

The Benefits of Being a Christian

(3) A NEW FELLOWSHIP: COMMUNION WITH GOD AND HIS PEOPLE

Introduction

A. Man is a “personal” being, and he thrives in the enjoyment of relationships with “persons” which correspond to him.

1. Man is a personal being because he is created in the image of God, who Himself is a personal Being - Gen. 1:26,27.

2. The creation of a companion to whom Adam could relate followed God’s judgment that it was “not good that man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18-22).

B. The sin which alienated man from His Creator also produced enmity among men themselves, and it soon bore terrible fruit: frustration, violence, fear, despair, and anguish.

1. By Noah’s day, the divisive results of sin entering the world had reached such an extent that even God could not tolerate it: “The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth’” (Gen. 6:11-13).

2. Many of the sins described by Paul as resulting from man’s rejection of God involve discord and enmity: “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent,...” (Rom. 1:18-32). Cf. Eph. 4:17-19.

C. The gospel of Christ addresses this problem of sin in which the personal relationships that we need are broken.

D. Let us contemplate the importance and joy of various aspects of the fellowship and communion which are possible through Jesus Christ, and through Him alone.

I. FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

A. Peace with God.

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1. It has been said that sin is a refusal to accept God’s love.

2. Man’s sin prevents God from extending Himself to man in the relationship He originally intended - Gen. 2:16,17; 6:5-7. Cf. Isa. 1:15; 59:1,2; Mt. 23:37-39; Rom. 1:18; 2:4; 2 Pt. 3:9.

3. In sin, man declares himself the “enemy” of God, and fear displaces love - Gen. 3:8-10; Exo. 19:16; Deut. 5:4,5,23-27; Rom. 8:7.

4. Through the forgiveness of sin in Jesus Christ, the cause of man’s alienation from God is done away - Rom. 5:1,2,10,11. Cf. Mt. 11:28-30; Jn. 5:24,25; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; 13:14; Col. 1:19-23 (cf. Eph. 2:11-22); 1 Pt. 3:18.

5. In truth, this is “grace” in which we stand - Rom. 5:1,2. Cf. Num. 6:24-26!

B. Access to God - Hb. 4:14-16; 10:19-22. Cf. Eph. 2:18; 3:11,12; 1 Tim. 2:5; Hb. 7:19,25; Jas. 4:8.

C. Continued forgiveness by God - 1 Jn. 1:7-2:1.

D. Knowledge of God.

1. The Christian enjoys a living, personal relationship with God. He “knows” God!

a. “Knowing” God - Jn. 17:1-3; 1 Jn. 5:13. Cf. Jer. 9:23,24; 31:31-34; Eph. 3:19; 4:13; Phil. 3:8-10; 2 Tim. 1:12; 2 Pt. 1:3.

1) Knowing God (as distinct from knowing about God) involves study, prayer, worship, and meditation — all aimed at the cultivation of genuine love for God as a person. Cf. Mt. 22:36-38; 1 Cor. 13:1-3; 1 Jn. 5:3.

- 2) David is a good example of the kind of relationship with God that is possible. Cf. Psa. 1:1-3; 23:1-6; etc.
- 3) What glorious eternal fellowship awaits those who have come to know the Lord, and who are unashamed of their acquaintance with Him - Mt. 25:21,34. Cf. Mt. 10:32,33; Rev. 3:5,12,21.
- 4) On the other hand, what an eternal tragedy not to know Him or be known by Him - Mt. 7:23; 2 Thess. 1:8.
- b. "Walking" with God - Gen. 5:24; 6:9. Cf. Lk. 24:32!
- 1) "When we walk with the Lord in the light of His word, what a glory He sheds on our way!" (J. H. Sammis).
- 2) "We must walk with the Lord before we can fight for the Lord."
- 3) We have worthy examples: Enoch, Noah, Abraham (Jas. 2:23), Moses, Elijah.
- c. God's "dwelling" in us and with us - Jn. 14:23; Rom. 8:1,9-11; 1 Cor. 6:15-20; 1 Jn. 2:24-27; 3:24; 4:12-16; etc. Cf. Exo. 29:45; Lev. 26:12; Zech. 2:10; etc.
- 1) "God in man, and man in God" (Godet).
- 2) Obviously, important duties belong to those in and among whom God dwells - 1 Cor. 3:16,17; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Jas. 4:4; etc.
2. We need to be careful not to neglect or undervalue the personal nature of our relationship to God.
- a. Spiritual life involves personal fellowship with our God - Jn. 10:10; 17:3; 1 Jn. 5:12; 2 Jn. 9.
- b. "Morality is conformity to an abstract law of right, while religion is essentially a relation to a person, from whom the soul receives blessing and to whom it surrenders itself in love and obedience...Religion in its essential idea is a life in God, a life lived in recognition of God, and under control of the indwelling Spirit of God" (A. H. Strong).
- c. The "nearness" of God to us is one of our most precious spiritual blessings in Christ - Mt. 28:20; Hb. 13:5,6. Cf. Deut. 4:6-8; Psa. 148:14.
- d. Our songs rightly emphasize our need for a vibrant personal fellowship with God. Cf. Rom. 8:31-39; 2 Cor. 3:4,5; Phil. 4:6,7,13.
- 1) My God and I: "This earth will pass, and with it common trifles, but God and I will go unendingly" (I. B. Sergei).
- 2) Be With Me, Lord: "No other gift or blessing Thou couldst bestow could with this one compare — a constant sense of Thy abiding presence, where'er I am, to feel that Thou art near" (T. O. Chisholm).
- e. The invitation of Christ is an invitation to fellowship with God - Rev. 3:20.

II. FELLOWSHIP WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD

- A. Peace with God makes possible true fellowship with others - Jn. 17:20-23; 1 Jn. 1:1-4.
1. God's people in Christ enjoy a unique relationship as:
- a. God's "own special people" - 1 Pt. 2:9,10.
- b. The "family" of God - Gal. 3:26-29. Cf. Hb. 2:11; 3:5,6; 1 Jn. 5:1.
- c. The "body" of Christ - Rom. 12:4,5. Cf. 1 Cor. 12:12,13; Eph. 1:22,23; 4:13-16.
2. This unique relationship binds together those who otherwise would be alienated - Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 2:11-22; etc.
3. This relationship entails unique responsibilities - Jn. 13:34,35. Cf. Rom. 12:10; 15:5-7; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 4:1-3; Phil. 2:1,2; Col. 2:2; 1 Pt. 1:22; 2:17; 3:8,9; 1 Jn. 3:14.
4. This relationship produces joy - 1 Jn. 1:3,4.

B. Christians' common relationship to God is the basis of a common life together - Ac. 2:42-47; Hb. 10:24,25.

1. Our spiritual "kinship" transcends physical ties - Mt. 10:37; Mk. 3:31-35; 10:28-31.

2. The mutual benefits and values of the relationship are important. Cf. Rom. 1:12.

a. Friendship, companionship.

b. Help, encouragement.

c. Knowledge.

d. Correction.

e. Comfort.

f. Prayers.

3. We need to recover a sense of the "community" aspect of Christianity - Rom. 12:5; Phil. 1:3-5.

a. To be "cut off from his people" ought for the Christian, like the Hebrews in the Old Testament, to be a dreaded prospect - Gen. 17:14; Exo. 12:15; etc.

b. There needs to be some "fellowship" which can be "withdrawn" in discipline - 2 Thess. 3:6.

4. Nothing in this life surpasses the joy of Christians together worshiping, praying, studying, helping, teaching, etc.

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5. "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above" (Fawcett).

6. Those of "like precious faith" (2 Pt. 1:1) are our "glory and joy" (1 Thess. 2:19,20).

Conclusion

A. Each of us is bound for one of two destinies:

1. Eternal fellowship with God - Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 4:16-18.

2. Eternal alienation from God - Lk. 16:19-31; 2 Thess. 1:8-10.

B. The choice is ours to make, while opportunity lasts - Hb. 5:9; Rev. 22:17.

C. There is even now no treasure we ought to cherish more dearly or guard more carefully than our fellowship with God and His people — it is the missing dimension we need so desperately.

1. It is in the gospel that God has purposed to "gather together in one all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10). Cf. Col. 1:19-23.

2. To "taste" what it means to have fellowship with God and with others is a powerful experience. Cf. Hb. 6:4-6; 1 Pt. 2:2,3.

D. Can we imagine life without God and His people? Dare we "take one step alone"?