

Hearts Near to God

Franklin Church of Christ
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February 19, 2006
AM Assembly

Introduction:

Psalm 73:27 is pretty frightening. “For, behold, those who are far from You will perish; You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You.” However, **vs. 28** is comforting. “But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Your works.” Nearness to God is good. But those who are far from Him will be destroyed. Certainly we can see how important it is to be near God. But what does that mean? Jesus actually addressed this with the Pharisees in **Matthew 15:1-14**. The Pharisees and scribes were walking a path of destruction. Yet, they did not know it. It frightens me to think of the number of people today who might be, walking the path to destruction but not even knowing it. Let us make sure it is never us. Examine this passage and see what it takes to be near God.

Discussion:

- I. It is not enough to be religious.
 - A. The scribes and Pharisees were extremely religious. They were so religious they washed their hands ceremonially before every meal. They read passages like **Leviticus 7:21; 11:31-35; et al**. They wanted to make sure they did not make themselves unclean. What if they had touched a pot in the market place that had a fly die in it? If they ate with unwashed hands, that uncleanness would pass into them. Not to mention the fact that there were probably unclean people in the market (especially during the days of the Roman occupation). What if they touched something that one of those unclean people touched, then they put food in their mouths with unwashed hands? They would become unclean.
 - B. These men were very religious. They were very much into religious ceremony. They were very much into demonstrating their devotion to God’s laws. The problem was, Jesus said their worship was in vain because their heart was still far from God. The sad fact is, we can be very religious, we can go through the ceremonies of worship and devotion but that is not enough to be near God. It is not enough to be religious; our hearts actually have to be near God.
- II. It is not enough to know the Bible.
 - A. The Pharisees and scribes knew their Bibles very well. In fact, most of their many rules were loosely based on a passage of scripture. Take the one by which they learned they did not have to obey **Exodus 20:12; 21:17**. Jesus doesn’t quote the passage but He alludes to it when He says the Pharisees say, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God.” **Leviticus 27** established the law of devoting things to God. **Vss. 14-25** talked about dedicating a house or portion of a field to God. The Pharisees knew about this chapter and twisted it to mean they did not have to help their parents in their needs. They knew about the verses that talked about unclean things. That was why they developed their ritual of washing.
 - B. These men knew their Bibles. The scribes were so-called because their job was to copy the Law of God. Despite having read and known the verses, Jesus said their hearts were far from God because they were only teaching the precepts of men. The sad fact is, we can know the Bible, we can loosely tie a verse to everything we do and still not be near God. It is not enough just to have the word of God in our hearts; we actually have to have our hearts near God.
- III. It is not enough to have God on our lips.
 - A. The scribes and Pharisees talked a lot about God. They talked about obeying God. They talked about being devoted to God. They would stand in the synagogues and on the street corners to make sure everyone knew how much they talked to God (**Matthew 6:5**). In a parallel passage in **Luke 11:37-41**, Jesus pointed out that while these Pharisees did a lot on the outside that supposedly honored God, their insides were unclean.
 - B. They were like the people of **Matthew 7:21-23**. From the outside it looked like they would be with God forever. But they were not obeying God and would be cast out. The sad fact is, we can talk about Jesus, we can talk about God, we can talk about His Spirit, we can cry out our praises and talk about His word and still not be near to God. It is not enough to have God on our lips; we have to have Him in our hearts.

- IV. It is not enough to follow those who are religious, know their Bibles and have God on their lips.
- A. The disciples became very concerned when Jesus said these things. “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?” they asked. Jesus responded, “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” What was most frightening about this scenario is the number of people who just blindly followed the Pharisees. What would be their outcome? Would they be let off because it was not their fault they were not near God? Would God wink at their disobedience because they just did what they were told by others who were supposed to be smarter and better?
 - B. The sad reality is, we can follow people who look really religious, who know their Bibles and have God on their lips and still not be near Him. It is not enough to blindly follow blind leaders; we have to actually follow God with our eyes wide open.
- V. We have to actually have our hearts near to God.
- A. *Our hearts are near God when we teach what God taught.* The main problem of the Pharisees, according to the quote from Isaiah, was that they were teaching what had come from men. They had developed their own traditions and their own teachings. Though they started out with the Law of Moses, they twisted what they read to justify what they wanted. All the while they made great displays of spirituality. Sadly, they held a form of godliness but denied its power (**II Timothy 3:5**). Our hearts are near God when we actually teach what God taught. When we work to learn what God meant and teach only that, then we are near God.
 - B. *Our hearts are near God when we obey His word, His way.* Remember, the problem was not that the Pharisees and scribes did not know God’s word. The problem was that they did not accurately apply God’s word to their life. **II Timothy 3:16-17** says that God’s word can teach us, reprove us, correct us and discipline us for righteousness. It can make us complete in Christ. Whether we are talking about our individual lives or congregational action, we need to be able to anchor what we do in the authorization of scripture. We need to make sure we are not twisting the scriptures. We need to make sure we are not taking passages out of context. We need to make sure we are not denying one passage with our mistaken view of another. **Ezekiel 33:30-32** must not describe us. God’s message must not be a sensual song, it must be a life-guide.
 - C. *Our hearts are near God when we are not allowing anyone to come between us and God’s word.* We must not blindly follow the blind. One of the issues that most concerns me in today’s religious world is how many people are worshiping in churches with a book between them and God’s book. I am not talking about lesson books in a Bible class that point to the Bible. I am talking about written creeds that govern the church’s work and worship. How many people today are in churches based on the *Baptist Church Manual* or the *Baptist Faith and Message Statement*? How many are in churches that follow the *Baltimore Catechism*, *Luther’s Catechism* or *The Westminster Confession of Faith*? How many are in churches led by *The Book of Common Prayer* or *The Book of Discipline*. I do not say these things to offend anyone. I am concerned that in the churches using these man written creeds, the blind have begun to follow the blind. I fear they will both fall into a pit and simply wish to warn. Why not remove the blinders and simply follow the Bible? Follow God and God alone, leaning on His word as you grow in your understanding of it. Then and only then can we be near God.

Conclusion:

Throughout this lesson, I have assumed your sins have already been washed away by Jesus’ blood. However, we need to back up and speak to those whose sins have not been forgiven. **Hebrews 7:19** says we can only draw near to God through the better hope of the better covenant of Jesus Christ, enacted on better promises (**Hebrews 8:6**). Jesus is the mediator of the covenant. His sacrifice was the true sacrifice that really provides forgiveness of sins, without which we cannot draw near to God. **Hebrews 10:10** says we are sanctified through the offering of Jesus Christ. Jesus said in **John 14:6**, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” Therefore, if you have not submitted to Jesus Christ, follow what God revealed in **Hebrews 10:19-22**. Draw near to God through the blood of Jesus Christ, allowing His blood to sprinkle your conscience clean, while your body is washed with the pure water of baptism into Jesus Christ (**cf. Acts 2:38**). Without this, you may be very religious, know a lot of Bible and talk a lot about God, but you cannot come near to God.