

## Access by Faith into this Grace wherein We Stand

Lent 3 2014

Exodus 17 vv 1-7 p75, Psalm 95, Romans 5 vv 1-11 p1132, John 4 vv 5-42 p1066

Last week I received an e mail from my energy supplier saying that they need nearly to double my monthly payments. As you can imagine, I was not pleased about this. I am careful to use a minimum of heating and lighting and I have just had a new supposedly more energy efficient boiler installed. For some reason, I have had no communications from my energy company since last October – no statements, no bills, no requests to submit meter readings. Although a meter reader did call once, I have a strong suspicion that their justification for increasing my payments is based on estimated readings. So I read my meters and attempted to log on to their website to check their figures and to register the correct readings. Then I discovered that they have unilaterally changed all our passwords and that I could not access the site. It said they would send a new password to my e mail address, but then it denied recognising my e mail address, even though they had sent an e mail to this very same e mail address the very same day. When I tried ringing their admittedly 0800 number, after working my way through the menu options, pressing various keys, I found myself in a queue too long to be worth hanging on. So I have a big problem and I am denied access to the only people who can sort it out. The word is frustration, frustration in every sense of the word. I need heat and light to stay alive. I need to cook my food. I might not absolutely need my computer, my radio and my television, but my life would be considerably impoverished without them – in terms of enjoyment, of knowing what is going on in the world and of communication with other people. Without hot water to wash myself and a washing machine to wash my clothes, my personal hygiene would no doubt leave something to be desired. I need access to my power company and it is extremely frustrating to be denied access. Actually I do have options. I can try e mailing them, keep trying to reach them on the telephone, maybe write to their head office, or change my supplier – which is supposedly much easier now than it used to be. I have a feeling though that I shall not be able to change supplier without gaining access to the information and billing that my existing supplier has. I will still need to gain access.

Today's epistle is about access, access to God. Access to gas and electricity is pretty vital in the modern world. We can hardly live without them. Life would be uncomfortable, hungry, difficult, dirty and lonely, and probably short. Life without God is actually impossible. It is impossible as a simple physical fact. God created us and God sustains us in this world. If God should stop loving us, even for a moment, we should in that instant cease to exist, absolutely cease to exist. Meaningful life, moreover, as opposed to mere existence, depends on actual access to God. It is in Him that we are washed clean of our sins. It is in Him that we are nourished to eternal life. It is He alone Who supplies everything we need for our comfort and well-being. It is in Him that we relate to other human beings, that we communicate. It is in the knowledge of God that we discover eternal life. It is in fellowship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that we know true joy. Access to God is vital, infinitely more vital than access to Co-operative Energy.

I blame Co-op Energy for my frustrating loss of access. They might attach some of the blame to me. Probably they would say I should have hung on the phone until it was eventually answered. I would say that they ought to notify customers of changes and make it simple for us to adjust to them. I also suspect that they are introducing these changes in a

manner calculated to allow them to hang on to more of customers' money for longer. So I would say that the reason for my frustrating lack of access to my energy supplier is that, despite their slogan, the Co-op is not really caring or sharing – and I rather doubt that any of the other energy companies are caring or sharing either.

In terms of my infinitely more vital need for access to God, it is entirely the other way round. God's care for me is infinite. He has shared everything with me in His Love. If my access to God is denied, it is because I have denied access to God myself. I have rebelled against God's holy Law of Love. I have rejected His Fatherhood. I have rejected His Love. I have been ungrateful and disobedient. I have squandered the gifts He has given me. I have failed to recognise my neighbours as my brothers and sisters in the family of our heavenly Father. I have denied my own access to God and so I have lost warmth and light and comfort and nourishment and cleansing and education and communication and joy. Without God I am nothing. Without God no human being is anything. Yet we have all denied ourselves access to the Father.

I expect that, if I decide to leave Co-op Energy, I shall all of a sudden be bombarded with e-mails and phone calls and even letters telling me what a valued customer I am and how they don't want to lose me and what wonderful deals they can offer me if only I stay with them – deals that will last just so long as they think I won't notice their being quietly withdrawn.

God isn't like that. God has no self-interest in reaching out to me. God doesn't make any profit out of me. He doesn't need me for His own advantage. He won't try to trick me into signing up as a Christian, only to rip me off later on, when He thinks I won't notice. God just loves me, unreservedly, unconditionally, disinterestedly. God just loves people, all people, without exception, whoever they are, whatever they do. God just loves people, just as we are, just because love is the nature of God – pure disinterested, unconditional, unreserved love. *We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* How I would love to go on with the rest of today's reading about how this works out in practice with the trials of this world proving the love of God for us, the absolute primacy of God in initiating our redemption, the infinite depth of His Love demonstrated by the Cross of Jesus Christ and the joy we experience in the Atonement, but I think I have said enough to digest in one session, save only this. How do we log on? How do we reach God's number? How do we enter into His presence? How do we access the Love of God? It is by faith and by faith alone. *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*