

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

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God In Christ, Reconciling the World

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In the beginning God, through Christ, created man in His image and in His likeness. Man was created for a purpose, to reflect the very presence of God Himself. He was created to reflect the glory of God, to live in the endless brilliance of God's light. Before long, however, God was forsaken by the sins of man. When man turned from righteousness to sin, it blocked the light of God's glory, sentencing man to eternal darkness. How sad for man to have been created for the highest good – to walk in fellowship with God, to convey the light of the glory of God, yet through rebellion become trapped in the darkness of sin.

Looking through eternity, God knew man, whom He had created, would sin and rebel against Him. So God designed a plan that would give man an opportunity to be "reconciled" to Himself, with the ability to reestablish a close spiritual relationship. What Jesus purchased on the cross was God's gracious plan of redemption, so His children might come back to Him.

Isaiah 43:6-7 - (NIV) - "Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth - everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

When we think about what we (man) had in the beginning, what we lost through sin and what we, through the grace of God, can have again through faith, we see an awesome story of "reconciliation." God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself! The message of reconciliation is an appeal from a loving Heavenly Father to His estranged children, to come back to Him, where they will find love, forgiveness, and a new relationship with Him.

II Corinthians 5:19 (NIV) - "...God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them..."

Not counting men's sins against them? Sounds good, but what's the catch, you ask? Surely we can't walk into the presence of God and be accepted with open arms, as if nothing had happened, can we? No, we can't. That would be rather presumptuous of us. We can't expect to go back into the Father's presence in the same spiritual condition we were in, when man (Adam and Eve) was banished from the garden (God's

presence). If nothing has changed *in us*, it would be fruitless to come into God's presence with our old nature, the same nature as Adam. Yet, that is what many try to do. Somehow we think we can reconcile with God without changing, without giving up sin. As much as God loves us, and wants us back; we are not ready to come under His sovereign rule until there is a change in our attitude and action with regard to sin. In reality, if we're still rebellious against God's righteousness, we'll have just as many problems obeying Him as before.

There is a condition to be met if we want to be reconciled with God, to be accepted back into His presence. We must repent, turning away from sin, that we might in faith turn toward God. Here's the dilemma man faces; Even though Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world, no longer counting the sins of Adam against us, Jesus can't give us a new life unless we are willing to put an end to our old one.

II Corinthians 5:17 (NIV) - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

In no way can we continue to identify with the old man Adam and his failures, if we want Christ to live *in us*. We must not allow our old sin nature to hold us back. The bottom line? If we want Jesus, the old man has to go! At the moment we repent of *our* sins, to go forward in faith with Jesus, that is the moment we leave the old man behind in the dust! We are not truly moving out in faith with Jesus to begin a new life, if we are looking back over our shoulder, making excuses for behaving like the old man Adam.

An inmate wrote, "I've been focusing lately on what I should be doing to follow Jesus. But, the harder I try the more obstacles Satan puts in my way. I know I should love my brother and I know that jealousy, hate, and all those evil thoughts shouldn't be part of me, and I know I should get them out of my life, but they still live in me. I know that I'm saved and I know that the devil will always be there tempting me to sin, but its so hard here in prison to overcome, if you know what I mean. I don't know, Sharon, maybe I'm just making excuses!?"

This inmate realizes that it is easier to look at his circumstances and make excuses. He is not alone. Many find it easier to blame someone else for their shortcomings, "You wouldn't believe my upbringing, Sharon, I had such a rotten childhood, it's just hard for me to trust anyone." Excuses are born out of pride, keeping us in rebellion against God, separated from the possibility of reconciliation. Excuses keep us looking backwards at the failures of the human race (at Adam), rather than looking forward to the good works that God in Christ wants to do *in us* and *through us*. It causes us to take on the "victim" mentality, "Well, what's the use in thinking we can be better people? As long as we live in these flesh bodies we're always going to be fighting the temptations of the flesh. Besides, the Bible says, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

Yes, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God! I know it, you know it, the angels in heaven know it, and certainly the devil knows it, because he was the one who led Adam to sin against God in the first place. It was his rebellion against God that influenced the "fall of man" from a state of righteousness into a state of sin. This is the "bad news"!

If all we had to go on was the bad news of man falling short of the glory of God (if the devil had the final say about it), man would be forever in a hopeless, condemned state of mind. But, let us not move away from the hope of the gospel. The devil doesn't have the final say about man's destiny! The Bible also speaks about the "good news"! Thank God for sending Jesus to reconcile the world to Himself, to lift fallen man up. Thanks be to our Holy God for the "good news" of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

II Corinthians 5:21 - (NIV) - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Brothers and Sisters, it is through faith in Christ Jesus that we might become the righteousness of God. We do not have to keep falling short of the glory of God! We were created to reflect His glory. It is Christ in us the hope of glory! (***Colossians 1:27***) Every time we repent for sin, turning toward Jesus in faith, rather than making up an excuse out of pride, we are moving ever closer to God, being transformed more and more into His likeness, His image.

II Corinthians 3:18 (NIV) - And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being

transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

When we go back into the presence of God this time, Brothers and Sisters, we're not going to blow it as Adam did! We're going in with a new nature, one that reflects the Lord's glory! We will have made the commitment to humbly repent when we sin, letting the Lord cleanse us from all unrighteousness, for He is faithful and just to forgive. (I John 1:9)

Colossians 1:20-23 (KJV) - And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven.

Questions for personal or group study:

- 1. What is the meaning of reconciliation? (II Corinthians 5:17-21)***
- 2. What is a good example from the Bible on how reconciliation works? (Luke 15:11-24)***
- 3. Can we expect God's grace to abound if we make excuses for continuing in sin? (Romans 6:1-4).***
- 4. What must we do to demonstrate to Jesus that we are through with making excuses for our sins, and are now ready to reconcile? (Matthew 3:8-10)***
- 5. Which work is greater, the work that the devil did in Adam or the work that God did in Jesus Christ? (I John 3:7-10, I John 4:4, Revelation 20:10)***
- 6. What must we continue in, be grounded and settled in, if we expect Jesus to present us to the Heavenly Father, holy, unblamable, and unprovable in His sight? (Colossians 1:21-23)***