

Spiritual Progress Requires a Right Attitude

Part 2 Spiritual Familiarity

Scriptures 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13 & 15

Background

Both scriptures above give account of David's initial unsuccessful attempt to bring the Ark of God to Jerusalem. Contrary to God's law and instructions, the Ark was transported on a cart pulled by oxen. On the way the oxen stumbled and one of the drivers called Uzza, put his hand out to steady the ark and God struck him down dead. David was angry and too afraid of God to move the Ark any further and so left it nearby in safe keeping for three months.

Later after the Levite priests sanctified themselves the Ark of God was successfully brought up to Jerusalem. This time the priests carried in accordance with God's law and they came to Jerusalem with great rejoicing. There are some very deep and real spiritual lessons for us to pray-fully consider from these wonderful passages.

Familiarity

It is clear that initially David and his men were dealing with the Ark of God with familiarity and not according to God's instructions. In this article we shall consider the subject of spiritual familiarity.

When we start to think about familiarity the well-known saying "Familiarity breeds contempt" immediately comes to mind. This phrase is often attributed to Publilius Syrus, a Latin writer of mimes in the 1st century B.C. The meaning of the saying is that extensive knowledge or close association with something or someone leads to a loss of respect.

A dictionary definition for familiarity is "inappropriate informality or intimacy". Oxford Dictionary

These are not useful when considering spiritual familiarity as it only applies relate to a human, worldly perspective and does not take into consideration the awesome holiness, power and authority of God.

God's Holiness cannot be compromised. Intimacy with him has always been and always will be, on his terms and by his chosen methods.

The following examples in the scriptures make it clear that God will protect himself from inappropriate attempts at intimacy.

After the fall, Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden. God set Angels and a flaming sword at the entrance so that man could not turn and re-enter. Gen 3v24

Men using their own method and strength built the tower of Babel in an attempt to obtain greater closeness to the Almighty. However God confounded their language and put a stop to their attempt. Gen 11v7

Under the Old Covenant, when God called Moses and Aaron to meet with him on the Mount Sinai. The people of Israel were told not to touch the mountain lest God breakout against them. Exodus 19v24.

God sent his son Jesus Christ to make a New Covenant and this has made a way for a new wonderful place of intimate son-ship with God by the spiritual New Birth. There is now the potential for unprecedented spiritual intimacy with God by the indwelling Holy Spirit. However in the New Covenant God is all the more careful to deny inappropriate closeness with himself.

The Holy Spirit who is altogether Holy, cannot and will not, allow inappropriate intimacy with God.

The Holy Spirit is very much like the Angel at the entrance of the Garden of Eden, denying access to inappropriate attempts at intimacy with the Almighty. This may have very fundamental implications for our spiritual lives.

Spiritual familiarity is not inappropriate familiarity with God; its intimacy with something we think is God but is not.

The question for us all is what are we becoming intimate with? Are we intimate with our own religious thoughts, feelings and emotions, dressed up to be the working of the Holy Spirit or are we increasingly intimate with a Holy God?

A danger for the modern church is that people may be directed and drawn into many forms of outward religious signs, spiritual words, miracles, works and activity but not the reality. In effect having a form of religious belief and activity but not the inward change of character and spirit.

Christ states in Matthew 7v22.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you.

The clear implication is that Jesus is describing people who think they have intimacy with God but he says he never knew them. The word *many* in Matt 7v22 means a multitude, or a large apart of mankind. Intimacy with some form of religiousness rather than the Holy God may be much more common than we would like to think.

What is very clear is familiarity can be dressed up to be Christian.. Jesus states people would be prophesying, casting out devils and doing wonderful works in his name, but he never knew them.

Where Jesus states, “he never knew them” the root of the word “knew” means “never had any acquaintance”. (Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon.) This does not describe people who have drifted away from Jesus and become spiritually cold, but rather those who had never been brought into the true “new birth” in the Holy Spirit. The Root of spiritual familiarity is a unchanged nature and spirit.

What are the indicators of Spiritual Familiarity?

1. Familiarity often has a strong religious delusional element, believing it is in a place with God and pleasing him but is not.
2. Familiarity tends to put an over emphasis on the external signs, gifts, emotions and words rather than the inner character of Christ being formed in us.

3. A spiritual attitude that is always looking for God's blessings to the exclusion of his discipline and cross is a good indicator of familiarity.
4. Familiarity wants to dictate to God, restricting His responses to those which agree with our set of spiritual rules and religious experiences.
5. Familiarity follows its own thoughts, notions and methods dressed up to be leadings, from the Holy Spirit. There is "religious thinking" but not "God thinking".
6. Familiarity has a strong tendency to try and control external things rather than trusting God, embracing external circumstances as being allowed by him.

Indications of Spiritual Intimacy

1. We have a peace about whatever circumstances God allows in our lives.
2. There is a continuing increase of Christ's character and nature in us as we go on in our spiritual walk in him. Character and Spirit are intrinsically linked.

Spiritual Challenges

- Christ has opened a way to bring us into a real intimacy of son ship with God through the Spiritual New Birth. May we never settle for anything less.
- God search out any familiarity in our heart that comes from an unchanged nature and spirit. Only Gods Spirit and Nature in us can have intimacy with God.
- God "break out" and destroy any man made religious thing in us that may be a substitute for the real intimacy with the Living God.