

**Reconciliation and Peace with God is
found only in Christ:**

**The following excerpt entitled "Peace
of Reconciliation with God" is from
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273; A modernized abridgment of the
Puritan Classic by William Gurnall**

2. What is Meant by Peace

Peace is a comprehensive word. 'We looked for peace, but no good came,' the prophet said (Jer. 8:15). Peace brings good with it, as the sun furnishes light for the world. When Jesus expressed what He wanted most for His disciples, He wrapped up all the happiness His large heart could hold and sent it in this blessing: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you' (John 14:27). Now peace in its greatest latitude, if it is not counterfeit, will always grow from this gospel root. True peace, then, is the blessing of the gospel, and only of the gospel. The blessing of reconciliation with God is the first type of peace we shall examine.

PEACE OF RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

I. NEED FOR PEACE WITH GOD

Open acts of hostility between nations announce the start of a war. Similarly, despite the fact that he shoots short (though such misses are against his will), man sends whole barrages of sin and unholiness at God. Even the most mature saints recall their old life before converting grace gave them a new one: 'We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures' (Tit. 3:3). In other words, being in bondage to

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Satan, we were willing to fight against God and take the side of His only enemy.

There is not a single part or faculty of the unconverted man that does not resist and fight against God. 'The carnal mind is enmity against God,' Paul instructed (Rom. 8:7). And if war boils over in the mind, there cannot be peace in the lower parts of the soul either. By nature the enmity against God is seated in the superior faculties of the soul. Common soldiers are often more interested in the personal benefits they receive from the battle, whereas officers are concerned about the principles at stake, and go into the fight full of contempt for the opposition. Thus, inferior faculties seek only the satisfaction of their sensual appetite in the excitement of sin, while the superior faculties of the mind come forth more directly against God to oppose His sovereignty. In fact, if it were possible to take away God's life itself, there is enough hatred in the carnal mind to execute that plot.

Not only is man in arms against God, but God is against wicked man also. 'God is angry with the wicked every day . . . he hath bent his bow and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death' (Ps. 7:11-13). God has set up His royal standard in defiance of all the sons and daughters of Adam, who are traitors to His crown. And He has taken the field as with fire and sword against everyone who rebels against His Word. God gives sufficient testimony of His wrath by revealing how He judges sinners - they are crushed to death by His righteous foot, a fate suited to their viperous master in sin.

At every door where sin enters, the anger of God meets it there. Because each faculty of the soul and member of the body is used as a weapon of unrighteousness against God, so every one, even to the tip of the tongue, receives its portion of divine wrath. And just as man is sinful all

over, so he is cursed all over – inside and outside, soul and body alike. Curses and punishments are written over him so closely together that there is not room for one more to be added to those God has already written.

In a word, the Lord's displeasure against sinful man is so fiery that all creation must share in it. Although God takes aim at man, and levels His arrows primarily at him, yet they wound other creatures as well. God's curse, then, blasts the whole creation for man's sake; and part of the misery of man is paid to him through the fallen creation, through all the forces and creatures of the natural world which originally were ordained to minister to man and to provide contributing drops in the filling of his cup of joy.

We can compare God's plagues to an enraged army which spoils all the enemies' land – destroying their supplies, poisoning their water, and burning their homes. Nothing escapes the fury of it. The very bread we eat, air we breathe, and water we drink are poisoned with God's curse, so that even the oldest, healthiest living man will eventually die.

All these expressions of God's violence against sin, though, cannot be likened to hell any more accurately than a handful of soldiers can be compared to an entire army. God does nothing but skirmish with sinners here – He sends only a sampling of His judgment to let them know they do have an enemy who is alive, who sees everything they do, and who can overpower them any time He pleases. Only in hell does God unleash the full fury of His judging power, for there He will punish sinners 'with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power' (2 Thess. 1:9). This, then, establishes the fact that there is a quarrel between God and man.

II. PEACE ONLY BY THE GOSPEL

God's Word first presents man with the articles of the

gospel peace treaty and then becomes the instrument, through preached and published Scripture, to effect this blessing.

(a) *Scripture presents the articles of peace*

The gospel is God's heart in print; and its precious promises are heaven's truths translated into man's language. In them are the purposes of love and mercy agreed upon by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for the recovery of lost mankind by Jesus. These are promises which are exposed to the view of our faith so we may believe them, and know the Father empowered His Son to preach His peace and then to purchase that peace by death on the cross. Finally, God sent the Holy Spirit to seal these promises to everyone who would believe Jesus' letter of credentials (the confirming miracles and the Bible's testimony), and receive Jesus as Savior by faith unfeigned.

The guilty man is surrounded on every side by a deluge of wrath – with no hope or help – until the gospel, like a dove, brings the olive branch of peace and tells him the tide has turned and the flood of wrath poured upon him for sin has fallen upon Christ. Because Christ was made a curse for us, the gulf which hindered our journey to God has been absorbed, and where the great sea once appeared we now find safe dry land called 'a living way,' by which every believing and repenting sinner can cross over (Heb. 10:20). Jesus offers Himself as the bridge to change for us the justice of God into His love and favor. 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 5:1).

We are entirely indebted to Scripture for the discovery of these truths of justification and peace. Philosophers like Cicero and Aristotle share only a deep silence on the subject – they are not able to tell the sinner how he can find

peace with God. And neither is this reconciliation to be found in the covenant God made with Adam, which shuts up the sinner in a dark dungeon of despair and tells him to expect nothing but the wrath which a just God will measure out to him.

Paul acknowledges that only Christ brings 'life and immortality to light through the gospel' (2 Tim. 1:10). It lay hidden in the womb of God's purpose until the gospel came and led us into the knowledge of it, as the sun's light reveals what was there before but could not be seen without its light. Therefore God's supply of peace is called not only 'a living way' but 'a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us' – so new that the heart of man never knew a single thought of it until the gospel opened it: 'I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known' (Heb. 10:20; Isa. 42:16).

(b) *The published and preached gospel effects peace*
Before peace can be completed between God and man, both must agree on the following: God pardons and the sinner must accept and embrace peace on God's terms. But how can this be done? The heart of man is so deeply rooted in its enmity against God that it requires a strength equal to that which can tear up mountains and carry rocks from one place to another in order to pluck the heart from that evil soil. The preached gospel is God's mighty tool to accomplish this feat. 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation,' Paul declared (Rom. 1:16). It is the chariot in which the Spirit victoriously rides when He enters the hearts of men – called 'the ministration of the spirit' (2 Cor. 3:8). He makes the heart new as He framed the world at first – by His spoken word.

This is the day of God's power in which He makes His

people willing and causes them – who had seeds of war sown in their natures – to become His friends. Unheard-of power! It is as if the sound of an army's beating drum could carry such an amazing influence as to make the enemy's soldiers throw down their arms and seek peace from the one they resisted with such rage and fury. Such a secret power accompanies the gospel. It not only strikes the sinner's sword out of his hand while it is stretched out against God, but cuts the enmity out of his heart as well – and brings the stoutest rebel to his knees, humbly craving the peace published in the gospel. It makes a sinner so obedient to the call of God in the gospel that he suddenly forsakes and forgets the close embraces of his beloved lusts, so they cannot keep him apart from God a moment longer.

III. WHY GOD EFFECTS PEACE BY THE GOSPEL

It is God's choice to reconcile sinners to Himself by Christ. 'Having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; . . . 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' (Col. 1:20–22).

Some say God did not know any other way to do it. But how pitiful is any attempt of created understanding to fathom the unsearchableness of God's omnipotent wisdom – to say what He can and cannot do! Yet we can say, in full reverence for the Majesty of heaven, that God could not have found a better way of exalting His own glorious name and purchasing sinners' peace, than by reconciling them to Himself by Christ the precious Peacemaker.

This mysterious exchange has in itself the ability to solve all the difficulties of the enmity between man and

God, and for wonder it exceeds even God's workmanship in creating the world. Now this creation is so perfect and glorious that it tells every creature that its Maker is God, a knowing which puts the atheist to shame in his own conscience because he will not believe. Even so, the plan of reconciliation excels the creation of heaven and earth as greatly as the watch surpasses the crystal which covers it. Indeed God intended, by this way of drawing sinners to Himself, to cause both angels and saints to admire the mystery of His wisdom, power, and love in it – from now through eternity.

When at last all angels and Christians meet together in heaven, the whole beautiful counsel of God will be unfolded to them! At that time we shall see how the seas of unbelief were dried up and what rocks of impossibilities were cut through by the omnipotent grace of God, before a sinner's peace could be secured. We shall learn how the Father worked to bring it all to completion. Surely we will be swallowed up in adoring the abyss of His wisdom, who laid the foundation of all this peace according to the eternal counsel of His own will! As the sun exceeds the strength of our natural vision, the glory of God's peace will stretch beyond our capacity to understand it.

This, then, is the masterpiece which God drew on purpose, for its rare workmanship, to beautify heaven. When Christ returned to the Father He did not take any of this world's crowns or silver or gold with Him. Of course men risk their lives every day for these riches, but what are earth's treasures to heaven? Earth's glories suit heaven no better than the beggar's scraps do a prince's table, or a patched threadbare coat suits a royal wardrobe.

No, the Lord Christ came for a much higher purpose than anything the world could ever design; He undertook to negotiate peace between God and rebels who justly

earned divine vengeance. And God knew no one else beneath His Son trustworthy enough to transact it. So Jesus stayed here long enough to complete His Father's business and then carried the joyful report of His finished work back to heaven. But now let me proceed to several more detailed reasons why God adopted this method of reconciliation by the gospel.

(a) *God expresses perfect hatred of sin and perfect love to sinners*

Nothing demonstrates mercy like forgiveness. To receive a reconciled sinner into heaven is not so great an act as to reconcile the sinner in the first place. The terms are very different, for there is every reason to expect the first but no reason to expect the latter. When God performs the act of reconciliation, He causes the sinner to see His hatred of sin written on His face of love. And this is necessary, if we consider how hard it is for our corrupt hearts to conceive of God's mercy without a shameful reflection on His holiness.

When God said, 'I kept silence,' what did the wicked man conclude about Him? God's Word answers: 'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself' (Ps. 50:21) – that is, 'You assumed I tolerated sin as much as you do.' Now if such a plain text of God's longsuffering mercy is glossed over to tarnish His holy nature, how much more will a sinner subject His forgiving mercy to abuse? Some stare for so long at the consoling truth of mercy that they are unwilling to look up and see any of God's other attributes.

Now in reconciling Himself to sinners by Christ, God has some formidable ways of convincing them of His implacable hatred of sin. It is true that the Bible says sin finds no favor in God's heart; it confirms the torment of a guilty conscience which hunts down peace and cries out

damnation to its prisoner. Scripture also describes the fiery judgments of this world, and the furnace heating for unbelievers in eternity shows how furious God's heart burns with wrath against their sin. All these are convincing arguments. But when we see the Father plunge the fatal knife of anger into the heart of Jesus even during His pain and supplications, and force His life out of His body, this shows God's hatred of sin more than all the tormenting screams of hell.

The backs of the entire damned population of hell are not broad enough to bear the total weight of God's wrath at once, for it is infinite and they are but finite. And if this were possible, they would not still be writhing in that dark prison for non-payment. But look at the One who carried the complete curse of sin on His back. The sufferings of condemned sinners are infinitely *extensive* because they are everlasting; but Christ's were infinitely *intensive*. He paid in one sum what they will be paying for ever, yet never finish.

The whole curse of sin met in Jesus, as all streams run to the ocean – a collection of all the wages of sin and death merged in Him. 'The chastisement of our peace was upon him; . . . and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all' (*Isa. 53:5, 6*). But take another step and consider God's unspeakable love for His beloved Son as He watched Him – alone – enter the stage of bloody tragedy. Be still here and know the painful price both God and His Son paid for you to be one with Him. I think you are at the highest stair God's Word can lead you to ascend into the meditation of His love.

Picture a father who has only one son – and can have no more – sending that child to prison and with his own lips sentencing him to death. And then, to guarantee the execution be completed with the most horrible torment

possible, he watches his child's death with eyes brimming not with grief but with anger. If you study this parent's countenance you conclude that surely he hates his son or the sin he committed. This is what you see in the Father towards His Son, for it was God, more than men or devils, who caused Christ's death.

Jesus knew the warrant for His death was signed and sealed by His Father's hand, for He prayed, 'O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done' (*Matt. 26:42*). Yet the spirit of the Man of Sorrows rejoiced in obeying God and His blood was the only wine which made the Father's heart glad: 'It pleased the Lord to bruise him' (*Isa. 53:10*). When Christ suffered death on the cross, God was pleased – not because He did not love His Son and not because He had disobeyed Him, for Jesus never once disappointed God. But God hated sin, and in His determination to exalt His mercy toward sinners, He satisfied His justice on His only Son.

(b) *God purchased our peace by Christ so He could protect Christians from pride*

Pride is the stone that made angels and man stumble and fall. And in order for man to stand up again, God rolled that stone away and laid aside that weapon with which His children harmed themselves. To protect His family from future batteries of hell at this door, then, God chose such a secure way of saving them that when the prince of this world comes to tempt with pride, he cannot find anything in them to respond to his offer. We wonder how pride, of all sins, can grow since its only root is traced to man's imagination and flights of fancy. Yet it flourishes like a mushroom or moss among stones, where little or no soil is there for the root to attach itself to. In this gospel way of reconciling sinners by Christ, God makes Satan haul in

that soil from outside.

Do you want peace with God? You cannot expect to find it in penance. 'The chastisement of our peace was upon him' (Isa. 53:5). Be assured you will never be your own peacemaker! That is Christ's name, and He did this work by Himself: 'For he is our peace, who hath made both one' (Eph. 2:14) – Jew and Gentile at one with God, and at one with each other.

Is it righteousness you want? Then you must not appear before God in your own clothing. Someone else has provided righteousness for you: 'Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength' (Isa. 45:24). In a word, do you desire to have a right to heaven's glory? Certainly your silver and gold are not good enough to buy it. The price cannot come out of your pocket; it must come from Christ's heart. He has bought it for us, not with silver and gold but with His precious blood, an inheritance coming down as freely as a father's estate upon his children (Eph. 1:14).

God chose to give this treasure of reconciliation to humble us, so our haughtiness might bow and God could be exalted in our day of salvation. 'The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world' (John 6:33). And notice why God chose that method to feed His children in the wilderness: 'Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee' (Deut. 8:16).

Let us examine this humbling process more carefully. Naturally we assume that the Israelites would have become wise as well as humble when God Himself fed them with 'angels' food' (Ps. 78:25). Yet man is proud and wants to be his own provider; he does not enjoy a meal sent in by charity, at another's expense, nearly so

much as he does food which he earned by himself. This pride made the children of Israel wish for the onions of their Egyptian gardens – inferior food but food bought with their own money instead of brought to them by God.

(c) God's reconciliation to sinners was aimed at a more perfect union than He had with Adam

God would never have allowed His first workmanship to be so scarred by sin if He had not planned to build a more magnificent structure out of its ruins. Because He intended to print man's happiness in the second edition with a more perfect type than the first, He used Christ as the only fit instrument to accomplish this design: 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly' (John 10:10). He did not come to give the dead and damned a bare peace – naked life – but a more abundant life than man ever had before sin separated him from God.

It was Christ who filled the second temple with a glory greater than the first – Christ in the second creation of man who lifts his head above his first happiness. Just as Adam was a pattern to all his seed – what he was, they should have been, had he remained innocent – so Christ is a pattern to all His seed of that glory which they will be clothed with: 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2). Our earthly bodies will be 'like unto his glorious body' and our souls like His glorious soul as well (Phil. 3:21). Meanwhile, the status of a reconciled sinner in Christ surpasses Adam's first condition because of the redeemed person's union to God and his communion with Him.