

In the Presence of God

Psalm 41:12 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹² *As for me, You uphold me in my integrity,
And You set me in Your presence forever.*

Introduction

You are about to hear a rerun of a sermon that I had preached six years ago. This past week, I read through it, and it was still sound and good. However, I made some revisions and improvements for clarity and simplicity. So, you are about to hear a ‘new and improved’ sermon on the topic of “In the Presence of God.”

If you have one wish you would ask for from God, what would that be? Don’t ask for small stuff. Wish big. Choose one wish that will trump all other earthly wishes. Also, don’t choose one that matters only in this life. Choose one that will last forever and benefit you eternally. What would it be?

To me that wish is this: I want to be in the presence of God forever. As King David prayed, I would ask the Lord, “Please, ***set me in Your presence forever***” (Psalm 41:12).

Come to think of it, all the things that we do as a believer in Christ boil down to one aim we have: to be in the presence of God for eternity. We do the following:

- We believe in Jesus’ name.
- We repent and are baptized.
- We forgive and even love our enemies.
- We receive and walk in the Holy Spirit.
- We keep Jesus’ commandments.
- We read the Bible/pray/worship/serve/do good/stay away from evil.

We do all the above so that we may be in the presence of God. Forever.

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You may already know what it means to be in the presence of God but let me tell you what I mean by “being in the presence of God” so that we may stay on the same page. English phrase “in the presence of God” is a direct translation of Hebrew expression “before

the face of God.” So, may I say, to be in the presence of God means to stand before God or see God face-to-face (Genesis 32:30---Jacob said that he saw God face-to-face).

Simply put, to be in God’s presence means to ‘be in fellowship with God.’ What’s that mean to be in fellowship with God? It means being a friend of God. By the way, what do we do with our friends? We love to be with them. We get together/dine together/talk and listen to each other/have fun together/cry together/suffer together.... We are being there for each other. So, being in fellowship with God, we do all these things above together with God. Furthermore, there are lots of benefits when we are in fellowship with God: we have rest, joy, peace, love, righteousness, wisdom, self-control, strength, confidence, and courage. The list goes on.

I must say, we are truly blessed with the fellowship with God in Jesus. It wasn’t so from the beginning, though. In other words, before we became a believer in Christ, we were living in sin and had no peace with God. The Bible puts it, we all were enemies of God (Romans 5:10). However, we became reconciled with God through Christ who died for our sins (Romans 5:10). Our peace with God was restored when we confessed our sins and received forgiveness in Jesus. From then on, we have fellowship with God. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39).

However, beware of dangers out there lurking on us to destroy our friendship (fellowship) with God. I would call those things “Fellowship Breakers.” These fellowship breakers at first don’t look too harmful to destroy our fellowship with God. However, unless we are careful, little by little, they will chip off our fellowship with God. We will drift away from God without even realizing it. Unless checked and corrected periodically, they will eventually result in our removal from God’s presence. Consider what happened to the Israelites (2 Kings 17:7-20): *because of their evil ways before the LORD*, they lost their fellowship with Him, and were removed from God’s presence. What caused them to get to that point? The evil things that they sold themselves to for centuries. They yielded themselves to their fleshly desires so as to disobey God.

These are the things they did and grieved God: stubborn heart to begin with that led to rebellion against God. Their unbelief/idolatry/arrogance/rejection of God’s commands/divination/enchantments surely provoked God to anger. Basically, whatever grieves the Lord and whatever provokes God to anger (we call sin) are detrimental to our fellowship with the Lord. Left unchecked and un-repented for a long time, they can cost us the presence of the Lord in our lives both in this life and in the life to come.

Think about the people of Israel who lost their privilege of being in the presence of God once again. Don't think that God didn't give them second or third chance to repent or the LORD has not been patient with them. On the contrary, He has been long suffering with them since Exodus. Here's the timeline for you to consider: God made a covenant with Abraham (circa 2091 B.C.), Exodus (circa 1446 B.C.), Entering the Promised Land (circa 1406 B.C.), Kingdom of Israel established (circa 1043 B.C.), Kingdom divides into two (931 B.C.), Kingdom of Israel falls (723 B.C.), Kingdom of Judah falls (586 B.C.) from which the Babylonian Captivity ensued. Between the first covenant with Abraham and the Babylonian Captivity, God has been patient with His people for almost 1,500 years. During that time, God repeatedly sent His prophets to bring His people back to Him to no avail. So, in the end, the LORD was very angry with Israel and Israel was '*removed from His presence*' (2 Kings 17:18).

Here's a lesson for us: some of us may think that our salvation in Jesus is secure *no matter what we do* even when we don't repent our willful sin against God. Some of us may be falsely assured that once salvation is given to us, we never lose it even when we walk in darkness or remain in sin un-repent. For instance, let's say I have not forgiven someone in my life for a long time, and I don't plan to. I know I am to obey the Lord's command by forgiving, yet I have not (and still I don't want to). That's a willful sin (knowing the right thing to do and not doing it--James 4:17). Let's further say that the Holy Spirit repeatedly convicted me that I need to repent of my disobedience to the Lord. If my unwillingness to forgive is bad enough, the refusal to repent is far dangerous because it will cost me eternal life—the life in God's presence for eternity.

Consider this: God loves us and invites us to be in His presence forever through Jesus. In His presence, Jesus/the angels of the Lord/apostles/saints are already there. They are waiting for us to join. It would be a grave mistake with eternal consequences if we neglect this great invitation and privilege by our unwillingness to repent. No one wants to join the other side--Hell. Who will be there? The devil and all his followers, both spirits and humans who disobey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. By the way, they are already separated from God's presence and their fate is already sealed. It is revealed in the Bible as follows: *These people will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power* (2 Thessalonians 1:9, NASB). May we never be separated from the presence of the Lord.

I don't want to end my sermon in a down-tone. If there are "Fellowship Breakers" that threaten us on our Heaven-bound journey, there are also "Fellowship Restorers (Antidotes)" that would restore us back to the fellowship with God, even after the fellowship is broken. What are they? Repentance and humility. We must use them as soon

as we suffer from the symptoms of “Fellowship Breakers.” The Lord doesn’t despise a broken and a contrite heart (Psalm 51:17). In fact, He will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness when we confess our sins (1 John 1:9). E.g. King David (who committed adultery and murder, who was guilty of cover up) repented his grave sin in humility and was pardoned by God. His fellowship with God was broken yet restored through his humble penitence (Psalm 51:10-12): “¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹ Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. ¹² Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit” (KJV).

Conclusion

One last thing: Most of us think that being in God’s presence as a remote future possibility. However, you don’t have to die to be in the presence of God. In fact, you can experience the presence of God here and now. Let me remind you once again of the meaning of being “in the presence of God.” It is to appear before God seeing Him face-to-face. It is to enter God’s presence and look at His face without fear. It means having an audience with God one-on-one. You can do this while you are still living on earth. One way to do it is prayer.

I am about to challenge you this morning: **3-3-3**. Three minutes-three times a day-for three weeks. Starting today, take time to pray for the next three weeks, three times a day, for three minutes each time. Let me recommend three things that you do in prayer: 1. **Remember** your covenant with God. He is your Father and you’re His child. 2. **Repent** of any sin that has been detrimental to your fellowship with God. Do not leave any sin un-repented. 3. **Renew** your covenant with God by recommitting yourself to God. Offer your body as a living sacrifice and your members as instrument of righteousness to God (Romans 12:2).

Those who would like to accept this challenge, please arise to your feet. I invite you to say a prayer after me: “*Lord, I am eternally grateful for salvation through Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior. I am also grateful for the fellowship with You in Jesus. You are my Father and I am Your child. You’re my friend, too. If I have been willfully disobedient to You, please forgive me my stubbornness and arrogance. I repent all my sins. Thanks for the forgiveness. Thanks for the restored fellowship with You. Thanks for keeping me in Your presence. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*”