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VITAL GODLINESS

A contribution to The Highway by Rev.
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The subject for discussion is "Vital Godliness." The text is found in Micah 6:8, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

There are two main thoughts in this passage: The revelation of good, and the requirements of God. At the time when these words were spoken by Micah the prophet, the general situation was bad. In the first four verses of chapter three, we have a brief description of the princes, or the rulers. They are pictured as being morally and spiritually corrupt, and without true principle. Their concern was for themselves, and they oppressed the people in general for their own gratification and gain.

Following this, we have a description of the prophets and priests. The princes were the political leaders, the prophets and priests were the religious leaders. The latter were not better than the former. According to the records they labored and taught for money and personal gain. More than that, and perhaps worse, they made the people to err. They preached error, and proclaimed a false peace. All this they did in the name of God, and with a profession that the Lord was among them.

With the political and religious leaders so corrupt, it was not surprising to find the people far from God. True they were religious, but there was no reality. Such was the condition of things that the prophet cried, "The good, or the godly man, is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men."

In the midst of such prevailing conditions came the prophet Micah with the message of the text, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Certainly such a presentation of divine requirements was in order at such a time, but the first statement is surely startling—"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." It tells us that these conditions existed, notwithstanding the fact that man knew better. It is another reminder of the fact that men love darkness rather than light. It is another example of the fact that in spite of knowing right, men will do wrong. No wonder the prophet thundered home the divine requirements.

But people have not changed. In many respects the situation today is similar to that of Micah's day. Thus, although there never was more knowledge of right than there is today, men and women the world over prefer to do wrong. They still love darkness rather than light, and prefer to live in known disobedience to the will of God. There will always be the need of a revelation of good,

but the need of the hour is a sounding forth of the requirements of God.

Let us consider these two thoughts of the text. First, the Revelation of Good. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good." The statement is that the revelation of good comes from God, and is to us all. It is a divine revelation, it is a direct revelation, it is to man and to all men. It is a definite revelation, it reveals that which is good.

Good, generally speaking, is the opposite of bad, but that is rather vague, unless we tighten up on the meaning of the word "bad." One preacher has said that the word "good," like the man who journeyed from Jerusalem to Jericho, has fallen among thieves, and has been stripped and robbed of much of its true meaning and value. Thus, almost any person and anything is called "good."

Jesus Himself said, "There is none good but one, that is God." That is, there is none naturally good, but God. The first chapters of the Epistle to the Romans have been pictured as a kind of a court scene; God is the judge, and the Holy Spirit the prosecuting attorney. The world of Gentile sinners is first brought in, and the judge pronounces them guilty. The next to be brought in are the Jews, but the same verdict is given. The statement concerning them all is "There is none righteous, no not one;" "There is none that doeth good, no not one." That is God's conclusion concerning the natural man. That is one reason why God gives to man a revelation of that which is good.

What is goodness? Seeing there is none but God, then true goodness must be Godliness. The Bible says, "The fruit of the Spirit is goodness." It is the fruit of a heart and life indwelt and transformed by the Spirit of God. The Apostle Peter spoke of goodness, or godliness, when he wrote, "As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of living." True goodness is godliness, and godliness is holiness of heart and life.

But I must pass on to the next thought of the text: The Requirements of God. "And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." You will notice the requirements follow the revelation, God shows us that which is good, and then requires or demands that we be good, and do good.

Notice, too, the requirement is according to the revelation. God's demand is for practical godliness. "To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." To do justly and to love mercy speaks of our attitude to man. It means being fair, just, and loving in all our dealings with man. To walk humbly with God speaks of our relation to God. It means living in fellowship with Him, and doing His will. Thus God demands of us that we be right with Him and right with our fellow man.

Notice further, the order of God's requirements. Our doing justly and loving mercy is

placed before our walking humbly with God. Not that there is any separation. The truth is, they are inseparable. But a right attitude to man is always necessary unto walk with God, and is proof of it.

Then, I see another thought in connection with God's requirements. Something that needs emphasis today. The chapter from which our text is taken is called God's controversy with His people. Verse two reads, "Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy . . . for the Lord hath a controversy with His people . . ." The reason is given in the connecting verses. In them is recorded God's call or challenge to His people. He states, He has a controversy with them, and questions them regarding their sin and backslidings. Then comes the enquiry of the people, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? Shall I come with burnt offerings? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams?" Micah speaks up and says: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God?" It seems these people sought to satisfy God with their offerings regardless of their manner of living. Thus the prophet showed them that God wanted more than ritual. He wanted righteousness. He demanded right relationship to God and man. That was the matter over which God had the controversy. It was not that the prophet belittled the sacrifices, but, rather, he showed that without vital godliness they would avail them nothing.

I sometimes wonder if God has not a similar controversy with many Christians and religious professors today. True, we have no need to offer such sacrifices. The Old Testament offerings pointed to Calvary and were typical of the Lamb of God, in His sacrificial and atoning work. Yet there are still two sides to salvation. First, we must never belittle the atoning sacrifice of Jesus the Christ. Without it there is no salvation for any one. Let us take that truth well to heart. But, if that offering of Christ has not caused us to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God, it has availed us nothing. Too many people are resting solely in the sacrifice of Christ, while their lives are not right. They seem to think, perhaps, because they have been taught so, that since Christ died for them, God is satisfied regardless of their manner of living and real attitude to God and man. But that is not so; God has shown us that which is good, and He demands of us accordingly. He demands practical, godly living. He wants more than mere religion. He asks for righteousness. Ritual will not satisfy God. He must have reality. He requires more than fundamental beliefs, and an acceptance of the atoning work of Christ. I repeat, He demands vital godliness, not to obtain salvation, but as a result of salvation,

(Continued on Page 4)