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WHY RECONCILIATION BY DEATH?

Reuben Warjri

“For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son; much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” (Romans 5:10)



One of the first impressions that many may have about Romans 5:10 is that God is a blood thirsty Being who finds pleasure in death and the shedding of blood because as the words of this verse seems to suggest, it is the ignominious death of Christ that is the sole reason that sinners are reconciled to God. This understanding may be used by a great number of people who have developed the notion that God is wrathful and seeks to be appeased only if violent methods are being used. Certainly, the understanding that death and bloodshed as the means to appease God is not in line with the idea that God is love. So, what is the true meaning of the above verse? What is the Bible trying to point us to when it says that sinners are reconciled to God by the death of His Son? In order to be able to answer these questions and gain a better understanding of what the word of God is actually saying, we need to understand the principle involved in the fall of man and how this principle in turn affects the

principle involved in the plan of redemption.

We have to bear in mind that sin came as a result that man had another perception of God, different from the one he initially had when he first came to existence. The misrepresentation of God’s character by Satan not only altered the way Adam and Eve began to behave, but it also went a long way in changing their character to one that viewed God as the enemy and were unable to subject their minds and their thoughts under the will and purpose of God.

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” (Romans 8:7)

This carnal mind that both Adam and Eve had after they fell into sin and eventually the rest of humanity possesses, is seen in the way they hid themselves from God when He came and looked for them in the garden. Their behaviour was rather unusual considering the fact that, before sin entered their lives, they enjoyed the company of God. What this tells us is that man changed because of sin. He no

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longer desired the company of his Creator and there is no way that man can make his way back to God because the carnal mind that he now possesses prevents him from doing just that. However, God did not change because of what man did. In spite of the fact that man chose to disobey Him, He came to look for His children as His custom was. But the closer God came towards them, the farther away they run from Him. This goes to show that it is man who needs to bridge the gap between him and God, and he has to accomplish this goal successively in his sinful and carnal state. In other words, there has to be someone from within the human race who, in the state of being sinful, carnal and separated from God, achieve the impossible, that is to take hold of God's hand. But because the major problem that stands in the way between humanity and his goal is the carnal mind, God has to find a way to make this possible.

This is where the humanity of Jesus is necessary as a means to achieve salvation. The goal of reconciliation was achieved at the cross because it was here that the Saviour of the world was separated from God. In being thus separated from His Father, Christ was placed in the same position that humanity found itself as a result of what happened in the garden of Eden when the first Adam decided to forsake God. And knowing that sin is a state of being separated from God, it was at the cross that Christ was also forsaken by God and therefore made to be sin.

“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

In choosing God outside of God, Christ chose to be united to God and He did this on behalf of humanity, thereby breaking the spell of sin that has so long held humanity captive. This was how the work of reconciliation was achieved. Finally, there is a Human who achieved the impossible task of stretching forth His hands towards God when He was in a sinful and carnal state of mind. Therefore, humanity has been reconciled to God through Jesus.

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us ... by Jesus Christ...” (2 Corinthians 5:18)

Another way of looking at this is our reconciliation to God was accomplished because of what Jesus did and it was certainly not on the basis of what He did not or could not do. What I am saying is that, neither the separation nor the death achieved the desired effect, but it is what Christ did between the time He was separated and when He died. Keep in mind that it was not Christ who separated Himself from the Father otherwise He would have not cried out, *“My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?”* Further, He did not kill Himself; it was because He was separated from the Source of life, God the Father, that He died.

If Christ's death did not achieve reconciliation, then why does the Bible say that God reconciled us by the death of His Son? The words in Romans 5:10 are intended to serve three main purposes. Firstly, this passage is intended to direct our attention to the crucifixion scene because it was here that God was finally able to reconcile humanity to Himself because of what His Son did. As a matter of fact, if Christ, being outside of God,

had not chosen God, He would not have achieved victory over sin and this would have defeated the very purpose He came to accomplish and humanity would remain unreconciled to God. Secondly, by saying that God reconciled us by the death of Jesus, it goes to show that His death proves beyond any shadow of a doubt that Christ was indeed placed in the exact same situation that humanity found itself in, that is of being sin, which is separation from the Potentate of the universe. Thirdly, because of the principle involved, separation was essential to achieve the goal of reconciliation. By separating Himself from His Son, God knew that the outcome would be that His Son would die. But because this was the only way through which sin could be defeated and reconciliation be attained, God had no other option but to sever the connection that bound His Son to Him. It is for

reasons such as these that Paul says that God reconciled us by the death of His Son. Hence, it is not death that actually achieved anything significant (not even reconciliation). That is why Roman 5:10 does not stop at the reconciliation part but it goes on to say that because we are reconciled, we are saved by the Saviour's life.

It is in light of these resounding truths of the gospel of salvation that Jesus is and shall always be the way to salvation. No wonder therefore that Jesus once said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by Me.*" (*John 14:6*) Therefore humanity stands to benefit immensely from the life of Christ. If only the world believes and takes hold upon the promises given by God that it will experience the peace and comfort that can only be found in the Saviour of the world.

THE FAITH OF JESUS

Reuben Warjri



In taking on humanity, Christ forsook, among others, the all-knowing power of divinity. The text that speaks volumes of this fact is found in the gospel of Luke, where we are told that Jesus increased in wisdom. (Luke 2:52). This indicates that the Son of God had to be educated about Himself and the world around Him. As He grew physically, He also learned about how things came to existence and the purpose associated with His birth. In other words, in becoming man, Christ had no memory of His past life when He spent endless hours with God in heaven. He was not aware of the fact that He was the only begotten Son of God and that He was the Creator of the universe. These things were gradually being revealed to Him by God through the inspired word of Old Testament scriptures and also through the conversations He had with His earthly parents who would have narrated the events relating to His super natural conception and birth. I believe that it was by comparing what He had been reading about the promised Messiah in the prophecies of the Old Testament and the account of His life as told by His parents that Jesus came to realise that He was actually the One whom He thought He and the rest of the world were waiting for.

In light of this understanding, we begin to realise that Christ had to exercise faith that the revelation He received from God were true and that they could be trusted. Essentially, the world's Redeemer was tasked with the mission to overcome the problem of unbelief. Being divine, He was naturally bent to love doing things that would naturally please God. God Himself spells this truth for us.

“Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness.” (Hebrews 1:8)

This goes to show that it is preposterous to think that Christ could fall prey to temptations that we humans are easily prone to fall prey to. This is not hard to understand when you consider the fact that the things that are detestable to you, are the very things that cannot be used to tempt you. However, I am not suggesting that you will not ever end up committing the sin that you consider to be most detestable in your sight. For instance, if a man is not attracted to alcohol he cannot be tempted to drink alcohol. But one can succeed in making him do so if one realises the man's weaknesses and use them as a channel to cause him to do the very thing that he naturally and initially detests. If one such weakness is the man's inability to cope with not being able to fit in and being unaccepted by his peers, the tempter, whoever one might be, can use this as a channel to cause the man to consume the alcohol. Similarly, in tempting Christ, it is an utter waste of time on Satan's part to tempt Christ with the very things that will not shake Him in any way, shape or form. However, if

Satan could find a potential weak point in Christ's character, he would constantly use this avenue as way to cause Him to do the very things that He would otherwise have not done. This "weak" point exists in the fact that Christ had not the power of omniscience and was held captive by a limited, human mind which rendered Him capable of unbelief! For this reason, the temptations that Christ had to constantly battle with were the kind that were aimed to weaken His faith and trust in God. Therefore, the Saviour's warfare is not so much about what law He would break but whether or not He would keep on believing. A strong evidence of this is seen in His first temptation in the wilderness.

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." (Matthew 4:1-3)

We see here, that the very first words of Satan were, "If Thou be the Son of God" because he knew that somehow, he could inflict doubt in the mind of Christ as to who He was. Essentially, Satan was telling Jesus, "Are You sure you are who You claim Yourself to be or are You just make believing that You are truly the Son? Because if what You believe is true and You are well pleased in God's eyes, then why is God not providing You with the basic necessities for Your survival to the extent that You are now in such a terrible state? If You are truly the Son, You would be as powerful as when You spoke the world into existence. But judging by the way things are at the moment, that does not seem to be the

case. So, I suggest that You confirm Your views about Yourself by turning these stones into bread. Besides, You must be starving after spending forty days without food to eat and water to drink."

After forty days of fasting and prayer, Jesus was indeed in a terrible shape. Weakened by lack of proper nourishment, He was both physically and mentally drained. It is in times such as these that man is unable to coherently evaluate the things surrounding him. Seizing this golden opportunity, Satan sought to instil doubt in Jesus' mind. If Christ had, in the slightest degree, doubted the revelations He received from God that He was truly the Messiah, He would have expressed that doubt and unbelief by seeking to confirm His beliefs and He would have been counted among the sinners! Again, turning the stones into bread had nothing to do with the law per se. This implies that sin is not so much about breaking or transgressing the divine law but it is a state of being.

As time went by, the temptations that Jesus faced were more frequent and grew stronger. The intensity of the temptations He faced culminated at Calvary. Here again, Satan used the physical weaknesses of humanity and Christ's inability to know all things as an avenue to inflict doubt.

"And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou hast destroyed the temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the king of Israel, let Him now come down from the

cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God.” (Matthew 27:39-43).

Again, at the cross, trusting God was the biggest issue that Christ had to struggle to maintain, which is why Satan caused His agents to utter the words, *“He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God.”* To the very end, the enemy of souls strived to make the Saviour believe that He was not the Son of God. The situation for Christ became all the more challenging when He felt the presence and power of God left Him and this had in it the potential to cause Christ to doubt God and rely on the information that His senses were feeding into His mind. But His victory was concluded when He said, *“Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.” (Luke 23:46).* What Christ did was He chose to believe although there was hardly any evidence to substantiate His belief. It was in this sense that the words, *“Now faith is the substance of things hope for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1),* resonated with the what Christ experienced at the cross.

How does this truth impact our understanding of the plan of salvation? The core reason that humanity fell into sin is because of unbelief. Unbelief caused man to separate himself from his Maker and, needless to say, the consequences were dire. Ever since the fall of man, unbelief is an inherent part of the nature of humanity. So deep rooted is this problem, that it is very easy even for a born-again Christian who had once believed to cease believing. Therefore, Paul was impressed to make the following statement.

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” (Hebrews 3:12)

Realising just how serious the problem of unbelief is, the Bible, in general, and the New Testament scriptures, in particular, is teeming with reminders that the need of the hour for humanity is to believe. In fact, one of the central themes of the gospel is faith. That is why we read of countless verses in the Bible that stress on the need to believe. Hence, It comes as no surprise that even the most popular text in the Bible also talks about the need for humanity to believe as a means to be saved.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

Note how Jesus actually puts it. He says that God sent His Son so that whoever believes in His Son shall have eternal life. Christ did not stress on the need to struggle and try to deal with the problem of sin. Our part is to believe. This further reinforces the notion that the greatest obstacle that stands in the way of man’s salvation is his unbelief. Likewise, Paul also emphasises the need to fight the good fight of faith and not to fight against sin.

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou was also called, and has professed a good profession before many witnesses.” (1 Timothy 6:12)

So, if unbelief is the biggest hurdle that humanity needs to overcome should not

all of us have faith as big or even bigger than the most gigantic mountain? As far as this part of our salvation is concerned, I believe that God knows that we are capable of believing only so much. This is reflected in the fact that Christ did not tell His disciples to have faith as big as a mountain but that they should have the kind of faith that, if it can be measured quantitatively, would be as small as the size of a mustard seed. And yet the Bible tells us that the very thing that pleases Him is faith.

“But without faith, it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

The question is how will we be able to please God if our faith is so small and weak? And in light of the situation that man constantly finds himself in, does it not seem that salvation is unachievable? The reality of the situation may easily discourage us and the very thought of not being able to have faith may even lead us to sink into depression. This is where the faith of Jesus becomes the solution to this problem.

The faith of Jesus is what sustains His people. It is His faith that is worthy and acceptable in God’s eyes. It is very similar to the notion that our lives need to be united with the life of Christ if we are to gain eternal life because it is only the righteous life of Christ that is acceptable before God. But most of all, the faith of Jesus was also produced to sustain and

strengthen those who would have to go through the fiery trial of the great tribulation. In other words, the same faith displayed by Christ will be fully manifested in the lives of those who will be persecuted just before the second coming takes place. That is why the Bible tells us in Revelation that the saints are they who keep not only the commandments of God but also hold on to the faith of Jesus.

“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” (Revelation 14:12)

So then, what does it mean that we need to fight the good fight of faith if the faith of Christ is what will see us through in the end? The thing is, the little faith that we have and that we can muster should be wholly channelled towards Christ. Our fight is to maintain this mustard-seed faith because it is this faith that acts as an arm that takes hold of the faith of Jesus. This is not impossible for us to achieve. If it were impossible, Christ would have not asked us to have faith as small as a mustard seed. We first need to exercise whatever faith we have and the rest is taken care of by Christ Himself and He will be the One who will move mountains. Because at the end of the day we can only have so small a faith, let us not be too bothered about how much faith we have but rather what kind of faith we have. It is not so much about how much I believe about Christ but whether or not I believe in Him and what He has done and accomplished for me.

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