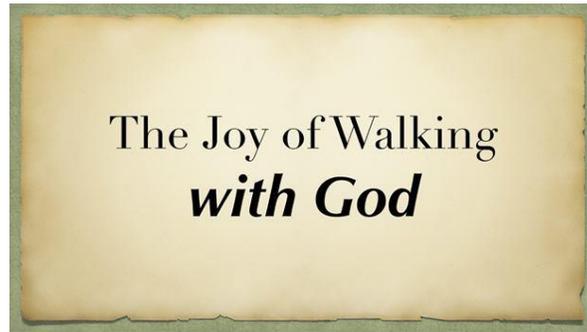


Social Justice and Walking with God



One of the most beautiful passages in the Word of God that I have cherished over many decades is

Amos 3:3, Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

The picture is of two friends, God and a believer, walking together on a journey. Life is a journey and it is walking with God that enables us to lift up, ennoble, and transcend the temporal realm. Because of His grace, we are able to live in His presence, which blesses all of life. At the end of the journey, God takes us to Himself. What a blessing.

However, there is a major problem, a major deficiency, with the way I viewed this passage. Due to my vertical view of Christianity (which is dominant in American style of Christianity), it was mostly about God and me. The "agreed" was reduced to agreeing with Him and His Word about such things as my personal sins, the nature of the true God, and a variety of orthodox beliefs.

What I failed to see until recently is that this "agreement" refers primarily to His views of social injustice. God and Amos agreed on social justice issues. In other words, this friendly relationship between God and a believer in this context is about social justice.

Amos was a prophet sent by God to denounce social injustice of Israel and her pagan neighbors to the poor, widows, orphans, and immigrants. People were living in lavish houses and furnishings all the while their vulnerable fellow human beings were living in hovels, being neglected, going hungry, and being exploited by those who had money and power.

Consider the social injustices in Amos that God had in mind that one had to agree with Him on in order to walk with God--as described by Abraham Heschel:

When Amos appeared in the North there was pride (6:13-14), plenty, and splendor in the land, elegance in the cities, and might in the palaces. The rich had their summer and winter places adorned with costly ivory (3:15), gorgeous couches with damask pillows (3:12), on which they reclined at their sumptuous feasts. They planted pleasant vineyards, anointed themselves with precious oils (6:4-6; 5:11); their women compared

by Amos to fat cows of Bashan, were addicted to wine (4:1). At the same time there was no justice in the land (3:10), the poor were afflicted, exploited, even sold into slavery (2:6-8; 5:11), and judges were corrupt (5:12). In the midst of this atmosphere arose Amos, a shepherd to exclaim:

Amos 6:1-7 Woe to you *who are* at ease in Zion, And trust in Mount Samaria, Notable persons in the chief nation, To whom the house of Israel comes! ² Go over to Calneh and see; And from there go to Hamath the great; Then go down to Gath of the Philistines. *Are you* better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory? ³ *Woe to you* who put far off the day of doom, Who cause the seat of violence to come near; ⁴ Who lie on beds of ivory, Stretch out on your couches, Eat lambs from the flock And calves from the midst of the stall; ⁵ Who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, *And* invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; ⁶ Who drink wine from bowls, And anoint yourselves with the best ointments, But are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph [did not care about needy fellow Israelites]. ⁷ Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, And those who recline at banquets shall be removed.

To walk with God includes far more than God, me, my life, and learning more about the nature of God. Social justice is a theme of the Bible from the beginning to end. In sum, to walk with God and agree with Him on social justice issues is to join Him in loving all others in an active way, which always brings great joy. One cannot walk with God and remain indifferent to fellow human beings in need anymore than Amos could have.

In His Majestic Grace,

Pastor Don