

LENT DEVOTION

Austin Christian Fellowship of India (ACFI)

March 18th 2019

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"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away" (Isaiah 64:8). This verse can be easily misunderstood. It does not mean that God will reject us if we come to him in faith. It doesn't mean that He doesn't like our efforts to please Him. It means that if we come demanding acceptance on the basis of our "good conduct" or "self-righteousness." God will point out that our righteousness is nothing compared to His infinite righteousness. Sin makes us unclean and we cannot even come closer to God who is Holy and Righteous (Romans 3:23). Our best efforts are still infected with sin because by nature we are sinful and sinners by birth (Psalm 51:5). Our natural inclination is to please our 'self' rather than God.

Our only hope, therefore, is faith in Jesus Christ, who came to cleanse us and bring us to God's presence. When we trust in Jesus Christ, we make an exchange -- our sin for His Righteousness. Our sin was poured into Christ at His crucifixion. His righteousness is poured into us at our conversion. This is what is meant by Christ's "atonement" for sin. Because "Righteousness and Justice are the foundation of his throne" (Psalm 89:14) and that "His righteousness endures forever" (Psalm 111:3). Psalmist declares: "How righteous are you, O Lord" (Psalm 119:137) and "no one living is righteous before you" (Psalm 143:2).

That God, in His love and compassion toward us, offers to trade with us His righteousness for our sin - something of great value for something completely worthless. Just like the father of the Prodigal son exchanged the 'costly robes' and 'status' for the 'filthy and worn out clothes' of a wayward son who became a 'slave' (Luke 15). It happens only when a person, like King David, asks God in faith to cleanse us from within (Psalm 51:7). "Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10) was his prayer which should be ours too.