ARE YOU WELCOME IN HIS PRESENCE?

"It is not a question of salvation — it is a question of how a believer should live life in order to worship God."

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Welcome! "Come on in! "Make yourself at home!" These words are spoken and heard anytime friends gather, whether during the holidays or at other times of the year. As people open their homes to family and friends for gatherings and celebrations, guests normally enjoy the benefits that belong to all guests — namely food, friendship, and fellowship.

During the Christmas holidays, an analogy often is made in reference to Jesus being born in a stable. Because there was "no room in the inn," the question often is asked, "Do you have room for Jesus? Is He welcome in your life?" But this Christmas, I’d like to turn that question around. Instead of asking if God is welcome in your life, I’d like you to ask, "Are you welcome in His presence?"

What kind of man, what kind of woman does God welcome into His presence? And, most important, has the past year seen you develop in that direction? This is not a new question. It’s one that King David asked thousands of years before the birth of Christ. David too was concerned with the kind of person God would welcome, and in Psalm 15, he asked,

"O LORD, who may abide in Thy tent?\nWho may dwell on Thy holy hill?\n"Thy tent" and "Thy holy hill" speak of Israel’s special place of worship in Jerusalem. From the phrase David uses, we can see that he is asking, "What kind of person will God welcome into His presence to worship Him?"

Today we might answer by repeating simply, "A Christian, a man of God. A woman of God." Certainly, any person who has accepted Christ by faith is entirely welcome in God’s presence. But in reference to vibrant, ongoing fellowship with God, we need to go further. We need to ask, "What is that person like? How does that person live?"

Why is this so important? It’s important for two reasons. First, it deals with practical living. Interestingly, the qualities David discovers in this psalm closely correspond to the qualifications for elders and deacons as found in the New Testament books of 1 Timothy and Titus. They offer a practical description of the believer and how he should relate to the people around him. It is not a question of salvation — it is a question of how a believer should live life in order to be able to worship God.

Second, it is an important question because of the benefits of being welcome in God’s presence. In Old Testament culture, to be welcome in someone’s house meant enjoying the benefits of oriental hospitality — namely protection and sustenance.

A few years ago, a movie told the story of a young boy who went to Arabia in search of a horse that had been stolen from him. While he was there, he learned that if he told someone, "I want to be your guest," that person was obligated to take him in, feed him, and protect him. The host was responsible to sustain and protect his guests.

In Psalm 15, David asks, "Who is welcome in God’s presence? Whom will God protect and sustain?" In verse 5, he gives a threefold answer to this question. He writes:

2 He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness,
And speaks truth in his heart.
3 He does not slander with his tongue;
Nor does evil to his neighbor;
Nor takes up a reproach against his friend;
4 In whose eyes a reprobate is despised,\nBut who honors those who fear the LORD;\nHe seems to his own hurt, and does not change;
5 He does not put out his money at interest,\nNor does he take a bribe against the innocent;\nHe who does these things will never be shaken.

David’s answer has a very interesting structure to it. In verse 2, three broad characteristics describe this person. The one who is welcome in God’s presence is one who has integrity, one who does righteousness, and one who speaks truth.

Looking further along in verses 3-5, these three characteristics are explained in more detail. Verse 3 corresponds to the third quality — speaking truth; the first portion of verse 4 corresponds...
“He does not make his evaluations based on the world’s standard of success and achievement.”