

When the social networking site 'Facebook' came into being in 2004 it soon became very popular and now has over one billion users [I'm not one of them by the way!]. The idea is that you can invite someone to be your 'friend' and then keep in regular touch with them. Facebook is supposed to work on the basis that friendship is a precious thing.

Among the many wonderful things the Lord Jesus said to his disciples was: *"No longer do I call you servants ... but I have called you friends"* (John 15:15). Abraham is described as *"a friend of God"* (James 2:23) – and surely there can be no greater privilege than that. Such a friendship with God comes as a result of 'reconciliation', which is another of the wonderful and amazing blessings that flow to us from the death and resurrection of our Saviour. As Paul was inspired to write to the Christians in Colossae, *"you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he [Jesus] has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him [God the Father]"* (Col 1:21,22). If the Lord Jesus had not risen from the dead and ascended to the Father's right hand, He would not be able to present us as *"holy and blameless and above reproach before him"*, as fully reconciled people.

OUR NEED OF RECONCILIATION

One of the greatest failures of the whole human race is to recognise the depth of the hostility existing between us and our Creator God – as quoted above, *"you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds"* (Col 1:21). The need for reconciliation ought to be very obvious to the world, especially these days. According to the 'World Population Website' there are currently well over two hundred countries in a state of conflict, and these conflicts are regularly reported by, or can be easily accessed through, global news media. Constantly we are being confronted with conflict!

A cursory glance at trailers for TV soap operas or the advertisements for even children's and young peoples' video games, shows how much these productions either contain a lot of violence or are based on conflict. Towards the end of last year a daily paper quoted an Office for National Statistics report stating that in 2019 the divorce rate in England and Wales rose by almost 20% on the previous year. The most common reason given being unreasonable behaviour, which surely implies conflict and hostility between couples.

Although the main news for a year now has been the corona virus, we continue to hear of *"wars and rumours of wars"* (Matt 24:6). It is a very sad fact of life that there is so much continual hostility. So where does it all come from? The immediate danger in attempting to answer this question is to look 'out there' at others! It must be the fault of power hungry politicians, fanatical terrorist groups, drug dealers, gang culture, people traffickers, domestic upheaval etc. Clearly *they* are the cause of it all!

Yet James 4:1 says: *"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"* The inspired word of God is telling us that the roots of conflict and hostility are present in the fallen nature of every one of us – even in the most docile, mild tempered, gentle and kindest among us. The Lord Jesus Himself told us that *"out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person."* (Matt 15:19,20). All these evils, when allowed to develop in a person's life, result in hostility and conflict in various ways. Pretty well all families know what it is to have endured sibling rivalries, to have 'fallen out' with class mates, be aware of petty jealousies at work, and so on.

The worst thing about these evil roots of conflict and hostility is that they produce a crop of hostility towards God, both *"in mind"* and in *"doing evil deeds."* These, and many other manifestations of our fallen sinful nature and consequent behaviour, result in our being *"alienated"* from God. We are born physically into this world, but in the spiritual sense we are also born into the realm of conflict with God. I was born in 1942, when the UK was at war, and as a result of coming into this world in the city of Birmingham I was born an enemy of Nazi Germany, and remained so until the surrender in May 1945. So it is with respect to God: the sinful nature with which we are born causes us to be and to live as God's *"enemies"* (Rom 5:10) – or, as the apostle James put it, *"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."* (James 4:4).

Furthermore, all our conflicts with and hostilities towards others, are ultimately against God, who has created us all in His image. *"For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot."* (Rom 8:7). The awful result of such hostility to God is to have His anger resting upon us: *"what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming."* (Col 3:5,6). The fact of the matter is that *"God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day"* (Ps 7:11), and that indignation is directed towards us all as hostile sinners in His sight.

The wrath and indignation of God is evident all around us, being *"revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men"* (Rom 1:18), and most obviously in that *"the wages of sin is death"* (Rom 6:23). We see it also in God's judgements on the earth from the days of the flood to the current Covid pandemic: *"I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity"* (Is 45:6,7). It is *"because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgement will be revealed."* (Rom 2:5) Reconciliation to God is the great need of the human race – and, most wonderfully of all, it is the great desire of God's heart.

GOD'S DESIRE FOR RECONCILIATION

The first thing to say concerning our being reconciled to God is that **ONLY GOD CAN DO IT!** As with 'regeneration' and 'justification', only God can bring it about for us. As "*it is God who justifies*" (Rom 8:33), so with reconciliation "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself... in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:18,19). If God does not reconcile us to Himself we remain unreconciled and, indeed, irreconcilable! We are entirely dependent on Him to act sovereignly on our behalf.

It is very important to recognise that we need to be reconciled to God, not He to us! The enmity, alienation, hostility and rebellious disobedience that has caused the breach between us and God, and brings down His justified wrath and indignation on our sin, is entirely on our side. Yet even in His anger at our wickedness, the Lord remains "*gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*" (Ps 145:8) He continues to be "*good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.*" (Ps 145:9). Remember that it was "*while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Rom 5:8)

It is wonderful that God is always ready to reconcile hostile sinners to Himself: "*As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live*" (Ezek 33:11). The awful fact is that sinners often spurn any opportunity given to them to be reconciled, when the opposite ought to be true. So, wrote the apostle Paul, "*We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*" (2 Cor 5:20). Sinners ought not to need to be implored, but they do need that imploring!

Reconciliation has been described as a "renewing of warmth and trust after a period of hostility and conflict; a willingness on both sides to join in a relationship of peace and concord; the replacement of a state of enmity and estrangement with peace and fellowship." Reconciliation to God is the transformation from being His enemy to having a deep, unending and wonderful friendship with Him! This is the kind of friendship that God wants with people, like you and me!

GOD'S WAY OF RECONCILIATION

So how does God do it? The straightforward answer is that He does it through the gift and sacrifice of His dear Son: "*you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death*" (Col 1:21,22). When the Lord Jesus was dying on the cross, all that alienated us from God and all our hostility towards Him, was laid on His Son, for "*God sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*" (1 John 4:10) We no longer use the word 'propitiation' much, if at all, yet it focusses our attention on the heart of God's work of salvation. Jesus being described as "*the propitiation for our sins*" means that He, and He alone, became the means of completely turning away God's righteous anger and satisfying His perfect justice, which was due to us because of our sins. When Jesus was dying on the cross, the Father turned His face away from His Son – "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Matt 27:46) – so that His righteous judgement could be turned away from us sinners. Christ's propitiation opens the way for our complete forgiveness and reconciliation to His Father. How absolutely wonderful is that!

Just as wonderful is the fact that all this is due to God's great love for us: "*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us*" (1 John 4:10). The one true living God has provided the one and only means of restoring the ruptured relationship between Himself and rebellious man by the sacrifice of His Son. He is the one who makes "*peace by the blood of his cross.*" (Col 1:20)

This, surely, is why Jesus is called the "*Prince of peace*" (Is 9:6); the great good news of the gospel is that in being "*justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Rom 5:1) When we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ he makes us His, and His Father's, everlasting friends. That is why every true Christian can sing:

Reconciled, I'm reconciled, I'm reconciled to God for ever.
I know He took away my sin, I know His love will leave me never.
Reconciled, I am His child, I know it was on me He smiled;
I'm reconciled, I'm reconciled to God. [and some, not surprisingly, add 'Hallelujah!]

Do make sure you are a friend of God through being reconciled to him by the Lord Jesus Christ.

THREE BLESSINGS OF RECONCILIATION

1. **A Place Among God's People:** "*For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ... so making peace and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility*" (Eph 2:14–16). These verses refer to the fact that, through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles can have the barrier wall of the natural hostility between them broken down and so be united in the body of the Church. By becoming reconciled to God through the Saviour, we discover that we are also joined in peaceful union with the people of God all over the world.
 2. **The Privilege of Service:** "*Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation*" (2 Cor 5:18). This was a privilege originally given to the early church, but the same commission has now passed down to us, and it is our privilege to serve our Saviour in seeking to urge and encourage others to be reconciled to God.
 3. **The Promise of Glory:** "*For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*" (Rom 5:10) All who are reconciled to God are saved already but then the resurrected, living Lord Jesus guarantees that they will be finally and fully saved in glory with Him eternally.
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