

HOW TO APPROACH AN OFFENDED GOD

63 ⁷I will speak of the lovingkindnesses of Jehovah, [I will sing] the praises of Jehovah, as is fitting, because of all Jehovah has done for us—the great goodness [he has shown] toward the house of Israel, [the great goodness] he has bestowed upon them in accordance with his mercies and in accordance with the multitude of his lovingkindnesses. ⁸He said, Surely, they are my people, children who shall not lie [to me]; so he became their Savior. ⁹In all their anguish, he, too, felt anguish, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. ¹⁰But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore, he turned and became their enemy—he himself fought against them. ¹¹Then he remembered the days of old, [the time of] Moses [and] his people. Where is he who brought them through the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who put his Holy Spirit in their midst? ¹²[Where is he] who caused his glorious arm to be with Moses' right hand? [He] who parted the waters before them, to gain for himself everlasting fame? ¹³[He] who led them through the depths as one leads] a horse through the desert, so that they would not stumble? ¹⁴Like cattle that go down into the valley, so the Spirit of Jehovah caused them to rest. This is how you led your people, to make a glorious name for yourself.

¹⁵Look down from heaven, observe from your holy and glorious habitation. Where are your zeal and your mighty acts? The yearning of your heart and your compassions are withheld from me. ¹⁶You are our Father, [even] though Abraham does not recognize us and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O Jehovah, are our Father; from everlasting your name has been, Our Redeemer. ¹⁷O Jehovah, why do you cause us to wander from your ways—[why do you] harden our hearts so that we do not fear you? Desist, for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance. ¹⁸Your holy people possessed [their inheritance] for only a short time; [but now] our enemies have trampled down your sanctuary. ¹⁹We have become like those over whom you never ruled, like those who did not bear your name.

64 Oh, [Jehovah] [I pray] that you would tear open the heavens, that you would come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—²like fire kindles the brushwood, like fire causes water to boil—[come down] to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake at your presence! ³When you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains quaked at your presence. ⁴From ancient times no one has [known about]—no ear has heard [of], no eye has seen—any God besides you, [a God] who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. ⁵You hold fellowship with the one who rejoices in the practice of righteousness, [you hold fellowship with] those who remember you by [observing] your ways. But you were angry [with us], because we sinned; for a long time we have [continued] in [our sins]. How can we be saved?

⁶All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. All of us shrivel up like a leaf; and, like the wind, our iniquities sweep us away. ⁷There is no one who calls on your name, [no one] who arouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us over to the clutches of our iniquities. ⁸Yet, O Jehovah, you are our Father; we are the clay and you are our Potter—all of us are the work made by your hand. ⁹Do not be exceedingly

angry with us, O Jehovah, and do not remember our iniquity forever. Oh, look, we pray, consider that we are all your people! ¹⁰Your holy cities have become a wilderness. Zion has become a wilderness; Jerusalem [has become] a desolate place. ¹¹Our holy and beautiful temple, [the place] where our fathers praised you, has been burned with fire; and all that was precious to us lies in ruins. ¹²[Considering all] these things, O Jehovah, will you [still] restrain yourself? Will you keep silent and let us suffer to the fullest extent? (Isa. 63:7-64:12)

Introduction

One day some little boys were playing baseball in the parking lot of a local bank. One of them hit a ball that sailed through the big plate glass window of the bank. The window shattered with an awful sound. A shower of glass fell onto the pavement. A dozen little boys ran for home as fast as they could.

A contemporary re-play of that scene might go as follows. The little boys would band together in a support group. They would defiantly demand that the banker give them back their baseball, thereby affirming their “rights.” They would then proceed to lay the blame on the city for failing to provide adequate playground facilities, and on the sporting goods manufacturer for making the baseballs too hard.

Consider some of the responses to sin and guilt that are recorded in the Scriptures. Adam and Eve hid behind the trees:

Then they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; and the man and his wife hid themselves among the trees of the garden from the presence of Jehovah God. (Gen. 3:8)

Aaron invented a fantastic story to excuse his sin:

[The people] said to me, “Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him.” ²⁴So I told them, “Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.” Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf! (Ex. 32:23-24)

Saul re-interpreted his sin, redefining it as an act of devotion. When Samuel inquired as to why he heard the bleating of sheep when the LORD had commanded the destruction of all the Amalekites’ possessions,

Saul answered, “The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to Jehovah your God, but we totally destroyed the rest.” (1 Sam. 15:15)

What do we do when we have offended the LORD our God?

Let us consider the instructions given to us in Isaiah 63-64 as to how to approach God when we have offended Him with our sins.

I. You Must Make an Honest Confession of Sin (Isa. 64:5-7)

Isaiah testifies that the LORD is pleased with the man who does what is right and remembers the commandments by keeping them: *“You hold fellowship with the one who rejoices in the practice of righteousness, [you hold fellowship with] those who remember you by observing your ways”* (vs. 5a.) But Isaiah must confess that he and his people do not fit the description of the man whose life elicits God’s favor, *“You were angry [with us], because we sinned”* (vs. 5b.) The Hebrew conjunction, ו, which normally has the meaning “and,” also on occasion has the meaning “since” or “because,” such may be the preferable rendering here. The latter part of verse 5 contains the confession that the way of sin has now been practiced for a considerably long time: *“for a long time we have continued in our sins.”*

In verse 6 of chapter 64 Isaiah continues to make an honest confession before the LORD. *“All of us have become like one who is unclean.”* Here is the confession of universal guilt and moral pollution without exception and without excuse; note, also, Isaiah’s confession in chapter 53:6a, *“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.”* The Apostle Paul asserts, *“all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God”* (Rom. 3:23.) Isaiah goes on to confess, *“All of us shrivel up like a leaf; and, like the wind, our iniquities sweep us away.”* Here is the confession that we are overpowered by our sins and swept away by them, as the Lord Jesus declares, *“I tell you the truth, Every one who commits sin is the slave of sin”* (Jn. 8:34.)

When we have offended God, we must approach Him with an honest confession of sin. Consider the experience of David:

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long; ⁴for day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. ⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to Jehovah”— and you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Psl. 32:3-5)

Consider the example of the Prodigal Son, the son declares,

I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you ... ²⁰So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (Lk. 15:18,20)

Consider the testimony of 1 John 1:8-9,

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 Jn. 1:8-9)

II. You Must Appeal to the LORD's Covenant Mercy (Isa. 63:7-19; 64:8-12)

In chapter 63:7-9 Isaiah looks back to the Exodus; the time when *"the angel of his presence saved them."* Isaiah is referring to the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, the LORD's miraculous provisions for His people in the wilderness, His bringing them to Mt. Sinai, and finally bringing them into the Promised Land of Canaan. When Isaiah reports that the LORD declared that the people of Israel would be *"children who shall not lie to me,"* the LORD is declaring **the purpose** of their salvation—the *"shall not"* has the same connotation as the *"shall not"* found in the Ten Commandments; it is declaring the divine intention as to how our lives are to be governed. Furthermore, the LORD, in uttering this declaration, is also looking to the final, finished product of His work of grace in His people, namely, devotion to Him, note, for instance, Revelation 22:3b, *"The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him."*

In verses 10-11a Isaiah recalls that in later days, when Israel rebelled and the LORD's anger was provoked against them, He remembered the Exodus and the events that followed thereafter. The LORD remembered Moses and his intercession, He remembered the fact that Israel is His people (here Isaiah seems to be specifically referring to the time when Moses interceded on behalf of the people after they had provoked the LORD by making the golden calf)—and He did not cast them away.

Reminiscing upon those past displays of pity and compassion, and the restraining of divine judgment, Isaiah implores the LORD to again remember His love for His people and to not forsake them utterly. Recalling how the LORD had previously looked down upon His people in their affliction and bondage, Isaiah beseeches Him to do so again: *"Look down from heaven"* (vs.15a.) Isaiah inquires, *"Where are your zeal and your mighty acts?"* Isaiah questions, "Has the LORD lost His zeal for His people?" Isaiah's question is not one of doubt; rather it is intended to move the LORD to once again display His zeal for His people. Isaiah is bold to complain to the LORD, *"the yearning of your heart and your compassions are withheld from me."* He is protesting and pleading that the LORD is not allowing His compassion to flow forth and move Him to act on behalf of His people.

In verses 16-17 Isaiah reminds the LORD of the relationship that exists between Himself and His people, a relationship that is in jeopardy. *"You, O Jehovah, are our Father; from everlasting your name has been, Our Redeemer."* That is to say, continuously since the time of the Exodus, the LORD has shown Himself to be a

compassionate father to Israel and a faithful redeemer; indeed, in His eternal counsel and purposes, the LORD ever assumed the role of redeemer of His chosen covenant people.

Isaiah goes on to inquire, *“O Jehovah, why do you cause us to wander from your ways—[why do you] harden our hearts so that we do not fear you?”* The people’s departure from the LORD caused Him in holy indignation to depart from them. This divine withdrawal in turn “caused” the people to indulge themselves in their sins, because the divine restraint of holy fear caused by the LORD’s immediate presence was removed. There then followed a judicial hardening of the peoples’ hearts—as a form of judgment, by withdrawing His restraints, the LORD was in effect consigning the people to walk in the way they had determined to take, the way of sin, which ultimately leads to condemnation. When there is persistent defiance against God’s commandments and the stubborn hardening of the heart against God, there eventually comes the divine judgment of God hardening the heart in the way of sin, giving the sinner over to the unrestrained pursuit of his sins. Such was the case with Pharaoh. After having hardened his heart against God, God eventually undertook the divine judgment of hardening Pharaoh’s heart, confirming him in the way that he himself had persistently and defiantly chosen.

Now we hear Isaiah pleading with the LORD, *“Desist, for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance.”* When the LORD withdraws His immediate presence, men lose their fear of God; conversely, when the LORD draws near, men acutely experience the fear of God; note Isaiah 33:14, *“The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless ones. [They ask,] Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burning?”* Such is the reaction when the LORD reveals Himself and makes known His holy presence. As noted, when the people remove their hearts from God, the LORD responds by removing His presence from them. When the restraint of God’s holy presence is removed, the people, without the fear of God before their eyes, become hardened in their sinful conduct and are “caused” to depart from the ways of God. In the latter part of verse 17 Isaiah is imploring the LORD to reverse this damnable process for the sake of His people—because they are His *“servants”* (i.e.; His possession, they belong to Him) and they are His *“inheritance”* (i.e.; His treasure.)

In verses 18-19 Isaiah points the LORD to the deplorable state of His land and His people. God’s people have been removed from the inheritance, and the LORD’s sanctuary has been trampled down. God’s holy people (those who have been called to be His own possession and to possess His holy character) are no longer distinguishable from the people of the world—like the surrounding nations, they, too, were carried away by the Babylonians (who served as the instrument of God’s) to judgment and punishment. Isaiah is imploring the LORD to act because the great work of redemption and the fulfillment of its purpose are in danger of being nullified—if God’s people are not restored, they will finally

suffer the same fate as those who are eternally lost. Thus, throughout this passage Isaiah is appealing to the LORD to act on the basis of His covenant mercy and faithfulness.

When we have offended God, we must appeal to His covenant mercy and faithfulness. Just as Isaiah looked back to the Exodus, and pleaded with the LORD on the basis of that great act of redemption, so we must look back to Calvary and appeal to the LORD on the basis of Christ's act of redemption. Our prayer must be: "Father, Your Son's sacrificial death has satisfied Your justice and has paid the price, so that I may receive forgiveness. Now Father, restore me, so that the purpose of Christ's redemptive work can be accomplished; namely, to make me Your own possession as a holy child and faithful servant forever."

Conclusion

How do you approach an offended God? In answer to that question, this passage of Scripture instructs us as follows: when we have offended the LORD our God by our sins, 1) we must approach Him with honesty; and 2) we must appeal to His covenant mercy and faithfulness. The fourth chapter of Hebrews instructs us, indeed, exhorts us with these words: *"Since we have a great high priest ... Jesus, the Son of God ... let us ... approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy"* (Heb. 1:14-16.)