

The Wednesday Word, Nov. 12, 2012 - Approaching God

No matter how many religious things we do, whether it's praying, giving or abstaining from worldliness, we cannot find, in any of them, qualifications by which we can approach the Father. Religious activity provides no resting place in which to discover the smile of God.

If sin were a simple thing like a disease, then perhaps religious observations might be useful in mending the gulf between man and the Almighty. But sin is much worse than any disease. The unsaved sinner is not merely 'sin-sick', he is 'sin-dead' (Ephesians 2:1). Worse still, he is under the righteous condemnation of inflexible justice (John 3:18). God, the unchangeable judge, has an unalterable hatred of sin and has warned about His coming wrath against the unsaved sinner (Matthew 23:33).

Unbelieving, self-righteous, religious people make the grave mistake of trying to present their character to God as the basis of approaching Him. Approaching God, however, has nothing whatsoever to do with our character. God says that our goodness, as a qualification, is an illusion and that there is no goodness in us that entitles us to or recommends us for His acceptance (Job 15:14-16). Ouch!

Unfortunately, there are many professing believers who think that, if they tell others about Jesus, study the Bible and are extremely earnest, then they are qualified to find a welcome from the Father. But, this makes zero sense! They started out with grace and are now trying to approach God through their performance (works)! Perhaps, their problem is even more serious. Perhaps they didn't even start their "Christian life" with grace at all. Perhaps they began with works, the work of doing something---something like asking Jesus into their heart to get saved. What a treacherous foundation this has become for many. It's easy, therefore, for such a person to think that there is something he must continue to do to earn the welcome of God.

So let's start at the beginning and ask, "How does a guilty sinner approach God in the first place?" "Well, we pray," says someone. That's fair enough, but how can we actually approach God? After all, His explicit testimony against all of us is, "You are unfit to approach me in your own merit" (Psalm 53:2-3). To imagine that we can pray ourselves out of unfitness and into spiritual fitness is ridiculous. Unbeliever and believer alike must learn that our religious efforts can never be the basis of our approach to God. No amount of praying, working or feeling, can satisfy the righteousness of God, or open the door to the presence of the Holy One.

So then, "How does a sinful man approach God and find acceptance before Him?" (Job 25:4). No appeal can be made to God based on our personal character, goodness, or religious performances (Romans 3:10 ff makes that clear). In that case, since God is not sufficiently impressed with our puny efforts, or with us, what then are we to do?

The good news is that we are not left to work this matter out for ourselves for God has already done something about this problem. He has already settled the dilemma of how to approach Him. In fact, it was settled 2000 years ago in the doing, dying and rising again of Christ. This is why Jesus claimed to be the Way to the Father and the Door into heaven (John 10:9). And this is why we read that we have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus," Hebrews

10:19.

It only remains for us to, by faith alone, to continually receive what He has done. It is on the basis of Christ and His shed blood that we have our first and our continual welcome in Heaven (Hebrews 10:22, Ephesians 3:12).

Wherewith shall we approach the Lord,
And bow before his Throne?
By trusting in His faithful word,
And pleading Christ alone.

The blood, the righteousness and love
Of Jesus we will plead
He lives within the veil above,
For us to intercede”

To approach God, we come to Him as needy and broken, dependent entirely on the person, work, name and grace of Christ Jesus our Saviour, Surety, Shepherd and Substitute.

And that's the Gospel Truth!