

God Questions: How do I relate to God?

John 3:1-5

5.12.2019

Happy Mother's Day – Ask Anything next week.

Series Intro... Today, we come to this question: “How do I relate to God?” This is an important question, but, for a lot of people, it's not the first question. People ask ...

- **Does God exist?** This is what we looked at our first week together. While we realize that we can't prove God exists, we discovered that God's existence is more than possible. It is the most believable reality based on the evidence.
- **Is God good?** There's so much evil in the world, some people are angry with God and don't want to relate to Him because they blame Him. There are lots of ways to address this question. Here's one way: The question, “Why does God allow evil to exist?” but that question really is, “Why does God allow me to exist?” I do bad things. The answer is: out of love. Love endures evil. This means God is good.

This leads us to today's question, **“How can we relate to God?”** Because if God loves us in our brokenness, He obviously wants to relate to us. So how do we relate to Him?

Today, in our text, we're going to learn how to have a relationship with God.

¹ There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Him at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform these signs You do unless God were with Him.” John 3:1-2

Nicodemus strikes up a conversation with Jesus. There are a couple of ways that Nicodemus seems to think a person can have a relationship with God.

You can have a relationship with God by being good. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. Pharisees were big on being good! This is called legalism. By ancient rabbinic counts, there were 613 laws in the OT, and the Pharisees tried to keep them all. For example...

³⁰ “Every tenth of the land's produce, grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.” Leviticus 27:30

There's a command to tithe on what the soil produces. The Pharisees took that to the extreme ...

²³ “You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin...” Matthew 23:23

They tithed on their spice rack! Now, that's not a bad thing in and of itself. However, Jesus tells a parable about a Pharisee who goes to the temple in Jerusalem to pray. He says...

¹¹ “God, I thank you that I'm not like other people – greedy, unrighteous, adulterers... ¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.” Luke 18:11-12

This is legalism at its worst. It's not that the Pharisee is big on being good. It's that he's big on being better than others. Self-righteous legalism believes God will like you more because you do better than others. Legalism needs to answer a question: **How good is good enough?** Jesus answers this question.

20 “I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:20
Their goodness was legendary! But it is not good enough! That’s why legalism doesn’t work. There’s always someone better than you ... and God is better than all of us!
45 ... be holy, because I am holy. Leviticus 11:45

You can have a relationship with God on your own terms. Nicodemus says ...

2 “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform these signs You do unless God were with Him.” John 3:2

This is flattery. He’s trying to get in good with Jesus, so he’s saying he’s honoring Jesus!
He wants Jesus to behave on his terms. **This is pluralism, whatever I believe or want, God should say and do.** We pick things we want or like from all over the place depending on our preferences. I can pick up on a little Christianity here and a little Buddhism there and a little new age mysticism over there. I’ll put them all together and they’ll all lead me to God, because, after all, all religions lead to the same place, right?
“In other words, we want to create God in our own image!”

<ILL: Conversation with a girl on an elevator> She didn’t know what to believe, so she was willing to believe in them all, but following them was another matter. She had decided that she would make her own rules! That is pluralism. That is trying to have a relationship with God on your own terms... and it isn’t even reasonable.

Back to our text, Jesus knows that Nicodemus isn’t getting it. He wants Jesus to say, “Nic, what you are doing is great!” But in the same way that Jesus isn’t afraid of our sin, He isn’t impressed by our thoughts and desires.

3 Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3

“You will not be able to see the kingdom of God and have a relationship with God unless you are born again,” Jesus says.
What does that mean?

1. Being “born again” means... Admitting what’s wrong. (contra legalism)

Jesus clarifies what He means by being “born again” when He says...

5 “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” John 3:5

In the first century, Jews were big on ceremonial washings. Jesus’ first miracle in John’s Gospel involves...

...six stone water jars had been set there for Jewish purification... John 2:6
He turns the water into wine!

The reason the Jews made such a big deal out of ritual purification is because they looked at sin as a stain. Jesus gets His language here of “water and the Spirit” from...

25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols. 27 I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow My statutes and carefully observe My ordinances. Ezekiel 36:25, 27

When Jesus tells Nicodemus that he needs to be born of water and the Spirit, He's saying, "No matter how good you may think you are, you're not perfect! You're still sinful! And you need to be washed. You need to come clean!"

Two ways to deal with sin... Covering up sin. We do this all the time!

- Flee the scene of a crime
- Manage an addiction

This is why we lie! Lying is the sin of choice to cover up sin!

Cleansing from sin. As water can cleanse you outside, Jesus can cleanse you inside by His Spirit. But that begins by showing the stain.

2. Being "born again" means... Believing what's right. (contra pluralism) Jesus has this interesting line...

¹³"No one has ascended into heaven except the One who descended from heaven —the Son of Man." John 3:13

Jesus points out that no one has gone into heaven except Him, which means, if you want to find your way to heaven, He's the only One who knows the way!

- Buddha did not come down from heaven
- Muhammad did not come down from heaven
- Confucius did not come down from heaven

Only Jesus!

<ILL: Israel trip> Jesus is the only guide to heaven who has been there and done that and so He is the only one who can assure that you make it. This is why Jesus says...

⁶"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6

You can't be born again without Jesus. You can't have a relationship with God apart from Jesus. Some people may balk and say, "That's exclusive!" Actually, it's incredibly inclusive! Here's why...

<ILL: "There's no such thing as a free lunch!"> Sometimes we really do get a free lunch ... but someone else pays! If I would have insisted on paying, I would have been told, "No!" This is what you do when you try to get to heaven without Jesus. You say...

- I want to pay with my goodness! NO Way!
- I want to pay my own way! NO way!

Jesus says, "Just let me cover it! You don't have to. You can't pay. Because I already did." When you accept that offer, that is when you're born again.

<ILL: Babies break the bank!> Jesus has taken care of EVERYTHING for our salvation. What is left for us is to trust Him like a little child. Is it any wonder He says it's like we've been born again?