



Conducted by
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“Could you please help me in understanding the relationship between God and Jesus. I have always thought that understanding such a relationship didn’t really matter so long as Jesus was my Saviour, but I now feel that further knowledge would help?”

As I have pointed out many times in these columns, I have never pretended to be an expert theologian. However, it is undoubtedly true that there are many references, particularly in the N.T., to this relationship, and it is to these we must turn. I shall refer to them and offer comments which I believe are pertinent. The best way to explore this question, I believe, is by looking at the great themes of the Bible, i.e., Reconciliation, Justification and Redemption.

RECONCILIATION

In Cor. 5:18, 19 Paul says, **“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. . .”**

There are one or two explicit points here that we must take note of. The Apostle says quite categorically that **“all things are of God,”** i.e., everything begins with God and ends with Him. He also affirms that God **“hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ.”** It is from God that we have been estranged by sin, and it is to Him that we need to be reconciled. There is no need for God to be reconciled to us, but there is a great need for us to be reconciled to Him. The reconciliation is effected through and by Jesus Christ. Paul then goes on, **“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.”** How are we to interpret the phrase, **‘God was in Christ.’** Which words do we emphasise, and does it make any difference? Do we read it **‘God was, in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself’?** If we do, then we would be indicating that God was ordering an action to be performed by Jesus which would be independent of Himself? If, on the other hand, we say, **‘God was in Christ’**, then we would seem to be indicating a **unified action** by God and His Christ. There is a difference, and I believe it to be a fundamental one. On the one hand we are looking at a God in Heaven aloof from the suffering of His Son; on the other, we are looking at a **participatory** God, sharing the suffering in the Person of His Son on the cross, and alleviating the sinful condition of man which **His own justice** has demanded should be dealt with. We will need to return to this point when we look at Justification.

What I am saying, then, is that God **finished** His work of reconciliation in Christ Jesus on the Cross. The sacrifice for sin, as I see it, was a sacrifice of **divine integration**. In terms of the unique unity of the Godhead, God suffered as Christ suffered on the

Cross. It was the closeness of the relationship as stated by Jesus in His prayer in John 17, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us:" and again, "I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one" (vv. 21,23). Jesus never doubted His Oneness with the Father; it is this unique relationship which reconciliation to God elevates us to.

JUSTIFICATION

I believe Christians, generally, should take a more radical look at the God in whom they believe. The unchanging nature of God is reflected in His unchanging counsel and will. In His unchanging nature, we must look upon God as being complete and entire; He cannot act outside His own nature. Therefore, when we speak about the love of God and the justice of God, we are not speaking about separate entities, displayed independently at various times. When God loves, His love is integral with His justice; when He rebukes and chastens, these aspects of His nature must be seen as incorporating His love and His justice. If we do not see God like this, then we are in danger of seeing a capricious God who sometimes acts **outside His own nature**; isn't this the criticism so often levelled against Christians by people of the world when they see the desperate plight of people, and make such comments as, "If your God was a God of love, as you say, He wouldn't allow this to happen". Comments like this are only possible when people do not understand the true nature of God.

The way God has dealt with sin ought to indicate to us His true nature, and the way in which His nature acts together in complete harmony. He loves us because we are His creation, and He wants to see that love reciprocated by us. He is gracious because He gives, and His giving is beyond our asking; we can never merit what He gives, particularly in salvation. He is merciful, because under all considerations we should bear the penal consequences of our sin but He has opened a way for us to escape through Christ Jesus His Son. He is just, because He did not leave sin unattended to, but He dealt with it decisively at great personal cost to Himself, and nowhere do we see that justice more clearly explained than in the letter that Paul wrote to Rome; a brief glance at Rom.3 will explain.

In v25, speaking about Jesus, Paul says, "**Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God**". The word 'propitiation' means, 'to placate an offended deity', and there are many Christians who do not like this word; they say that God does not need to be placated. But is this strictly true? Are we saying that the wrath of God is not turned against sin? If we are, then how do we account for the fact that millions of people will go to hell if they do not repent of their sin, and why do we preach and teach this? There is strong evidence in the O.T. that the wrath of God had to be placated, particularly against the children of Israel (Read Numbers 16:41-50). You see any declaration of God's righteousness demanded that He act justly, not only by divine fiat but also in world view of His creation. He would have been an **unjust** God and it would have been inconsistent with His true nature of love, if He had allowed His creation to bear the full penal consequences of sin without dealing with it, and remember, only **He could** deal with it. So what did He do? He sent to us **Emmanuel**, in the Person of His Christ, and 'Emmanuel' means, 'God with us'. The astounding impact of the sacrifice on the Cross means that God interposed **Himself**, in the Person of His Christ, between sin and ourselves, thus providing a way for us to avoid the penal consequence of sin — even though we deserved it — and bearing the penalty Himself in Christ. What a wonderful Father we have. Paul puts it like this, "**To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.**" What was seen on the Cross was an almost incredible declaration of the power and majesty of the Godhead in action to procure our salvation. The greatest wonder of all is that through the Gospel we can enter this glorious relationship which Christ envisaged in His prayer,

“I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.” We can, as Peter says **“become partakers of the Divine Nature.”** We need to understand our relationship with God better.

REDEMPTION

I suppose the foundation passage for our understanding of redemption is to be found in Mk 10:45 where Jesus says, **“For the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.”** There can be no redemption without a price being paid. According to Jesus, the ‘many’ would have had to pay the price, but instead of that, His own life was given as the ‘ransom’. This was the price paid to buy us out of the bondage of sin. The glory of redemption, however, does not end with the forgiveness of sins. Paul assures us that even after we have lived in the flesh, greater blessings await the children of God in the future, for he says **“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”** It is here that we see the other Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, entering a relationship with us. He ‘helps us in our infirmities’; He makes intercession for us according to the will of God.

Do we Christians really understand the great power at our disposal in the Godhead? We ought to, because Christianity is a great deal more than just ‘refraining’ from doing things which might be considered sinful; it is a positive attitude to our relationship with the Godhead. Once we understand this, our Christian lives will not be a reluctant ‘letting go’ of things here, but will be a ‘reaching forward’ to the greater glory. Yes, we **do** need to understand more concerning our relationship with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit; thereby, our lives will be enriched.

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