

Relationships: The Reconciliation Factor

II Corinthians 5:11-6:1; 7:2-4

August 15, 2010

Reconciliation: The Second Battle of Gettysburg In 1913, the Federal government held a fiftieth anniversary reunion at Gettysburg. It lasted three days. Thousands of survivors bivouacked in the old battlefield, swapping stories, looking up comrades. The climax of the gathering was a reenactment of Pickett's Charge. Thousands of spectators gathered to watch as the Union veterans took their positions on Cemetery Ridge, and waited as their old adversaries emerged from the woods on Seminary Ridge and started forward toward them across the long, flat fields. Philip Myers, [who witnessed the event as an 18-year-old] wrote, "We could see not rifles and bayonets but canes and crutches. We soon could distinguish the more agile ones aiding those less able to maintain their places in the ranks." As they neared the northern line, they broke into one final, defiant rebel yell. At the sound, "after half a century of silence, a moan, a sigh, a gigantic gasp of unbelief" rose from the Union men on cemetery Ridge. "It was then," wrote Myers, "that the Yankees, unable to restrain themselves longer, burst from behind the stone wall, and flung themselves upon their former enemies ... not in mortal combat, but reunited in brother love and affection." —Ken Burns, *The Civil War. Leadership*, Vol. 19, no. 4.

I. The Comprehension of The Lord. II Cor. 5:11-13

Glorifying God

A Matter of Motives Those who willingly endure poverty in my name are truly worthy of my love; while those who through their greed would gladly have worldly riches, but are not able to have them, lose the profit of their labour. Yet he who seeks riches to satisfy in them my will and not his greed, will have in my house the reward of glory for his good will. So too, he who seeks the power of glory because of his bragging arrogance and not for the glory of my name—seems to me like a stinking corpse. But he who seeks glory for the sake not of his own arrogance but of my renown, will appear full of glory in my Kingdom. —Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), Benedictine abbess and noted writer, musician and visionary. From *Scivias* (SC II 6, 92) in *Hildegard of Bingen*, ed. Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies. *Christianity Today*, Vol. 42, no. 6.

Glorifying Self and God An elderly pastor made this superb observation, "It is very hard to glorify God and yourself at the same time." —Stephen Brown, *If God Is In Charge...*, p. 63.

If You Would See His Monument, Look about You When a visitor was looking around St. Paul's Cathedral he saw monuments erected to the greatest persons of the British empire but none to the architect who has dreamed this poem in stone. Feeling that the architect had been forgotten, he asked the guide, "Where is the monument to the architect?" The guide led him to a dimly lighted crypt beside a slab in the floor and told him the body of the architect, Sir Christopher Wren, lay beneath that slab. On the wall of the crypt a tablet contained this inscription: *Lecture is monumentum requires circumspice*. "If you would see his monument, look about you." If you would see the monument of Jesus, look about you. Look at the orphans' homes, the hospitals, the Christian colleges, the missionaries; look at the homes that have been blessed, the lives that have been lifted, the hearts that have been comforted, the souls that have been saved, the spiritual skylines of the world which have been raised nearer to heaven. Look about you and see the monuments of Jesus! —*1989 Minister's Manual*, Ed. James W. Co., (Harper & Row, 1989), p. 61-2.

II. The Compassion of the Lord. II Cor. 5:14-15

God Has Taken the Hatred Steve Estes reported a remarkable example of turning hatred into love in the Wycliffe Bible Translator. In January 1981, Colombian rebels kidnapped Chet Bitternman, shot him, and left his body in a hijacked bus. Imagine how his parents and loved ones must have felt at the senseless death of this young man! But in April 1982, as a demonstration of international good will, the churches and civic groups of Bitternman's native area, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, gave an ambulance to the State of Meta in Colombia, where the young linguist was killed. Bitternman's parents traveled to Colombia for the presentation of the ambulance. At the ceremony his mother explained, "We are able to do this because God has taken the hatred from our hearts."

Omnipotence of Love A young woman in Scotland left her home, and became a companion of the street-girls of Glasgow. Her mother sought her far and wide, but in vain. At last, she caused her picture to be hung upon the

walls of the Midnight-Mission rooms”, where abandoned women resorted. Many gave the picture a passing glance. One lingered by the picture. It is the same dear face that looked down upon her in her childhood. She has not forgotten her, nor cast off her sinning child, or her picture would never have been hung upon those walls. The lips seemed to open, and whisper, “Come home: I forgive you, and love you still.” The poor girl sank down overwhelmed with her feelings. She was the prodigal daughter. The sight of her mother’s face had broken her heart. She became truly penitent for her sins, and, with a heart full of sorrow and shame, returned to her forsaken home; and mother and daughter were once more united.

III. The Commission of the Lord. II Cor. 5:17-21

Call
God at Work In the 1930s in Stavropol, Russia, Stalin ordered that all Bibles be confiscated and Christian believers be sent to prison camps. Ironically, most of the Bibles were not destroyed, yet many Christians died as “enemies of the state.” With the recent dissolution of the U.S.S.R., a CoMission team arrived in Stavropol in 1994 for ministry. Their request to have Bibles shipped to Moscow was being held up. But someone told them about a warehouse outside of town where confiscated Bibles were still stored. Remarkably, the team was granted permission to distribute them. Hiring several local Russian workers, they began to load their trucks. One young man, a hostile agnostic, came only for the day’s wages. But not long after they had started, he disappeared. He was found in the corner of the warehouse, weeping, a Bible in his hands. Intending to steal it for himself, he had picked his own grandmother’s off the shelf! Her signature was on the front page. Today, that young Russian is in the process of being transformed by the very Bible that his grandmother was persecuted for, but still held dear. —Ken Taylor, *Christian Reader*, Sept/Oct 1995, p. 57.

God’s Calling In 1944 the Lord called me from aviation to Himself, and now He has sent me back to aviation for Himself. —Nate Saint, quoted in *Men of Integrity*, Vol. 3, no. 5.

IV. The Community of the Lord. II Cor. 7:2-4

Jesus Is Counting on Us There is a fantasy story which recounts the return of Jesus to glory after his time on earth. He bore the marks of his cruel cross and shameful death. The angel Gabriel approached him and asked, “Master, do they know all about how you loved them and what you did for them?” “No,” replied Jesus, “not yet. Right now only a handful of people in Palestine know.” Gabriel was perplexed. “Then what have you done to let everyone know about your love for them?” Jesus said, “I’ve asked Peter, James, John, and a few others to tell people about me. Those who are told will tell others, and my story will be spread throughout the earth. Ultimately, all mankind will know about my love.” Gabriel frowned, “But what if they fail? Do you have another plan?” Jesus answered, “No. I’m counting on them.”

True Community The real community of man, in the midst of all the self-contradictory simulacra of community, is the community of those who seek the truth. —Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind. Christianity Today*, Vol. 41, no. 2.

The Hands of Christ During the Second World War, a church in Strasbourg was destroyed. After the bombing, the members of this particular church went to see what was left and found that the entire roof had fallen in, leaving a heap of rubble and broken glass. Much to their surprise, however, a statue of Christ with outstretched hands that had been carved centuries before by a great artist was still standing erect. It was virtually unharmed except that both hands had been sheered off by a falling beam. The people hurried to a sculptor in town and asked if he could replace the hands of the statue. He was willing, and he even offered to do it for nothing. The church officials met to consider the sculptor’s proposition—and decided not to accept his offer. Why? Because they felt that the statue without hands would be the greatest illusion possible that God’s work is done through His people. In a very real sense that’s true. Jesus Christ chooses human hands. Sometimes they seem to be the most infirm hands, the least potentially successful hands, or the least qualified hands—but those are the hands He uses.