

Discover A Relationship With God Through Jesus Christ.

The core message of Christian Spirituality is that we can have a relationship with God our creator. Not only that, but because God is our creator, it is profoundly important that we have a good relationship with him. If we truly are creatures made by God, life will only find its ultimate purpose in relation to God. We must be what we are created to be. If we are truly creatures, then our truest priority is to live a God centered life.

Hebrews 11:6

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Important Principle in Christian Spirituality:

Before we can have a relationship with God, we must believe that such a relationship is a priority, in fact that it is the greatest priority in life.

Discussion Questions:

Explain why it is either difficult or easy for you to accept that the highest priority in life is to earnestly seek after God.

If a relationship with God is important, do you believe that God has a mostly positive attitude towards you, or a mostly negative one? What reasons can you give for your response?

As Christians, we gain our information about God and our relationship with God from the scriptures. In the scriptures we see two important lines of truth. On the one hand we see that God is profoundly angry with humanity, but paradoxically on the other hand, he has a deep and passionate love for all people. Lets explore the anger and love of God.

Our Problem: God’s Anger With Our Sin

The Bible is clear that all people have sinned and that God’s justice demands punishment for this sin. This is summarized by the following two verses in Romans.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, ...

Many of us have not committed any heinous sins such as murder or adultery. In the eyes of society, we are probably more or less good citizens. This may lead us to conclude that in God’s eyes we are mostly good. Perhaps our attitude would change if we understood more clearly the nature of sin.

To Sin is to Reject God:

At its core, sin is the failure to honor God as God. It is placing something else in the position of supreme value in your life. This could be money, sex, family, your own ambitions or anything else. Consider the attitudes described here in 2 Timothy 3:2-4

“People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, ... not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”

As such, sin could be described as spiritual unfaithfulness towards God. It is as if our true love ought to be God, but we have rejected him to love other things. Therefore the reason that God is angry with sin is the same reason a husband would be angry with his wife if she cheated on him.

To Sin is to Disobey God:

We all have an inborn sense of what is right and just. This standard of goodness is defined by the character of God. Sin is failure to meet the standard of God’s moral law. These standards cover not only right actions, but also right thoughts and motivations.

Interestingly, one does not have to be familiar with God’s standard in order to recognize their own guilt. We do not even live up to our own standards let alone God’s. When we judge others and then do the same things ourselves. This shows us that we have a God given sense of right and wrong, which we invariably fail to keep.

Romans 2:1-3

“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. 2 Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. 3 So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?”

Important Principle in Christian Spirituality:

Because of our sin, we in fact have a broken relationship with God. The first step is restoring this relationship requires us to humbly accept the fact that we are sinners and that we are under the judgment of God for rejecting him and breaking his moral law.

Discussion Questions:

Is it difficult for you to accept the idea that God is angry with you for your sin? How does this make you feel?

What do you think you could do to resolve God’s anger and pay for your sins?

God's Solution: God's Love for Us is Expressed in Jesus Christ.

It is important to note that we cannot solve the problem of sin for ourselves. It is a very popular notion to believe that by doing good deeds, we can somehow outweigh our shortcomings and endear ourselves to God. This is impossible, because our sinful minds are hostile to God and even our so-called good deeds are done for selfish purposes. It is important to realize that rather than earning our salvation, we must rather receive it as a gift of God's grace. Only God can solve the problem of sin.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Fortunately for us, God's attitude towards us is not entirely negative. While he is angry with us for our sin, he also deeply loves us as his creatures. Because of this great love, he has graciously provided a way for us to find forgiveness so that we might have a right relationship with him. This love for us is expressed to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ Demonstrates God's Love For Us

The primary way in which we see God's love is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gave up his life for us, so that we might receive forgiveness.

Romans 5:8

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Even though we are sinful and have rejected God, God sent his son to come and die for us. Knowing that there was no way for us to save ourselves, God took it upon himself to provide a way for our salvation. That salvation was achieved through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Death of Jesus Christ Makes Possible a Positive Relationship with God:

You might ask why it was necessary for Christ to die? The answer is that Jesus died as our substitute. God was angry with us, because of our sin, so Jesus satisfied that anger by taking the penalty for our sin, which according to Romans 6:23 was death. Jesus Christ has removed God's anger, because his death satisfied God's justice. God's justice said that sin must be punished. Jesus Christ took that punishment, so that we did not have to be punished. The judgment and punishment that we deserved was freely received by Jesus. Jesus, being God, lived a perfect life and did not deserve death, but he gave his life up for us. Because he did not deserve death, he did not die for his own sins, but

rather the sins of everyone else. His life had infinite value and could operate as sufficient payment. Because of his great love and grace, he became our substitute.

Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity [sin] of us all.

2 Corinthians 5:21

God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Imagine that you owed a debt that you could not possibly pay. This is just like our situation before God. Our sin has caused such an offense to God that no amount of good deeds can erase. Imagine further that a rich friend, because of his great love for you, paid that debt on our behalf. That is just like what Christ has done for us. He paid for our sin, only in this case the price was his very life.

Because Christ made the payment for our guilt, we are declared innocent. The Bible calls this justification. To be justified is to be declared innocent, to be forgiven. Whereas death was the punishment for sin, eternal life is the blessing we receive from Christ.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This eternal life is secured for us, because Christ was raised from the dead. God showed that he accepted Jesus' death as payment for sin, by raising him from the dead. And because Jesus was raised, we can have hope for eternal life.

Important Principle in Christian Spirituality:

We must put aside all attempts to please God by our own efforts and gratefully accept that it is only through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we can receive forgiveness and enter into a right relationship with God.

Discussion Questions

Can you accept the fact that Jesus is your substitute, that his death paid for your sins?

How is Christ's death an expression of both God's justice and God's love?

Our Response: Reaching out to God in Faith

The benefits of Christ's death and resurrection are not automatically applied to all people. For Christ to be your substitute, you need to receive him as your substitute. You must accept the gift which he offers. We receive this gift of eternal life through faith.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

The grace of God gives us what we do not deserve. This gracious gift must be received through faith. If faith is so important, what exactly is it?

Faith is the commitment of the whole person to God. It recognizes one's own sinfulness and inability and then surrenders to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Faith could be likened to entering a relationship with God. Faith is the full embrace of our problem and God's solution.

Saving Faith Includes Repentance:

Faith includes embracing our problem of sin. This recognition of our sin will lead to repentance. Repentance means letting go of sin and self and turning to God. Whereas sin is a rejection of God, repentance is a rejection of sin. Repentance is more than saying sorry, for it implies a turning away from sin and turning to God.

Luke 5:32

[Jesus said] I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

One must not only believe they are a sinner, but have an honest heartfelt sorrow for their sin and a desire to turn away from it.

Take for example the prayer of the tax collector in Luke 18:13, which Jesus commended as a prayer which brought salvation

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

Saving Faith Includes Believing

Faith includes the definite belief that our hope rests in Jesus Christ. Faith is much more than mere intellectual belief, but it does require that we believe that salvation is found in Jesus Christ. Having come to this belief, however, one must then willingly depend on

Christ. The Bible usually sums all this up in the idea of believing in Jesus or Receiving Jesus or Trusting in Jesus.

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 1:12

Yet to all who received him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

Having faith in Jesus means renouncing our own efforts to please God and depending totally on the work of Jesus. Faith is surrender. It is the exact opposite of attempting to earn God’s love and favor. It is a willingness to receive what Christ has done for you. Faith is a willingness to lay hold of the promise of God that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Faith Results in Obedience:

Faith is not a single decision, or a momentary act. Faith must persevere. We must continue to trust God. Faith that does not lead to obedience is not true faith. True faith results in purposing to follow Jesus and through the power of the Spirit to live a life of obedience. This does not mean perfection, rather it is the desire to continue to fight sin and depend on God to transform us. This is the ongoing expression of faith.

James 2:14-17

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Thankfully, as we trust in Christ, he lives in us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in our life and he empowers us to obey God and live a life that pleases him. The good life is like fruit, which is produced within us as we submit to the power of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.

Faith could be described as a wedding that is followed by a marriage. At one point we commit ourselves to Christ, just as a bride and groom commit themselves at a wedding service. But just as a marriage relationship follows a wedding, we continue with Christ after we come to faith in him.

A person can begin a relationship with Jesus and find forgiveness through a heartfelt prayer which expresses repentance and trust in Christ. A sample prayer would be:

Lord Jesus, I am sorry for the way I have ignored you and done many wrong things with my life. Please forgive me. Thank you that you died on the cross for me so that I could be forgiven. Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit to be with me forever. Help me to live a life that pleases you. Amen.

Important Principle in Christian Spirituality:

We enter a right relationship with God repenting of sin and placing our faith in Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

How would you describe faith in your own words?

What is the difference between having faith in Jesus and having knowledge about Jesus?

Is there anything stopping you from placing your faith in Jesus?