

**dishonored** God; and this is the reason why he is an angry God and a threatening God, because he is a dishonored God, for, "Sin being a transgression of God's law" (1 John 3:4), his authority is despised, his wisdom slighted, his power ignored, his holiness mocked, his justice enraged, and all his glorious attributes abused and affronted.

[4] God out of Christ is a **distant** God: sin having set God and man at variance, and at a distance from one another; therefore men are said to be "afar off" (Acts 2:39; Eph 2:13,17). Not in respect of any local distance, for God is everywhere; but in point of moral distance. We are far from the image of God, far from the favor of God, far from the knowledge of God, far from the love of God, far from the life of God, being alienated therefrom through the ignorance that is in us (Eph 4:18); and from any relation to God, except that of a vindictive judge, and an avenger of sin, a consuming fire, ready to break out every moment into everlasting flames. Between the Christless sinner and this God there is nothing but the weak, tender thread of life, which the least spark of that fire of God's wrath can burn and break, and then he falls into the depth of endless torment. Thus you have a short account of what God is out of Christ. Now see what God is in Christ.

### GOD IN CHRIST

[1] God in Christ is a **reconciled** God, whose anger is appeased and quenched by the blood of his eternal Son, offering up himself a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savor to God; upon which account he proclaims in our text, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," and he sends ministers to proclaim the word of reconciliation, "That God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor 5:19).

[2] As God out of Christ is a threatening God, so God in Christ is a **promising** God. The covenant of promise being sealed and confirmed by the death and blood of Christ, which covenant is therefore called the New Testament in his blood (1 Cor 11:25). And the condition of all the promises being so well fulfilled, the price of them being so well paid, they come to us in the dispensation of the gospel freely and absolutely, to be received without money and without price, because the money and price is already paid to the full, in the liquid gold of the blood of the God-man; that being freely received, we may wait with assured hope till all the promises

be fully accomplished, because, "All the promises of God are in Christ, Yea, and in him, Amen, to the glory of God" (2 Cor 1:20).

[3] God in Christ is a **glorified** God. As God out of Christ to a sinner is a God abused and dishonored, God in Christ is a God glorified and honored; Christ having fulfilled, yea, magnified the law (Isaiah 42:21), he hath brought in everlasting righteousness, made restitution of all that honor to God and his perfections that sin took away: "Then I restored that which I took not away" (Psalm 69:4). And Christ testifies this: "I have glorified thee on the earth," even on the earth, where thou wast dishonored. "I have finished the work thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). God in Christ is a God not only whose mercy is magnified, but also whose truth is vindicated, whose holiness is celebrated, whose justice is satisfied, whose wisdom and power, and other attributes, are made more conspicuous by the work of redemption, than ever they were in making heaven and earth; and a God in whom we may look for salvation through Christ to the honor, the highest honor and glory of all his excellencies.

[4] God in Christ is a **nearly-related** God; he is a **nearly-approaching** God. In Christ, he comes near graciously, saying, "I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory" (Isaiah 46:13). And he comes near relatively, saying, "I will be thy God, and thou shalt be my people"; and that upon account of Christ's approaching to God in our place, as our surety: "Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me, saith the Lord?" (Jer 30:21,22). So the near relation is promised, "And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God." And this near approach and relation of God to us in Christ is an everlasting nearness, and so he says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb 13:5); as it is written, "This God is our God, for ever and ever; and he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

### IN CHRIST WE SEE GOD

[1] In Christ we see God in all his **saving offices**. The Father hath anointed him to the office of Prophet, Priest, and King. O Sirs, what employment will you put in his hand? It is he, as a Prophet, who says, "They shall be all taught of God"; look to him for the promised teaching. It is he, as a Priest, who says, upon the ground of the sacrifice he hath offered, "I, even I, am he that pardoneth thine iniquity for my own name's sake"; look

to him for forgiveness through his blood. It is he, as a King, who says, "I will subdue your iniquities; sin shall not have dominion over you." O ignorant sinner, will you find in your heart to refuse such a Prophet as Christ is? "Who teacheth like him?" O guilty sinner, will you refuse such a High Priest as this? such a sacrifice as this? O enslaved sinner, will you refuse the help of such a King and Conqueror as this? If there be none of these offices to be dispensed with, then take hold of him in them all.

[2] In Christ we see God as he is clothed with all relations that can contribute to the happiness of a sinner. What friend or relation do you want, O sinner! Want you a father to pity you? Behold, here you have an "everlasting Father," for that is his name (Isaiah 9:6), and "In him the fatherless find mercy." Want you a mother to be tender to you? Behold, here motherless children may have their losses made up. When father and mother forsake you, here is one to take you up (Psalm 27:10). He is one that can be a thousand times better to you than father and mother, and manifests more love than the tenderest mother that ever was: "Can a woman forget her sucking child? Yea, she may forget: yet will I not forget thee" (Isaiah 49:15). Want you a husband? Oh! What would you think to be married to the heir of all things? Why, if the ear of faith be opened, you may hear him saying, "Thy maker is thy husband" (Isaiah 54:5). And again, "I will betroth thee unto me forever" (Hosea 2:19).

If you say, Oh! how will it be consistent with the justice of God for him to marry such a sinful bride? Why, he says, "I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness." If you say, how will it be consistent with the wisdom, mercy, truth, and faithfulness of God to betroth the likes of me? He says, "I will betroth thee unto me in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies; I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord." Thou shalt know God in Christ, who can betroth thee to himself, and yet be infinitely just and wise, and merciful, and faithful in doing so; because mercy and truth have met together in Christ, the glorious Bridegroom; they strike up a match together, and embrace each other, that there might be nothing to hinder the match between Christ and you.

Want you a proper match then, O sinner, or a help meet, poor bankrupt? Is not he that hath unsearchable riches a fit match for you? Poor, dying creature, that will be food for worms in a little while, here is a living head

for you, that can make you live forever. O mortal worm, here is an immortal husband for you. Poor, changeable creature, here is an unchangeable match for you, Christ, "The same yesterday, today, and forever." Want you a lover? Are you an outcast, that reckons yourself despised by all the world, insomuch that none cares for you, nor loves you? Behold an infinitely loving and lovely Jesus tendering his love to you, saying, "I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely" (Hosea 14:4). And he is seeking your conjugal love, saying, "My son, give me thine heart."

Want you a leader through the dark and difficult steps of your way; a guide, a director, and counsellor, in whatsoever affair you have upon your hand, wherein you need to be directed? Here is a wonderful counsellor, who says, "I will lead the blind in a way they know not, and in paths that they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight" (Isaiah 42:16). Want you a shepherd to feed you? Or a captain to fight your battles for you? Want you a physician, when in sickness, to heal you? Want you a refiner and purifier, when you are in the furnace, to purge away your dross? Behold, a God in Christ hath all the happy relations you can desire.

[3] In Christ we see God in all his **graces**. This is a great part of the glory of the only begotten of the Father, that he is "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14-16), "And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace." The Spirit of the Lord is upon him, for he hath anointed him; anointed with the Spirit of all grace.

Want you grace to believe? Behold, it is in him, as he is the author of faith. Want you grace to repent? Behold, it is in him, as a Prince and Saviour, exalted to give repentance. Do you want grace to pray? It is he that hath the Spirit of prayer to give (Zech 12:10). Do you want grace to communicate aright; grace to mortify sin; grace to bear the cross; grace to resist temptation; grace to do and suffer? It is he that hath all grace to give, and who says, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Hence, his people are called to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

[4] In Christ we see God in all his **blessings which he hath to give**. He is the Lord-Dispenser of temporal blessings, for, "The earth is his, and the fullness thereof"; the Lord-Dispenser of spiritual blessings, for heaven is his, and the fullness thereof; the Lord-Dispenser of eternal blessings, for eternal life is in him, "He is the true God, and

eternal life." It was promised of him, that men should be blessed in him; and accordingly he is sent to bless us, "God having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (*Acts 3:26*).

I might here enumerate many particular blessings: the blessing of illumination is in him, for, "He is the light to lighten the Gentiles"; the blessing of conversion is in him, for he says, "When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to me"; the blessing of justification is in him, for, "We are justified freely by his grace"; the blessing of reconciliation with God is in him, for, it is he that "makes peace by the blood of his cross"; the blessing of sanctification is in him, for, "He is made of God to us sanctification"; the blessing of acceptance with God is in him, for, "We are accepted in the Beloved"; the blessing of access to God is in him, for, "By him we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in him"; the blessing of consolation is in him, for, "He is the consolation of Israel"; the blessing of a happy death is in him, for, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord"; the blessing of a happy resurrection is in him, for, "He is the resurrection and the life"; the blessing of a happy sentence at the great Day is in him, and at his disposal, for, "All judgment is committed unto him"; and it is he that will say to the wicked, "Depart from me, ye cursed," and to the righteous, "Come ye blessed of my Father"; the blessing of eternal glorification is in him, for, as he is the glory of the higher house, so he says, "Father, I will that these whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory"; and "so shall they ever be with the Lord." Can you tell me any spiritual blessing that is not in him? No; "We are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (*Eph 1:3*).

And now, after all that, what think you of him? Have you no heart to join hands with such a well-furnished Saviour, "in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"? If you have no heart to such a good bargain, this is very sad; but because it is a day of glad tidings, I will tell you, among all other things, that all hearts are in his hand, and it is his prerogative to open the locked heart. It is easy with him to create a clean heart, to melt the hard heart, to fix the wandering heart, to cleanse the filthy heart, to elevate the drooping heart, to conquer the stubborn heart, to quicken the dead heart, to draw the backward heart; and if anything

draw your heart to him, it will be the revelation of his grace and fullness, and of God's being in him, and in him a well-pleased God.

My friends, though you had never heard a word of the gospel before, there is more in this truth than a whole world is worth, namely, that God is in Christ, and in him well pleased: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; and, he and all things in him, is set forth in this gospel to you. And if your heart were open to receive him, happy would you be to eternity. I know not what the joyful sound of the gospel is, if it be not the news of God's being in Christ, and in him well pleased; and blessed are the people that know it, and embrace it; and cursed are the people that despise and undervalue it; and all the people of God must say AMEN.

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Happiness and misery in life, in death, and forever, is now before you, O hearer of this gospel. If God be in Christ, and in him well pleased; and if this be the gospel of Christ, then God is in it dealing with you: man, woman, young person; with each of you, of whatever station, high or low, rich or poor, young or old. May he give proofs of his powerful presence, by drawing out your heart to him, of whom the Father here proclaims, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." □

—Ralph Erskine (1685-1752)

## ARE YOU BORN AGAIN?

Many professing Christians have none of the marks of being born again. John, in his first epistle, lists these marks that we might *know* if we're truly born again.

(1) "Whosoever is born of God **doth not commit sin**" (*1 John 3:9; 5:18*). A man that is born again doesn't commit sin as a habit. There was a time when he did not think whether his actions were sinful or not, and never felt grieved after doing evil. But all that has changed. Now he hates sin, flees from it, fights against it, mourns when he falls under its influence, and longs to be delivered from it altogether.

(2) "Every one that **doeth righteousness** is born of God" (*1 John 2:29*). A man that is born again is a holy man. He endeavors to live according to God's will, to do the things that please God. His desire is to love God with all his heart, and to love his neighbour as him-

self. He is continually looking to Christ as his example as well as his Savior, and shows himself Christ's friend by doing whatsoever Christ commands (*John 15:14*).

(3) "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we **love the brethren**" (*1 John 3:14*). A man who is alive in Christ has a special love for all true disciples of Christ. Like his Savior, he loves the worst of sinners, and can weep over them; but he has a peculiar love for those who are in Christ. A true Christian is never so much at home as when he is in the company of other believers. Others may value learning, riches, or rank in society—the regenerate man values grace. Those who have the most grace, and are most like Christ, are those he loves most.

(4) "Whosoever is born of God **overcometh the world**" (*1 John 5:4*). A man born of God overcomes the love of the world. He doesn't make this world's opinions his rule of right and wrong. He doesn't mind going against the stream of this world's ways and customs. He overcomes the fear of the world. He's ridiculed; it doesn't move him. He loves the praise of God more than the praise of men. He's counted the cost. He's no longer a slave of fashion. His first aim is to please God.

(5) "He that is begotten of God **keepeth himself**" (*1 John 5:18*). He that is born again is very careful of his own soul. He endeavors not only to keep clear of sin, but also to keep clear of everything which may lead to it. He's very careful about the company he keeps. He's very careful over his own behavior. He knows that his own heart is deceitful, the world is full of wickedness, and the devil is always working to do him harm. He desires to live like a soldier in enemy territory, to wear his armor continually, and to be prepared for temptation. He's watchful, humble, and prayerful.

The apostle sets forth these marks. What would he say about you? Are you truly born again? He says a person who is born of God: (1) does not commit sin (2) does righteousness (3) loves the brethren (4) overcomes the world, and (5) keeps himself. We must conclude that only those who have these marks are born again; and that all men and women, regardless of their religious profession, who have not these marks, are not born again. □

# GOD IN CHRIST

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"—Matt 3:17

What is **God in Christ**? First, to understand this, we need to know what God is **out of Christ**.

## GOD OUT OF CHRIST

To a sinner, God out of Christ is an offended, a threatening, a dishonored, and a distant God.

(1) God out of Christ is to a sinner an **angry** God—"God judgeth the righteous; God is angry with the wicked every day" (*Psalms 7:11*); or, it may read, "God is the *righteous Judge*; God is angry with the wicked every day." Because he is a righteous judge, therefore he cannot but be displeased, offended, and angry with them; and, oh! but the wrath and anger of God is a terrible matter. "Who knows the power of his wrath?" When it begins to burn, it burns to the lowest hell.

(2) God out of Christ is a **threatening** God. His anger manifests itself in threatenings and curses—"If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he hath ordained his arrows" (*Psalms 7:12,13*) for taking vengeance; and his threatenings are not bare words; but as God in Christ gives a being to his words of grace; so God out of Christ gives a being to his words of wrath, saying—"See now that I, even I am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of mine hand...If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold of judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and a reward to them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood" (*Deut 32:39-41*). God out of Christ is a God whose mouth is full of curses and threatenings, and whose hand is full of terrible vengeance for executing his threatenings—"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them" (*Gal 3:10*).

(3) God out of Christ is to a sinner a