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SERMON CXI.

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NECESSITY OF DIVINE INFLUENCE.

*ZECCHARIAH, iv. 6.—Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.*

WHEN Cyrus, king of Persia, issued his decree, giving the captive Jews permission to return to their own land, and rebuild their city and temple, a pious remnant, under Zerubbabel, gladly availed themselves of the opportunity. Their enterprise, however, involved great difficulties. They were few in number; their city and temple were in ruins, and could not be rebuilt without great labor and expense; and they were surrounded by numerous and powerful enemies. Shortly after they commenced their work, their adversaries, in a spirit of most determined hostility, endeavored by stratagem to interrupt it. After years of unavailing opposition, the rulers of Samaria, by gross misrepresentation and falsehood, procured from the Persian monarch a decree for the suspension of the work. To the great grief of Zerubbabel and his pious associates, they were obliged, after years of labor and peril, to abandon their undertaking. About three years afterward, by the reproofs and remonstrances of the prophets sent among them, they were brought again to apply themselves to the rebuilding of the temple. The writer of the text was commanded to encourage Zerubbabel and the Jews to prosecute their work, and assure them of success. Had the completion of it depended solely on them, their own weakness, the magnitude of the work, and the number and power of their enemies, might well have produced despondency. But God, by the prophet, assured them that the work was His, and should infallibly be accomplished. He directed the prophet to go to Zerubbabel, and say, for the encouragement of himself and his associates, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Accordingly, he influenced the Persian kings successively to favor their undertaking, defeated the opposition of their enemies, and enabled them to persevere till the temple was completed, and his worship in it restored. The whole history of this work, as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, is a complete verification of the text. Nor has its truth been evinced only in those events. The temple at Jerusalem was a type of the church of God. In the erection of this spiritual building, he has from the first employed, and his word assures us that he will continue to employ, instruments

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your own responsibility, have the unenviable lot of doing nothing. Christ can do without you. If you choose, you can remain inactive till roused by some tremendous judgment of God, or by the midnight cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." And no marvel if you then make the agonizing discovery that your lamps are unfurnished with oil, and that upon you must rest for ever the curse of the servant who knew "his master's will and did it not."

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## SERMON CXII.

BY REV. GIDEON N. JUDD.

SINNERS URGED TO A RECONCILIATION WITH GOD.

II COR. v. 20.—*We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

THIS passage exhibits by implication the standing of our race toward God as their righteous moral Ruler, and opens to our view the unsearchable riches of his condescension and love. The entreaty which it contains is based upon the implied fact, variously and explicitly stated in other parts of the inspired volume, that mankind by nature are enemies to God. Were they not in a state of alienation from him, the entreaty in the text would not only be irrelevant, but most manifestly unrighteous. While they were benevolently affected toward his character and administration, it would implicitly charge them with the fearful criminality of being adverse to both,—a supposition utterly incompatible with the infinite rectitude of Jehovah.

To exhibit the evidence that "there is none," until "born of the Spirit," that doeth good;—that all by nature are "alienated and enemies by wicked works;"—that "the carnal mind is enmity against God," in the abstract, forms no part of our present design. In the text, man's native alienation from God is assumed as a fact not to be disproved; and on the authority of this apostolic and inspired assumption, we shall proceed in God's behalf to urge the overture of reconciliation which it contains. That the reasonableness of this plea, and the importance of yielding to it may be duly appreciated, we propose,

- I. *To state the ground of the controversy between God and men.*
- II. *To consider the terms on which it may be settled,—and*
- III. *To urge a compliance with those terms.*

The ground of the controversy between God and his revolted creatures on earth is a claim for supremacy on the part of both. This, doubtless, many will be "slow of heart to believe," and others will unhesitatingly deny. It is a statement, however, characterized by the soberness of truth. God comprehends perfectly his own being and attributes, and the relations which exist between himself and all moral beings. Nor is it less certain that his unlimited excellences and righteous supremacy over them, justly entitle him to their highest love and cordial and unreserved obedience. This he authoritatively demands. Every subject of his moral kingdom he addresses, saying, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself."

And on all the population of our world, favored with his holy oracles, are the commands obligatory, "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.—Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." In requiring them to love him supremely, to repent and believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and render every interest subordinate to his glory, he demands nothing which is not his most righteous due,—nothing which does not directly tend to promote their own happiness and the highest good of the universe. His requirements, all founded upon principles of eternal righteousness, he has enforced by the most weighty and awful sanctions. To the obedient he has promised the perfect and ever-enduring felicities of heaven; those who impiously invade his rights and refuse submission to his authority as exhibited in the claims of the law and gospel, he has threatened with the eternal torments of hell.

These claims, though characterized by infinite justice and benevolence, mankind by nature resist. They set up their own wills in opposition to the will of God. They refuse to love him, to repent of their sins, to seek for remission and eternal life through the atonement made by his beloved Son, and to subordinate their inclinations and interests to the honor of his name and kingdom. By doing this, whatever they may profess to the contrary, and however seemingly respectful their deportment towards him, they practically declare that they *will not have God to reign over them*. Here the parties are fairly at issue; and the point in dispute is, whether the will of men or their Maker shall be done;—whether the rights of infinite sovereignty shall be maintained, or sacrificed to the wishes of a proud, selfish, rebellious world.

II. *The terms on which this controversy may be settled next demand our attention.*

Parties at variance can become reconciled only in one of the three following ways.

1. Without rendering any satisfaction for injuries done, or even investigating the grounds of the controversy, or the manner in which it has been carried on, *the parties may agree to exercise mutual forgiveness, and ever after treat each other as friends*. In settling disputes among men, this in some cases is unquestionably the best method. Controversies, however, can with propriety be terminated in this way only when the injury done is limited to the individual or persons on whom it was directly inflicted. If it be an offence against one clothed with authority, and of a manifest tendency to subvert his authority and prostrate the law which it is the design of his office to maintain and enforce, to pass it by and treat it as personal and private, would be obviously unjust. Such a procedure would tend directly and powerfully to weaken the motive to obedience and introduce disorder and misery into the community. It would be to sacrifice the interests of its virtuous members to the lawless wishes of the vicious and refractory.

In this way the controversy between God and rebellious men can never be settled; not, however, from obstinacy, or any want of benevolence on his part. Insuperable difficulties oppose;—difficulties arising out of the relations which the parties in this controversy sustain to each other, and the influence of such a procedure on the moral kingdom of Jehovah. To suffer the transgressions of men to pass without any acknowledgments on their part, or token of displeasure on his, would be a practical declaration either that his demands were unrighteous, or that he had not goodness enough to enforce them. This course of conduct in the Ruler of the universe would weaken the confidence of holy beings in the stability of his government, and foster a spirit of rebel-

lion. It would be to sacrifice the good of his extended and everlasting kingdom to the depraved inclinations of his revolted subjects on earth.

2. Another way in which contending parties become reconciled is by *mutual concessions* and forgiveness. This method of terminating differences among men is in most cases not only expedient, but perfectly equitable. With very few exceptions, both parties are to a greater or less extent deserving of blame, and under obligation to make mutual acknowledgments. But it is not thus in the controversy between men and their Maker. The entire blame rests upon *them*. He has never given the least provocation for their disobedience and enmity, and consequently has no concessions to make.

3. Another method by which controversies are terminated among men, is *for one of the parties to concede all, and make peace on terms proposed by the other*. Thus, and thus only can a peace be concluded between God and alienated offending men. As he is guiltless, they must justify him, condemn themselves, and close their unrighteous controversy with him on his own terms. And let it not be forgotten that their compliance with the terms of reconciliation he proposes must be *sincere*. In the settlement of controversies among men, there is often a professed, and so far as the eye of man can discern, a real compliance with the conditions of peace proposed, when the subsequent conduct makes it perfectly evident that there was no cordiality. Thus the controversy between God and sinners can never be terminated. He searches and requires the heart. A professed compliance with the conditions of pardon and peace revealed in his word, where the heart is wanting, is mere hypocrisy, and an affront to his infinite majesty and holiness. With him, the nature of actions depends on the motives which prompt them. Hence in order to terminate the controversy between them and their Maker, mankind must *cordially* comply with his terms of reconciliation.

Let it also be distinctly borne in mind that their compliance must be *unreserved*. It must have respect to every feature of his character and act of his administration. Cordial reconciliation to the mercy of God, while his infinite holiness, justice, and sovereignty are regarded with rancorous aversion, is impossible. Among the attributes of Jehovah there is not the least discordance. They sweetly harmonize, shed lustre upon each other, and unite to form a character supremely lovely and adorable. Every feature of this character must be the object of complacency, or there can be no cordial reconciliation to God. The native enmity of the heart must give place to the ennobling and felicitous affection of holy love.

Genuine reconciliation to God also includes unreserved *submission to his will*. All the statements of his word and dispensations of his providence are but varied illustrations of his character, and are equally entitled to our cordial approbation. No exceptions must be made to doctrines revealed, however abasing to our pride, nor to duties required, whatever self-denial their performance may cost. Like his character, which they serve to illustrate, they are "holy, and just, and good." Such too are his providential dispensations. Whatever their aspect toward individuals and communities, they are the fruit of his adorable sovereignty and his boundless wisdom and benevolence;—necessary parts of his perfect plan of administration, which seeks and secures for the universe the greatest amount of good. The reconciliation which the text demands has equal respect to every part of the divine counsel and government.

This must necessarily be connected on the part of God's reconciled enemies with an *ingenuous acknowledgment and utter detestation of their former feelings*

*and conduct.* If truly reconciled to his holy character, law, and dispensations, their former feelings of hostility toward him, and overt acts of disobedience will be viewed with abhorrence. They will feel no inclination to conceal or palliate their sins, but will penitently confess and freely forsake them. In them will be verified the prediction concerning God's ancient rebellious people. "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings which were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations."

Another branch of true reconciliation to God consists in a *cordial approbation of his revealed method of saving sinners.* To this mankind by nature are no less opposed than to his character and law; though from mistaken views of it and from ignorance of their own hearts, they often profess to regard it with approbation. Deliverance from punishment itself they do indeed desire; but salvation from sin through faith in a crucified Savior, to the utter exclusion of human merit, has no attractions for those who are under the dominion of pride, selfishness, and enmity to God. This method of salvation furnishes the most glorious exhibitions of the Divine character; and while it secures to the penitent believing sinner pardon and eternal life, it sustains and magnifies the law. "Grace reigns through righteousness," and sheds ineffable glory upon the character of God as the righteous Ruler of the universe. Without submission "to the righteousness of God by faith;"—without a cordial reliance on Christ for pardon and eternal life, and a spirit of obedience to the requirements of the Gospel, there can be no true reconciliation to its Author. This includes complacency in every discovery which God has made of himself in his works of creation, providence, and redemption by his beloved Son.

Having noticed the terms on which the controversy between God and men can be settled, we pass,

### III. *To urge a compliance with them.*

1. *They are reasonable.* God requires no more than is his most righteous due,—nothing, which a proper regard to his own honor as the supreme Ruler, and the best interests of the universe do not imperatively demand. Those, to whom these terms of reconciliation are proposed are the sole aggressors. Their enmity to his character and government is wholly unprovoked. It is exercised toward that which should call forth their most fervent admiration and praise. Ought not infinite excellence to receive their highest esteem? and what is infinitely vile their abhorrence? Ought not authority supremely righteous and benevolent to be treated with the profoundest respect? And does it not become the eternal Majesty to fix for his rebellious subjects such conditions of securing his favor? To these inquiries reason unbiassed by prejudice can return but one answer.

Do you say these terms of reconciliation are unreasonable, because you have *no ability* to comply with them? Can you make good this plea? Is it true that you are really unable to love God, submit to his will, repent of your sins, trust in his Son for salvation and obey his commands? Do these exercises transcend the limits of your powers as free and accountable agents,—the proper subjects of government by law and motive? Do not all your embarrassments spring from your voluntary aversion of heart to them? To these interrogations, an enlightened conscience can give no other than affirmative answers.

Do you say the terms are unreasonable, because you *cannot conquer your unwillingness* to comply with them?—that God affirms, it is "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit," and the Savior himself said, "No man can

come unto me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him?" It is undoubtedly true that you will not comply with the terms of salvation, unless made willing by Divine power; and this is all that the passages just cited and others of similar import are designed to teach. And it is no less true that you, by your voluntary aversion to holiness and love of sin, create the necessity for this special Divine interposition to incline you to do what God requires. And are his requirements unreasonable because you have no heart to comply with them? Then does the reasonableness of all law depend upon the willingness of the subject to obey; and where this is wanting obligation ceases. Upon this principle Joseph's brethren were guiltless, because they could not from mere hatred speak peaceably to him; and so is the drunkard, because he cannot from love to his cups abandon them; and the highway-robber and the assassin, because hurried on to their deeds of darkness by the strength of vicious inclination. But this you will not admit, nor will you admit that the laws which require in them the opposite course of conduct are unreasonable, because they are unwilling to obey. And "with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged." Out of your own mouths will God condemn you. It does not appear that we speak otherwise than truly and soberly, then, when we affirm that the terms of reconciliation with God are reasonable. They are such as it became him to propose, and a compliance with them is fairly within the compass of your ability. Act not, then, a part so unnatural and guilty as to refuse to accede to them. By the reasonableness of the conditions of pardon and peace proposed in the Gospel, "we pray you,—be ye reconciled to God."

2. We press the entreaty by the consideration that *the terms are immutable*. Where controversies exist among men, overtures of reconciliation are sometimes rejected in anticipation of their being made easier. But all hope of a change in the terms of reconciliation with God, is vain. "He is in one mind; and who can turn him?" Should you wait till the last sands of life are running;—till you are convulsed with the final agony, no cries or tears will move him to "alter the thing that is gone out of his lips." He cannot substitute other terms of reconciliation, nor make the least change in those stated in his word, without detriment to the universe, and rendering himself unworthy of the love and confidence of his subjects. They are as easy as infinite goodness can make them, and unchangeable as their glorious Author. A final refusal to become reconciled to him we presume forms no part of your present calculations. Since, then, you design not to prolong your controversy with God to the end of life, and other terms of concluding it than those now laid before you will never be proposed, be entreated to comply without delay. If you are not deliberately and madly resolved to contend with God forever, accede now to the unalterable terms of reconciliation proposed in the Gospel.

3. We urge a compliance with them by the consideration of what *God has done to prepare the way for overtures of pardon and peace*. The necessity of such provision, previously to any proclamation of mercy from him, did not arise from any implacability in his nature, but from his boundless benevolence. His unbending majesty as the moral Governor of the universe could not allow him to make proposals of peace to the guilty, except through a medium which should put honor upon his violated law, and make him appear venerable and glorious in the view of all accountable beings. This the good of the intelligent universe, which looks up to him as the assessor of eternal holiness and order, demands. In order to open a channel through which his mercy might flow to our revolted race,—to constitute a medium of

reconciliation between him and them, he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for their offences. In order to prepare the way for proposals of reconciliation, the glories of the Redeemer's Godhead were mysteriously concealed by a veil of flesh. He appeared in our world, deeply stained as it is with the guilt of rebellion, in the form of a servant. He assumed our nature in the weak and suffering state of infancy, became a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and for about thirty-three years sojourned as a stranger in a world which he created and furnished for himself. And his immaculate, laborious, and self-denied life, was closed by a depth of humiliation and severity of suffering, which utterly surpass our powers of comprehension. He was assailed by the malice of earth and hell. The Father mysteriously concealed the light of his countenance, till the agony of his soul caused him to "sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." And in order to complete the great work of atoning for the sins of men, he endured the inglorious and excruciating death of the cross. By this wonderful expedient of redeeming love, by the costliness of the sacrifice which was offered to expiate human guilt, by the depth of the Savior's humiliation, and by the variety and intensity of his sufferings, "we pray you, be ye reconciled to God."

4. *A rejection of God's terms of pardon and peace is fraught with the most revolting impiety.* The tendency of all the dispensations of his providence is to influence you to be at peace with him. His judgments show you how utterly unable you are to contend with his omnipotence. They urge you on the ground of expediency to accede to his will. His providential kindness is a moving appeal to all that is ingenuous in your nature, urging you to desist from opposing him "who crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies." A refusal to become reconciled to God counteracts the melting, subduing tendency of all his providential dispensations; it also pours contempt upon the sacrifice of the cross—the unsearchable riches of divine benevolence. Thus to treat Jehovah, your Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, and King, who, at infinite expense, provided the way for your return to him is a crime which no finite mind can duly estimate. It is breaking asunder every bond of duty to your sovereign. It is despising his infinite excellences, and the inestimable blessing of his friendship. Nay, it is a wanton violation of authority, no less righteous than absolute. All who are under the dominion of "the carnal mind which is enmity against God" are peremptorily *required* to accede to the terms of reconciliation. It is not left to their election, under any responsibility, either to accept or reject them. God not only entreats, but *commands* them to love him with an enlightened and supreme affection, and repent and believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ. A refusal to become cordially reconciled to him is no ordinary act of impiety. It is marked with all the hateful characteristics of the basest ingratitude, the most unyielding obduracy and rebellion against a government, whose principles and administration are infinitely wise and benevolent. Will you deepen those dark shades of guilt which now pollute and debase your souls, by persisting in your rejection of the terms of reconciliation? By the exceeding *criminality* of such a course of conduct, "we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

5. Your reconciliation is urged in the text and verses immediately connected with it, by considerations of *amazing tenderness and interest*. It would seem most reasonable that measures for settling the controversy between you and your Maker, should originate with *you*, and that peace should be sought by pledging yourselves to comply with any terms within the limits of your

ability. But the overture of peace, the plea for reconciliation in the text, comes from him whom you have wickedly made your enemy. He might glorify his holiness, and justice, and power in your everlasting destruction. But such are his amazing condescension and benevolence, that instead of addressing you in tones of infinite majesty and authority as your supreme and eternal King, he places himself before you in the attitude of a suppliant. In the text, he does not *command*, but *beseeches* you by us, to become reconciled to him.

And in whose stead do we deliver this message of infinite mercy and love? Instead of his beloved Son, the great Days-Man, who, by a mysterious union of deity and humanity, is fully qualified to act as Mediator between the offended Majesty of heaven, and his rebellious subjects on earth. In *his* stead, who, though he knew no sin, "was made sin for us;" who stooped from a throne in heaven to the manger, the cross, and the tomb, that proposals of pardon and peace with God might be made to guilty, self-destroyed men. It is in *his* name and stead, "who bare our sins in his own body on the tree," that we urge a compliance with the gospel terms of reconciliation. And shall arguments, drawn from the everlasting, boundless love of the Father and the Son, prove unavailing? A heart that is uninfluenced by motives like these, could sorrow find admittance into celestial bosoms, would cause grief in heaven. I add,

6. *That your everlasting destiny depends on the manner in which you treat the gracious overture of reconciliation.* Nothing can possibly be gained by persisting in your enmity to God's holy character and service. It is an unequal controversy, perseverance in which must end in defeat and ruin. Your knowledge compared with his is ignorance; your wisdom, folly; and your strength, weakness. "Who hath hardened himself against him and prospered?" He can roll a tide of desolation over the universe. With infinite ease he can blot every creature, and world, and system from existence. "He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth; he toucheth the hills, and they smoke." This holy, just, eternal, and almighty God holds you in his hand, and "can destroy both soul and body in hell." Nor is it at all doubtful, should you refuse to become reconciled to him, that he will glorify his justice in your eternal overthrow. In that imperishable volume, which he sent down from heaven to teach us the way thither, it is written, "Wo unto him that striveth with his Maker. Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished. I will render vengeance to mine enemies and will reward them that hate me." He has solemnly admonished those who may die unreconciled to him, that "they shall come forth from their graves to the resurrection of damnation;" that in the great decisive day, he will say to the executioners of his vengeance, "Those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." "These," he has assured us, "shall go away into everlasting punishment." They "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power. Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

The tremendous evils threatened in these and other passages of the inspired word, you will escape by becoming reconciled to him. Nay, the act will secure to you blessings immeasurably rich and eternal. It will be followed with the pardon of all your past offences, by peace of conscience, peace with God which passeth all understanding, and a well-founded joyful hope of victory over death and of eternal holiness and felicity in heaven. Your relations to God will undergo a change in the highest degree honorable and advantageous. He will no longer regard you as enemies, but friends. You will be the

objects of his love, members of his holy and blessed family. He will watch over you, guide and defend you, and make all things work together for your good. In your conflict with the last enemy, he will bring you off conquerors, and more than conquerors, through him who has vanquished death and hell both for himself and his followers. While your bodies lie mouldering in the dust, your ransomed spirits shall be with him in paradise. When the trump of God shall sound, he will redeem your bodies from the grave, make them glorious and immortal, like that of your adorable Savior, acquit you before assembled worlds, and put you in possession of "a crown of glory; a kingdom which cannot be moved; an inheritance incorruptible; a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

We have now delivered our embassy. We have placed before you the terms of reconciliation proposed by your offended God. By their reasonableness and immutability; by the consideration of what he has done to render forgiveness and peace possible; by the heinous crime of rejecting his proposals; in the name of his beloved Son, who died for our sins; by his precious mediation and your own eternal interests, we have urged your acceptance of them. On you now rests the fearful responsibility of deciding whether you will yield to the claims of duty; to the entreaty of infinite love, and be blessed with God's eternal friendship; or reject them, and sink beneath his frown for ever. This responsibility no doctrine of his word, nor plea of inability, can remove or even weaken. In vain do you attempt to throw it off, by pleading the coercion of God's decrees and the indispensable necessity of divine influence to break down the dominion of sin in your souls. You carry about with you continually in the consciousness of your own bosoms, the evidence of your freedom and accountability. And the necessity of the special agency of the Holy Spirit to make you willing to comply with God's requirements, is created and prolonged by your own voluntary and unyielding enmity to them. All your embarrassments are wholly self-induced. In vain do you strive to break away from your obligations. No power in the universe can release you from the responsibility of becoming reconciled to God, nor can you offer a single valid plea in extenuation of the guilt of refusal. And do you know what you are doing when you attempt to rid yourselves of this responsibility? It is but an effort to counteract what God has done, and is still doing to reclaim and save you, and to bring upon yourselves the woes of a lost eternity.

And now, perishing fellow-sinner, what is thy decision? Soon thou must make it, or the power of doing so will be taken from thee forever. The period of God's forbearance has its limits. The mediatorial hour hastens to its close. Soon the last lingering call of mercy will sound in thy ears; and if it die away unheeded, in thee will be verified the fearful threatening of insulted majesty and Justice; "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation; and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind."