

ENJOYING GOD

Some people are easier to enjoy being with than others. The people we enjoy being with the most are those who love and accept us just as we are. They don't view us with a judgmental eye; they don't try to manipulate us or make us feel guilty. They are not "high-maintenance," requiring our unending efforts to maintain the relationship. They neither envy nor pity us, but are content to be our friends no matter our station in life. May I propose that God is just such a friend?

The Westminster Catechism says that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. It does not say it is to worship God and serve Him; nor does it say to fear God and obey Him forever. It says the thing God wants most for his human creatures is that they glorify Him and enjoy being with Him.

God does, in fact, love us despite the fact that we are sinners who are completely incapable of making ourselves acceptable to Him. He demonstrated this love "in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Jesus' death removed the barrier of sin that separated us from God; His perfect life is now how God sees as acceptable those who belong to Christ.

God is the righteous and holy Judge, before whom no one will offer any excuses. As Hebrews 10:30-31 says, "For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the Living God." Yet because Jesus knew He would take the wrath of God against all sin, He was able to say, "He who hears My word and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). God's righteous judgment was executed against His Son, and so He no longer looks at Christ's people with a judgmental eye, but with love and compassion.

Knowing how utterly sinful we are and how great a price Jesus paid to purchase our forgiveness seems like it ought to increase our sense of guilt. But from the very beginning of His ministry Jesus declared His mission to be "to bring good news to the afflicted . . . to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners" (Isa. 61:1, Luke 2:18). And later He said, "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). The Old Testament sacrificial system, while it pictured the sacrifice of Christ, was incomplete, that is, it did not really take away people's sins, but was a constant reminder to them that they were sinful (see Heb. 10:1-18). Jesus offered Himself as one sacrifice for sins for all time (v. 10, 12) and consequently God does not remember our sins against us any more (v.17). That is the truth and that is true freedom from guilt.

If ever there were a perfect example of "high maintenance relationships," the sacrificial system was it. I've often wondered how the Jews of old had time to do much of anything else besides bring their offerings and sacrifices. In contrast to this, the only thing we need to do to maintain our relationship with God is to continue to trust Him and do what He says. While this is not always an easy thing to do, it does get to the heart of matters more effectively than symbolic acts.

The Bible's positive admonitions to good works and personal transformation may be summarized by Eph. 2:10. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." And 2 Cor. 9:8, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." Whatever God calls us to do, whether outward good works toward others or inward cooperating with His Spirit in our own sanctification, we may be sure He will provide the grace to do it.

God knows how frail we are, how incapable we are of being "perfect, as our Heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Our sin is abhorrent to Him. Yet in His compassion, He accepts our weaknesses, delighting to work in and through such lowly creatures to demonstrate His character to the world and bring glory to Himself. "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things that are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that he may nullify the things that are" (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

Because of Jesus' perfect life, sacrificial death, resurrection, and ascension to make continual intercession for us before the Father, we can know we are loved, forgiven, reconciled to God, saved from His wrath, bathed in His love, showered with His grace, and promised an eternal inheritance with Christ. What's not to enjoy about that?

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