

Draw Near in Perfection
February 17, 2013

We Christians do not live under the old testament covenant (this use of the word testament means covenant) that God had formed with the Israelites. That means we are not under the commands God gave them to obey. We live under the new covenant, through Jesus, and are responsible for His commands. So many people wonder why we read the Old Testament. **Why bother with the Old Testament?**

Let me give you five quick answers to that question.

1) There are life lessons to learn from the history there.

1 Corinthians 10:11 (NIV) These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

2) We learn the purposes and values of God from the commands He gave them. For example, we learn that God cares how the poor are treated.

3) We learn the character of God from His actions. God kept all His promises to Israel. So we learn that God is faithful.

4) We understand the New Testament cultural and religious context more fully. For example, in the New Testament, we see that people were hoping that the promised Messiah would show up during their lifetime. Many thought Jesus might be the Messiah, but were not sure because He did not do what they expected the Messiah to do. Their expectations of the Messiah were based on promises God made to the Israelites through His prophets in the Old Testament.

5) We understand the substitutionary atonement of Christ more clearly. Many of the books of the New Testament, especially Matthew, Romans, and Hebrews, draw on information from the Old Testament. They use this information to teach the significance of Jesus' death on the cross.

With that reminder of why we read the old testament, look with me at one short event from Leviticus.

Leviticus 10:1-3 (NIV) Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before Yahweh, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of Yahweh and consumed them, and they died before Yahweh.

Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what Yahweh spoke of when he said: "Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored."

There are several truths we need to understand from this event. The first is that God is holy. We looked at the holiness of God last week. The holiness of God refers to how different from us God is. God is different from us in almost every way. Some examples include the following. He is uncreated, while we are created. He is infinite while we are finite. He knows all things and controls all power while we are limited in both knowledge and power. God is holy, separated from us by His very nature.

The second thing we need to learn from this event is that we cannot take liberties with God that He has not authorized. God is holy, and you cannot treat Him as if He is common. You cannot treat Him as if it doesn't matter in what manner, or in what condition, you approach Him.

Leviticus 10:10-11 (NIV) *(God speaking to Aaron) "You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees Yahweh has given them through Moses."*

Those decrees differentiated between holy and common, clean and unclean. A person had to be clean in order to approach God in worship. What they used to worship with had to be clean. And if you were unclean the decrees told you how to get clean.

Any person, under most conditions, can approach the common. Not just anyone can approach the holy. There are special rules for approaching the holy. There is special protocol for approaching the holy. If you break protocol you will be seen as a stubborn, sinful, rebellious person. You might even lose your life for treating the holy as if it, or He, is common.

With such a heavy emphasis on the Holiness of God, the danger of approaching God, you might think the message God was sending was to back off from God. But the opposite was true. While they had to be careful to obey the O.T. commands and approach God correctly, they were still invited to approach God. God wanted His people to approach Him. He wanted them to draw near. He wanted them to draw near for cleansing from sin. He wanted them to draw near for fellowship. He wanted them to draw near in worship.

Here is the spiritual principle for us. **God is holy, so do not approach Him as if He is just anyone.** This spiritual principle is not just Old Testament. It applies to us too, because God is still holy. God must still be approached as if He is holy.

Even now we must approach God as if He is special. Even now we must not approach God with common righteousness. Let me explain.

We are all good people. We are all commonly good. We are all average good, maybe even above average good, above average righteousness. But this is still common righteousness. We all have common righteousness.

People who work at their marriages and try to be good parents are respected by others. This is common righteousness. People who work for a living and do their jobs well are said to be good workers. This is common righteousness. People who pay their taxes and obey the laws of the land are called good citizens. This is common righteousness.

Common righteousness keeps you off the police radar, off the court's docket, out of the IRS's scrutiny, off the Social Services agenda, and off the neighborhood association's watch list. Common righteousness is what most people have. It wins you common respect, common dignity, common privileges.

But common righteousness is not good enough to approach the Holy God. To approach the holy God, to enter His kingdom, you need a holy righteousness. You need a righteousness that is better than the best.

The Pharisees had above average righteousness. They were more righteous than most people. Yet, their righteousness wasn't good enough to enter the kingdom of heaven. Look at what Jesus said about them.

Matthew 5:20 (NIV) *For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Why does Jesus say this? He says it because the standard for entering the Kingdom of God (heaven) is so high. It was higher than the righteousness needed to relate to God under the old covenant.

If the Pharisees were the best of the best, how can we be better than them? The truth is, we can't. We have no hope of being better than they were. We need a different righteousness, from a different source, if we are to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, **Only perfect righteousness will get you into the Kingdom of God/Heaven.**

None of us have perfect righteousness. Our righteousness falls short of what is needed to enter the Kingdom of God. Our only hope is that God will extend someone else's perfect righteousness to us. That is exactly what God has done through Jesus.

The only one with perfect righteousness is Jesus. We need His righteousness to enter the Kingdom of God. This is exactly what God offers us through Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

This verse tells us the purpose of Jesus' coming, the purpose of His death on the cross, the purpose of putting our faith in His death. God's promise is that Jesus' holy, perfect righteousness is applied to us as we put our trust in Jesus' death and resurrection. This is the righteousness of God. This is the righteousness needed to draw near to God.

This righteousness is not earned by sinful people. It was only earned by Jesus. But it can be given to us by God as a gift. This is what God does when we put our faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. We put our faith (trust) in His death as the full penalty for our sin.

The very righteousness we need with which to enter the Kingdom of God is a gift from God, not by our working for it. None of us is able to earn such a righteousness. No amount of religious activity, good works, or self-sacrifice can earn us the needed righteousness. We can only receive this righteousness from another, from Jesus. It is a free gift from God if you will put your faith in Jesus and receive Him as your Savior and Lord. It is your faith in Jesus, your trust in His death, with which you can approach the Holy God and ask to be part of His Kingdom. Jesus has paid the price for you to enter the Kingdom of God.

God so loves us that He made all of this possible. He involved Himself in our world by sending Jesus to us.

Last week I gave you a big theological word, transcendence. The transcendence of God means God is not part of the creation. God is outside of the creation.

Today, let me give you the flip side. **We speak of the transcendence of God. We also speak of the immanence of god.** God is not part of His creation, but God is intimately involved in His creation. God did not create the universe and then sit back and watch it go. **God is intimately**

involved in His creation. God has invited each of us to seek Him, to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him. The immanence of God makes this possible.

God involved Himself in this world. He made Himself known in this world. He revealed Himself to Adam and Eve. He revealed Himself to Abraham. He revealed Himself to the Israelites. He reveals Himself to us through Jesus, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit.

(Invitation)

Today, God is revealing Himself to you. Today, He is calling you to believe His promise of entering His Kingdom through faith in Jesus. Believe that Jesus died for your sins. Receive Jesus as your Savior, and turn your life over to Him as your Lord. And the righteousness of Jesus will be applied to your soul. Your sins will be forgiven and you will inherit eternal life.

Draw near to God in the perfect righteousness of Jesus.