

Boldness and Access with Confidence.

Ephesians 3:8-13.

Sunday, January 2, 2011.

I. Separation

The Old Covenant teaches us the separation that exists between a holy God and His sinful people. This separation is based on two characteristics of the covenant relationship between the Lord and His people.

A. The Creator – Creature distinction.

1. God, as Creator is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. Shorter Catechism Q. 4.
2. Man, as a creature, and fallen at that, although made in the image of God, is finite; he is temporal in his fallen state; and in his fallen state he is ever so changeable.

B. The Holy God – Sinful Creature distinction.

The entire Old Covenant economy spoke of the separation that existed between a holy God and His sinful people. The Lord kept everybody at arms length; some more than others. At the same time He allowed them to worship Him from a certain distance, as if to say: “You are still My people, even though I don’t want you to come too close to Me because you are sinners.”

1. All around the temple in Jerusalem was the Outer Court or the Court of the Gentiles. It was separated from the rest of the Inner temple complex by a 4.5 ft. high wall. On it was clearly posted in Hebrew, Greek and Latin that no Gentile person, or person with a physical defect, was allowed beyond this point.
2. Beyond this court was the Court of the Women. (Jewish women). It was so named because this was as far as Jewish women were allowed to go in approaching the temple.
3. In front of the Court of the Women was the Court of Israel. This is as far as Jewish men were allowed to go in approaching the Lord.
4. Each court was several feet higher than the previous one. At the top stood the temple structure proper. In front of the Court of Israel was the outer court of the temple proper. Here the priests ministered, sacrificing the offerings on the great altar, and ceremonially cleansing themselves at the great laver (basin). Here the priests alone had access with the assistance of the Levites.
5. Inside the temple was the Holy Place. Here the priests alone ministered, twice daily. It was separated from the presence of God in the Holy of Holies by a thick veil. Incense with prayer was offered in front of this veil.
6. The Holy of Holies was entered into only once a year, and only by the High priest on the day of atonement.

Besides this separation structure there were laws governing ceremonial cleanness vs. uncleanness. One had to be ceremonially clean to approach God, and there were ways to bring this about.

II. The ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in the heavenly temple.

- A. Jerusalem’s temple was an earthly copy, or illustration, of the true temple in heaven, shown to Moses on Mount Sinai. Hebrews 8:5.

- B. The last significant act of the Lord Jesus Christ, at the moment of His death, as He entered the Father's presence, going through the veil, He tore the veil in the temple of Jerusalem from top to bottom. It was 60 ft. tall, a few inches thick, and weighed thousands of pounds. It clearly was a supernatural act indicating that the veil of separation was abolished, and access to God was opened up. The book of the Revelation shows us the proceedings in the heavenly temple, and there is no veil.
- C. Not only that, but there are no walls of separation between various courts, keeping people at arms length. Christ has broken down the wall(s) of separation. Eph. 2:14. In view here is the wall keeping the Gentiles confined to the outer court.
- D. Not only that, but there are no ceremonial ordinances governing access to God. No one has an advantage over another in coming to God. This is meant in Ephesians 2:15 when it says that Christ has abolished in His flesh the law of commandments, contained in ordinances.
- E. The Lord Jesus Christ, in entering as our High Priest into the true and Heavenly temple, did two things.
 - 1. He tore the veil; He did away with it, which is what tearing the veil symbolizes. He opened up access to God.
 - 2. He leveled the "playing field" in approaching God. No one has an advantage over another anymore in coming to God. All walls and fences of separation have been torn down.

III. Boldness and access with confidence.

- A. The position of the New Covenant believer is one of inestimable privilege in the matter of access compared to the Old Covenant believer. The privilege granted to the High Priest alone, and only once a year, is ours every day privately, and corporately twice weekly every Lord's day. Have we taken this privilege for granted? Have we become unappreciative of this privilege?
- B. Notwithstanding this position of inestimable privilege, we should not assume that we may enter into the divine presence however we want.
 - 1. Notice that our text says "In whom" (That is the Lord Jesus Christ), and "With confidence through faith in Him" (The Lord Jesus Christ once more). We are still sinners, and acceptable to a Holy God only as we stand next to the Lord Jesus Christ as Mediator; dressed in his righteousness, provided by His shed blood. This is why we pray in Jesus' Name.
 - 2. It is not our agenda that we seek to advance in the divine presence. We come as servants of the Lord's agenda. Notice the prayer of Paul that follows this teaching in vss. 14-19 as an example of the Lord's agenda. Who could be consumed by his own agenda in this kind of setting?
 - 3. We enter into the divine presence in much the same way Esther entered into the presence of her husband-king. Only as he extended his golden scepter to her would she be acceptable in his sight; otherwise certain death awaited. And only standing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, having a sense of our own sin, need and unworthiness, may we expect with boldness and confidence that the Lord will reach out to us the scepter of His grace saying: "What is your petition Queen Esther? It shall be granted you; and what is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done." 1 John 5:14,15.