In the name of Jesus, fellow redeemed by His blood,

So you want to get right with God. Join the crowd! Everbody’s in this boat whether they know it or not!

There is an inner compulsion that drives every human being to seek peace with God. That is true even for those who say there is no god and for those who seek to be their own God. The name for that inner compulsion is conscience. It is a part of the natural knowledge of Himself that God puts into every human soul. Paul wrote to the Romans (2:14,15): “…when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.”

But, there is a disconnect here. The desire to get right with God does not—and cannot—make it happen. Even though we all have a conscience that prods and pokes at us to get right with God, we do not have the ability to make peace with our Creator. Wise Solomon wrote, (Proverbs 14:12) “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Paul explained this to the Corinthians: (I Corinthians 2:14) “…the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them.”

Of course, the fact that it is impossible to make our own peace with God has never stopped people from trying. Mankind’s vain attempts throughout history to make his own peace with God is called religion—the vain attempts of people who have tried to win God’s favor with ascetic lifestyles, sacrificing of people and animals, endless pleading prayers, burning candles, mutilation, philosophy, reciting of mantras, throwing virgins into volcanoes, oneness with nature, oneness with the universe, the relics of saints, searching the stars, church laws, diets and fasting, abstinence from money, marriage, sex and certain foods, and of course, the building of pyres, pyramids, temples, stone-hedges, steles, altars and groves.

God is not impressed. He condemns those who preach and practice such ways at seeking peace with Him. Jeremiah wrote (6:14) “They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace.” All the empty efforts to get right with God start with a terrible mistaken presupposition. If we think that the sin that destroys our peace with God is not so serious that we cannot fix it ourselves, we will continue to pursue the vanity of getting right with God by our own efforts. If you define religion as human effort to find peace with God, then Christianity is not a religion. Let me say that again: if your idea of religion or spirituality is your sincere attempt to get right with God, then you are not a Christian. Pretty plain speak!

The message of the Christian Scriptures is the antitheses of every religion invented and practiced by man. All human religion is based in some way on human moral performance. But human efforts to appease God fly in the face of faith in Jesus Christ. Paul insisted to the Galatians (5:4, 5) “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.”

Hebrews, chapter 11 is one of the most beautiful and convincing treatises on the nature of Christian faith. It is the recap of the lives of many prominent Old Testament believers. The holy writer of Hebrews wanted his audience then and now to know that peace with God has never been the product of human effort. It has always come through faith in what God Himself did to make peace with us. We are to understand that the patriarchs and the great leaders of the Old Testament did not gain peace with God by doing great things. Rather, the opposite was true. They did great things because their faith rested on the peace that God had made for them.

And so Hebrews 11 repeats the phrase “by faith.” “By faith Abel...by faith Enoch...by faith Noah...by faith Abraham...by faith Isaac...by faith Jacob...” and so forth. With this repetition God wants to reinforce the theme that
He introduces at the beginning of the chapter and which we discussed at length two weeks ago, “...without faith it is impossible to please God”(6).

The media often lumps Christians together with every brand of spirituality as being just another religion. In their effort to treat everybody the same, they make them all sound the same. But Christian faith is radical in its approach to getting right with God. All religious and spiritual people have faith of some kind. But the unique quality of Christian faith is that it seeks and finds the righteousness of God apart from and outside of ourselves. When St. Paul summarized the Christian message in his letter to the Romans he wrote, (Romans 3:21,22) “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. “

The Bible asks us to place our faith outside ourselves. We are to believe not in man but in the God-man Jesus Christ. God sent Jesus to do for us what no human being can do for him or herself. Jesus not only took away our sins and paid the penalty to God for them; He provided God the righteousness—the moral perfection which God demands to make peace between Himself and us.

That’s what the writer to the Hebrews is saying when he talks about Noah’s faith. He writes, (11:7) “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” Noah was surrounded by the world and its human religions, all based on human efforts. But Noah’s faith was grounded in a Savior that God had promised. Noah’s faith was based outside himself and outside the world in which he lived. He trusted God’s promise of a Savior and God counted that trust as righteousness.

Paul makes the same argument from the life of Abraham. Paul wrote to the Romans: (4:20-25) “He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”

Because of His prominence in history Jesus cannot be ignored, not even by other religions. Unable to deny the influence of Jesus Christ on individual lives and on the course of history, those who do not place their faith in Him have nevertheless had to offer Him grudging praise. He has been acknowledged as a great teacher, a rabbi, a role model, a martyr, a miracle worker, an exemplar of morality, even a political hero.

But such accolades damn Jesus with faint praise. The Holy Bible and the Christian faith invite us to receive Jesus as our personal Savior from sin. Any and all other titles represent something less than saving faith. At the end of his Gospel, St. John explains why he wrote about Jesus’ life: (20:31) “…but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” And Paul reaffirms the deity of Christ and His saving purpose in his epistle to the Colossians: (1:19,20) “For it pleased the Father that in Him (Jesus) all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself...having made peace through the blood of His cross.”

The righteousness that saved Noah and Abraham—the righteousness that saves you and me—is not one that we can produce by or in ourselves, no matter how religious and spiritual we are. Saving righteousness—that moral sinlessness comes alone from Jesus Christ. (II Corinthians 5:21) “For God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

The righteousness earned by Jesus Christ is freely given to those who trust Him rather than themselves. However, the rub is that our human pride stands in the way of trusting in Jesus. In matters so weighty we’d rather do it ourselves and are unwilling to admit our own impotence. But the Holy Spirit works in us to overcome such pride when we hear the Word. Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah and says, (I Corinthians 2:9) “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him”—but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit.
So you want to get right with God? Hey, who doesn’t? But you have it, this “right-ness” with God. You see, it belongs to you and me, by faith in Jesus! Amen. **Response: CW #390:1, 4**

**PRAYER:** Forgive my sins, Lord, for they are many. Forgive me for the conceit that prompts me to try to appease You through my own weak efforts. Renew in me the message of Your Spirit in the Word of God. Place my heart and soul firmly in the righteousness Jesus earned for me and offered to me freely by His grace. Lead me, Spirit, to trust that what I have never been able to do, Jesus did for me. Let me start each day in the joy of knowing that I am at peace with You through the blood and merit of Jesus Christ, my Savior. Let my life shine in thanksgiving to Your glory. Amen. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.