

CHRIST THE MEDIATOR

BY Charles Grandison Finney

THE PENNY PULPIT, MAY 19, 1850*

"For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus."--I Tim. ii. 5

In speaking from these words I propose to show:--

I. WHAT A MEDIATOR IS.

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE OFFICE OF A MEDIATOR.

III. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE INDISPENSABLE QUALIFICATIONS FOR A MEDIATOR.

IV. THE CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS IN THE EXECUTION OF THE OFFICE OF MEDIATOR.

V. APPLY THESE THINGS TO CHRIST AS THE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN.

I. WHAT IS A MEDIATOR? A Mediator is one who undertakes to effect a reconciliation between parties who have some matter of difference.

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE OFFICE OF A MEDIATOR? 1. The existence of the office of a Mediator, always implies that there are two or more parties, and that some controversy exists between them. 2. It implies that there is some obstacle in the way of their coming together and reconciling their own matters in difference. If there be no obstacle in the way of doing this, there is no necessity for the interposition of a Mediator. The existence of the office, therefore, implies that there are parties between whom there is some matter in controversy, and that some difficulty is in the way of their adjusting their own differences. 3. The relation of the parties to each other may be the cause of the difficulty. God is a Sovereign, and if his subjects should take up arms against him, there would be immense impropriety in treating with them, while they continued in this rebellious and hostile position. There is a necessity for some third person to interpose if any reconciliation is ever to be effected. The Sovereign cannot treat with his subjects while they have weapons in their hands;--they must first return to their duty and lay down their arms, or he cannot have any intercourse with them. 4. The state of mind in which one or both parties may be, may prevent their coming together. There may be prejudice, misapprehension, or enmity in the minds of one or both parties. And when this is the case they cannot come together and adjust their matters of difference. This may lay the foundation for the necessity of an interposition of a Mediator. 5. Again: There may be some condition upon which the offended party must insist, from his relations and the circumstances of the case; which condition it may be impossible for the offender to fulfill. On this account it may be necessary for a third person to interpose, and fulfill for the offender what he cannot fulfill for himself, as a condition of the reconciliation to be brought about, between the parties. Either of the reasons, or all of them, may exist and require the interposition of a Mediator.

III. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE INDISPENSABLE QUALIFICATIONS FOR A MEDIATOR? 1. He must be the common friend of the parties between whom the controversy exists. By this we mean, that he should sustain such a relation to both parties, that they can wholly confide in him. 2. He must be able to fulfil, or secure the fulfilling, of any such conditions as are necessary to be fulfilled, in order to bring about the reconciliation, or he will not meet with success. He must have both willingness and ability to make any personal sacrifice, to which the nature of the undertaking calls him. If the nature of the undertaking be such that he cannot bring about an adjustment of the difficulty without making some personal sacrifice, he must be able and willing to make the necessary sacrifice, whatever it may be. We now come to consider--

IV. SOME OF THE CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS IN THE EXECUTION OF THE OFFICE OF MEDIATOR. I observe, that of course the above qualifications are necessary; and, further, I observe, that success must depend upon the consent of the parties. 1. First, the Mediator himself must consent to sustain the relation, and to take upon himself the office. 2. And then, the parties must consent, for the Mediator can do nothing to bind the parties without their own consent and sanction to it; for there may be two or more parties between whom there is some controversy, and this controversy cannot be adjusted, unless the parties between whom there exists the difference consent to any arrangement that

may be proposed. The Mediator himself may propose some terms to effect an agreement; but only so far as the parties consent to the Mediator's terms, can he succeed in his object. Just in so far, and no further, as they give the matter up into his hands, can he bring about the reconciliation. This matter in difference cannot be set right by any authority, by any man, or by any means whatever, that shall seek to supersede the necessity of the consent of the parties themselves. I am now prepared to proceed, and

V. APPLY THESE THINGS TO CHRIST AS THE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN. It is said in the Bible that Jesus Christ is a Mediator between God and man; this is plainly expressed, and we understand what it must mean. God addresses men in human language, he always uses that language which we can understand. I once heard a remark of this kind gravely made by a man who had been hearing a sermon on the atonement, in which the governmental view of it had been exhibited and enforced,--"Ah," said he, "you cannot explain spiritual things by natural things; you cannot explain the government of God by any human government or human transactions." Now, when I heard this remark, I could not forbear saying, "What a pity that God did not know that when he wrote the Bible." Cannot explain spiritual things by natural things! What a pity God did not take that into account when he wrote the Bible, where such illustrations are so abundantly introduced. But surely if God has seen fit to use such means to illustrate and explain his meaning to us, it is also permitted to us to do the same.

In the remarks that I have made this evening, I have shown you what a Mediator is, what is implied in the office of a Mediator, what are some of the indispensable qualifications for a Mediator, and what are the conditions of his success; and now we are farther to apply these remarks to the case before us. 1. I said that a Mediator is one who undertakes to reconcile parties to each other between whom there is some matter in controversy. In the text, these parties are shown to be God and men-- God on one side, and all the race of mankind on the other. That there is a matter in controversy between God and man, is one of the most palpable facts which lies on the surface of history: everybody knows it to be true; it is a fact as plain as that man exists upon the earth; every man feels it in his own consciousness; and if he is in a right state of mind, he would as soon think of questioning it as he would his own existence. Everybody must be aware of the fact that they do not live in a way that pleases God. What idea should we have of God if we supposed that he was satisfied and pleased with the conduct of the great mass of mankind? If God be a good being, he must be displeased with their conduct[.]? Who can doubt this? 2. Again: God manifests this displeasure which he feels, in thousands of ways. To be sure, he tempers his anger with great kindness, and suffers long with the perversities, follies, and sins, of mankind, yet how often has this world's history shown that God is angry with its inhabitants. How often has he swept over the world with his besom of destruction! At one time, all the inhabitants of the earth were swept away by a flood of waters, with the exception of only one family; and, on the other hand, we see that men are everywhere doing what they can to repudiate God's authority and claims to love and obedience, and are making war on his throne and government. In all this we can plainly see that there is a controversy between God and man; man opposes God, and God is continually, by many ways, showing his displeasure with them. 3. But I said also that the existence of the office implied that there was some obstacle in the way of their coming together and reconciling their differences, and that this might arise, first, from the relation which the parties sustained to each other. Now, anyone who has ever considered what government is, or has had anything to do with administering the law, can understand the sacredness of government, and the difficulty there is in the way of exercising mercy to the rebellious. Can rebels approach offended majesty in their own name? What have rebels to say in their own name? They cannot come nigh to treat with him in their own name, for he says, "I am of purer eyes than to behold iniquity." It is of no use for them to attempt to approach to him in their own name, for he will not look at them. Secondly, the difficulty may arise out of the state of mind of the parties. To be sure, God is disposed to do men good, notwithstanding their rebellion, and there is no state of mind which that would not allow him to exercise compassion and mercy where sinners will repent, but his government relations are such as to prevent his having any intercourse with those who continue in a state of hostility; the state of mind in which they are renders it indispensable for some third person to interpose, in order to reconcile them to God. Hence it is that Christ is represented as reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. But I said further, that the existence of the office implied that there might be some conditions, the fulfillment of which it might be necessary for the offended party to insist upon, but which it was impossible for the offending party to fulfill, or cause to be fulfilled.

Now, here, I suppose, was the great difficulty which stood in the way of God's showing mercy to sinners, even if his own disposition disposed him to be merciful. The law had been violated and dishonoured, and God must insist upon its being honoured, and public justice being satisfied. Here I must notice a distinction between public and retributive justice. Retributive justice respects the intrinsic deserts of an individual; for example, a moral agent may deserve punishment, who is not governmentally liable to it; or the government may be placed in such circumstances as to think it inexpedient to award that punishment which he deserves, and which the law sanctioned. Now, public

justice respects public interests; the laws of a country are public property, and when they are violated, all the subjects of the government are interested in having the law executed, that its authority might not in any way be weakened; for when the laws are violated with impunity, they are of no weight, and the government which cannot enforce them is despised. Let me observe, also, that in establishing a government of law, the lawgiver, either expressly or impliedly, pledges himself to punish the guilty, and protect and reward the innocent; and the public interests of the whole community demand this; the criminal must be made a public example, or the authority and intention of law cannot be maintained. No lawgiver, in heaven or on earth, has any right to compromise the claims of public justice. Now, observe, God has expressly, or impliedly, pledged himself to sustain his government, and maintain the authority of his law; man has dishonoured and violated it, and public rights will be compromised unless something be done to assert and sustain the authority of the law. Here is the difficulty; what shall be done? Shall the execution of the law be dispensed with, and thus be rendered void? Now, what public justice required was, that this law should be vindicated by its penalties being executed upon the offending parties, or something be done to secure reverence for the law and the lawgiver. Now, observe, God himself says that Christ is sent to be a propitiation for our sins, that he may be just, and yet the justifier of them who believe in Jesus. God cannot set aside the execution of the penalty. Here, I say, is the great difficulty. God's relations and character are such, and such the relations and character of man, that something must be done that men could not do as the condition of their being forgiven--the requirement is, that they make satisfaction to public justice. Why, to be sure, public justice required every offender to be punished. What, then, shall be done to meet the demands of public justice, and yet the offender be spared the infliction of the penalty? God's government is perfect; no compromise must be made which shall set aside the true spirit of the law. This leads me to say again, God could not dispense with the spirit of the law. All that the spirit of the law required, was simply this--not that the letter of the law should in every instance be fulfilled, that every individual who violated the law should be punished without any reserve; but that means should be adopted which would effectually secure obedience to the law. The offender must receive the punishment unless something else should be done that would as truly and effectually honour the insulted law, and make a deep public impression of God's regard for it, and his determination to sustain it, and as thoroughly serve to promote holiness and rebuke sin. This would be the fulfilling of the spirit of the law: here would be no compromise of its claims, neither a literal execution of its penalty; but it would be a full satisfaction made to the spirit of its claims. What would be the object of God in executing the law upon sinners, but to make a public impression of his abhorrence of sin, and his determination to maintain the law inviolate, and to honour it at all hazards. The execution of it would teach the universe certain great lessons in respect to God's character and government. Now, suppose that the lawgiver himself should teach these lessons in some other way that shall be as effectual, as impressive, and as influential as would be the execution of the penalty of the law upon sinners, why, then, the spirit of the law would be as effectually honoured and sustained. But suppose, to show his great regard for it, he should yield implicit obedience to it himself, and become the representative of man, as it is said he did,--"He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Now, in order to do this, in order to make an offer of pardon to the poor guilty sinner, there must be a public demonstration made to the whole universe--the law must be honoured as widely as it had been broken.

How was this demonstration to be made? How was the law to be honoured? Who was to do it? See, God's own Son, closely associated with him, one with him in the formation and government of the universe, takes upon himself human nature, and represents the race; he undertakes to be the impersonation and representative of sin. God is about to show how he regards sin, by inflicting the penalty due to man, upon one who has come forth to be a Mediator between the sinner and the insulted majesty of the law. God is about to make a terrible demonstration, and show to the whole universe his deep and eternal abhorrence of iniquity. Now, this will fulfill the law even more thoroughly than if the consequences of sin had been visited upon the heads of the guilty themselves. "He laid upon him the iniquity of us all!" What a wonderful demonstration was this! Again: It is plain that this condition was indispensably necessary. God, as the governor of the universe, must insist upon something being done to meet the claims of public justice; the dishonoured law must be restored, public justice must be appeased; the spirit of the law must be maintained in all its integrity. Now, there was only one being in the universe qualified to sustain the office. The Lord Jesus Christ was both God and man; he sustained such a relation to both the parties as to be in a position to "magnify the law," and make it even more honourable than it would have been made by its execution upon mankind. Christ satisfied the claims of public justice, and hence it is said, "he gave himself a ransom for all." Christ, by his atonement, testified to the manner in which God regarded the sins of man. Again: Our Lord Jesus Christ knew well what it would cost him. I said just now, that one of the conditions of a Mediator's success must be this: that if the office should call for any sacrifice on his part, he must be fully willing to make it--he must be willing to make any sacrifice, or undergo any degree of self-denial, which may be requisite in the nature of the case. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ

knew well what it would cost him. It was no part of his business to compromise the claims of public justice; no part of his business to justify iniquity, or let down the authority of the law. He knew better what he had to do, than to act thus; and he was willing to do what the office required of him. Again: the circumstances of Christ's death were such as could never be accounted for except upon the supposition, that he suffered not as a mere mortal, but as the representative of a race of sinners. The circumstances of his death were of a very peculiar nature. He died not as martyrs generally die; when they have been tied to the stake the words of gladness and triumph have burst from their lips, and they have passed from earth shouting and singing glory to God. Christ did not die so. How was this? Is it true that Christ was more afraid to die than martyrs are? What was it extorted from him that cry-- "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" How was that? Is God wont to forsake even the meanest of his saints in their hour of trial? Let me ask those who have been in the habit of visiting the deathbeds of the saints, how many, when the last enemy was approaching, and when the clammy sweat was upon their brow, have you heard speak in the language and with the accents of despair? Did they cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" No, indeed! Their language is that of peace, serenity, triumph, and when their voice has been gone, they would give you a quivering grasp of the hand, to indicate that the light of God's countenance was upon them. The fact, then, is plain; he died not as a martyr but as the representative of a sinful race. Although God loved him infinitely, still, as the representatives of a sinful race, in his displeasure he poured down upon him the vials of his indignation. The death of Christ was intended to make an impression upon the universe, and all the circumstances attending it show what a wonderful effect it had. When he was nailed to the cross the sun refused to look on, and the heavens were clothed with sackcloth; the whole universe seemed shaking to its foundations. Heathen philosophers observed it, and said, Either nature is being dissolved, or the god of nature is dying. The dead could not sleep in their graves, the earth trembled, and the tombs opened, and those who had been dead issued forth, and walked into the city. The veil of the temple was rent in twain. God made a mighty impression upon the entire universe, when, in order that sinners might be pardoned, he thus made a fearful demonstration of his hatred against sin.

I shall conclude with a few remarks. 1. You recollect that the success of the Mediator must depend upon the consent of the parties. Now, it is for us, on our part, as one of the parties, to consent to receive him as a Mediator in the relation in which he is proposed to us. The Divine government has given to Christ the adjustment of this difficulty, so that as parties in this controversy we must give ourselves up to the will of the Mediator. The sacrifice which he has made has satisfied the claims of justice; but this will affect us, and prevail in our favour, no further than we ourselves approach him as the Mediator between God and man. 2. Again: Man can be reconciled to God only in one way, and that is by faith in Christ; when men believe in him the matter is at once adjusted between them and the Divine government. They are reconciled to God through Christ. Now, we have only to leave this matter in the hands of Christ, and he will set us free from the penalty due to sin. 3. Again: With respect to those who decline to accept of this Mediator, the matter is not only not adjusted, but greatly aggravated. If they will "not have this man to reign over them," they will never be reconciled to God, and their guilt and consequent punishment is greatly magnified, aggravated; and remember that all those resist this arrangement who do not most cordially embrace it by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. 4. This leads me to say again, that you are not to understand by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ merely an intellectual assent to the truths which he taught--and to the fact that he sustains the office of Mediator. The devil knows this, and believes it, but he has not saving faith. You may have no more doubt of the historical fact that Christ died for the sins of mankind, than you have of any other historical facts, but this is not faith in him as a Saviour. You must embrace the method of salvation with all your heart. This is the way in which God purposes to save you, and when you have done this you can enter the door of mercy which Christ has opened for your reception.

Let it be understood then, what it is to be a Christian. It is not mere intellectual assent to the truth of the Gospel, or that you outwardly appear to be religious; but it is with the heart that you must believe unto righteousness. You must yield up your whole being to Christ, and rely not upon your own goodness as a ground of acceptance, but upon Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and man, who has "magnified the law, and made it honourable." God requires us to approach him in Christ's name, or he cannot treat with us or make us any offer of pardon. Suppose that the inhabitants of London, or any other city, should rise up in rebellion against the Government. It might be quite impossible to make a general offer of pardon without endangering the safety of that Government. It would be very impolitic and unwise to do so. It would be the way to encourage other cities to rebel--taking refuge under the precedent which the Government had established. The way to make a Government strong is by asserting a principle and adhering to it, giving the people to understand the inviolability of the law, and that it is not to be broken with impunity, and that rebellion could not be connived at. Now, it may be safe sometimes for a Government to exercise pardon, but not unless the exercise of mercy will tend more than the infliction of the penalty to claim reverence for the law and Government. Rebels against the law and government of God could never have been forgiven without an atonement had been made; because God's law is inviolable, and therefore cannot be transgressed

without the penalty being inflicted somewhere; and God, by accepting the sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin, at once showed his love for man and testified to the goodness of his law. Christ magnified the broken law, and rendered to it a governmental equivalent. But before a rebel can treat with God for mercy, he must lay down his weapons of rebellion; he cannot make terms with God with arms in his hands; he must repent before he can hope for mercy. Every human Government demands this, and so does the government of God; no Government can stand on any other principle. Those entirely misunderstand this subject who think and say that it is an easy thing for God to show mercy. It cost him more than the creation of the world. But the work is done--Christ has thrown the doors of mercy wide open: "Behold," he says, "I have set before you an open door." It was love to mankind which caused him to make such sacrifices for their salvation. The atonement was not demanded in a malignant spirit, but as a necessary condition of salvation. It was God himself who proposed the plan. He saw no eye to pity and no arm to save; and his own eye pitied, and his own arm brought salvation. His heart yearned over them. Over them, did I say? Over you, and over me. "He loved ME," says the apostle, "and gave himself for ME." Can you, my dear hearers, apply this language to yourselves? Have you committed yourselves to him? Is Christ your Mediator in this great controversy? Now, I come to-night as the servant of Christ, to ask you whether you will receive this Mediator--whether you will repent and renounce your sin, and commit yourself to the hands of Christ as the great Mediator between God and man? Do you reply that you do not want a Mediator? The minds of many men are so dark that they are foolish and absurd enough to think that they can approach God and get salvation from him without a Mediator. The following fact was communicated to me some time ago: the sister of a minister's wife who had imbibed Unitarian principles always used to resist the idea of a necessity of a Mediator. She would say, "If God is disposed to be merciful, he can exercise mercy without reference to the death of his Son. I want no Mediator; I am not conscious of wanting one. Is not God my Father--my heavenly Father; cannot I pray to him except through a Mediator? What do I want of a Mediator between me and my Father? I love my Father, and I love to pray to my Father; I love communion with my Father. I know no necessity for a Mediator." In this way she used to talk, with that kind of sentimentalism that is common to Unitarians. A great revival took place in the congregation, and one evening this lady returned home and went direct to her chamber. The family, who were below, presently heard her shriek out in great agony, and at the top of her voice: they rushed to her room and saw her standing there in a great fright, with her arms extended, and her eyes starting from their sockets: with much alarm they cried out, "What is the matter? what is the matter?" "Oh!" said she, "God is looking right at me, and there is no Mediator--there, can't you see, right opposite there?" and she shrieked out again in fearful agony, "God is looking right at me, and there is no Mediator." In this state of mind she continued for some time, but eventually Christ was revealed to her, and she was led to embrace the truth. She never realized before what it was to stand before the Judge of all the earth without a Mediator; but when she felt the eye of God blazing upon her, and searching into her heart, she felt then the necessity of "a Mediator between God and man." O sinner, let me tell you, that without a Mediator you are undone; but there is one provided, and he is now offered for you to embrace; it will not take you long, if you are disposed to do it; you can do it now--even now. If you accept him not into your hearts, his blood for you has been shed in vain. There is no middle course; you must be either the friends of Christ, or his enemies. God offers mercy now, but he has not promised that he will ever offer it again! Remember that! There is no angel in heaven, or minister upon earth, who is authorized to say that salvation will ever be offered to you again. Suppose that Christ himself should now come and take his stand in this pulpit with the book of life in his hand, and should say to you all, "Whose name shall I write in this book? Whoso will accept of me as a Mediator? WHO WILL GIVE ME HIS HEART?" Should we have voices responding on all sides, "I will! I will! I will! O Lord Jesus, take my unworthy name, take my heart; I renounce my sin, and gladly give all my being to thee." Would you reply thus to the personal invitation of the Saviour? Why not do it now? God invites you! Jesus invites you! the Bible invites you! the Spirit invites you! the Preacher invites you! Will to come to Jesus, and come now? Why not? Are you not prepared? What preparation do you want? Cannot you get your own consent? This is the difficulty--the great and the only difficulty! If you can get your own consent, there is no being in the universe that can stand in the way of your salvation. But may you not obtain your own consent if you so will it? What say you? Will you consent? Will you allow Christ to have your name? Will you give him your heart? This is a momentous question, will you decide to-night? We are going to pray. Now, let those who are willing to accept Christ as their Mediator, bend their hearts at a throne of grace; and, Christians, let us seek to get the arms of our prayer round every impenitent sinner in this house, and bring them to Jesus. Let us pray.

* No. 1,537, Delivered on Sunday Morning, At the Tabernacle, Moorefields.