with. So I can understand how people want to kind of take credit for making that step for their salvation. People want to talk about the moment that they made that step. But for me, I think it’s a lot more comforting to think that God chose me. It’s a lot easier to look at it that way, the way that you’re teaching and saying today, that God chose me. I just think it’s so much more comforting and so much easier to accept, than to try and take credit for it.

Bruce: Well, I’m glad you can say that. That’s wonderful! I agree with you, because that’s where we get an attitude of gratitude. You see, the great question I can’t answer is this: Why me? That’s a mystery! I need to let that be a mystery. There is nothing I’ve done to accomplish that, because He knew I would choose Him later. It’s that He initiated that in Himself, because all of this is from God. That is what makes it so mysterious. We need to let it be that way. That’s the magic of the gospel. It’s supernatural. God has done something, and put a deep message in your soul, and in your life, that you now can talk about.

Participant: We can only say what Don is saying if we’re in Christ. If we’re not—

Bruce: It won’t make any sense. We’ll pick this up next week. We’re talking about the presentation of our ministry. What is it we talk about when we go out and share Christ? We’ve been made ambassadors, and what does that mean? We’ll talk about that next week.

Let us pray. Father, we thank You for Your preservation of Biblical truth throughout history. And yes, Father, we know that the church has weapons of mass deception. And Father, just help us to understand the glories of the gospel that is a mystery. Father, don’t allow us to think that we can figure this out from our human capabilities, our human intelligence. Let it be a mystery—the wonderful, magnificent grace of God. May it be so. And all the brave men said, “Amen!”