

What We Can Learn From This Day Of Atonement

Justification, Reconciliation, Sanctification

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Acts 3:19-21 Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord: And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

It has been God's purpose since the foundation of this world to restore all things that He intended for mankind when He created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden.

That restoration, or restitution, is characterized in verse 19 as "a time of refreshing." The problem here is this: By what means does one get from what happened in the Garden of Eden to the "restitution of all things"?

The Greek word underlying "restitution" suggests the establishment of something good following something bad, as when an old rusted beat-up automobile is restored to its original beauty. In context though, it indicates the establishment of what was predicted by the prophet.

I think that we can wholeheartedly agree with God that mankind needs relief through the restoration prophesied, but things are getting worse. Viewing what is happening in the world, it definitely appears that God is gradually loosening the reins by which He restrains Satan from fully unleashing his destructive powers. Even so, Satan has managed to create a pressure-packed and wearying state of stressful anxiety. I think that this stress is one of the things Jesus had in mind whenever He said, "He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved."

Notice how this stressful time was anticipated in a long-ago prophesy appearing in Daniel 7. You might recall elsewhere in Daniel 12 he said that

"men shall run to and fro." What is interesting about that phrase is that it can also appear to be something that is taking place in a person's mind, indicating a stress, the mind zipping back and forth, trying to figure a way out.

Daniel 7:23-25 Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.

I think this is clearly an end-time prophesy, and as bad as it is now in terms of anxiety and wearying, it is going to get worse because that last person prophesied there is undoubtedly the Beast, and he is going to wear out the saints.

The *Revised English Bible* translates that phrase in verse 25 as, "He will hurl defiance at the Most High and shall wear down the holy ones."

We have not entered into the intensity of a stressful situation as verse 25 pictures, but it cannot be all that far over the horizon, and it is already somewhat wearying. Anxiety is growing.

There is no doubt at all in my mind that a gradually intensifying state of fear exists. It is being fueled by constant news of war, of corruption in business and government, of crime in the streets, of sickness of all kinds, and of the depletion of essential minerals such as the peak-oil situation. From every angle, apprehension is increasing.

The overall effect of this is to drive people apart. Whom can we trust to tell us the truth? Suspicion that we are being taken advantage of, or about to be taken advantage of, is everywhere. We feel as though we are losing control. A summary of what Peter is saying in Acts 3:19-21 is that none of this would be happening if we were not separated from God.

Verses 19 and 20 are better translated in the *American Standard Bible* and other modern translations. The *American Standard Bible* says this: "Repent therefore, and return, that your sins may be wiped away in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus, the Christ, appointed for you."

They rightly insert the word "that" into that sentence three times, thus showing more clearly that Peter is describing a linked, step-by-step process: "from this to that, to that" is the way he is saying, and that this linked process will result in reconciliation with God for an individual and for the nation of Israel.

Here I want to interject something from Jesus' prayer on that last night before He was crucified.

John 17:11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to you, Holy Father, keep through your own name those whom you have given me, that they may be one as we are.

John 17:20-21 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that you have sent me.

I mentioned at the very end of my Trumpets sermon that the overall issue—the story thread of the Bible—is government, but the restoration of God's government is not all that God has in mind. God is above all, and He has a plan of reproducing Himself through the creation of divine character in beings created in His image.

This plan also involves the use of angels He created to assist Him and the heirs of salvation. But one-third of the angels rebelled, and when man was created and sinned through the temptations of one of those angelic beings, the rebels—that is, those born out of Adam and Eve and their children—continued to lead mankind into rebellion against God.

God is all powerful. He defeated the rebelling angels whenever they mounted a war against Him, and He could have just forced His government on the creation and condemned the rebels—man included—with no hope. But as I said just a little bit earlier, restoring His government is not the only aim. There is another purpose being worked out. God did as He did, because merely restoring His government is not the central issue. Bringing mankind around to oneness with Him is.

God is infinitely wise, merciful, and patient, so He continued on with His plan, including the rebellious angels as unwilling dupes, assisting Him in producing the desired result anyway. Now the events prophesied for the end-time make it evident that not only is the rebellion continuing, but it is intensifying. We are moving toward a very sobering climax.

How will mankind be reconciled to God? How will mankind ever be at peace with each other? The answer to that is *never*, as long as things remain as they are, and that is why Peter in Acts 3:19 called upon those listening to him to repent. That is a good first step. So Peter charges, in what he said there, all of the called-out people to do something they can do. God even expected the unconverted Israelites to repent. Surely the called-out of God can repent. This means allow your mind to change, and turn to God.

The Day of Atonement is concerned with the legal, spiritual, and practical moral aspects of how to restore God's government, and also ensure that rebellion will not happen again in beings of free-moral agency. Everything is kind of cohesively put together in this one day, not always in the greatest of detail, but in an overall way. This is what the day observes.

I Peter 1:17-21 And if you call on the Father, who without respect of persons judges according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear [meaning, in reverential respect, not terror in this case]: Forasmuch as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain [futile] conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of

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the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

We normally think of Passover in terms of being reconciled to God, and indeed it does. Atonement is inextricably bound with Passover because it too involves reconciliation, but Atonement supplies answers and solutions to problems that are not resolved by Passover.

Consider this: Passover is personal and individual in nature, and provides reconciliation of the called individual to God. The emphasis is on the word "individual," like one at a time. It marks the beginning of God's creative process for the individual, through Christ, bringing the person into the church, and in unity with the Father and Son and the others who are already in the church.

The emphasis here in I Peter is on the initial cost of reconciliation. God hopes that we are impressed enough about the price paid for us that we are motivated to submit, because a major portion of our desire to cooperate with Him is derived from a sense of obligation to God and Christ regarding how much was paid for so little. Brethren, in the whole scope of things, *we are nothing*, and yet our Creator paid for us with *His* life. That is pretty awesome. We have to eventually reach the point where we are awed by the fact that so personal is Christ's sacrifice for each of the called of God that if we were the only ones who had ever sinned, He still would have followed through on His obligation to die for our sins.

Let us develop further why atonement is necessary by turning to Isaiah 59.

Isaiah 59:1-2 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

Sin, iniquity, lawlessness, transgression, whatever it is we want to name it, is what brought on the need for atonement, or reconciliation. Sin, lawlessness, transgression, and iniquity produce the opposite of atonement. Iniquity builds barriers and separates. Atonement heals them. This is why I said at the

beginning of the sermon that all of this that is going on around us—this news of corruption, and war, and so forth—is driving us apart because all of those things represent war, and it makes us distrustful and suspicious and guarded, always kind of psychologically looking back over our shoulder. "Who's out to get me now?" That is the kind of world we live in. We are witnessing in this world what sin causes. Even if it does not directly cause our death, or robbery of our properties, it does put us into fear and separates us from our neighbor and God as well.

Understand it is not that God cannot hear. He simply will not answer people's prayers, and thus it *appears* as though He is not hearing. What pride there is in people who are sinning left and right, yet praying to God and expect to get an answer! But it says there that God will *not* hear. He is not hearing their pleas. He hears the sounds of their words, but turns off His ear and will not respond. In fact, it may appear that He has gone far off, as some people believe, but the reality is that it is the sinners who are drifting ever further away. God never changes. People do. Paul said, "Evil men shall grow worse and worse."

It is interesting to note in the context are a people who anticipate some kind of divine intervention and have prayed for it, but their lifestyle shows all too clearly that their heart's desire is not toward the establishment of God's government, because all the while they are praying they are rebelling against it by continuing to sin. If they were not sinning, God would have responded. That is how I know they were sinning. In other words, putting this into a little bit different picture, people want the good things of security, ease, and prosperity, but they want also to continue to live as they always have, without repentance, and therefore without change.

Let us touch on a scripture that I used in my Trumpets sermon. We are going to go to II Chronicles 15, because the prophet there said something significant to life.

II Chronicles 15:1-2 And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded: And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear you me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while you be with him; and if you seek him, he will be found of you; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.

There is a principle expressed here of reciprocity. These people in Isaiah 59 were not exercising any reciprocity with God. They wanted the good things, but they were not willing to pay the price to get any of the good things. Human nature wants to get things from God but is unwilling to respond with the things that He requires in return, and He requires a change of mind towards Him. Human nature wants to irresponsibly get things without cost to the self. This is one of the things that socialist-type governments teach people, like they are getting things for free. Oh no, they are not. It is a sham.

Isaiah 1:11-17 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? Says the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hands [to pray], I will hide my eyes from you: yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

What we see here in Isaiah 1 is a very similar situation to what is recorded in Isaiah 59. Isaiah wrote both of them and it is very possible that at the beginning was a different time from Isaiah 59, but the people had not changed at all from what Isaiah found when he began his ministry. So we have a similar situation, and very interesting in its causes and its result.

It is good to remember who these people were. They were the people of God. They had an acquaintance with God at that time under and through the Old Covenant. It is neither their sacrifices nor the keeping of their holy days that God is in reality rejecting, but people who are merely going through the motions without the humility of submitting to God's great moral and spiritual laws. Remember what we just read: "Your hands are full of blood. Wash

you. Make you clean. Put away the evil of your doings." But all the while they were doing that, they were taking care of doing the ceremonies that God required.

These people were a Sodom-like offensiveness to God. "To whom much is given, the much more is required." Much in the way of knowledge and understanding had been given to God's people through His prophets. So what God is showing here right in the first chapter of the book of Isaiah is that there must be a relationship between worship—that is, going to services—and character, which is what one does *away* from services and God's people.

God is far more concerned about right relationships between men than He is about scrupulous adherence to what could be nothing more than a ceremony through which even God is to be worshipped. Their religion was a sham. It was a hypocrisy. They looked good in public when they went to services and blew their trumpets, or whatever it was, and plunked their shekel into the treasury, but behind closed doors what were they doing in their families, in their businesses? Out of sight they could not see God either. That is why those people and what they were doing was a Sodom-like offense to God. These people were hardly at one with Him.

I John 4:20 If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: [That is what was happening in Isaiah chapter 1.] for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

How can those who treat their fellow man with contempt, and then carry into God's services greed, anger, revenge, hatred, or any other distortions of God's Spirit and way, say that they are worshipping God? This amounts to nothing more than a hypocritical sham, and such a person is separated from God, and he needs atonement. And since they were acting toward God as the pagans did towards their idols, God then acted like the pagan's idols—that He could not hear nor see.

I think it is essential at this point to note that God, in His wisdom, knew before creating mankind that all would rebel against Him, and if there was

going to be both reconciliation and character built, there would have to be a means provided that not only would satisfy His legal requirements, but also contain moral and spiritual influences for man to become one with God.

God was going to require influences strong enough for man to cooperate on his own, to motivate him to repentance, to turn him to God, to resist the desire to sin, to submit to God's laws, to study, to pray, to meditate, and build character and live by faith. When the Father and Son were working this out, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ became the foundation for these influences. It does not stand alone, but it is huge in its importance, and that is one of the reasons Passover precedes Atonement.

Romans 5:10-11 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. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement [or the reconciliation].

The issue in this chapter is reconciliation. We are going to go to verse 12 and spend a little bit of time on it because it pertains to reconciliation.

Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.

This chapter explains a contrast between two significant people: Adam, and what he did and how it affected mankind; and Christ, and what *He* did, and how *it* affects mankind.

A Catholic doctrine of the original sin says that we are all tainted with an evil nature at birth because of Adam's sin. There is not doubt that we have been very significantly affected, but not in the Catholic way. Sin, and guilt for sin, is not passed on genetically.

What we are looking at in this chapter is a judgment by God, and Adam was the test case because he was the first man. He was the representative man, and God judged that as Adam behaved, so would all of his descendants. God also judged (and this is a unique judgment) that when Adam sinned, all the

families of mankind sinned right with him because they were literally *in* Adam; that is, in his body through his ability to reproduce himself, and what Adam reproduced would be just like him.

God used the same form of judging in Hebrews 7 in regard to Levi paying tithes to Melchizedek, because he (Levi) was within Abraham when Abraham literally paid tithes to Melchizedek, but Levi was not literally born until three generations later. God said Levi paid tithes even though he was not yet even born, because he was *in* Abraham's reproductive organ.

And thus, in regard to Adam, it is not a sinful nature being passed on genetically, but rather God making a judgment that all would sin and fall short of the glory of God just like Adam did. God's judgment proved to be correct, because that is what happened even though everybody did not sin the same kind of sin or in the same way that Adam did, but we all sinned nonetheless. So all have sinned, and all have had passed on them the ultimate in separation: death.

Ezekiel 18:4 clarifies a bit the statements I just made. God is speaking.

Ezekiel 18:4 Behold, all souls [meaning lives] are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins, it shall die.

Sin is passed on by a person sinning. Each person then commits his own sin, and each earns separation from God, and each dies as a result. The soul that sins dies. Sin, guilt, separation and death are all individually earned.

Now we will go to Genesis 3, because we need to check on another part of the separation equation.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yes, has God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

Genesis 3:8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid

themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

Genesis 3:12-13 And the man said, The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that you have done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

Genesis 3:24 So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life.

This is helpful to understand why mankind is separated from God. There is a four-step process in those verses I just read. (1) Adam and Eve are placed in the garden. (2) They are influenced to sin by Satan who made sin appear logical, rational, and therefore wise to their desires. (3) When confronted to give account by God, they justified themselves, blaming it on each other, or somebody else. (4) Judgment occurs. The sentence is passed, and they are separated from God.

Again, do not forget what we learned in Romans 5, that through Adam and Eve, because all of mankind was in those two people, all of mankind is involved in this judgment.

Do you see the basis for the judgment? They sinned in defiance of what God said. There is no indication of sorrow. Instead, there is a sense of guilt and fear (otherwise why did they hide?), and then self-justification. There is no indication that they wanted the separation that the sin produced healed. Again, brethren, all of us have followed the same general pattern in the same spirit, and earned the same separation as Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were the first to sin, and therefore introduced sin to mankind. In one sense, they were the door, and Satan was there to open it, and he did.

We are going to go back to the New Testament once again into an epistle of Paul.

I Corinthians 2:9-11 But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them unto us [His children] by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so [or in like manner] the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God.

I Corinthians 2:13-14 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

From that original sin, judgment, and separation, man has been doomed to producing cultures based on his own reasoning because access to the Tree of Life and the Holy Spirit was cut off; thus there is a dimension missing from man's reasoning processes regardless of how much intelligence a man has, regardless of his academic level, regardless of the religions that he is part of. If he does not have a connection with God, he is without a dimension in his thinking, and that is the spiritual dimension that is from God.

I have to designate it as the spiritual dimension which is from God because man *has* a spirit, and demons have a spirit, and demons are able to communicate with man by a spirit, and thus man can be influenced by their spirit, and it will be an evil influence. But man does not have the connection with God, because he has been separated from God through sin—his own sin.

Being unable to think along true spiritual lines in a way that is really meaningful is of such a dimension, that in verse 14 it says:

I Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him.

He cannot get it! Man can get individual pieces of it, but because the Spirit of God is not there to put it all together in the right order and within the right context, he keeps coming up with wrong answers. That is why it says, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him." The separation can only get wider unless God Himself bridges the gap, because man, as history shows, of and by himself, will not do it. In fact, he cannot. So even though unconverted man has a spiritual capacity, it is too limited, and very easily overpowered by Satan, and just about totally deceived.

We are going to go back again to Romans 5. Before we read this I want you to understand, as is the Bible's way, that not every aspect of this judgment and how it affects man is provided in this one passage of scripture. By passage, I am talking about the whole chapter of Romans 5.

Romans 5:15-19 [*The Revised English Bible*] But God's act of grace is all out of proportion to Adam's wrongdoing, for if the wrongdoing of that one man brought death upon so many, its effect is vastly exceeded by the grace of God, and the gift that came to so many by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ. Again, the gift of God is not to be compared in its effect with that one man's sin, or the judicial action [the judgment] following on the one offense resulted in a verdict of condemnation, but the act of grace following on so many misdeeds resulted in a verdict of acquittal. If by the wrongdoing of one man death established its reign through that one man, much more shall those, who in a far greater measure, receive grace and the gift of righteousness, live and reign through the one man, Jesus Christ. It follows then, that as the result of one's misdeed was condemnation for all people, so the result of one righteous act is acquittal and life for all, for as through the disobedience of one man many were made sinners, so through the obedience of one man, many will be made righteous.

God's solution to mankind's separation from Him is that just as mankind was cut off from God through one man, so would mankind be reconciled to Him through one man—Jesus of Nazareth. But there are some contrasts with Adam. Adam's sin and death ultimately affected all of mankind more or less

automatically, because sinning is such an easy way to go, and Satan is in the picture. However, Christ lived righteously, never sinning one time, and because He did, and because He was God, our Creator in the flesh, His death is *more* than sufficient to cover all the sins of all of mankind so that reconciliation may be effected. ***But, what He did does not affect all of mankind automatically.***

Mankind's blindness and hard-headedness is so impenetrable, that unless God reveals Himself, showing Himself to be open to reconciliation and leads people to believe, focuses guilt in a right direction that leads to repentance without self-justification, no reconciliation will occur. God not only has to reveal Himself, He has to work a miracle that converts our thinking. "Converts" means "changes our thinking."

Reconciliation is necessary when parties disagree, and usually in such an occurrence both parties are wrong, and both have to make a sacrifice in order for a compromise to be reached. But in the case with God (one of the parties), God did absolutely nothing wrong. The cause of the separation and the need for reconciliation was all on one part—man. "All have sinned and have come short of the glory of God."

God does not make people sin, but He gives them the opportunity to sin, to make a choice, and we have all done it. So God, in order to accommodate our weaknesses, our stiff-neckedness, deception, and so forth, makes the first move to bridge the gap, and sacrifices that which is nearest and dearest to Him—the only Being in all creation that He could really share life with.

Remember the reciprocity. In order for a reconciliation to occur, there *must* be a response from us.

Paul's main purpose has been to establish a firm legal basis to justification, and thus reconciliation with God by grace, through faith, in the sinless life and death of Jesus Christ. Once reconciliation is accomplished, sanctification can begin in earnest. But even as when man was being led to repent by God working miracles on his mind (the reciprocity—a changing of mind), in order for sanctification to continue, mankind must continue his response over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over. Let us go to John 6 so that we can see how this is possible.

John 6:25-29 And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when came you hither? Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, You seek me not because you saw the miracles, but because you did eat of the loaves, and were filled. [He had just fed the five thousand.] Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat [or food] which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him has God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto, This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent.

These people tried to take Him by force and make Him their king. The time was not right yet, and so He rejected that in a hurry. But the next day the crowds found Him again, and this thing here took place.

The key instruction at this point is that "you believe." This is a general overall statement that shows what the problem with mankind has always been since Adam and Eve. Because of this problem, it also shows the need for reconciliation. Because Adam and Eve did not believe God, they sinned, and thus separated themselves from God, and so it has been with all of mankind. There is the root of our problem. We do not really believe God. We are on our way, but that still remains *the* problem.

Now believing implies submission; thus, if one truly does believe, he will submit and obey. Disappointingly though, like most of mankind, these people in John 6 were just looking for a magic formula. They wanted the good things in life without having to do anything on their part to have them, and Jesus cut to the chase. He gave them one work: an obedient attitude toward God's will which would lead to salvation.

Do you understand this? Believing is a work. Believing is a sacrifice that man must make, and we will be faced with this issue all the time. By that I do not mean every single day to a tremendous degree, but it is going to be crossing our path continually.

II Corinthians 5:16-21 Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yes, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us [meaning Paul, the apostles, as well as to the church] the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God. For he has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

That last sentence is very important to those of us here. The effect of belief is reconciliation with God. The effect of belief is becoming *one* with God, because when we really believe, we obey.

The relationship changes with belief because with repentance one's point of view toward God and life changes. One will no longer look at life in the same old self-centered way. With belief, the perspective begins changing to a God-centered view of life, and gradually everything in life becomes filtered through the Word of God and the Kingdom of God.

Other people are less likely to be judged according to race, ethnicity, or social status, but rather whether they are converted or unconverted. That is the way we are looking. Are they converted or unconverted? A person's perspective of Christ changes too. Christ becomes much more the person's eternal Creator, Savior, High Priest, Brother, and Friend. He is truly perceived as living in us by His Spirit, and we are in fellowship with Him; that is, in communion with Him.

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These things can have a tremendous impact on a repentant person's life because he truly gets it—that God is creating a new order, a new race of children, beginning with Christ, being added to His family. We are now responsible then to Him.

Please understand that reconciliation is not just a polite ignoring of hostility but is a total removal of hostility on God's part so that there can be a living relationship that will produce sanctification unto holiness in order that one can live everlastingly within this new creation, participating in what it is doing.

A person "in Christ" is a new creation. He is not merely improved, or reformed, but remade spiritually. The kind of world that we live in depends on what we believe because what we believe shapes our perspective on everything.

Brethren, this is extremely important because before we were influenced only by the spirit of Satan, and that spirit exaggerates love for self, and pride. Following God's opening our eyes and belief in Him, repentance, and the receipt of God's Spirit, the perspective changes to one that is outgoing and God-centered.

Notice in these six verses here that it is God the Father who is the reconciler. Jesus Christ is the agent working it out, and the result is forgiveness. The result is a start toward oneness, and our responsibility to carry the same message to others, primarily by means of our conduct, grows out of this process. The object is not just that we are to be reconciled to God but that we become "the righteousness of God." That is the purpose for reconciliation.

From time to time you may hear somebody calling the gospel "the gospel of peace," and indeed it is because it says that in Ephesians 6:15, but the peace is only between God and His children. The rest of the world is still separated from Him and at war against Him.

After saying in verse 21 that "we might be made the righteousness of God," Paul continues in chapter 6 by saying:

II Corinthians 6:1 We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that you receive not the grace of God in vain.

Notice we have to work with God. We have to cooperate with God.

This states God's purpose for our reconciliation to Him. We are able to be reconciled because Christ flawlessly participated with us as a human, and He was substituted for us through His sacrifice, thus making forgiveness possible. This in turn opens the door to sanctification, and it is through sanctification that we become one with God.

This sanctification part of our conversion is by far and away the longest lasting and the most trying experience of our life. The purpose, brethren, is that we are not merely legally righteous through what Christ did, but *practically* righteous; that is, in the practical way we live it, and the object of this is that we might be like God and everlastingly a part of His Family. Paul is urging us to understand this and not allow our opportunity to slip away without its purpose being fulfilled.

A major reason for the Day of Atonement and the fasting that we do within it is associated with the circumstances of Jesus' statement. These people were seeking God for entirely the wrong reason. They wanted to use God for their end, not to serve Him and His purpose, but to be served *by* Him. It reveals their self-centeredness.

There is a very clear correlation between how teenagers act towards their parents when they are going through that especially rebellious time, and the way that we act towards God many times. Teens refuse to believe their parents really know what is going on. "Oh, they're just old fogies." They assume that their parents do not know what they are talking about. They think that their parents are only keeping them from having fun, and that their parents are really just "out of it."

Let us consider two questions and their answers. This is something you have to answer to yourself.

1. What is the basis of *your* relationship with God?
2. Why is disbelieving God so serious?

To refuse to believe God is being guilty of slandering His righteous character, as though He does not know what He is talking about. It is slander! It is an assault on His integrity. It is because disbelief is calling either His omniscience or His righteousness into question.

Has your reconciliation to Him resulted in greater belief and trust? Has it brought forth less resistance to submitting to Him? Disbelief is what keeps us from being "at one" with Him. Even as Adam and Eve did not believe God, they were separated from God. If they would have believed Him, they would have obeyed Him and they never would have been separated from God. It is such a simple equation.

One of the solutions is to get Satan out of the way. It is obvious from Genesis 3 that neither Satan, nor Adam, nor Eve agreed with God. If they had they would not have sinned, but like teenagers, they thought they knew better. Their pride drove them against God's government and brought on the need for atonement and reconciliation.

Isaiah 58:3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and you see not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and you take no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exact all your labors.

Oh, they were fasting. Just like in chapter 1, they were going through the routine. They were doing the ceremony. They were obeying that, but where was their mind?

Isaiah 58:4-8 Behold, you fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: you shall not fast as you do this day to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness [that is, to let go of sin], to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to deal your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast

What We Can Learn From This Day of Atonement by John W. Ritenbaugh
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out to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him; and that you hide not yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth as the morning, and your health shall spring forth speedily: and your righteousness shall go before you: the glory of the LORD shall be your reward.

There is an overall problem with the people, and with mankind. It is one of the things that leads to disbelief. Man is not humble. He thinks he already knows. He is like the teenager who has only lived fourteen or fifteen years, and is in possession of all truth. They really *know* what is going on. Well, that is the way Adam and Eve behaved, and that is the way *all* of mankind is toward God and His Word.

Because man is not humble he will not submit himself to God, to God's way, or to God's authority. It is only when we think we do not know very much, that we do not know it all, or feel helpless and weak and backed into a corner, that we will listen. Brethren, if we understand, that is a major reason why so much pain is going to come upon the world in the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord.

We have to come to the place where we do not merely intellectually agree with God, but also *feel* the belief flowing from conviction that ***He is right !*** As long as we do not agree with Him, we will forever remain in a state of denial.

The context of this chapter is showing that like in chapter 1, the people were merely going through the formalities. Doing that is insufficient and meaningless because it does not produce a change in one's life. What will produce it is a distinct and clear turning to God in order for the purpose of seeing how to do things from His perspective. So Paul says in Philippians 2: 5: "Let this mind be in you. . . ." That is not quite translated properly in English. It should read: "Let this mind *continue* in you." In other words, always be there.

Fasting should help enable a person to continue to be reconciled to God by helping the person know and feel what he is in comparison to God. It is to enable a person to be able to both feel and understand his need, not to impress God with his discipline. God is not looking for people who are

merely disciplined. The Pharisees were disciplined. They fasted twice a week.

Brethren, God is looking for people who *get* it! They know that submission is love, and that means submission to all that God says. Brethren, this is why the sanctification period is so long. It takes us so long to learn and to make the changes.

Another aspect is that we do not have life inherent. Even the life that we now live is going to end. Do we understand that, brethren? Do we believe it? I hope there is nothing left from this "immortality of the soul" doctrine that we come into the church with. It is simply not true. When man dies, he is dead. "Like Rover, he is dead all over," as Garner Ted [Armstrong] used to say. Man's thinking processes stop. He is unaware. We are going to die.

Life can be so good! Do we not want to live that kind of life everlastingly? There is a way. God is showing us what the way is but we have to believe it in order to begin to put it into practice, getting ready for it.

Fasting is undoubtedly an uncomfortable experience. It requires faith, discipline, and willpower. It is not easy to go contrary to human nature that is constantly screaming at us to take care of ourselves. And above all, it wants to preserve ourselves physically. It is very important for us to want to satisfy this self-centered monster.

But brethren, in principle, that is exactly what Adam and Eve did in their sin. They satisfied their natural drive at a time and occasion when they should not have done it because it was against the will of God. They thus put themselves forward as being more important than God's Word.

Among one of the good sides of fasting is that it emphasizes we can resist even this most powerful drive to preserve our life. Can we learn from that? This is not its main objective, but it is there. The main objective is that we learn of our dependence upon God, and our need for the things He so generously provides so that we will willingly and humbly seek Him out and submit to Him.

The first sin involved a bodily desire for food. It is what gives physical strength and satisfaction. If we deny our body food, we will die. Fasting should help us realize how much more one needs that which only God can supply spiritually so that we can live as He does. God's Word is typified by "food" in the Scriptures. Jesus is the bread of life, but man in his pride rejects God's spiritual food by choosing to disbelieve it; thus he elevates himself to judge that he does not need to submit. After all, he reasons, it is not all that important.

So man then has a form of godliness by going through the formalities, but in his life he does not use God's Word, and without God's Word there is no fellowship and no relationship with Him, and without that relationship there is no continuance of the sanctification process. The person will never become one with God. Fasting can bring a person face to face with what he really is—a very mortal being who needs all the help he can get. It serves to remind us that we are still flesh, and how much of our time is taken up caring for the self. How especially self-concerned we are when we feel afflicted.

Brethren, Passover is the beginning of salvation. Atonement—"at-one-ment"—is the end. All of this is accomplished through faith that is bolstered and motivated by humility. Fasting plays a part, especially in that last one, and that is why He calls on the Day of Atonement especially for us to fast.