

MARCH 20, 1994

BEING RECONCILED TO GOD

We hear stories about people who have "picked themselves up by their own bootstraps" and become very successful in life. These stories are usually about a person from an improvised background, who through hard work and the right "breaks" were able to become leaders in their field. These situations are not all that rare. Many people do well and accomplish a lot in their lifetime. In the world of television comedy, we have seen stories of a chimpanzee that became a corporate executive or a government official. We all realize the improbability of such fantasy happening and accept it for its entertainment value. It is really a case of no matter how well he is dressed like a man or how well he behaves, he is still a chimpanzee. No matter how hard he tries, he will never become human. He may have plastic surgery to alter his appearance, but he will still be a chimpanzee. He can't lift himself by "his bootstraps" to be anything other than a better chimpanzee.

When God created man, there was a fellowship and relationship between God and Adam that was possible because of the spiritual life that was in man. When mankind sinned and the relationship with God was broken, the life that was open to God died and man was left with what has been called our "old sin nature." This "nature" can be educated, refined, and dressed up, but it will always be the "old sin nature." Regardless of how hard we try, our old nature can never be pleasing to God, it can never give us spiritual access to God, the best it can do is only become a better "old sin nature." Unless we receive help outside of ourselves and our ability, then we can never escape from who we are. What we really need is to get rid of the old and get an entirely new nature. The solution seems to be impossible to achieve. Except by the grace of God, it really is impossible.

ROMANS 5:6-11 Simply stated, "In our weakness, we can not save ourselves." Our weakness is a result of our inherited traits to sin. Mankind is inherently weak and sinful. In the world in which we live, we do not have to look very far to see the results of man's sinful nature. We can look back only a few years and see evidence that the expression of this sinful nature is becoming more and more open and defiant. As we hear of depravity, we are repulsed and shy away from those who are living sin-filled lives. We tend to think that they get what they deserve and secretly hope that "they" will just go away.

But wait! Stop and ask yourself, "What would have been the outcome for mankind if God had the same attitude we have toward sinners?" As we consider this, we get some idea of the kind of love God has for people. It is a love that is beyond our comprehension. As Paul tried to put God's love into perspective, we might imagine that someone would be capable of giving his life to enable a really good and worthwhile person to live, but who would do such a thing to enable a really bad person to live. However, this is exactly what the love of God did. "While we were yet sinner, Christ died for us." Fortunately, God did not use the standards of the world to measure us for worthiness, but acted out of His nature.

The concept of being **reconciled** is related to the concept of being **justified**. In parallel statements, Paul said we are "justified by His blood" and "reconciled to God by the death of His Son." Both these concepts speak to the misalignment of mankind with God because of sin and they speak to the means by which the misalignment can be made right. Since the penalty for sin is death, then that debt can be paid only by a death. This is where the grace of God comes to our rescue. If we are required to pay our debt, then it is all over with and nihilism becomes realism. However, by God's grace, Jesus paid the penalty for sin by His blood which then enable us to be acceptable to God. As we (by an act of faith) come under the provisions of what God has done for us by His grace, then we are "reconciled to" or "brought back into harmony with" God. This situation is made possible by the death of Christ.

If God loved us with such a great love when we were in rebellion against Him, then we should see even greater abound from that love now that we are reconciled to Him. One of those benefits is being saved from the consequences of a life that continues in sin. Paul referred to this as the wrath of God. In a parallel statement in verse 10 Paul used the phrase "saved by His life." It is the fact that Jesus lives in and through us who have been born again that enables us to align our lives with the will of God and thus avoid the inevitable consequence of sin. Knowing that we are at one with God and

are the object of His pleasure should bring great confidence and joy to our lives.

ROMANS 5:12-17 The parallels and contrasts of Adam and Jesus Christ give us insight and understanding of mankind's situation. If we are "saved by the life of Christ" it is because His nature is in us by the new birth -- our spirits have been born of the Spirit of God. In a similar manner, we were doom to wrath because the nature of Adam was in us by reason of our physical birth. We inherited the "Adamic nature" and were under the rule of sin and death ("the soul that sins, it shall die") in much the same way the child of a slave is also the property of the slave owner. Therefore, all that are "in Adam" are subject to judgment that leads to condemnation -- "the wages of sin is death." In the same way, all that are "in Christ" and are "born of the Spirit" are subject to the law of grace and faith -- "for by grace are you saved through faith" -- "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

Just as a chimpanzee can never become human by dressing in clothes or even acting and looking like a human, mankind, in his fallen state (Adamic nature) can never become spiritual by good works or learning. He must first die to the old nature and be born again of the Spirit of God.