



Good Friday 2019
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The Bible begins with the words, "In the beginning, God..." God. There's a huge word. And every one of us is left to imagine that God. As A.W. Tozer said the thing that comes to your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you, ultimately because you're either right or you're wrong. God. Who is God? Who is God? Is he someone who you imagine or do we try to fit him into our expectations? Do we consider him to be like us? Value what we value? Like so many that I speak to about God in our day, many of them see God as an affable grandfather, someone who just has this great affection for his creation and wants to give us whatever we want. Or he's the one I call when I have a problem, one that fixes my hurts. The Great Physician who heals my sicknesses. Many see him simply as a caterer to my life, a butler, someone who will give us what we need, a cheerleader who will coach me through my life, a provider that when I have wants, if I pray to him, he'll give me those things. In a sense God is, in many ways, all of those things but that is not who he is. The Bible endlessly speaks to the character of God in every page, the self-disclosure of who God is, is trying to inform his creatures who are so apt with a propensity to create God in their own image, to understand who God actually is. That's the challenge. Who is God?

From the very beginning in the Old Testament a picture of God starts to emerge. It is very clear that when it comes to God there's one thing that rises above all else. Even as Tozer titled his little book on understanding God, it is the knowledge of the holy. That when in heaven they surround his throne, the picture of that setting is that the angels cry out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty."

We know, as Psalm 5 says so clearly, that God is not a God who delights in wickedness. He's not a God who will ever dwell with what is evil. The problem, of course, for all of us is looking at those two words and trying to understand if we qualify. That's part of us defining God in our own image. We want to see him as a God who affirms what I affirm, who detests what I detest, who has the same values that I have. We look at other people as evil and wicked and not ourselves. And yet the Bible's very clear that there's something that stands between the creator and every creature on this planet. It's a problem of sin. He's not a God who delights in wickedness, he certainly doesn't approve it, and he can't dwell with evil. He's got a real problem with his creation. One that we're loathe to admit. But really the message of the Bible in exalting God in the Old Testament as a holy God leaves us to understand, as we compare ourselves to that God, that we are sinners. Sinners.

The Bible uses all kinds of words to describe that, iniquity is certainly one of them. If you look that word up the idea, even of that Hebrew word that translates in the Old Testament, it's the idea of something that is a gross injustice. A gross injustice, something that is so twisted from the perspective of the Holy One looking at someone who falls short and who takes his rules and transgresses them. Who understands the requirements of God and fails to meet them. The Bible says that iniquity is something that we all commit. If you take the definitions of Scripture and simply divide them into two categories you start to find that we clearly can see that we have a problem with God because we don't do what he says. We call it the sins of commission. Like the very first sin in the Bible when men and women are instructed not to eat of one particular tree. "Here it is. I said don't do it." And they reached out and they took hold of that. They did what God said we shouldn't do. God's holiness is reflected in the law code and the



law code is very clear about things that we should not do: to lie, to cheat, to steal. All of which we as human beings when we rightly understand ourselves, when we hold up the mirror of God's Word, we start to recognize we qualify for all of those things. There are many things that God has asked you and I to do as reflections of his character. We are to live according to his standard and we have to admit we've done what we should not do.

But even those, like the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 who came to Jesus and said, "I've done it all." Which of course he hadn't. Jesus turned quickly to other kinds of sins, the sins of omission. There are many things that you haven't done that you should have done. There are many things that God asks you to do that we just haven't done because they're too distasteful to us, they're too extreme for us, they're too costly for us. Many things that Jesus simply did in expressing his position as the God-man asking him to make sure that there was no other god before him and asked the rich young ruler in Matthew 19, show me that you're willing to express my preeminence in your life, my lordship, just by giving away this money. And he wouldn't do it. He went away sad, went away rejecting God simply because in that scene he wouldn't do what God asked him to do. If he were to go home and tell his family how the day went he wouldn't say I've done any terrible thing, I haven't committed a sin. There wasn't a sin of commission but certainly there were sins of omission and if you think of all the things God asks you to do, certainly, "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind," and all the expressions of that. To be generous, as Matthew 19 says. To be able to be worshippers, to pray without ceasing, to be ambassadors and evangelists. We can look in our week and our day and our month and our year and say we certainly fall short of the glory of God. We don't do what he asks us to do all the time.

Sin. That gross injustice. Whether it's doing what God asks us not to do or whether it's not doing what he asks us to do, it creates a separation the Bible says. Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God. We may not feel it but it's true. Our sins have hidden his face from us. The reality is that God in his glory were we to understand it the way the angels do, we would see what a great and awesome majestic God he is. But as the great hymns of the church have often expressed, because of our sin his glory we don't see. We don't recognize the greatness of God. His unmitigated majesty is shielded because of our sinful behavior. Worse than that, God doesn't respond the way that he could and one day will for those who are redeemed. He doesn't hear us because we have a sin problem.

The issue for us in understanding that is that we have so many residual gifts that God gives us. We call it common grace. We don't feel separated from God because we have a good meal and we feel satisfied. We have good relationships. We are happy, we have experiences that bring us joy, and we think, "Well, surely God loves us. Everything's fine." The Bible does affirm that is an expression of God's love. God loves sinners in that he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good. He sends his rains on the fields of the just and the unjust, Jesus said. But that's not the unmitigated favor of God. That's not the kind of responsiveness that you would have if you were in the presence of the great God and you were to be considered holy.

We've got common grace but don't allow that, the Bible says, to make you think that we don't have a separation problem. We do have a separation problem and it's very clearly expressed in Scripture with all kinds of words. Ephesians Chapter 2 uses four phrases or words that describe this. It says not only are we separated from God, as Isaiah 59:2 says, but we're alienated. It's as though we live on another planet. And of course there's that feeling of a God

who's distant. In many ways he is and you've cried out to God I'm sure many times and you feel like he doesn't hear you. The Bible says we're strangers. We'd like to think we're all tight with God and we may be tight with a God of our own imagination but that's just a fantasy. The real God, the God who is, the Bible says we're all born strangers to that God.

And then there's a phrase, a dividing wall. The Bible says it's more than a passive turning away. There's a sense in which there's an impenetrable barrier between us and the God who created us. It's a wall. It's a wall, look at this phrase now, it's a wall that's called a dividing wall of hostility. There's a kind of hostility that unfortunately is a true depiction of the God of the Bible, a God who looks at us and says, unfortunately, I can't look at you with favor, I can't look at you with acceptance. I can't even look at you with affection. I can only have the echo in the universe of common grace upon my creatures. But in a real sense, even creation itself has been cursed according to Romans Chapter 8. Right now, unfortunately, when God looks at us and sees our sin it creates an impenetrable barrier between us and God because of the implacable nature of God's justice. He cannot approve sin.

Many of us stand on one side of this wall and feel like, "Well, you know what? I have a relationship with the God of my imagination." You wouldn't put it that way but "I feel like things are going okay. And every now and then I'll pray and things seem to happen and I feel like I'm at peace with the universe. And that must be I'm at peace with God and things are generally good for me." But the Bible says the real God, the God who offers us something eternal, something that will be his unmitigated, unfiltered personal presence and blessing, it's not ever going to be realized, as we stand divided, a wall that is hostile from both sides, if you think about it. This wall of hostility is a hostility that God has toward us and a hostility that we have toward God. In every single sin that we commit there is a sense in which we continue to enforce that impenetrable barrier between us and God. We fall short of his glory with sins of omission. We transgress his laws with sins of commission. And that barrier stands between us, a barrier of hostility.

Look at it this way, it's not as though we're simply passively going our own way like two people turning their backs on one another. It's not just that his face is hidden. As a matter of fact, his hand is often stretched out toward his creation. There is a turning of the two hostile parties toward one another. The Bible says that we are in many ways hostile toward God, not only alienated and separated, but in our minds we have a hostility toward the true God, the living God, the God who has a holy standard we don't like it. Our evil deeds express that. Alienated. The Bible goes even further to say we're enemies. Enemies just don't turn their backs on each other, they focus their attention on one another in a very negative way. Enemies.

Enmity is a word that is used in the Bible to describe two parties who just cannot get along, that something stands between them. The first use of that word in the Old Testament speaks of that kind of hostility that's going to exist between women and snakes, of all things right. That there's not going to be peace there. The natural obvious distaste and disdain is one of enmity. Enemies. The Bible speaks not just of one party chasing the other, it's not like dogs chasing cats, it's as though the cat has turned on the dog and the dog is turned on the cat and we think that's the picture of the God of the Bible? It's exactly the picture the God of the Bible. A God who unfortunately looks at us and has a hostility towards sin that we commit, and



sinner who really think of the true God and think, "I don't like that, I don't want to live your way, I don't want to do things according to your rules."

People say, "Wait a minute, I know one thing that I learned in church and that is that God is love. Isn't God loving?" Well, he is loving, that's true. The question is what does that love look like? There's a sentimentality that is settled into the modern church thinking of God's love has something sappy, something, internally sentimental. The "green fuzzies" I call it. That God has affectionate feelings toward us. And we're just his kids like a grandparent looking at grandchildren and putting our picture up on his divine refrigerator and he just loves us so much. His affectionate feelings toward his creation. But the Bible defines love for us. As a matter of fact, the most poignant expression of his love is just that, it's poignant, it's painful. That God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, which is a word of hostility toward a holy God, that "why we were still sinners," here's the expression of God's love: "Christ died for us."

On Good Friday what we do as we commemorate the death of Christ. We not only commemorate it, we celebrate it by calling it Good Friday. Our adjective is this is a good thing that God has done. God has sent his Son to die. "For God so loved the world," the Bible says, "that he gave his only Son." Such an innocuous verb. He "gave" his son. But in that passage, of course, we recognize he gave his Son so that we wouldn't perish. What did he give his Son the do? To die. It wasn't just a death, it wasn't an execution in the sense that he was beheaded, or that he was shot, or he was driven through with a spear and died instantly. It was a day of torture for him, a day of rejection, a day of beating, a day of being whipped, a day of being mocked, a crown of thorns on his head, nails through his hands and his feet.

The expression of love in the Bible, it's not what we often think. It's a statement of God looking at enmity at his creation and having hostility towards sinners, and saying while we were sinners I'm going to fix the problem. I'm going to fix the problem by reconciling the two alienated parties by having my own Son be the target of my just wrath. Wrath means anger. God is angry at sin. The implacable nature of God's justice drives him to say, "I can't look the other way." Just as a judge in the Orange County courthouse couldn't say, "Well, I know you have a heinous sin that you're absolutely guilty of and all the evidence points against you, but I'm going to be a nice judge, I going to be a loving judge, I'm just going to look the other way and let you go." Well, he should lose his job for that. Judges are only good judges when they're just judges and God is a just judge and says, "I've got to pay for this sin." Oh, he does love us and his demonstration of love is that while we were still sinners, while we're still hostile toward him, while we were enemies, he was willing to reconcile us to himself.

That's a great word. That's the word I'd like you to get firmly in your mind this Good Friday. To be reconciled to God. Which wasn't God saying, "I just want to bring you near because I love you and I have this affectionate, sentimental feeling toward you." It's saying there's a problem that stands between us and the only way to solve that is to have the judge take off his robes and to become the judged. When the judge becomes the judged he takes on the role of the one who's going to be penalized, the one who's going to be punished. The one who in human form is going to pay for human sin by humans suffering. That's the reality of the cross and the Bible says it is the most expressed and the most clear expression of God's love for his creation.

God demonstrates his love for us in this: "That why we're still sinners Christ died for us." It's hard to reconcile the sentimental view of a God who loves his creation as though he just as a grandfather just can't help but love his irresistible grandchildren. God does love us and that means he purposes to do us good. But to do that he's got to get the sin problem removed, he has to put himself in between the sinner and his own justice and to die on a cross.

The love of God is rich. But it's not unknown in our human experience. We give medals and give certificates and awards and we write newspaper articles about people who go the extra mile and are willing to suffer to do good for someone else. Someone who is going to rescue someone by incurring the penalties or the difficulties or the pain and take the risks to bring those who are wayward, those who are in danger, those who are in peril, bringing them to safety. There are pictures of this certainly in our society and we'd say, "Well, that's love." But that's not the kind of love that so many people attribute to God. That is what the cross is all about. That while we were enemies God reconciles us to himself. He brings us back.

He changes this from a distant relationship to a relationship where he can now bless us, though even now in an unmitigated form we don't have all that God is going to give us. But we are reconciled to God positionally. Much like the word "saved" we are now judicially, legally, forensically saved but we are not saved on that day of judgment quite yet because it hasn't come. We are now reconciled. Salvation is to be reconciled to God having every one of these hostile statements and decrees that stood against us that made us guilty before God, having them all removed, but we're not reconciled to God yet because we haven't been in his presence yet. Not in the unmitigated, immediate presence of the holy God who dwells in unapproachable light. We will approach him one day. And we will be reconciled. That day is coming. But right now we need to make sure positionally we receive that reconciliation.

We love stories of reconciliation on the human plane. Whether it's Esau and Jacob, after 20 years of hostility coming together. Whether we see pictures in Scripture of those who are at odds with one another being brought together in some kind of scene of affection. None greater than the story in Luke 15 of the lost son being reconciled to his father. We call it the prodigal son but the picture is one who was really living in hostility and always had been as a child against his own father. When he comes of age he takes the inheritance and he goes and squanders it all. And in his own squalor in the pigsty he comes to his senses and he's drawn back to his father.

A picture of reconciliation which is exactly what Ephesians is talking about in the context of the passage I was quoting earlier. That we were far off. We were on our own without God, without hope, without any security for eternity. But we've been brought near and that took place, not by God just saying nice things to us or feeling good feelings for us, but sending his Son to take on the penalty of our sin. Brought near by the blood and the death of Jesus Christ for he himself is our peace. That is what solves our problem. He is broken down in his flesh that dividing wall of hostility. If you think about it, though it's very, very painful for us to think about, that God and his justice can only have that justice satisfied by consuming the sins of those who are guilty. We are natural enemies of God. There's no way around it. But God steps in and instead of being the one who consumes us in his just fury, he becomes the one who's reconciled to us, that there's peace made. The picture in the millennial kingdom is animals that should never get along lying down together and everyone being at peace. Children playing with the cobra in the cobra den and no problem, everyone's at peace. Of course, that's



the picture of the ultimate hostility being solved, that God is at peace with his people. One day Christ in his glory will live among us. If you're a Christian you will live in a kingdom where Christ is on a throne in Jerusalem with the unmitigated favor of that Christ, the God-man. And you will look back on that and recognize it was only because the God-man spilled his own blood so that we could be saved.

C.S. Lewis in his *Chronicles of Narnia* is certainly pictured God rightly and aptly by having this authoritative, even scary creature, be the king. And that king, that king like a king of the jungle, this lion becomes the one who is sacrificed for the sins of the children, you remember. The waywardness, the transgressions, the sins of omissions and commission in that imagery certainly clearly that one that should consume the guilty becomes the one who is consumed for the guilty.

Christ lays down his own life. How great this picture is in Romans Chapter 5 of reconciliation that all took place through Christ. We've been justified, made right as though we have no sin, by his blood, by his death. "Much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God." Listen to that great theological statement. "Much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God." We deserve God's righteous, just anger toward us because we're sinners. But God is going to save us, because Christ is going to take the penalty for us. "For while we were enemies," here's the passage, "we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, how much more, now that we are reconciled," look at this, "shall we be saved by his life." The one who should consume us becomes the one who is consumed for us and then becomes the protector of us. This is the picture in Romans 8. Who can judge us? Well, the only one who can judge us is the lawgiver, the holy one. Well, he's become the one who died for us and was raised, and intercedes for us and becomes our protector, and our advocate. That's the expression and the result of the love of Christ.

We're going to be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God and that's why Christians should be happy, not because God is our butler, or our life coach, or our genie, but because he's solved a problem that we all face, and one day it will be put to the test, the day we breathe our last on this earth. And when we're done we'll meet our maker. We rejoice in God that through the Lord Jesus Christ we've received this reconciliation. The Gospel is called the message of reconciliation. That is the picture of us being brought together with God because of the death of Jesus Christ.

While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. God no longer sees us as those who have these sins that are hostile against us. Matter of fact, not only does God not have that hostility toward those who are saved, trusting in the blood of his Son, but our minds now, the Bible says, are no longer hostile toward God. We have a struggle with the flesh, we struggle with temptation and sin but Christians in their heart of hearts, they love the God of this universe. They now want to please him. They're no longer hostile in their heart. They no longer have a heart that rebels against God. They have one that wants to please God. Not according to their own imagination, but according to God's standards. They love his Word, they love to do what he says as hard as it may be in this world.

God says all of this hostility removed, the barrier that existed is gone. The separation that should separate us eternally, it's taken away. That's the picture and here's the word: the death of Christ is a historical event. The theological definition of it, among several, but here's one



important facet, is that Christ death is our reconciliation, that the Gospel is the message of reconciliation, that we rejoice in reconciliation. Don't think horizontally until we think vertically. I'd love to be reconciled to people but not until I recognize the most important person I have to be reconciled to is God. The barrier has been removed. That's the picture of Scripture.

We celebrate every time we take the Lord's Supper, we celebrate the picture of reconciliation that in his blood and in his body he absorbed the penalty that I deserved so that God can look at me without any reference to my sin and that I can be accepted relationally now and physically in his presence one day with my resurrected body in the presence of God. He said, you ought to celebrate this with these elements. It's one of two things he said in the New Testament, they're called ordinances. He ordained that we would do these things, these pictures with elements in our hands in this case, the other one is baptism. But the element of this bread, this unleavened bread, and this cup, this juice from the vine, we are supposed to take these elements, the Bible says, remembering him. A broken body, spilled blood to bring us reconciliation. "Do this in remembrance of me."

I'm going to have the ushers come and pass our elements. We do this every Good Friday, we take the Lord's Supper. This is for Christians who know what it is to experience the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not the common grace of Christ, but the special saving grace of Christ. And I invite you, if you're a Christian, to take this bread and this cup and just spend some time right now thinking through all the things that we do as human beings that stand between us and a holy God and recognizing what we celebrate, what we rejoice in, is reconciliation that Christ has brought us near that there is no longer a dividing wall between us and God. Hold onto those elements as they're passed to you. You spend some time talking to God. I'm going to come back up in about four minutes and we're going to take these elements together.

You spend some time talking to God. If you're not a Christian just let those elements pass by or better yet let me appeal to you right now. It's time for you to recognize the sin problem. I say it often but it's true, you cannot understand or appreciate the good news of the Gospel until we really grapple with the bad news that before a holy God we have a sin problem we can't solve. Accept the bad news, embrace the reality of the bad news that you tonight might be a Christian by accepting by faith with a penitent faith the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I'll be back up in a few minutes. We'll take these elements together in the meantime you talk to God, confess your sins to him, he's faithful and righteous to forgive your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteous, not out of divine fiat, out of nothing, out of thin air, but because he can take your sins and appended it to the cross and remove that barrier because of Christ. Let's celebrate that. But first let's spend some time talking to God silently and then we'll celebrate the death of Christ in these elements.

Jesus dying on a cross 2,000 years ago is a historical fact. The question is what does it mean? The New Testament says it was the reconciliation of sinners to a holy God because of a dividing wall of hostility that existed. A reconciliation that God initiated. A reconciliation that we did not deserve and a reconciliation that we can enter into now by trusting in what Christ did. It's always going to involve a penitence, a repentance, to say to God that we need to change our disposition and our involvement and our connection relationship with sin to take this truth of God that he's delivered to us, this book of self-disclosure that is punctuated by



predictive prophecy, that's got God's fingerprints all over it, to see that this word from God needs to be rightly understood and diligently obeyed.

The obedience doesn't save us, it doesn't reconcile us, but those who are saved and reconciled they are no longer hostile in mind toward this God who reconciled them. They want to pursue him. They want to love him. They want to serve him. That's what this church is all about. It's about us understanding what it means to take his Word and to become doers of it. I love Good Friday not because of the poignant pain of Christ dying on a cross but because what it provided for us. Christ dying is the historical feature, the theological reality is reconciliation. Remember that this dividing wall of hostility exists for every single person until they put their trust fully in Jesus Christ. If you've done that, with great thanksgiving, let's remember the cost, the broken body and spilt blood of Christ, let's with great thanksgiving eat this bread and drink this cup.

God, for 2,000 years now Christians have been engaging in this very simple tactile experience of eating bread and drinking this cup and remembering. That's what the Bible says this is about. You told us it's about remembering Jesus Christ and what he's done. God, let us remember in a way that may be richer, more full, having a spectrum of that truth in Scripture about what the atonement meant. And in this case, let us never forget a wall that was filled with reminders of our sin that's been removed. A barrier, an alienation, a hostility that now is turned from natural enemies to eternal friends. A love that was demonstrated in removing that barrier by a painful death on a cross. God, provide us a deeper appreciation for that, a greater knowledge and understanding of it, and a better response to it on our lives, I pray, as we celebrate at this Good Friday.

In Jesus name. Amen.