

# **JOHN MACARTHUR**

## **TAPE #3**

### **Transcript of 3/18/98 at TBC**

Well, you know John has been working me to come to Grace Church to preach. We're friends and you know he's really been working for an invitation to come to my church and I said, "John, you're not ready. You're not ready. You're doing well, your progression, you're not ready." He said, "Can I send you a tape and you can listen?" He sent me a tape. I listened. It was okay, but he wasn't ready. About a year passed and he said, "I'm getting better. I really want to come to your church. I really want to come and preach in your church and can I send you another tape?" And I said, "Sure John, send me another tape." And I listened to that tape. It was good. But, he's just not ready. I told him that and he said, "John, I want to come so bad, I'll pay my own way and I don't even want an honorarium." I said, "John, you're ready!" And of course, that's not true. I'm just trying to loosen you up a little bit. I'd just been negotiating to get him out there to preach for me on a Lord's Day.

#### **A question from a Moslem**

I was on a flight to El Paso from Los Angeles and flying down to do a conference with men in the El Paso Civic Center. And I was on the plane and I was just sitting there as I often do when I travel with my Bible open, writing some notes about what I was going to be speaking on. There was a guy sitting next to me who was obviously Arabic. You know, you're kinda squished in on this little 737 and he was looking at me. He kept looking at me and finally got up enough courage and said, "Sir, may I ask you a question?" And I said, "Sure." And he said, "Is that a Bible?" I said, "It is a Bible!" And he said, "Oh, I'm new in America. I'm from Iran and in Iran everybody is Muslim. Over here I don't understand American Religion. May I ask you a question?" And I said, "Sure." And this was his question, verbatim, "Can you please tell me the difference between a Catholic, a Protestant and a Baptist?" That was his question. I don't know why it fell out that way. So I did. I said, "Sure. I can tell you the difference." And I went through sort of a little abbreviated history of the Catholic Church and the Reformation and how the issue of salvation by grace through faith alone through Christ alone and talked about that. And Sole Scriptura in terms he could understand and asked him if he understood. And he said, "Yeah." And I said, "You know, Protestants protested against ceremonial, external, mechanical religion and a surrogate Christ, namely the Church," and I went through some of that. And I said, "Baptists belong to that Protestant group and they tend to be a kind of Biblical and they love the Bible and they want their Christianity to be practical in life," and I just explained a little of that.

## **Moslems and sin**

And I said, "Now that you've asked me a question, can I ask you a question?" And he said, "Sure." And I said, "You're a Muslim. Do Muslims have sins?" And of course, I know they do. I said, "Do Muslims have sins?" And he said, "Oh, we have many, many sins. We have so many sins I don't even know all the sins!" I said, "Well, can I ask you another question?" He said, "Sure." I said, "Do you commit those sins? Do you do them?" "All the time I do them," he says, "In fact, to be honest I'm flying to El Paso to do some sins." I said, "You are?!" He said, "Yes." I say, "Well, what kinds of sins are you gonna do while you're there?"

He says, "Well, I was immigrating and I met this girl." They immigrate through El Paso; people coming from all around the world, it's a big immigration center. "And I met this girl and I'm going and we will sin." He's a pretty honest guy, right? He doesn't even know me; he's giving me the whole deal here. And I said, "Well, ugh, I want to ask you another question. Um, how does God feel about your sins?" "Oh, it's very bad," he says, "Very bad." I said, "What do you mean it's bad?" He says, "Very bad. God is very unhappy with my sins." And that, of course, is his perspective on Allah. And I said, "Well, what could happen to you?" "I could be in some big trouble." I said, "Really? What kind of big trouble? Like maybe going to Hell forever?" Because Muslims have Hell too. He said, "Yeah." I said, "But you're going to go anyway and do this?" "Yeah." I said, "You're in some real difficulty here. Do you have any hope? Do you have any hope at all?" And he said, and this is a quote, "I hope the God will forgive me." I said, "On the basis of what? Why would he forgive you? What's so special about you?" "I don't know." I said, "Is there anything in Islam that indicates there is salvation for people who willfully sin like you?" He said, "No. I just hope the God will forgive me."

## **Knowing god personally**

Then I said something I didn't really understand how it would affect him because it's so common to us, I said, "Well, I know Him personally and He won't." The guy was absolutely shocked! First thing he said to me is, "You know the God personally?!" Like what are you doing in Coach, on Southwest, in the middle seat? C'mon, you know God personally, what are you talking about? The whole idea of knowing God personally is absolutely bizarre to a Muslim. I said, "I know Him personally and He won't forgive you. He won't forgive you. You'll die in your sins and you'll perish forever in eternal judgment." And he got very sober, and I said, "You want to hear the answer to your problem? I'm here to tell you that there's a way in which all your sins can be forgiven forever." And I had a willing audience. I unfolded the significance of Jesus Christ and the complete forgiveness of sin that Christ offers. He was shocked, he said, "For the first time I understand the meaning of Christianity." I sent him a bunch of tapes and sent him to a good church. I haven't heard from him. I just commit him to the Lord.

## **The gospel: god forgives sin!**

But I've learned, as I've traveled around. You know, if you're sitting on an airplane traveling and they ask you what you do and you say you're a preacher, the only thing they can think of that's worse is sitting next to some kind of salesman. I've actually had people bolt and never return to that seat. I had that happen on a flight from New York. A guy had to stay away five hours. So I've learned not to say that, "I'm a preacher." I just say, "I have a wonderful job. I go around and tell people God will forgive all their sins. Are you interested?" That's cutting to the chase. You immediately get right where Jesus got with the rich young ruler. This is all about sin and forgiveness, does that interest you? Or would you rather just bury your sins and die and perish eternally in Hell for your own sins? Or are you interested in forgiveness? That cuts right to the issue. The issue of the gospel and the issue of repentance and whether or not the Holy Spirit has plowed the heart or not. And whether or not the Holy Spirit is convicting of sin.

## **The s-l-n virus**

Now the Bible makes it clear that all people are sinners by nature and by action. They are sinners by birth. Born alienated from a holy God. And they live out their lives as a result of that innate sinfulness in such a way that it produces in them no good thing ever and nothing that pleases God for which they pay eternally in Hell. Um, the most deadly virus is not the HIV Virus; it's the SIN virus. The HIV Virus kills everyone it affects; so does the SIN virus. There is no cure however for the HIV Virus; there is a cure for the SIN virus. And God Himself has provided the cure. You say, "Why, we all know this." Well, I know we know this but I want us to know it so well that we can give it to someone else with complete clarity and understanding. And one of the fears I have is that our churches are filled with people who have a minimal understanding of the Gospel but it's not sufficient enough for them to be clear and penetrating and present it to someone else. So I want to help you with that.

Open your Bible to 2 Corinthians, chapter 5. Now, if you're going to spend the rest of your life telling people that God will forgive all of their sins, you need to know how to approach that, right? Because that's why you're here. God left you here to do this work. 2Cor 5 and I want to just read from verse 18-21.....Now the good news is there's a cure for the SIN virus. Everybody has it and we're given the responsibility to disseminate the cure. That's what we do, that's why we're here. Folks that's the only reason you're here at all.

✓ If we'd been saved purely for fellowship with God we might as well go to heaven because the fellowship here isn't what it ought to be.

✓ If we were saved purely for fellowship with each other we might as well go to Heaven where it's perfect because it's imperfect here.

✓ If we were saved to have triumph over sin because the triumph here is severely checkered, isn't it? We all live in Romans 7 somewhere, wanting to do what we don't do and not wanting to do what we find ourselves doing.

## The ministry of reconciliation

We're here because there's one thing we can do here that we can't do in heaven and that's the ministry of reconciliation. Five times in the verses I read to you the term "reconciliation" is used in one way or another. And that term defines the heart and soul of our responsibility as believers in the world. You know, Christianity can get very complex. Your Christian life can get very complex. Your Christian calendar can get very complex. And so, if I might, I'd like to simplify everything and pull it down to the irreducible minimum of what it is that you're all about and I'm all about as Christians. We have been given the ministry of reconciliation. It is simply this: **Our duty is to tell people they can be reconciled to God.** That's what we do. Our mission is to preach the fact that God will forgive all someone's sins forever. That the relationship of hostility and hatred and enmity and bitterness and alienation from God can be totally changed. That enemies can become friends. Aliens can become sons. That is the good news. The good news is not that God will fix your marriage. The good news is not that God will make your life happier or that He'll make you prosperous or that He'll make you successful or that he'll bump you up a few notches on the comfort level. The good news is that alienation from a holy God which carries the price of eternal damnation can end. And you can be reconciled with God and enjoy His glorious Heaven forever. All your sin having been dealt with. Our high calling and our high privilege is simply to tell people that God will forgive all your sins forever, are you interested? This is what we live for. This is what we preach for. This is what we teach for. That people might be reconciled to God.

## What is the ministry of reconciliation?

Literally, it says in verse 18, "He placed in us the ministry of reconciliation." Then you will notice at the end of verse 19, "He has committed to us the word or the message of reconciliation." We have the obligation and we have the content. We have the ministry and we have the message. The word "word" here is "logos" and it indicates what is true and trustworthy as opposed to "mythos" which was the Greek word for myths and lies and deceptions and fictitious and spurious things. We have the logos in the midst of all the mythos. We live to announce that God can be reconciled to sinners. That enmity between hopeless, wicked people and a holy God can end. And from our viewpoint, the relationship certainly seems irreconcilable and Hell seems irreversible but from God's standpoint it is not. There is a way to be reconciled to God. And beloved, as Christians, we'd better understand in a crystal clear manner exactly what that is

all about. And I'm afraid we don't. And you know why I'm afraid we don't? Because there is utter chaos at the very point of the Gospel throughout Christendom today from the grass roots level to the level of discussions going on among theologians. And I've been in those discussions. I sat locked up in a room in Florida for seven hours with some of the most prominent Evangelicals in this nation. Men like Chuck Colson and men like Bill Bright and people like J. I. Packer who sat next to me for seven hours in that locked up room and other very prominent men. John Woodbridge, the church historian at Trinity. Many men, R.C. Sproul was there Michael Horton was there. For seven hours we were embroiled in an irreconcilable discussion about the Gospel and could not come to agreement on it. On what it was that was essential for salvation. What is the essential content of the Gospel, which a person must believe to be saved and if they don't believe it they can't be saved? And there was no consensus as to the answer to that question.

## **The "gift of salvation" document**

Now you're talking about some pretty highbrow people. I get involved in this all the time. I've been involved in it again recently when a new document came out called, "The Gift of Salvation" in which ten Roman Catholics and ten Evangelicals take a second run at ECT, the Evangelicals Catholics Together" document and they come up with another document that again shows the utter confusion of what this message is all about. How in the world can we do the ministry of reconciliation if we're not sure what the message is? It filters all the way down to the grass roots of course and if the people who are supposed to be in leadership don't know what the Gospel is, how in the world are we supposed to know? If I ask you the question, "What must a person believe to be saved?" What's the answer? Do you really understand what it is? Do you know what's the irreducible minimum? Do you know what really is the Gospel? Do you understand what we're telling people?

## **Are mormons Christians?**

I spent, recently, a full day with the two leaders of the Mormon theology, The Chairman of the Theology Department of BYU and the Associate Chairman. The two Mormon gatekeepers of theology. The Mormon Church has seven presidents that are actually like seven apostles. They make all the doctrinal decisions if it's not in the Doctrine of Covenants, the Book of Mormon. And they came to spend a day with me under the authority and commission of the seven presidents of the Mormon Church to talk theology. We sat in the room and they told me they believe in salvation by grace and salvation through faith and salvation in Christ. And they wanted to affirm the things we have in common. Now there are some people who would say, "Wow! It must a revival in the Mormon Church." But when we got done with hours and hours of discussion, very gracious men. And very compelled, in fact, they'd been reading through,

they'd read through all four volumes of my commentary on Matthew and they were going through both volumes on Romans and they'd read the Gospel According to Jesus' Faithworks, the Sufficiency of Christ. All these books I've written and they were drawn to me because they never really understood the Bible like that. And they came because they wanted to know me personally and ask questions. And they said, "We want to affirm salvation by grace alone. We want to affirm salvation by faith. We want to affirm salvation is in Christ."

## Mormons have a different god

Recently I heard that at a very prominent seminary you know very well, very Evangelical seminary, two faculty members have just put up on their web page and it's there for you all to see: That we should all be invited to embrace the Mormons now. I said, "I want to ask you three questions," at the end of the day and in a gracious way.

✓ I said, "**Tell me about your God.**" And they gave me a God who didn't have three persons. They're Unitarian, so I said, "Well, whatever it is we want to talk about regarding grace, faith and Christ, let's just get it straight, **we have a different God.**"

✓ And I said, "**Tell me your Christology.**" And they said, "Jesus is created by God. He's a high order of created beings." I said, "Now let's make this clear, **we have a different Christ.** And if anybody comes and preaches a different Christ he's cursed."

✓ Then I said, "**If I wanted to get to the highest heaven, what would I need to do?**" They said you would need to join the Mormon Church, you would need to evidence certain obediences, you would need to be baptized with a certain kind of spirit-endowed baptism in the system. I said, "Then let me get this clear, **we have a different Gospel.** Apart from those, we agree."

## Ecumenical jihad

There's a book out, I don't know if you've read it. You may have seen it out John, called Ecumenical Jihad. Write it down you need to read it. It's a short little book. I'm always giving him assignments you know. Ecumenical Jihad, I just want to tell you what the book's about, just very brief. Just to illustrate the issue here. Ecumenical Jihad is a book written by Peter Krieff, some of you may recognize his name. He's a Catholic apologist that teaches at Boston College. He's a Catholic bastion up there in Boston. Peter is a very articulate writer and very bright guy. Ecumenical Jihad is a very interesting name. A jihad is a holy war in Islam. Ecumenical is what you think it is, everybody get together. So everybody has to get together to fight the Holy War.

Now the thesis of the book is that there is a holy war going on in our society and our culture. Our culture is going down the proverbial drain and we need to get a cultural morality. We've got to stop America from sliding; we've got to stop Western Civilization from sliding down into a moral morass. So what we need to do is--there are not enough Evangelical Christians to fight this battle alone, there are not enough Catholics to fight it alone so we need to all through our arms around each other. Let's all get together and embrace each other and let's go fight the Holy War ecumenically. Maybe we can reclaim the culture and create a cultural morality, which will create a better environment for belief in the Gospel. That's the idea.

## **Do all roads lead to heaven?**

Now, he says, the thesis in the book is that basically we should accept the fact that all mono-theists are on their way to Heaven anyway. Because there's only one God and they all just view Him differently. So, he casts this, and it's a brief little paperback but it's quite interesting. It was advertised in Christianity Today, promoted by them. He casts that he was surfing one day, he says, and he hit the bottom and had an out-of-body experience. And in his out-of-body experience, he was taken to Heaven, so Krieff writes. And the first person he met there shocked him. Because the first person he met there was Confucius. And his response was, "What are you doing here?" Confucius says, "Well, what I didn't understand about Jesus down there I understood once I got here. It was all clarified for me." And then he met Buddha, same scenario. And then he met Mohammed and then he met a bunch of Orthodox Jews who worshipped the true God, they just didn't quite get the Jesus side of the deal. And then he met a bunch of Atheists who were seeking truth and since truth all resides in God they were really seeking God. So they were true God-seekers because they were also there.

## **Universalism**

And the thesis of the book is: Look, we're all going to arrive at the same place, why are we fighting each other? Then he said now if we're going to win the Holy War we gotta get our arms around everybody and we gotta have a General. There's only one General in the world who's up to this task and that's the Pope who's the great winner of unwinnable wars, he calls him. So we all subscribe to the Pope. That's the General who commands the troops. And then he said we have to have an inner power. And the final section of the book is a call for all of us to reaffirm our devotion to Mary, bow as it were to the power of Mary in us.

## **What if he is right???**

You say, well that's a pretty weird book. On the back cover there's a paragraph endorsing the book in which it says, "Peter Krieff is one of our finest contemporary apologists. We need to listen to his message. Signed Charles Colson." Next paragraph says, "What if he is right? Signed J.I. Packer." What if he's right? Are we asking if he's right? I don't think so. He's not right, is he? He's wrong. Are they still asking that question? Do they not understand what the Gospel is? Do they not understand how a person gets to Heaven? I'm not commenting on what they said. I only quoted what they said. You can buy the book and see it. It's on the back. It's endorsement of the book on the back cover.

There is such confusion at the level of the Gospel. More than I've even known in my lifetime and that's why I'm embarking upon this. Now, if we are ambassadors for Christ, and as he says in verse 20, if we have been given, verse 18, the ministry of reconciliation. And if we have been given the word or the message of reconciliation and that's what we do and who we are then certainly we'd better be clear on the issue, right? And it's up for grabs right now.

## **Reverse the reformation**

There's a strong movement going on right now for a pre-Reformational Christianity. A pre-Reformational Christianity. Where we wipe out the Reformation. In fact, one great leader says he believes that maybe God has called him to reverse what Martin Luther did. Undo it. This is serious stuff. We need to understand the Gospel. In fact, when I was in the Ligonier Conference down in Florida, we were trying to find a new word. We used to call ourselves Fundamentalists but we don't really want to do that anymore because it's sort of become no fun-, too much dam- and not enough -mental. We can't use that word; it's become sort of cast in a certain way. And then we had the word Evangelical but that doesn't mean anything today. You've got more stuff in this town called Evangelical that you'd like to ever be associated with. Is that not true?

So, what's the word? So, Sproul says, "I know that word I'm using. I'm calling myself and imputationalist." And I said, "Well, you could probably get some money from the government for the Americans for Disabilities Act." I can't go around saying I'm a Bible-believing Imputationalist. People will run for cover. But we were trying to find a term that we can actually use in the middle of all of this. I'll get back to that in a minute.

## **Do you understand the gospel?**

Well, you understand the problem, let's look at the solution. Do you understand the Gospel? Let me give it to you in these verses. I want to give you an understanding of reconciliation. In the ministry of reconciliation we preach the word of reconciliation, Paul says verse 20, "We beg you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God." Verse 18, "God is reconciled." That's our ministry, that's



what we are. In fact, maybe that's the word we ought to use: Reconcilers. Biblical Reconcilers. Not bad, just thought of it. We could start a movement tonight.

## **Religion: ways to be right with god**

Let's go back to verse 18. Let me give you just several points. Number one: Reconciliation is by the will of God. Reconciliation is by the will of God. Verse 18, all these things are from whom? From God. All these things are from God. What things? Verse 17.....The whole saving work is from God. What makes new creatures is from God. The whole work of reconciliation is from God. Sinners can't decide to be reconciled to God and devise a plan to reach Him. That's what all false religion in the world is. All the world's false religions are the same thing. Sinners devising a way to be reconciled to God. Christianity is God determining a way to be reconciled to sinners. Sinners have no power to satisfy God's anger toward sin. They have no virtue to charm Him. They have no righteousness to qualify themselves for forgiveness. We are all offenders. We have been justifiably, eternally banished from His presence. We are hopeless, helpless, impotent, ignorant, blind and doomed. And any change in that relationship has to come from Him, it can't come from us.

## **Salvation: God reconciles sinners**

God alone can change our relationship and that's the good news. God so loved the world He made a way of reconciliation. He desired to reconcile sinners. He desired to make them His friends, His children. This is not foreign to His holy nature. This is a very important point. As if He had to be reluctantly appeased like some whimsical deity created by man. Now this is really astonishing stuff in Paul's day. Brilliant any day. Because nobody knew a god who was by nature a loving reconciler. All the gods of the nations had to be appeased, cajoled, somehow their anger had to be ameliorated by some sacrifice. In some cases taking your little baby and putting your baby on a fire and burning that baby to a crisp as the Canaanites did for centuries in the land of Palestine to pacify the god Molok.

## **God the reconciler**

People in the world didn't know God as a reconciler. They didn't know a god who was a reconciler. They knew gods that were, at best, indifferent, at worse, aggressively hostile and in the middle whimsical. Seemingly doing inconsistent things at their own discretion. But whoever heard of a god who was a loving god. Whoever heard, where are you going to find that in the history of

ethnology? You can search. See if you can find in the religions of the world a loving, kind, gracious, merciful, tenderhearted, compassionate god who sought to reconcile sinners. You won't find one. It was a stark, shocking realization when the Gospel penetrated the Roman World with that message. But our God is a reconciling God.

Titus chapter 1, it says, "Paul a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of those chosen of God." God is a God who chose to save sinners. God can't lie. God promised before time began that He would save sinners. It was his plan. At the end of verse 2, "He promised long ages ago." Actually in the Greek, "before time began." From the very outset, before time began, that means before Creation, that means before Man ever existed God predetermined to save sinful Man. It's nothing we've done. It was all bound up in who He was, who He is. Titus 2:10 identifies God as "God our Savior. God our Savior. By the way, verse 3 of chapter 1, the same thing: God our Savior". God is mentioned once after the introduction in verse 1, that's in verse 3 He's called, "God our Savior". He's mentioned once in chapter 2, verse 10, He's called, "God our Savior". He's mentioned once in chapter 3, verse 4 and He's called, "God our Savior". Jesus Christ is mentioned after the introduction once in chapter 1, verse 4, "Christ Jesus our Savior". Once in chapter 2, verse 13, "Our great God and Savior Christ Jesus". Once in chapter 3, "Jesus Christ our Savior" in verse 6. God by nature is a saving God. That's a tremendously important issue. God is a Savior.

In fact, He demonstrates that. Look at 1 Timothy 4:10. In 1 Timothy 4:10 there's a most remarkable and somewhat disconcerting verse when you first read it because it's kind of hard to figure out. But it says in 1 Timothy 4:10.....Boy, that has really created havoc in the minds of people. What do you mean God is the Savior of all men? In what way is God the savior of all men? Well, we know this, we know He's not the Savior of all men spiritually and eternally, don't we? We know that because people go to Hell, right? Jesus makes that clear when you find a rich man in torment. That's a glimpse into that place. So we know He is not the Savior of all men spiritually and eternally.

In what way is He the Savior of all men? Listen carefully. Physically and temporally. Physically and temporally. You say, "How does that work?" Well, He doesn't give the sinner what the sinner deserves the moment he deserves it. The fact that you're still here, you're still breathing, you're still alive is evidence that God is a saving God. He has temporally and physically delivered you from the wrath which should have felled the first time you violated His law. He's already demonstrated that He's a saving God. You've already seen His mercy. You've already seen that.

Romans 2 said that forbearance of God, that patience of God by which He overlooks the transgression and waits and gives space for repentance should have led you to repentance, Romans 2: 4-5. God is a saving God and He's demonstrated it across the globe through all of the history of humanity because He's delivered men temporally and physically from what they deserve which was the instantaneous explosion of His just and righteous wrath. The world has had plenty of illustrations of how much a saving God He is. Then He adds,

“especially of believers.” And He saves believers spiritually and eternally. Okay? But even when you look at the world as it is today, you see sinners running rampant all through the world that’s evidence of God’s saving character. God said to Adam in the Garden, “You eat that fruit, you’re gonna die.” He ate, guess what? He lived. He lived. He didn’t die the day he ate. The seeds of death were planted but God showed Himself a saving God, didn’t He? And immediately put in place the saving plan, didn’t He? Right in the same chapter when they have the Fall in verse 15, God promises there’s gonna come a seed that’s gonna bruise the serpent’s head. Redemption is on the way. God, by nature, is a saving God.

You find Him in the Garden. He’s not off somewhere having Adam wandering around the Garden saying, “Where are you God? Where are you God?” No, it’s God wandering around in the Garden saying, “Where are you Adam? Where are you Adam?” The Son of Man has come to what? Seek and save. God does the seeking.

From Genesis 3:8-9 on, God has been seeking the lost. Ezekiel 34:16.....Man is lost and not seeking. God is seeking. No man seeks after God. Luke 15, three parables, lost sheep, lost coin, lost sons. In every case, there’s a search and what was lost was found all of Heaven rejoices. Why does all of Heaven rejoice? Because they know how precious that is to the heart of God. Right?

The lost coin is like a sinner that repents.

The lost sheep is like a sinner that repents.

The lost son is like a sinner that repents.

And it causes a party in Heaven because it’s so dear to the heart of God. God is a saving God by nature. We’re not trying to appease Him. He’s a saving God by nature.

And you see it in the demonstration where the guy finally got up in the middle sty eating the pig slop and says, “I’ll go home.” And runs and what happens? He gets near his house and his father who is an old man runs, runs when he sees him coming. Throws his arms around him, kisses him and calls for a robe to be put on and the most beautiful ring, a feast and that’s God. That father is God. That’s the saving nature of God. Running to the repentant sinner. Throwing His arms around that sinner and lavishing blessings on that sinner. It’s His nature, it’s his nature. And this is what he said to the sinner, “All that I have is yours.” He seeks the reprobate. He seeks the wicked. He seeks the outcast as well as the respectable and the outwardly religious. So God is the reconciler.

Go back to the text. God is the reconciler. In case you forgot what the text is, it’s 2Cor 5. Reconciliation is the divine provision by which God’s holy displeasure can be appeased. The hostility removed and sinners restored to Him. Let me just give you something to think about. Man never makes reconciliation. We don’t make reconciliation with God. It’s not what we do it’s simply what we embrace. God has provided the reconciliation, we can only embrace it. To put it another way, reconciliation with God is not something we accomplish when we

stop deciding to reject Him, but something He accomplished when he stopped deciding to reject us. God is the source of reconciliation.

## **The act of justification**

So we're not looking for some religious leaders to invent the plan, okay? We don't need a meeting to come up with this. All we need is a revelation from God. True? So we go here.

So, first of all, reconciliation is by the will of God.

Two, second point, it is by the act of justification. It is by the act of justification.

Verse 19, God was reconciling the World to Himself. God was reconciling the World to Himself. I wish I had more time to talk about all of that. The world here is not the world of Universalism. It doesn't mean everybody's going to be saved, John 1:29.....John 3:16.....1John 2:2.....Heb2:9.....This is not Universalism, it simply means mankind in general, very simple. Mankind in general. Titus 3:4, God's love for mankind. The world of humanity. Obviously not every individual will be saved. But the world indicates the sphere, the kind of being, the class of being toward which God seeks reconciliation. And God who was in Christ, verse 19, reconciling the world to Himself, did it this way. Verse 19, by not counting their what? Trespasses against them. That's how he did it. So that's justification. He declared them righteous.

Justification means to be just or to be right. The only way that God could reconcile sinners would be if they were not sinners anymore. If they were made righteous. If they became righteous. So, you've got a problem if you say, "Well, God's going to reconcile sinners. He's just going to do it by saying, 'Ah, it's not big deal to me. You're all forgiven, come on in.'" Then you've got a problem with God's justice, right? God's holiness, God's integrity is at stake. So, if we're gonna have forgiveness, we have to have justification. It's by the will of God by it's by the act of justification. Somehow God has to declare us just. And how does He do it?

By not counting their trespasses against them.

It doesn't say He doesn't know about them, He does.

It doesn't say they aren't there, they are.

It just says He doesn't hold them against us anymore. In fact, that's another way to present it. Say, "You know, I'm happy to tell you I know a truth that can allow God never again to hold any sin you ever commit against you." That's the good news folks. That's the good news.

So, it is by the act of justification, "blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity," Psalm 32:2. "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account," Romans 4 says. So, the only way that God can do this, His plan, is if He forgives you and never holds your sins against you. None of them, past, present, future. Absolutely none of them. Fully forgiven and you're declared to be righteous. That's the only way it could ever happen. You say, "Well, I don't know if I can make it." Well, if you were raised a Catholic you understand how tough that is. This is Roman Catholic theology.

## **A short course in Romanism**

I'll give you a little course in Roman Catholic theology. Here's how it works: You want to be justified, made right with God? Here's the process: God infuses grace into you, they use a term "infused grace". God infuses it into you, it's grace or righteousness and it's the grace of Christ and the righteousness of Christ and it's dumped into you. The first dose you ever get you get at infant baptism. That's why infant baptism is absolutely required because it is the first dispensation of infused grace. And according to Catholic Theology, at that point, grace is infused into you. That grace becomes an energy in you moving you toward justification, toward righteousness as you cooperate by good works. Every time you go to a Mass, every time you do penance, every time you say your beads, every time you go to confession, every time you do any of that you get more infused grace. That's why some Roman Catholics go to church seven days a week because they need lots of infused grace. They operate under fear that's why they go to confession. Not because they want to tell the priest all their sins, but because they want the infused grace that perpetuates them on the process to righteousness.

If, per chance, as you move along the road you're getting closer and closer, you commit a mortal sin. Two kinds of sin in Catholic theology, venial sins which don't count like big ones and mortal sins which are really big. Any time you commit a mortal sin you're back to zero again in the process of justification. It's as if you just had infant baptism, you go all the way back to ground zero. Most Catholics don't know these nuances at all. All they know is they're working real hard hoping they can get to Heaven. But I'm giving you the inside stuff. This is Catholic Theology. Commit a mortal sin you're back to square one again and you start the process. Do that when you're 75 years old and you die when you're 76 and you've got a long time in Purgatory.

### **Purgatory**

Purgatory comes from the word "purge". And Purgatory is where you go because you didn't make it to justification. You didn't make it to righteousness but you're a good guy and you tried really hard and we can't send you to Hell, so we'll invent a place and you go there and over a period of 300-400 years or whatever it is, you get purged. And finally you get righteous and then you can go to Heaven. And you can get aided because there's some folks who had more righteousness than they needed. In fact, they were so good, they had extra righteousness and when they died their extra righteousness was put in what's called "the treasury of merit". The treasury of merit is a big, you know, hypothetical box. And God, at His own discretion, can take some of that out and give it to you while you're in Purgatory and move you faster along. And that's, and you just keep hoping you're going to get finally to righteousness.

## What's wrong with Romanism?

So that Roman Catholic Theology believes this: God justifies only the righteous. In other words, you're never going to be right with God until you've achieved righteousness. My Bible says, "God justifies sinners." And that is the difference. **Roman Catholic Theology says you'll get justified when you get righteous. The Bible says you'll get justified when you fall on your face and acknowledge you're a sinner.** And justification is not a process that finally culminates in Purgatory. It's an act that occurs in a moment of time when God declares you righteous and forgiven. That is a huge difference. One view saves, the other damns because it's a system of works. Sounds good, it's got grace in it, it's got faith in it, it's got righteousness in it, the righteousness of Christ is in it. They use all those terms. In fact, this latest document says, "We Catholics, and we Protestants believe in salvation by grace, in salvation by faith and salvation in Christ alone and we believe in the righteousness of Jesus Christ." And they go, an average Evangelical goes, "WOW! What else can you say? Salvation by faith, by grace, through Christ alone!" And then there's a paragraph at the end that says, "Of course, we have yet to discuss the doctrine of imputation, the Mass, and baptismal regeneration." It doesn't mean anything. It's just words. HUGE difference.

And the way God, listen to this, the way God justifies a person is not by infusing grace in them so they can become perfect but by not counting their what? Trespasses against them. It's just a matter of God saying, "Okay, I'm not counting those anymore against you." It's not God saying, "Oh, there aren't any more there." It's not God saying, "Well, you've reached the point where you don't have any more trespasses you can be declared righteous." That's not justifying the ungodly. "God justifies the ungodly," the Bible says in Romans. He just doesn't repute their sins. So you can say to a person, "Do you want some REALLY good news? God wants to save you. God wants to justify you and to sanctify. God wants no longer to count any sin you ever committed against you. Ever!" That is good news. So, this whole matter of reconciliation is by the will of God, by the act of justification, which is tantamount to complete forgiveness.

Thirdly, and I have to say this, it's by the obedience of faith. It's by the obedience of faith. There's a faith component, verse 20. We're going around begging people on behalf of Christ, "Be reconciled to God." You say if it's all of God what are we begging people for? It's not apart from faith. It's not apart from faith. We're begging for a response and a response is to believe as many as received Him they became, how can I say it? They became privileged to count themselves as sons of God. It's by faith. So, we go around calling people to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Don't we? Now you know this,

so, getting people to understand this and to put their faith in Christ alone to justify them is really what we do.

Let me just give you a little insight into this. You say, "What's the actual message?" Well, it comes down to this, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved," Acts 16:31. Believe that Christ came into the world, was born in human flesh and born of a virgin and lived a perfect life, died a substitutionary death on the cross, rose from the grave, ascended to the right hand of the Father having accomplished our redemption as our High Priest and coming King. That's what I call the drive train of the Gospel. You believe that. You believe in the Christ who is the true Christ and in His death and resurrection for you. So we call men and women to that faith. We understand that.

Men and women are trapped in all kinds of lies, all kinds of deceptions, Paul in 1 Cor 10 calls them "fortresses" and we smash those fortresses with the truth. Hoping that the fortress will crash down and we can leave the prisoners captive to Christ. But we call them to faith. Believing, "For by grace you are saved," Eph 2:8, "through faith." So we say, "Here, do you want to take the gift? Just trust Christ. Just put your faith just affirm you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who lived and died for you and rose again. Do you believe that? And acknowledge Christ as your Lord and Savior." That's it. And receive the forgiveness He offers. But one final point remains and frankly all the rest was introduction. I really want to get to verse 21. The question is, "How do we do this? How in the world can God pull this off? How can He do it? How can He do it and still be just? How? How could God do this?" Reconciliation by the will of God, by the act of justification which involves forgiveness, by the obedience of faith. We just call sinners to believe. How can He do it? How can He reconcile sinners when He's too pure to look upon iniquity? He can't behold evil. How can He fellowship with transgressors? How can He satisfy His justice? How can He satisfy His righteous, holy condemnation of sin with full and deserved punishment and still be able to show mercy to sinners at the very same time? How can He punish the sin in our lives at one time and make us His own children at the other? How can He punish us without destroying us? How can He end the hostility of those who hated Him and take them into His holy Heaven? How can He do it?

## **The greatest verse in the bible**

Verse 21 is the answer. Maybe there's a greater verse in the Bible, I don't know. Maybe not. Fifteen Greek words. If you understand this verse, you understand the Gospel. Fifteen Greek words that define the meaning of the reconciliation message. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." That's how He did it. That's how God did it. There is the plan. This is the secret of redemption folks. Right here. Understand this verse, "He made," is God, God is the antecedent at the end of

verse 20. God is the one who did it. It's God's plan, God designed as we said, God devised it and in order to make it happen, in order to make it work, "He made Him who knew no sin," who's that? You don't have a lot to choose from. "Him who knew no sin," who's that? Jesus Christ who the writer of Hebrews said is, "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." The sinless, spotless Lamb of God. "He made Him who knew no sin," that's so critical. It had to be a perfect lamb. It had to be without spot, without blemish, right? "He made Him who knew no sin."

Here's comes the key, the Greek says, "He made Him who knew no sin, sin." His sinless son in whom He said, "I am well pleased." His sinless son who said in John 8:46 says, "Which of you convicts me of sin?" His sinless son who Peter calls "the just for the unjust" was made sin. What in the world does that mean? Do you know what that means? Kenneth Hagin says, "It means," I've heard him say it, "Christ became a sinner on the cross. On the cross He became a sinner." Others in the Word Faith Movement say, "He not only became a sinner on the cross but He had to go to Hell for three days to pay for His sin and when He finally paid for His sin God let Him come out of the grave." Let me tell you something, that's not anything short of blasphemy. **On the cross Jesus was NOT a sinner.** He never was a sinner before. He wasn't a sinner then. And He never will be. He was as pure and holy and harmless and undefiled hanging on the cross as ever before or since. He is not a sinner, never a sinner. He never broke a law of God and he never failed to fulfill PERFECTLY everything God ever required or desired. And God did not make him a sinner on the cross, that is an unthinkable blasphemy. If he became a sinner on the cross then He'd have had to go to Hell for His own iniquities.

## **What happened on the cross? Substitution**

Isaiah 53:4 and 6 says, "He was wounded, not for His transgressions but for our transgressions." He was bruised not for His iniquities but for --- and it was the chastisement for our peace that was put on Him. Boy that is a terrible thing to say. God has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. Let me tell you something. You have to understand this. Here's how to understand it. **On the cross, God treated Jesus as if He had committed every sin ever committed by every person who would ever believe.** Though, in fact, He committed none of them. Did you get that? God treated Him as if He committed, personally, every sin ever committed by every person who would ever believe though the fact is He committed none of them. That's the great doctrine of substitution. And that's the first side of imputation. God imputed our sins to Him. He was guilty of none of them. God treated Him as if He committed all of them. And He just unloaded His fury for all the sins of all the people who would ever believe in Him in the history of the world. He unloaded all His fury against all their sins on Christ.



To borrow the language of Leviticus 16, Jesus became the “scapegoat”. Scapegoat was guilty of nothing. But the High Priest, as it were, laid all the sins of the people on the scapegoat and sent him away. He was without sin. But sin was credited to His account as if He had personally committed it and then God punished Him though the fact is He never committed any of it. That’s imputation. That’s imputation. That’s the first step. So the only sense in which Christ was made sin was in the sense that our sins were imputed to Him. God treated Him as if He was guilty but He wasn’t. You were. You were. And then God just exploded His wrath on the innocent Christ who was in our place as our substitute.

Galatians 3:13.....that was it. Now, go back to the verse. Here comes the rest of this incredible truth. “He made Him who knew no sin, sin”. Only in one sense and that is that He treated Him as if He’d committed all the sins ever committed by all the people who would ever believe when in fact he committed none of them and He did it on our behalf or for us. Listen to this, “In order that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” That’s the other side of imputation. This is just mind-boggling to me. Let me tell you what that last half means.

## **The perfect life of Jesus**

Have you ever asked yourself the question, “When Jesus came into the world why did He have to live all those years?” If I was planning the plan of redemption I’d have had Him come down on Friday, die, rise on Sunday and go back to Heaven Monday. I mean, that was the only deal, it needed to happen, wasn’t it? Have you ever thought that through? Why 30 years? Why 30 silent years? Isn’t that quite a remarkable to you that you have one little tiny vignette in the life of Christ at the age of twelve and that’s it? And that’s not of monumental theological significance. He was a twelve-year-old who got separated from His parents and He was wandering around the temple asking questions of the theologians there. And He made the one comment that He needed to be about His Father’s business, which a noble Jew could have made. A devout Jew, concerned about things of God who was His Father.

But you have 30 years of absolute silence. You have 30 years of no record. Look this is God on the Earth! This is the Almighty, glorious God of Heaven living in the world and we have absolutely no information about this. We don’t know anything about what happened. So many times I’ve wondered what kinds of a little boy He was. Was He like my little boys? Not a chance. Was He like your little boys? Not a chance. What was He like? And you have all these apocryphal books about whenever He saw a bird with a broken wing He healed it and whenever He saw a crippled child He healed him and those are fanciful things. What was He like? Well, we know He grew in wisdom and stature and favor with God. And then we know absolutely nothing. We have 30 blank years of the life of God on Earth. Isn’t that wonderful to think about? I mean, I just wish there was ---I wish the Gospels didn’t start with the birth of Christ and leap to the baptism.

There's 30 years in there, what was going on in there? I'll tell you what was going on. The reason He had to be here all those years was identified at His baptism when John said, "I'm not going to baptize you." Remember that? And He said, "No, you have to. I have come to fulfill all righteousness." That was just part of doing what righteousness required. And the reason, listen carefully, that Jesus lived a full life was that He might live a complete life fully righteous. **That He might live a complete life absolutely without sin, absolutely perfect (listen to me), so that that perfect life could be credited to your account. That's the backside of imputation. On the cross, God treated Jesus as if He lived your life so He could treat you as if you lived His life. That's the Gospel. That's substitution.**

I don't think people even grasp the reality of that. The only way God could ever be reconciled to sinners was if sin had been paid for and He did it in Christ. And if the sinner was made righteous and He did it in Christ. And that's why Paul in Phillipians says, "Oh man, all those years I was racking up all that stuff in the gain column you know, circumcision, tribe of Benjamin, of the Nation Israel, Hebrew of the Hebrews, concerning the law, you know, a Pharisee, blameless and then I saw Christ and it was immediately manure. And I found a righteousness, not of my own, but the righteousness of God through Christ." What happens in justification? God simply declares you righteous because your sin has been paid for. He treated Christ as if He'd committed all your sins and lived your life and He treats you as if you lived Christ's life. That's how the Father sees you now. And that happened at the moment of faith, didn't it? That's the Gospel. That's what we need to tell sinners. That's the essence of it.

## **No salvation without imputation and substitution**

And if you take out, listen carefully, if you take out the doctrine of substitution and you take out the doctrine of imputation you just mess up the message. That's why R.C. Sproul said, "I'm an imputationist." You can't tamper with that. We're not cooperating with infused righteousness trying to become holy so God can declare us righteous. No. In faith, repentant faith, acknowledging our sin, we acknowledge Jesus died and rose again for us in simple faith. We ask Him to save us from our sins and at that moment, the payment of Christ is sufficient for all our sins and the righteousness of Christ is granted to us. And from then on God treats us as if we had lived Christ's life. That's why Paul in Romans says, 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation." Can't be, it's paid for. A brother and shows up in Heaven and he says, "Ah, John MacArthur down there, he did this, he did this, he did this." Jesus says, "Paid for. Paid for. Paid for." The Father says, "Sorry Satan, can't see it. All I can see is the righteousness of Christ."

That's the great message of the good news. And this is what we preach. This is the word of reconciliation. There's not cure for the HIV. There is a cure for the

SIN. And folks, we are the dispensers. Hang on to this message. It's being assaulted everywhere. Absolutely everywhere. People are caving in to this some knowingly and some unknowingly. The great doctrine of substitution. The great doctrine of imputation. The great doctrine of imputed sin to Christ on the cross and the imputed righteousness to us. That's the heart of the Gospel message.

## **Applying this doctrine as we witness**

I walked into a store, I'm closing this, in Cleveland. Dick Mayhew, the dean of Masters Seminary, and I were wondering around waiting for a meeting we had to speak at and we just walked down the street. It was a cold night in Cleveland. And we ducked into a store to keep warm. And there was a guy there. I started talking to this guy, it was a men's store. We just fiddled around there keeping warm and asking where we could go to get some coffee or tea to drink. I said, "Sir, I don't know what your religious background is but I just want to let you know that if you're ever interested, God will forgive every sin you've ever committed or ever will commit completely and totally if you'll just ask Him." He said, "C'mon, that's not fair! I'm a moral guy, I work hard at being a moral guy. I'm a good husband. I'm a good father. That's not fair to just forgive all that. You mean He said that if some really bad criminal-type guy just wants forgiveness God will forgive them?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "That's not fair. That is not fair." I said, "Well, that's true. I'm not sure you want fair if you think about it. I agree it's not fair." So I said to him, "I understand, I just want you to know if there ever comes a time in your life where you just come to the place where you say, 'I'm so weary of my sin. I'm so fearful about the potential consequences of it.' I just want you to know that if you will ask God, on the basis of the death of Christ, which I briefly explained to him, that if you just ask God to forgive your sins He'll do that. You may never want to do that. But if you ever do, you can just ask. On the basis of the death of Christ as a substitute for you."

He says, "Ah, nah, nah. That just can't be right." We went down, we got some coffee and tea and an hour later we went back. I was thinking, "I gotta slip in to see this guy again." This is exactly what happened. I walked into the door. I said, "Hi! We were just walking back and I wanted to thank you for telling us where to go to get something to drink." He said, "I eh-uh-duh, you mean I can just ask anytime?" I said, "Yeah. Absolutely anytime." And we gave him some material and when we got back we sent him some material.

That's the message. Do you understand it and the heart of it? Well, you should because you're an ambassador for it. Amen?

Father, thanks for a great evening for these precious friends. For this great church and for the great ministry given to us. And we love You and we thank You beyond words for reconciling us who are so utterly unworthy. We bless Your name. We praise You. And may we be faithful to proclaim this great word. In the name of Jesus, Amen.