

## Reconciliation And Unity

Reconciliation with God Precedes Unity

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 20-Sep-99; Sermon #414

I am going to speak about a subject I am, in one sense, speaking about all the time, and yet I believe that this is the first time I have ever given a sermon on this particular subject specifically. I think I may have spoken on it in a sermonette and I know that I have heard a sermon or two about it during the course of the forty years that we have been in the church, but it is very likely that we need to speak on this subject more often.

All of us know that we have been reconciled to God by means of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, through the shedding of His blood, which resulted in His death following a sinless life. That death is the atonement, the covering for sin. It is what wipes away our sin and this is what makes reconciliation possible.

We take comfort in reconciliation with God because of the scattering. But, because of the scattering of the church, I feel that we must now ask ourselves how effective that reconciliation is working, seeing that the church is so disunited. Reconciliation is supposed to draw us together, but instead, we are scattered. We are disunited. None of the evidence that I see surrounding this scattering shows me that we have been scattered because we have been **good!** God clearly reveals in the Bible that sin and offense produces the separation that makes reconciliation necessary. We are scattered because we are not of the same mind with God or our brethren. It was not this way at the beginning. Then everything was, as we might say, "peachy-keen."

Now let us turn back to Genesis 1:31 and we will use that verse as a springboard to what follows regarding reconciliation.

**Genesis 1:31** And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

This is the way that it began. Everything was very good. Chronologically this statement covers until the end of the sixth day and, therefore, Adam and Eve were already created. But then Satan, and with him unlawful desire and sin, enter into that ideal environment that God created. Adam and Eve were separated from God and reconciliation was needed.

I want you to fast forward all through time up until the present, and while you are doing

Reconciliation and Unity by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

that, turn back to the New Testament because we find scriptural statements that all of us have done in a similar manor what Adam and Eve have done.

**Romans 3:23** For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

In Romans 5 and verse 12, a little bit different setting, but we find the same result. Paul writes:

**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.

That is quite an indictment, that everybody has sinned. That means everybody requires reconciliation. We might add to this something that Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 59:1-8. It is interesting that my Bible has as a title for this chapter, "National Corruption". Of course, he is referring to sin. He says:

**Isaiah 59:1-2** Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. [Does that not give you a picture of God being so far away that we speak to Him and He 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.

Now this sounds like a God who is turned off. The kids are still in the house, but He is not listening anymore because the kids have been so rebellious to what He has said and laid down as the rules, that He simply is not listening anymore. He has hardened Himself to what His children are doing. Then He begins to give reasons why He will not hear any longer.

**Isaiah 59:3-8** For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perverseness. None calls for justice, nor any pleads for truth. They trust in vanity, and speak lies. They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity. They hatch cockatrice eggs, and weave the spider's web. He that eats of their eggs dies, and that which is crushed breaks out into a viper. Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works; their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts

Reconciliation and Unity by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings. They have made them crooked paths. Whosoever goes therein shall not know peace.

Everybody has sinned and become separated from God, but this does not mean that every person is committing all of these things that are named here. What God has inspired Isaiah to do is to show some of the general attitude in Judah toward sin, just before they went into captivity.

Now those of us who know a little bit about the book of Isaiah know that the first chapter opens up by Isaiah describing Judah as though it is a man and that man, meaning the whole nation, is sick from the top of the head to the soles of the feet. The going into captivity and losing possession of the land was a discipline by God designed to show them how wide their separation from Him was. It was like an accentuation point, an exclamation point. They were no longer in the land.

Now if this happened in the family, it would be like parents kicked their children out of the house. It is interesting also that this report that is given in Isaiah 59 sounds like an ordinary broadcast taken any old day from CNN Headline News. We live in it, we experience it because it is right in the world around us, but brethren, we (because of the scattering giving the evidence), are also separated from God!

Do any of these acts we just read about in Isaiah 59 promote unity? Every one of them causes division. What is implied here without saying it is that the opposite of the acts named are the ones which will either promote or maintain unity. Collectively, I think that we can honestly say then that keeping of the commandments (love) unites. Breaking the commandments, which is what every one of these things is here in Isaiah 59, breaks the commandments and divides.

The church is divided. Therefore, love is either missing entirely or, at the very least, it is in short supply. And even if it is there (which I believe that it is), it is infrequently used. We are not choosing to use it.

Now people do not divorce within a marriage because they love each other, but rather, because there is so much enmity in both feeling and act, that they cannot any longer stand to be around each other. And so they separate. That is a greatly simplified illustration, but it is nonetheless accurate when applied to mankind as a whole, and also (as I am proposing to you), as a church.

Reconciliation and Unity by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

**Romans 5:8-11** But God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. 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].

Here is briefly described the greatest act of reconciliation in the history of the world. What the Father and the Son did demonstrates the principle that acts of love reconcile those separated by some enmity. They want us to understand that through Christ's death, while it is undoubtedly a benefit, should not be merely seen as a benefit but as vicarious. He died **for us!** He died in our place. The seriousness of that is that if He had not done this, we would have to pay the penalty for our own sins. We would die and *we would forever be separated from God.* It does not anticipate the first death, but rather the second death.

He died for us, in our place, and He did it in order that we might be reconciled and therefore not have to die. He did not die merely for reconciliation, but rather for what reconciliation will produce if it is taken advantage of.

Now I think that it is clear that this love that unites is not a feeling, but rather it is an act. It is reasoned conduct containing sacrifice and based on eternal truth, done because it is the righteous thing to do.

In regard to reconcile, which appears here several times, the Greek word here means "to change mutually." That is, there is a change on both sides. Something took place. "To change mutually; to make an adjustment; to restore; to reconcile." The English word reconcile means "to bring back together; to unite; to settle or resolve differences; to restore harmony between."

I think we can see then, that though the two words are not precisely the same thing, that both the English and the Greek words are still very close in meaning. Both have the sense of bringing together separated parties. Both words indicate that somewhere along the line alienation occurred.

There is another word, also translated reconciliation in the Bible, and this word is, in usage, actually closer to the English word propitiate. Propitiate means "to appease; to make amends; to compensate." With this word the emphasis is on the payment. It can

be applied to what is sacrificed in order to affect the reconciliation. It indicates what covers or atones so the differences can be bridged and thus resolved.

So, both words translated reconcile or reconciliation in the Bible, imply action, not feeling. They imply action, movement toward agreement and unity. The only real difference between these two words is one of emphasis. One is showing payment, the other is showing more strongly the feeling of movement together.

**Romans 8:7** Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

I think in the church of God, at least all of those that have sprung from the Worldwide Church of God, this might be among the best known verses. However, I wonder if we grasp how deep this enmity is against God.

Taken as a whole, the record of the Bible shows that we have a deep and, actually, a fierce and fixed hostility to God. I mean that it is something that is in the nature. Not only is it against Him, but it is against those things that are associated with Him, such as His law. And yet, some are barely sensible to this even after conversion. But to illustrate how deep and how subtly powerful and insidious this enmity is, I think that we can point to Romans 7, that even after many years in the church, probably at least twenty years of conversion, the apostle Paul was still wrestling with this powerful inner impulse to go the wrong way and to do it in the wrong attitude.

When we consider somebody as converted as the apostle Paul was showing that sometimes he did the things that he did not want to do and he did not do the things that he wanted to do, that is, he did not do the things that he knew were right to do and he wanted to do the things that he knew were not right to do—he had to wrestle against those things the same way you and I do.

If we are not as deeply converted as the apostle Paul, how much possibility is there for that nature to rise to the occasion and produce separation from God, even though we have been, in the past, reconciled to God? For to continue in an attitude that is not in the image of God or to continue in an act that is not in the image of God, it is not part of His character, and to have this thing maybe even dominating our life in certain circumstances—it is very possible for that to occur.

I know that I have never smoked excepted for a couple of cigarettes when I was a teenager, so I never became addicted to them in any way. And it was not any act of

great character on my part. I just did not have a lot of money to buy the cigarettes and I did have an automobile. A choice had to be made. Gasoline for the automobile or cigarettes. I chose the automobile. That was more fun. Phooey on the cigarettes. By the time I woke up I was smart enough to know that I should not smoke.

But what I am getting at here is this: there are plenty of people who have been addicted to cigarettes who are now attending services all over the world in the church of God and they can witness to you how *powerful* that urge to go back to smoking is. The habit becomes ingrained within us and it is very difficult for people to throw this off.

Well if it can happen with cigarettes, why can it not happen with other things, especially attitudes that are so deeply buried within us. We know that they are churning within our minds and we hide them with "whatever" so that they do not get out, but they are still there.

Jeremiah 17:9 contains another one of those scriptures that we have heard over and over and over again, but it is in a sense a parallel to what Paul wrote. Jeremiah said:

**Jeremiah 17:9** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; [and then he asks an interesting question] who can know it?

Who can really grasp, who can really understand how **deceitful** the heart is? Well I think that we can come to know it, but that deceitful heart is still there generating its animosity toward God.

This means that human nature tends to be muted in us who are converted. But it is nonetheless there and it has been described as being like a spring under pressure. We compress the spring to keep human nature suppressed, but given an inch, given a little opening, it will spring to the surface again and it will exert its influence. Human nature has a subtle, but strong, tendency to lead us astray primarily through our feelings and attitudes. So the inference is, here in Jeremiah 17:9, that we must not be led by our own desires but by the Word of God, because the word is truth.

Now there is an enigma here. On the contrary, we, the converted, like to tell ourselves that we love God. I do not mean to imply that we do not love God, but we tell ourselves, we convince ourselves, I think, that we love Him more than we actually do. We want to submit to Him and yet each of us have areas in our life that we really do not agree with God on and we will not submit to Him usually until He puts the pressure on, usually through some sort of painful embarrassment or physical or emotional pain.

Romans 8:7 said that the carnal mind is enmity against God. Some synonyms for enmity are that there is animosity, hostility. Let us make it a little bit milder with displeasure. It requires reconciliation because enmity or animosity produces separation. Animosity or enmity is sin regardless of the intensity. Some animosity is intensely and outwardly competitive. Other animosity is inward and it is artfully, outwardly covered. But still, self-regarding and competitive.

Why are we competing with God? Why does human nature hold this feeling against God? Well as Herbert Armstrong said a hundred-million times, the whole issue is government. Human nature does not want to be governed by God. It wants to be free to govern itself and to choose what is right for itself. That is why it competes. That is why there is an animosity there. It wants to hang on to what it takes pleasure in and what it regards as righteous.

Now two people who have animosity between them, whether it is two humans or between one human and God, are not particularly close even though they may not actually be coming to blows. The human heart, since it is deceitful above all things, is very capable of hiding its true affections and intentions even from its possessor. That is why Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" Human nature is very tricky. It is deceitful at hiding itself even from its possessor, us.

I am going to give you an illustration. We are going to go back to the book of Proverbs. It says in my King James:

**Proverbs 31:30** Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman that fears the LOORD, she shall be praised.

Modern translations render favor as charm and deceitful as deceptive. Thus, in a modern translation that will very likely say that charm is deceptive. I want you to notice as we begin this, that immediately, charm is put in a bad light by being contrasted to the godly fear of the LOORD. It is like they are on the opposite ends of a spectrum. On the one side is charm. On the other side is the fear of the LOORD.

All of us know that the fear of the LOORD is the beginning of wisdom and it is **good**. Since the contrast is made by God, I think you can begin to see that God, at the very least, is skeptical of charm. On the other hand, we tend to admire people who are charming and we are drawn to people who are charming.

Is charm, since God seems to be against it here, inherently evil? The answer to that is no. But the reason that God is skeptical is because charm is a learned cultural skill in which the world has set the standards and, unfortunately, human nature wants us to think that being nice is what conversion is all about. It frequently forces a person to use it to cover the deceitful intentions of the heart.

Charm can be good or bad. In one sense it is a neutral. In Proverbs 31:30, God puts it in a bad light. He wants us to be skeptical of it. That is why He put it in a bad light. I am going to show you other verses where He is also skeptical. The reason is because it has come out of the world. It is a learned cultural skill.

**Proverbs 11:16** A gracious woman retains honor, and strong men retain riches.

This is not translated well. The first part of it is not too bad. A gracious woman retains honor. It is the second part of it that is not too good. My Bible has in the margin, "Ruthless men retain riches." If you have a modern translation they will usually translate that word ruthless as violent. Violent men gain or get reward. That is the way the modern translations are translating it.

A gracious woman retains or gets honor, and violent or ruthless men gain riches. Now again, charm is not being put in a good light here. What God is showing is that charm may indeed reward a person something before other people. A gracious woman retains or gets honor. So charm may produce a reward for somebody who has it and it will be before other people, **even as violence** may reward a person with wealth. There are plenty of ruthless businessmen who have become very rich. Is that good in the eyes of God? No, it is not.

And so the comparison between charm and ruthlessness is again made. In the eyes of God, charm is something that needs to be questioned. What needs to be questioned is **why** are these people charming? What do they hope to get from it? That ought to tell you something. *What do they hope to get from it?* Charm, God is showing, is self-serving in most cases and the person who is charming can very easily be using that to cover something else up. So God is showing that charm or social skill is not conversion.

**Proverbs 11:22** As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman [or charming woman] which is without discretion.



Reconciliation and Unity by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

This proverb is related to verse 16 because it is showing that what is on the outside of the person, a jewel in a pig's snout, be it charming, be it clothing, be it jewelry decorations, be it a handsome or pretty face, a shapely body or whatever, cannot make up for what the person really is in the heart.

So charm, in which the standards are set in the world, does not fool God a bit. And I will show you why in a little bit. And so He is warning us to be aware, to be a bit skeptical.

Let me give you an illustration. Sunday, a week ago, Evelyn and I wanted to watch the 20/20 program on television because they were going to have something on there in which some things were going to be named and Evelyn thought it would be interesting. So we watch it and it was fine.

But then they went on to another news event. This particular news event was about breast implants that can be pumped up to any size that the woman desires. Brethren, this just might be the ultimate in cosmetic deception. The deceitful heart has convinced these women that they are nothing more than a fake, inflated breast. The whole program was about living up to a false, worldly, perception of what a woman ought to be.

Neither the doctor who performed the surgery or the women who sought it, had apparently ever stopped to think about the hypocritical deceit that was involved in what they were displaying to the public about themselves, which was a lie. But they sure looked charming.

The whole driving force was how they **felt**. There was no mention of character, intelligence, creativity, love, kindness, joy, anything that really counts with the Creator.

What am I driving at here? Those of us who are in the church of God are pretty nice people, I kid you not. We are nice people. We have learned many of the social graces and our manners are generally quite good. We are not out murdering, pillaging, raping, plundering, robbing gas stations or banks, or working as con-artist scamming helpless elders.

In other words, we have some measure of charm so that we can conduct ourselves acceptably in the company of others in social situations. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. But brethren, something **is** seriously wrong with the church! Being a nice person, being charming, is not conversion!

Now turn with me to I Corinthians 3. As you are turning there I want to remind you that

we are going to an epistle which Paul wrote to a very badly divided congregation and he says in verse 1:

**I Corinthians 3:1-3a** And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk and not with meat, for hitherto you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are you able [this badly divided congregation]. For you are yet carnal. . . .

Is this a condemnation of the church of God, the greater church of God? That our scattered condition is telling us that we are yet carnal? That we do not have the love that would bring us together? You know that love is the keeping of the commandments. Is there sin somewhere along the line? Is being a nice person, a charming person, no longer cover?

**I Corinthians 3:3** For you are yet carnal, for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal and walk as men?

The church has not split all over the place because we have a wonderful relationship with God and with each other. The very fact that we are divided is proof that carnality, worldliness, acting in an unconverted manner despite our social graces, lies at the base of our splitting.

So I think it is about time that we ask ourselves some serious questions. What are we like when we are beyond the searching eyes of others in the church? What are we like behind the four walls of our homes? What are we like where we are not working with other church members? What are we like when we think nobody else is looking? What are those women like behind those fake, pumped-up breasts?

Are we truly studying God's Word, praying to God with the purpose in mind of being in the image of God and in glorifying Him? How are we really treating our spouse and our children? What really goes into our heart, because out of the heart, Jesus said, proceeds evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders, lying, deceit. Out of the heart the mouth speaks.

How real is our Christianity? People with wonderful relationships do not split. If they are separated for a while it is usually because something external to their relationship was the cause, like a persecution. It is brief and they come back together again quickly and

the relationship continues as it was before.

Now turn with me to John 17. Jesus said:

**John 17:20-23** Neither pray I for these alone [meaning the men who were there with Him], 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. And the glory which you gave me I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and you in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that you have sent me, and have loved them, as you have loved me.

I do not know how it could be expressed any more clearly that it is God's will that we be united with Him and each other in His family. And yet other scriptures reveal just as plainly that He is the one who drove us apart, even as anciently He drove Israel and Judah apart and then scattered them.

Now He did not do that because they were pleasing to Him. He did that to them because they were **displeasing** to Him and therefore the conclusion is inescapable, that even as He was displeased with their relationship with Him, then He is also now displeased with our relationship with Him. He is the same God. He changes not. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever. What has happened to our reconciliation with Him?

Let us go back to the Old Testament and look at another very familiar scripture.

**I Samuel 16:7** But the LORD said unto Samuel, look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him. For the LORD sees not as man sees, for man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

The basic idea in this expression is that we can see how men *look*. God sees men *as they truly are*, not as they appear on the outside. In other places God gives counsel regarding this. First He tells us we are to be very slow about judging others, because we cannot look into the heart. And second, at the same time, He shows us that we need to have a very healthy skepticism about our **own** intentions, our own reasons and motivations for what we do and what we say.

With that in mind, that God looks upon the heart, that He sees as people are not as they appear to be, we are going to back to the New Testament again, to Hebrews 4. Paul, or whoever the author was here, says:

**Hebrews 4:11-13** Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. [It is interesting that the subject is not only the Sabbath here, but also faith.] For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

This rendering of the principle that is given there in I Samuel 16:7 is much more profound because it shows that there is absolutely no possibility—that it is absolutely vain to deceive ourselves—into thinking that we can somehow escape the notice of God. All insincerity, unbelief, and hypocrisy will be detected by Him.

Now on the more positive side, we are meant to understand that since our hearts are perfectly open before Him, that we should be sincere and make no attempt to deceive others, because that sin is in reality against Him. All sin is against Him because it is His law that is being violated and all of us are His creation. Everything belongs to Him.

Suppose some little girl had a little doll and you destroyed that doll. On one hand the sin is against the little girl because she lost a cherished item, something that was close to her. But even more so, the sin was against the little girl because the doll belonged to her. Though some damage is against the doll, the greater damage, the greater sin is against the one who owned it.

That is the way it is with us and our sins. People get caught in our sins, but the real sin is against God because He owns us, all of us, the whole creation.

Let us add another thought here. Do not lose your place here in Hebrew 4. We are just going to add something to it out of the Psalms. It is another thought that reinforces the thought that is there in Hebrews 4.

**Psalms 11:4-7** The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven; his eyes behold, his eyelids try [or test, or prove], the children of men. The LORD tries [or tests] the righteous; but the wicked and him that

Reconciliation and Unity by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

loves violence his soul hates. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest. This shall be the portion of their cup. For the righteous LORD loves righteousness; his countenance does behold the upright.

Now this, carrying on beyond the primary thoughts expressed in these verses, is something that is perhaps more sobering because of the implication that appears. The sense is (that is Psalm 11 combined with Hebrews 4), that since He is so penetrating and so searching in His scrutiny, and at the same time He loves us and desires that we inherit His Kingdom, that the real thoughts and intents of the heart will be brought to light. For a while His eyelids **test**. For a while His eyelids **prove**. For a while He creates circumstances that He hopes will bring the truth into our minds so that we can repent. But if not, He steps up the intensity.

So first, gently and privately to the individuals involved. He does these things to bring them to mind. But if that does not work they will be revealed to as strong a public embarrassment as is necessary to bring about repentance.

There is an interesting statement in the book of Luke where Jesus stated this very thing.

**Luke 12:1-3** In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trod one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, "Beware you of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. [Remember the thing about charm and the possible hypocrisy that is involved there] For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever you have spoken in darkness [behind the four walls where nobody hears, we think] shall be heard in the light [out of daylight]; and that which you have spoken in the ear in closets [whispering] shall be proclaimed upon the house tops."

So God will **use** His penetrating powers to awaken the conscience, trigger our fear, causing us to tremble with apprehension of judgment. God is faithful to bring us face to face with the truth about ourselves, penetrating and piercing until He reaches the heart of the matter. Because right there is the very center of life itself.

It says in Hebrews 4:12 that He divides asunder of soul and spirit, the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

What goes on in the heart that is left uncovered in private situations? Things spoken secretly in a closet? Things whispered and not shown to the general public? I do not know. I am asking these questions in order, hopefully, to help bring about unity in the church. But unity begins with God! It begins with the relationship with God and if we do not have unity with Him, any unity we have in the church will be the same kind of unity that is possible in the world.

So we find in Proverbs 4:20:

**Proverbs 4:20-23** My son, attend to my words; incline your ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart. [Store them, he is saying.] For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. [He says] Keep the heart [it means guard, protect your heart] with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

Issues means that which comes forth. What did Jesus say in Matthew 15? Out of the heart. What did Jesus say in Matthew 12? Out of the heart.

Is it going to be the deceitful side of the heart that is enmity with God or is it going to be God's Word which you are preserving, keeping, storing, in your heart? The choice is ours regardless of where we are when we act. Behind the four walls of our home or out in the public at church.

So the heart is shown in the Bible as the seat and source of all of a person's outward actions as well as its inward, and sometimes hidden, motivations and attitudes. Sometimes the medicine that God must give in order to heal the heart is particularly bitter.

Hebrews 4:13 is particularly vivid. Paul uses an image here to illustrate his point in this series of verses. Commentators who study into these things feel that the imagery is drawn either from a wrestling match or from the sacrifice of an animal by a priest. You see that word "opened". "All things are naked and opened." It literally means to expose or to lay bare the neck. And then the remainder of the verse names to whom we have to do, i.e., with God.

Either way you want to look at it you can get the picture that Paul is driving at here. In the one, we are seen as wrestling with God. Jacob wrestled with God. God put his hip out of joint. But Paul may be showing here that **we** are wrestling with God, *but God has us in a grip so that we are forced to look quizzically into the eyes of absolute purity*, the very

one we are guilty of sinning against, the one that we sentenced to death on that stake by our sins.

In the other, God has us in a grip exposing our neck to the penetrating knife that will spill our life blood as payment for our sins. It is an act that He has every right to do, but is willing to forego upon repentance and acceptance of the blood of Jesus Christ.

He died vicariously for us—in our place. His life-blood was shed in order that there be a means of atonement, a covering that wipes away the penalty. That last phrase, "with whom we have to do," again in modern Bibles they will often translate that, "with whom is our account." It is a business accounting term.

We might say today that we have an account with a certain store or a certain bank, and it is they who tell us how much we have in our account or how much we owe them. In other words, they reckon it. They add it up. They account it.

Now God holds our account and we cannot impose upon Him, before whom all is naked and open, we cannot pass off hypocrisy for insincerity, we cannot hide our sins from Him as we can from men. He will judge us according to truth, not appearances, and His sentence is absolutely correct.

The conclusion is then that the one (the man or woman), who will be tested by the eyelids of the one who sits in His holy temple in heaven and knows all about him, should have every motivation to live a pure and holy life. There is no escaping His gaze.

If we try to do this it points out where the sin lies. It is the subject of Hebrews 4. There is little or no faith. If we really believe that God is God as He presents Himself in the book, what is there to hide from? That is really dumb. Nothing can be hidden.

God intends that we use this knowledge positively and focus on what we might call the positive aspects of His character, His wonderful holiness, His wonderful, merciful, and forgiving character.

**I John 1:5-10** This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and

Reconciliation and Unity by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

**I John 2:1-2** My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation [there is that word, payment, the means of reconciliation] for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

I think that it is fitting for us to understand that John wrote this as the first century church was rapidly disintegrating under the pressures of false doctrines substituted for those taught by the apostles. As a result, immorality (sinning) was inundating the church and eroding everything that the apostle held dear. Sounds like today.

Now consider this. Mankind's major problem is that we will not accept God as He is shown in the Scriptures. I think that mankind's problem can be summed up in one statement. We simply will not let God be God. *We* want to be god. We will not give Him, the Sovereign Creator, our unquestioning obedience. The whole problem on earth began when the serpent convinced Eve that she should question what God said. "Oh has God said?"

And so like her, we reject His revelation of Himself and His purpose, and substitute one of our own making in its place, and we usually think or say to others, "I think of God as . . ." and then follows a description of God or a god whose main purpose in life is merely to satisfy the whims of His creatures. But God is boss. He is Creator. He has a purpose and He is going to proceed on regardless of what we think.

Now when we do sin, it is also in His nature to be extremely merciful and He will forgive by the blood of Jesus Christ upon repentance. Sin separates us from Him. It is a separation (from John 20) that we can see He does not want. He desires reconciliation because **it is in OUR best interest!** We can **never** become what He wants us to be unless we are reconciled to Him, because *He is the source of all the goodies, all the power* to create us into sons that He will accept into His Kingdom.

Without the reconciliation, without the atonement of Jesus Christ, that will never happen! And right now, as the church is scattered all over the place, it is giving every evidence that the reconciliation that we **had with Him has been devastated** and some how or another, brethren, we have got to repent and get back to Him or we will not be there! It is that simple.



Reconciliation and Unity by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

It is interesting in this book of I John, that what motivated the writing was Gnosticism. He does not say that directly, but one of the tenets of the Gnostics that comes through this writing is that sin just does not matter all that much. It is all of grace! Nothing ever changes! And so you over-play the grace card in the first century and in the twentieth century it comes right back again.

(I am going to give an offering sermonette at the Feast that is going to show you why God wants us to work. It is so simple and logical. Work does not earn anybody salvation, but grace will be given to those who respond to God and do work.)

I will just summarize where I was going to head and that is, that God shows us that if we, if the fellowship within the church, with our brethren, has broken down, it is proof that the fellowship with God has also broken down. Fellowship with Him and fellowship amongst the brethren are two sides of the same coin and they cannot be separated one from the other.

If we say we love God but we will not have good relationships with our brethren, then the saying that we fellowship with God is a lie. In reality, we hate our brother. That is kind of hard to take, but that is what John says and that is what God says.

Brethren, God expects a great deal from us because He empowers us to do whatever is needed in order to be reconciled with Him, and also to be reconciled with our brethren wherever they happen to be. I am actually, in some ways, going to carry this same theme on and for those of you who are going to be at the Feast in Jefferson City, you can consider this to be the opening salvo in the series that I am going to give there, because the entire thing is going to be on unity in one form or another. But do not forget this: without reconciliation to God, there is no reconciliation with men. (I am talking about people in the church.) Without reconciliation with God, there will be no unity of the church of God.