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God Wants Our Friendship

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God Wants Our Friendship

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God Wants Our Friendship

There is a thought in the apostle Paul's letter to Christians throughout Galatia that I want you to consider with me. "But when the right time finally came, God sent his own Son. He came as the son of a human mother, and lived under the Jewish Law, to set free those who were under the Law, so that we might become God's sons" (Galatians 4:4, 5, Good News for Modern Man, American Bible Society Translation, 1966).

"The right time finally came," Paul says, "for Jesus' appearance among men." Have you ever asked why He came? Have you wondered about the purpose of His strange and miraculous birth into our world?

The Bible may be accurately viewed as one continuous commentary on these questions. In short, let me suggest that Christ came into the world so that man could fully know God again. He was the Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us, John explains in his Gospel (John 1:1-3, 14). At that point in time when men sensed an overpowering burden of sin and guilt, when men despaired of life, when philosophy, government, and religion were the most ineffectual, "God sent his own Son." According to an eternal plan God revealed Himself fully and redemptively in Christ Jesus, "in whom," Paul explains, "we have boldness and access in confidence through our faith in him" (Ephesians 3:8-12).

Paul describes this great historical event with the Biblical concept of reconciliation in II Corinthians 5. Listen as we read: "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us; we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God. Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:17-21).

First, we need to ask, "What is reconciliation?" This is the prominent term in the reading just noticed. "God has reconciled us in Christ," we are told. But what does that mean? To reconcile literally is to exchange or bring about a changed relationship. A movement from one position to another; the exchange of one set of values and attitudes for another; and the change in one's relationship to another are among the many uses of this rich word "reconciliation." One well-known student has remarked, "The root meaning of the word is an exchange of equivalent values, and then, through the ideas of exchange of sympathy and mutual understanding, the notion of a thorough or radical change. Thus reconciliation has the significance of a new stage in personal relationships in which previous hostility of mind or estrangement has been put away in some decisive act" (p. 185, F. J. Taylor, A Theological Word Book of the Bible, Alan Richardson, Editor).

The New Testament writers employ the term in varying contexts thus assisting us in learning its meaning. The word is used to indicate the act of making peace between God and man. Listen to Colossians 1:19, 20: "For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens" (Colossians 1:19, 20). The phrase "having made peace"
modifies the previous statement, “reconcile all things unto himself” in this verse. Paul is saying that God makes peace with all things in reconciling them to Himself. Reconciliation is God’s way of making peace with man.

A similar emphasis is made in Romans 5 regarding this Biblical concept. Verse 10 of Romans 5 reads, “For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life; . . . ” (Romans 5:10). Here reconciliation is viewed as a change in one’s relationship to God, from enemy to friend. When Paul urges in II Corinthians 5:20, “as though God were entertaining by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God,” he says that God wants our friendship, God wants you and me to serve Him in harmony and peace.

Reconciliation is the central theme of a long passage in Ephesians, chapter 2. At the conclusion of this discussion we read, “So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, . . . ” (Ephesians 2:19). Paul had just pictured the plight of the Gentiles under the Old Testament system. He also showed the separation between the Jews and the Gentiles pointing out that Christ had united both because of the common need created by sin in all men’s lives. He returns to the separated and alienated condition of the Gentiles at the conclusion of this discussion about reconciliation and makes the statement just noticed, Reconciliation for the Gentiles, therefore, meant a complete change of their relationships to both Jews and God through Christ. “So then,” that is, because you have been reconciled to God through Christ along with all obedient Jews, “ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”

These New Testament passages suggest that reconciliation is God’s way of making peace with us, God’s way of changing our relationship to Him from enemy to friend, and God’s method of breaking down the separating walls created in our lives by sin and rebellion, “Reconciliation is thus a breaking by Him men are delivered from a condition of estrangement and restored to fellowship with God; the act is accomplished by God through the power of the sacrificial death of Christ” (p. 185, F. J. Taylor, A Theological Word Book of the Bible, Alan Richardson, Editor).

The Bible graphically and repeatedly shows man’s estrangement and alienation. This “separateness” occurs between individuals, among the entire human family, and above all between God and man (Ephesians 2:11-19). The fleshly man guided by his own unregenerate mind cannot know God, we are told in Romans 8:6-8. We have alienated ourselves from God and one another by our “evil works” (Colossians 1:21). Sin, disobedience, and lust have created walls and barriers that will permit neither man’s open access to God nor his free communication and co-operation with his fellow man (Ephesians 2:1-3). Isaiah properly assessed our predicament, “Behold, Jehovah’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1, 2).

In the midst of the confusion and separation caused by our sin, God has reconciled “all things unto himself” (Colossians 1:19, 20). “But all things are of God.” Paul reminds us, “who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:18). The “good news” of Christ’s gospel is that God gives peace to our confused situation and offers communication to our walled-up lives, in Jesus Christ. Donald Grey Barnhouse once said, “God did not have to be reconciled to man because God is love. Man had to be reconciled to God because man was a helpless, unholy enemy.”

The New Testament further defines reconciliation by showing where this great act of becoming God’s friend and receiving His peace occurs. In Romans 5 we learn that “we were reconciled to God through the death of his son” (Romans 5:10). Our relationship to God is changed in the death of Christ. In sacrificing Himself on Calvary He provided alienated mankind the only solution to their fragmented and divided existences.

Paul also teaches that in “our Lord Jesus Christ . . . we have now received the reconciliation” (Romans 5:11). Christ is the focal point of God’s love for divided mankind (John 3:16). Christ is central to God’s redeeming grace now fully available to sinful man (Titus 2:14). Christ speaks to our age of relativism in these terms: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). To know God, to be God’s friend, to have complete openness with the human family, we come to Christ in obedient surrender. God has “reconciled us to himself through Christ,” Paul explains in II Corinthians 5.

In another New Testament passage the all-important act of reconciliation is further taught. “And, you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unproveable before him: . . . ” (Colossians 1:21, 22). The body of Christ is where our reconciliation to God occurs. Christ’s body was given in service to mankind and in sacrifice for all sinners.

The great reconciliation passage of the New Testament, however, is Ephesians 2:11-22. I want us to read this entire passage together. Listen carefully: “Wherefore remember, that once ye, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called Circumcision, in the flesh, made by hands; that ye were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; and he came and preached peace to you that were far off, and peace to them that were near; through him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father. So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; in whom each several building, fitted framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:11-22).

On the cross the death of Christ, the sacrifice of His body and blood, created those conditions that reconcile man to God, that unite man to man, and produce the great church of all the saved. Reconciliation between man and God and between man and man occurs at the cross, at Calvary, in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. In Christ, in the body of Christ, in the death of Christ, we are offered friendship with God. One cannot consider Golgotha without knowing that God wants our friendship!

“The word of the cross,” as Paul uses the phrase, is “the word of reconciliation” about which we are talking. Those of us who know the result of God’s recon-
ciling power and love have been given a “ministry of reconciliation” with a “word of reconciliation” to proclaim to the world (II Corinthians 5:18, 19). This message is not an involved theological treatise. It certainly does not consist of involved logic and cloudy rhetoric. Paul defines this “word of reconciliation” when he says, “For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God” (I Corinthians 1:18).

To become God's friend, to experience his reconciliation in your life, you must place yourself where reconciliation occurs. We have just noticed in detail that we are changed from enemy to friend, and given the peace and harmony of God, in Christ, in His body, and in death. This Biblical principle brings into proper perspective the many New Testament teachings about how we reach Christ, come into His body, and contact His death.

Our entrance into Christ or union with Christ occurs in baptism, Galatians 3:26, 27 tells us. “For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ.” To know Christ and to come into a meaningful relationship with Him requires the baptism of a penitent believer.

We also reach the body of Christ in the same manner. “For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free, and were all made to drink of one Spirit” (I Corinthians 12:13). Membership in the body of Christ, meaningful relationship with Christ in His body, is for those who by baptism are made a living part of that living body.

But this is also the manner by which we come into personal contact with Christ's death. Paul says, “Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his reath, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; ...” (Romans 6:3-5).

Our discussion today does not concern the various opinions that men have held through the centuries, even into our own time, about baptism and its place in the Christian religion. Our study has emphasized the reconciliation of man to God. We have listened to God, in His Word, offer us peace, friendship, forgive-