

Melva's Corner

ARE YOU FRIENDS WITH GOD?

August 15, 2005

Bible Text: II Cor. 5:21

Central Truth: Broken relationships can't be repaired by rules or promises to do better or even church membership.

How long do you think the original experience of Eden lasted? Hours? Days? Years? I think we let our quick reading of a short section of Genesis – less than three whole chapters of the Bible – deceive us into thinking there was hardly the blink of an eye between Adam's utter lack of self-consciousness or shame about being totally naked before his wife and his Creator and his pitiful attempt to become a clothing designer and to hide from his Best Friend. Ah, yes, and that's my point. Adam, Eve, and God were "best friends" until something happened to alienate them. Put the man and woman on the run. Make them afraid of God to the point that they would try to avoid Him.

Let me tell you how I see this verse: "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3:8). God walking in the garden was commonplace. He did it every day. He probably walked around with Eve and Adam not only "in the cool of the day" but at sunrise and at lunchtime. Whenever they wanted to talk to Him – ask a question or figure out something about their humanity. He was there. They were tight with God. Best friends!

That's why the next verse is among the saddest in all of Holy Scripture: "The Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?' " (Gen. 3:9). Intimacy had just become estrangement. Emotional closeness had been transformed into emotional distance. Friendship mutated into fear, and delight at His presence into dismay that He was around. There is no sadder scene anywhere in the Bible. The personal relationship between God and mankind had just been broken!

Redeemer God has been on a mission every since to close the gap. To put an end to the alienation and fear. To restore the broken relationship. Although He is the aggrieved party, He has been taking it upon Himself to communicate with His estranged creatures. Loving us as a concerned Father who is grieving His prodigal sons and daughters, He has struggled to communicate His deep love and concern.

In Romans 5, Paul links what happened at the cross to the disruption that goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. I like the familiar words Eugene Peterson uses to express the ideas involved in reconciliation – people “at odds with God” have been “put on friendly terms” with Him through Christ’s sacrificial death.

Now that we are set right with God by means of this sacrificial death, the consummate blood sacrifice, there is no longer a question of being at odds with God in any way. If, when we were at our worst, we were put on friendly terms with God by the sacrificial death of his Son, now that we’re at our best, just think of how our lives will expand and deepen by means of His resurrection life!

With this new resurrection life my concern is that we do not take sin seriously enough!

We have worked out this neat self-deception to the effect that beliefs and actions, love and behavior may be contradictory. In our theology we try to have it both ways – we believe God for salvation but at the same time we refuse to obey Him. A professed faith in God that doesn’t obey God isn’t faith at all. Or, if you want to call it faith, it is dead faith (Jas. 2:14). In our personal relationships, according to this absurd parallel theology we’ve created, a man can love his wife in spite of the fact that he beats her or cheats on her. Love is as love does. And it is a lie spawned in hell that we humans can love either God or one another while doing hateful things to them. The Apostle John says the phony claim is cancelled by contradictory behavior (I John 4:20-21).

God doesn’t play those games with us. He doesn’t allow us the luxury of denial. He forces us to admit that we are either believers or unbelievers; to be undeclared is to be an unbeliever. Jesus said people would either be for Him or against Him; there would be no third category. That means that we either have a relationship with God, or we don’t. We are either His friends, or we are His enemies.

We are either reconciled to Him through the cross, or we are alienated in our thoughts and deeds.

The sin that had us separated from God was laid on Jesus when He died in our stead. He cried out, **“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”** (Matt. 27:46). Do you think that’s just some minor statement used to fill up the Bible? Well I take it literally – that Jesus was experiencing the alienation, enemy status, and abandonment sin brings on those in bondage to it. And I understand it to mean that He experienced so awful a fate in order to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. It is the biblical concept of reconciliation (i.e. putting estranged persons back in healthy relationship). Through Christ, God and humankind are put at-one again!

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (II Cor. 5:18-21).

The initiative in this reconciliation is with God. He was in Christ. He reconciled the world to Himself. He gives the message of reconciliation. **It is not** an invitation for us to come and try to make amends for breaking God’s heart by doing better or simply living by the rules. **It is** the announcement of a completed work on our behalf and an invitation to accept what has **already been done** for us. You can’t do anything to earn salvation. God through Christ has made the first step. All we have to do is turn around from our sin consciousness and make the next step-receiving. How different the gospel is from the moralism or legalism so often preached as gospel!

Broken relationships can’t be repaired by rules or promises to do better or even church membership. They must wait for a dramatic move by one or both of the parties involved at a personal level. The cross is God’s move toward us to offer pardon, reconciliation, and a fresh start. It sets us free from the self-hatred and fear of judgment that so often passes for religion. It lets us live in

peaceful community with one another. It gives the world a little glimpse of Eden - and invites them to live the experience themselves. Ah, yes, how wonderful it is to be friends with God!

Memory Text:

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (II Corinthians 5: 21)