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*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)*

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*That religion which will enable a man to endure persecution for the name of Jesus; to bear calamity without complaining; to submit to a long series of disappointments and distresses for Christ's sake, is genuine. That religion which will prompt a man unceasingly to a life of prayer and self-denial; which will make him ever conscientious, industrious, and honest; which will enable him to warn sinners of the errors of their ways, and which will dispose him to seek the friendship of Christians, and the salvation of the world, is pure and genuine. That will answer the purpose. It is like the good axe with which a man can chop all day long, in which there is no flaw, and which does not get dull, and which answers all the purposes of an axe. Any other religion than this is worthless (Albert Barnes, **Notes on the New Testament**, comments on 2 Corinthians 13:5)*

The Scriptures are a sufficient guide to godliness (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and a failure to live righteously when possessing them is due to a lack of will rather than lack of knowledge. (adapted from J.W. McGarvey, **Fourfold Gospel**. 516. Comments on Luke 16:29)

*Death's last breath cannot alter a bad character or a guilty conscience. Only the blood of Christ can cleanse a man's heart and purge his life. Death will not do for a sin-swamped soul what His blood could not do. As death finds a man, so he will be the instant after when he opens his eyes in the unseen*

world. You will be yourself, and I will be myself. We are ourselves and will be ourselves eternally. (Neil R. Lightfoot, **Lessons from the Parables**. 136)

*Men are not saved by the witness of ghosts. They are not convinced through miracles but by persuasion. God draws men to Christ through the teaching of His word (John 6:44-45). The word of God when believed and received is able to save from sin (James 1:21). To underestimate its value is to put oneself in jeopardy of everlasting rejection (Ibid. 138).*

## FASTING

Patrick Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Introduction: I am told ...

- There is more teaching in the NT on fasting than repentance and confession.
- Jesus taught more on fasting than on baptism and the Lord's supper.

Should Christians fast today?:

- Matt 6:16-18 yes, because we will be rewarded by God if we do
- Matt 6:16-17 Jesus assumed his disciples would fast ("when" not "if")
- Matt 9:14-15 disciples should fast after the bridegroom (Jesus) was gone, which is true today
- Phil 4:9, I Cor 11:1, I Pet 2:21 yes, because approved examples (like Acts 20:7) are binding
- Matt 4:2 Jesus
- Acts 13:1-3, 14:23 groups of Christians
- II Cor 11:27, 6:5 Paul
- I Cor 7:3-5 fasting must be important today; it is the only reason (accompanied by prayer) for which God allows married couples to suspend sexual relations

When did people fast in the Bible?: (it was almost always accompanied with prayer)

- II Chron 20:2-3 at the threat of war
- Esther 3:8-9, 4:3 when faced with impending danger
- II Sam 12:16 when praying for the sick
- II Sam 1:12 when loved ones died
- Deut 9:15-18, Dan 9:3-5 when seeking God's forgiveness

The purpose of fasting:

- Jonah 4:3-5 fasting was not just forgetting to eat, or not having enough time to eat
- Jonah 3:6-10 to entreat God's favor
- Luke 2:36-37 to serve God
- Psalms 69:10, Isaiah 58:5, Psalms 35:13 to chasten/afflict/humble our soul
- Ezra 8:21-23 to seek God's favor in a particular matter

Length of fasting:

- Judges 20:26, I Sam 14:24, II Sam 3:35 many times it was for one day until evening
- Esther 4:16 three days seemed to be a special case
- Deut 9:9, Mt 4:2 I am assuming these 40 day fasts were aided by divine assistance

Wrong ways to fast:

- Isaiah 58:3-7 fasting without repentance/obedience
- Matthew 6:16 to be seen of men

Conclusion:

- One brother wrote "Generally speaking, when do people fast? When such important things are on their minds to cause thoughts of food to flee." But almost every verse we've been over on this outline shows that God's servants planned to fast and did it on purpose.
- I Cor 13:8 the Bible does not say that "fasting" shall cease .

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## REVIEW OF PAT'S OUTLINE ON FASTING

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Fasting is an important biblical topic. Three Greek words refer to fasting (either voluntary or involuntary fasting) in the New Testament; (1) nesteia (noun), (2) nestis (adjective), and (3) nesteuo (verb) for a total of **29 occurrences**. There are also three Greek words used in the New Testament to denote repentance: (1) metaneo (verb), (2) metamelomai (verb), and (3) metanoia (noun) for a total of **65 occurrences**, more than twice as many for fasting. Likewise, three Greek words are found in the New Testament that refer to confession: (1) homologeo (verb), (2) exomologeo (verb), and (3) homologia (noun), for a total of **45 occurrences**. The Greek word for "baptize" (baptizo) occurs **77 times** in the New Testament Scriptures, and the term for "baptism" (baptisma) **20 times** for a total of **97 occurrences**. It is true there are only seven definite references to the Lord's Supper in the New Testament (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 21; 11:20-34).

More importantly, no New Testament writer makes fasting a condition of salvation, whereas repentance (e.g., Acts 3:19; 8:22), confession (e.g., Romans 10:8-10; 1 John 1:9), baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; et al), and observation of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16) are most certainly divinely required for salvation.

### Matthew 6:16-18

The Sermon on the Mount is indeed an announcement of the principles of the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Matthew 4:23). Jesus replaced the righteousness taught by the scribes and Pharisees with His own standard

(Matthew 5:17-20; cf. 23:2-3). But, the Law was still in force when Jesus preached this sermon (Galatians 4:4; Colossians 2:13-14), and the Master employed Jewish practices under the Law to illustrate the spiritual principles of the kingdom. Must we offer gifts on the altar? (Matthew 5:23-24) Jesus was teaching the principle of doing good to be seen of God rather than of men (Matthew 6:1-18). We are blessed if we do good deeds to be seen of God rather than men.

#### **Matthew 9:14-15**

The whole point of the passage is that fasting is an expression of sorrow. The disciples would be in sorrow when Jesus was taken away. But He came to them again (John 14:18) by sending the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-15).

#### **Matthew 4:2 : Compare Luke 4:1-4**

I do not know why Jesus fasted forty days, but if this fast is a binding example, why should not the forty days duration also be binding? In fact, it provided the occasion for the temptation to turn stones to bread.

#### **Acts 13:1-3**

The prophets and teachers were fasting and praying, and, in connection with sending out Paul and Barnabas, they fasted, prayed and laid their hands on them. This certainly proves that all three of these practices are approved. Of course prayer is commanded, so it should not be an issue (1 Thessalonians 5:17). But fasting and laying on of hands were innocent Jewish customs (cf. Matthew 9:14; Genesis 48:14; Mark 6:5; 10:16) and are no more binding than other innocent customs. So also **Acts 14:23**.

#### **2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:27**

Fasting is listed with the suffering Paul endured for the gospel.

1 Corinthians 7:3-5

This passage does present "fasting" as an important act. I do believe it is used by synecdoche of the part for the whole to mean spiritual activities. When I leave my wife for a month to preach in Africa, I am acting by the authority of this passage. But I concede that it demonstrates that fasting is an important spiritual activity in connection with prayer, but I do not believe it proves that fasting is essential to salvation.

#### **Conclusion**

It appears that Pat considers fasting a divine requirement, whereas I view it as a liberty. I add that I increasingly see secret fasting as an important accompaniment of prayer, particularly in times of grave importance.

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## **QUESTION ABOUT SALVATION**

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

### **Question**

Jesus said this about belief in Him, John 3:18. Can you provide for me a verse that says if a person is not baptized, does not confess, or does not repent he is not saved?

### **Answer**

John 3:18 states, "He who believed in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." This is one of many passages that prove we must believe that Jesus is the Son of God to be saved, and I believe and teach every one of them.

If the passages the reader requests did not exist, this would not alter the fact the Lord teaches baptism, confession, and repentance are essential to salvation (Acts 2:38; Romans 10:8-10). I am not interested in rewriting Scripture to satisfy the demands of those who refuse to believe that Scripture plainly teaches.

But in fact, the Scriptures do plainly teach one who refuses to be baptized, refuses to confess Christ, or refuses to repent will be lost. "Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God'" (John 3:5). "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33). "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5).

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## **QUESTION ABOUT BAPTISM IN GALATIANS 3:27**

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

### **Question**

Which baptism is Gal 3:27 referring to and how do you know?

### **Answer**

The baptism of Galatians 3:27 puts one into Christ. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Entering Christ is equivalent to being saved. "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10). The baptism that saves is in the name of the Lord. "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38). Baptism in the name of the Lord is water baptism. "Can anyone forbid

water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:47-48). The baptism of Galatians 3:27 is water baptism.

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## MIRACLES, SIGNS, AND WONDERS (2)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

### **Well, what about the healing miracles that are performed today?**

We have TV preachers and others who hold great healing campaigns that attract huge crowds to witness so-called healings. Many "cures" have proven to be fakes, others are imagined, and still others may actually experience healing. Let us consider some examples.

**Fake cures.** Investigations at some of the big revival "healing" campaigns have revealed an elaborate system of fraud. Greeters are trained to talk to people as they arrive and gather information as to any ailments they might be suffering. They will pick out likely candidates and radio the information to the evangelist, who has an earpiece-receiver. He will then announce that he has been told by the "spirit" that there is someone present with acute lumbago or whatever. That person jumps up shouting "Me, Me," and rushes up to the stage where he is "healed."

These greeters will on occasion encounter a person with an obvious ailment, such as a prosthetic arm, or a large goiter on the neck, or some other similar problem. They would not dare to allow that person on the stage, but they are sent to a private room for prayer. Why? Because they know that the "healer" could not heal this person, and they don't want a farce to be seen on the stage.

There have been documented cases of out-and-out fraud where "sick" people fake some disability, and go to be "healed" before a large audience. Did anyone mention the vast sums of money that are contributed to these healers? It seems I remember Jesus telling his disciples "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts" (Matthew 10:8-9).

**What has happened?** Doctors tell us that a great many of our ailments are psychosomatic, that is, they are caused by the mind. If your mind is convinced that something is wrong, then something is wrong. Thus, if you convince the mind that the ailment has been removed, it is gone. The same thing has been demonstrated to occur with hypnosis. It is the matter of the mind over the body.

There was story of a young mother lifting a car off her child whose legs are pinned under a wheel. In her panic, her adrenalin flows and her strength is increased so much that she can actually move the car enough to extract her child. If she attempted to lift the car on the next day, she would find it impossible. Many stories exist of superhuman strength that has manifested itself in emergencies.

Now, in a fit of emotion at the healing service, a person may have some affliction, some inability to walk properly, or something like that. But, being convinced they have been healed, the body's adrenalin might provide enough strength to begin walking. But then a few days later when the adrenalin subsides, the previous ailment returns.

Dr. William Nolen once followed the healing revivals of evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman. He received permission to interview those who had been "healed" a few days after the event took place. He wrote a book, and I believe it was titled "A Doctor In Search of a Cure." I believe he stated that he did not find a single permanent cure. They all relapsed after their supposed miraculous cure.

Oral Roberts was a well known TV evangelist and healer. He founded Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and conducted healing revivals in many cities. He taught and evidently strongly believed in miraculous power by the laying on of the hands, as the apostles did.

On one of his TV programs he revealed that a nine-foot-tall Jesus had appeared to him while he was praying in his closet. (I was not aware that closets had ceilings that high, or that Jesus was that tall.) He said Jesus told him he was going to take his life unless he raised \$8 million to finish the hospital he was building. Sure enough, some man in Florida sent him the money. Question. If Roberts could heal people by praying over them and/or laying his hands on them, why did he need a hospital? Neither Jesus nor any of his apostles ever told those they healed to go find a doctor or a hospital.

Some years ago the late Foy Wallace, Jr. visited Angeles Temple in California, where faith-healer Aimee Semple McPherson held forth. A guide was taking people on a tour through the facilities, which included a "trophy" room—a place where crutches, canes, etc. were displayed. As the tour group continued on, Wallace stayed behind. In a few minutes the guide, who was a member of the church, came back and asked Wallace if he could help him.

Wallace replied that he was looking for a glass eye, an artificial limb or some other artificial device which a healed person had left behind after being made whole. There was nothing like that. (And the guide, a member there, actually had an artificial leg!)



Why do the “miracle workers” today not raise the dead, cause the blind to see, and do other miracles that would be obvious to all? Isn’t that what Christ promised to his disciples? Why do today’s workers cure stomach aches, ulcers, cancers and other ailments that cannot be seen, and thus are not obvious to all watchers.

There was an occasion when Peter and John healed a man, and were preaching the gospel. The authorities were upset and wanted to put a stop to their preaching.

*“And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, saying, ‘What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it’” (Acts 4:14-16).*

No one ever questioned a single miracle that Christ or the apostles performed. Christ healed a man born blind (John 9:1-7). Has anyone ever done that in modern times? Christ replaced a man’s ear that had been severed after Peter cut it off (Luke 22:51). Has anyone ever restored a severed body part today? Peter raised the dead Dorcas (Acts 9:40). Has anyone raised the dead today? Surely the news media would be all over this astounding accomplishment.

This all reminds me of something Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church about “the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders” (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Does Satan have the power to deceive people with “signs and false wonders?”

*“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).*

Some years ago I had a part in a debate which David Harkrider had with a Pentecostal preacher —Preacher Payne. Payne claimed he had all the miraculous powers the apostles had. Harkrider then produced a bottle of syrup of ipecac and put a “Poison” label on it. He then challenged Payne to drink it, for in Mark 16:18, Jesus said “and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them...” Obviously the ipecac would not kill Preacher Payne, but it might make him throw up. But Payne responded by pointing to the word “if” in the passage. “The Bible says ‘if,’ and therefore I don’t



have to drink it.”

After the session that night, Harkrider asked me if I could find a rattlesnake for him. I called a local Science Center and talked the curator into lending me a rattlesnake. Of course I had to sign a waiver, and he said that if the snake got out of the box and bit someone, he did not know me and never heard of me!

So the next night the snake was in a glass enclosure inside a closed cardboard box. Harkrider then gave Payne the opportunity to pick up the snake, and quoted again from Mark 16:18 where it says “they will pick up serpents.” He reminded him of the “if” that enabled Payne to get out of drinking the “poison” the night before, and pointed to “they will pick up serpents,” not “If.” Payne finally went over the looked inside the box and saw there really was a rattlesnake there. But Payne refused to touch the snake.

The apostle Paul was bitten by a venomous snake, and was unharmed.

*“But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, ‘Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.’ However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm” (Acts 28:3-5).*

If Payne had the same power as the apostle Paul had, he would not have hesitated to pick up the snake.

### **What about speaking in tongues?**

The first instance of speaking in tongues was on the Day of Pentecost, as the people were amazed that they heard these men speaking in their native tongues—some 16 of them.

*“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia...’” (Acts 2:4-9).*

Notice that the apostles were speaking in known languages, not some unintelligible babbling. I have visited various denominations and have heard various people speaking in “tongues,” but no one seemed to know what was being said.

The apostle Paul gave some clear instructions as to the use of tongues. In 1 Corinthians he chides them for the improper use of the gift of tongues in verses 18-23, and then verses 26-28 say the following:

*“When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.”*

I have **never** observed tongue speakers following these instructions. One time some woman in a balcony where I visited did give a brief “interpretation” of what the preacher was saying in a tongue, but I don’t recall that she said as much as he had said. I have been present when 15 or so were all speaking in “tongues” at the same time, with no interpreters. Obviously, this is not of God, and therefore must be from Satan. If it were from God, then they would follow Paul’s inspired instructions.

And with the “interpreters” there are also some problems. Recordings have been made of someone speaking in a tongue, and then the recording is played for different people who claim they have the “gift of interpretation.” Now, when they all give different “interpretations” of what was said, that is just further evidence that this is all fake, and therefore not from God.

### **How many baptisms are there?**

In general, the claim is made that today there are two baptisms—baptism in the Holy Spirit and baptism in water. In truth, there are several baptisms mentioned in the Scripture: (1) John’s baptism (Luke 7:29); (2) the baptism unto Moses (1 Corinthians 10:1-2); (3) the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8); (4) the baptism commanded by Christ (Mark 16:16); (5) the baptism of suffering (Matthew 20:22); (6) the baptism of fire (Matthew 3:11); (7) Christ’s own baptism (Matthew 3:16).

But many years later, as Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, he said there was only one baptism.

*“There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all*

*who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).*

What was this one baptism? The baptisms in numbers 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7 were all in the past. And number 6, baptism of fire, is yet in the future, as that refers to hell. So that leaves number 4. We have already shown that the baptism in the Holy Spirit only occurred twice—on Pentecost (Acts 2), and upon the household of Cornelius (Acts 10). It accomplished its purpose, and there is no need for it today. We also noted that Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 that the miraculous would cease when the “perfect” had come—the completed revelation.

What is the significance of number 4? It is the baptism commanded by Christ that accomplishes various things. (1) It is a baptism “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38); (2) It is a baptism connected with salvation (Mark 16:16, 1 Peter 3:21); (3) It is the means of our being united with Christ (Galatians 3:27); (4) It is connected with washing away our sins (Acts 22:16); (5) It is a picture and re-enactment of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, where we put to death the old man of sin and are raised a new creature (Romans 6:3-7); (6) It is the occasion of our becoming united with the church or body of Christ, as we are baptized into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 1:22-23).

Now, we can understand what Paul wrote when he said there is “one God, one Lord, one Spirit,” etc. No one can misunderstand that. The Holy Spirit baptism had nothing to do with one’s salvation, but the baptism in water commanded by Christ has much to do with our salvation.

Cornelius’ baptism by the Holy Spirit took place about 41 A.D. That is absolutely the last reference that is made to Holy Spirit baptism in the Bible. Then, over 20 years later, Paul said there remained only one baptism. The Holy Spirit had accomplished its purpose, just as John’s baptism had. They were no longer in existence. Thus those who claim there are two baptisms today fly in direct contradiction of the Words of Inspiration. I believe I’ll take what Paul said rather than the “two baptism” preachers.

#### **Is there a difference between the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” and the “gift of the Holy Spirit”?**

Peter’s response to the question asked in Acts 2:37 (“What must we do...?”), was “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (verse 38). Some have taken this to mean that everyone who is baptized for the forgiveness of sins would also be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

We have already established that this cannot be true, for Ephesians 4:4-6 says there is only one baptism. One cannot equal two. It is also worth noting that in the New Testament church, it is obvious that not all Christians had miraculous powers automatically given to them when they were baptized. Remember that many were baptized in Samaria as Philip was preaching to them, but they did not receive any power to perform miracles until Peter and John came and laid hands on them (Acts 8:12-17).

Thus baptism did not give miraculous power. But Acts 2:38 says that all who are baptized will receive “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, it is obvious that the “gift” is different than the “baptism.”

So, just what is the gift? There are two possibilities. (1) The Holy Spirit is given in some measure. (2) The Holy Spirit gives the believer something.

One possibility is seen in Acts 3:19: “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” Consider, their sins have been forgiven, and “times of refreshing” have come. Could it be that the Holy Spirit gives this comfort to the believers whose sins have been erased?

Another possibility is that the Holy Spirit is given to dwell within us even as Christ dwells in us. There are various passages that speak of this idea of “dwelling in us.”

**Ephesians 3:17** – “...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love...”

**Colossians 3:16** – “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you...”

**James 4:5** -- “Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us’?”

How, then, does Christ dwell in us, or the Holy Spirit? It is not a personal indwelling, but they dwell in us through the Word, by faith. Notice the language: “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...” And again, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you.”

How do we obtain faith? Does God just zap us and plant faith in our minds? Paul informs us in Romans 10:17 that “...faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” Thus, as we read and study God’s word, and take it into our hearts, that’s how these spiritual beings come to dwell in our hearts. There is no Scripture that indicates that it is a personal indwelling.

### What is the conclusion?

Sadly, all this confusion and false teaching is but a fulfillment of what the Scripture says. "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1). Over and over again we are warned about false teachers, and some even disguise themselves so as to fool people.

"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

It is my prayer that the readers of this material will follow the Bible rather than the doctrines of men.

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## LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Patrick Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

*But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matthew 5:44-45).*

The word rendered "love" in our text has been a challenge to translators and Bible students. It is "charity" in some passages in the **King James Version** (I Corinthians 13, for instance). The problem is aggravated by today's idea that "love" is an affection, a feeling, perhaps a progression from "like".

When Jesus says "love your enemies" some respond by recommending hypocrisy ("pretend you like them") but of course that cannot be what is intended by the instruction (confer Romans 12:9, **ASV**). So, where do we go from here? Our text has the solution within it. The understanding that children look, and think, and often act like their parents, is in view as Jesus says love and pray for adversaries "that you may be sons of your Father."

His point is, just as God does what is good for everybody, friends and enemies alike ("sun ... rain"), so those who would be his sons should behave that way, "Love ... pray". Nothing is suggested in these verses about having to "like" your enemies – but we do have to "love" them, as Paul loved Peter when he "opposed him to his face" (Galatians 2:11).

So, to “love” as we should means, not only that we admire our friends, but also that we correct them when they err – because, in both cases, they are treasured.

John 3:16 is another helpful passage: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”. The “world” is not likeable; it has always been rebellious to God; but nonetheless He so loved it that He gave his only Son. It is our privilege to imitate “God, as beloved children. And walk in love ...” (Ephesians 5:1-2).

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## FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

It is sobering to consider how close we are to eternity every day. We might be driving home from the store, or leaving a restaurant, or going to ball practice, or making a quick trip to the bank, and in an instant be transported from this world into the next because of a reckless driver or unexpected event. It happens all the time all over the world. We are all literally one heartbeat away from traveling from here to eternity.

How prepared are we to meet God after death? Are we ready to give account to Him? There is no point in acting like it's not going to happen, because His word makes it clear that we will meet Him in judgment. “‘As I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:11-12). Jesus said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). Indeed, “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

The good news is Jesus can prepare us for eternity. “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9). Specifically, He said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Have you put your faith in Him in following Him into eternity? Have you had your sins forgiven? Life is too short and eternity is too long to put off obeying God. Enter the body of Christ while you still can (Galatians 3:26-27). Now is the time to repent of sin (Acts 24:25), before you leave this world forever.

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## FELLOW WORKERS IN CHRIST JESUS

**Aquila & Priscilla | Acts 18; Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 16:19**

from the e-book, “...And They Shall Become One Flesh...”

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

*Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. (Romans 16:3-4)*

### **Working Together In Christ**

Solomon once penned,

*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the place where you are going. (Ecclesiastes 9:10)*

From what is revealed to us about Aquila and Priscilla, they were the type to give themselves to any good work they could find to do. Take a look at what the Scriptures reveal about them:

- they had Jewish ancestry (Acts 18:2)
- they worked together as tent makers (Acts 18:3)
- they journeyed with Paul at times (Acts 18:18)
- they taught the gospel together (Acts 18:26)
- they sacrificed themselves for the gospel (Romans 16:3-4)
- they traveled a lot. They had lived in Rome (Acts 18:2), Corinth (Acts 18:1-3), Ephesus (Acts 18:19), back to Rome (Romans 16:3-4), and then back to Ephesus again (2 Timothy 4:19)
- the church met in their home in both Ephesus and Rome (1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:3-4)

It is noteworthy that every time we read about Aquila and Priscilla, they are mentioned together. There is no point that we are aware of, when one engaged in the Lord's work without the other. When Paul left Corinth and journeyed to Ephesus to preach, Aquila did not go and leave Priscilla behind. They went together (Acts 18:18-19).

Years later, when Paul wrote to the church at Rome, in his greeting, he wrote,

*"Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus." (Romans 16:3)*

He did not send greetings to Aquila, his fellow worker, and his unnamed wife also. Paul considered them to be equally important as fellow labourers in the work of the gospel. He went on to say that they "...risked their own necks for my life..." (Romans 16:4) and that both he and the churches of the Gentiles were thankful to them.

Sometimes after this, Paul was again imprisoned in Rome, and Aquila and Priscilla were back in the city of Ephesus. At the end of his second epistle to Timothy, the apostle wrote, "Greet Prisca and Aquila" (2 Timothy 4:19). Again, the



indication is that they were equally important to Paul and the Lord - a couple who together were labourers in the cause of Christ. It is noteworthy that in both greetings (Romans & 2 Timothy), Paul lists Priscilla first. She is not just a tag-along wife; she was a valued worker.

When couples share together in the work of the Lord, there is benefit to all involved. The marriage will profit, as the threefold cord (Ecclesiastes 4:12), husband, wife and the Lord, will be drawn closer together. The local church will benefit, for strong faithful families are an essential ingredient for a strong faithful church. And those who do not know the truth will benefit, for the couple is focused on teaching God's word, and will employ their mutual skills to that end.

### **Working Together, Period**

Not only did Aquila and Priscilla work together in serving the Lord, but they also worked with one another providing sustenance for themselves. Acts 18:3 reveals that they were tentmakers by trade. This is the only reference to their secular work, but certainly it is a trade in which they would find work regardless where they journeyed.

It might be inferred from just the single mention of their trade; their lives were not wrapped up in their work. It was a means of providing for their needs; but their primary focus was upon the Lord and His cause. When the principal identifying mark of an individual or a couple is what their secular work is, there is a need for a change of focus. Many in today's works are concentrated almost exclusively on work, work, work. This life is not about the attainment of status, wealth or personal satisfaction in a job - this life is a place of preparation for the next life - eternity.

In working together, Aquila and Priscilla had the wonderful opportunity to spend most of their time together. A couple ought to desire to spend time with one another, whether it is in work or play. What a blessing for them, to see each other and enjoy one another's company throughout the greater part of the day. Of course, not all of us are able to share as much time with our spouses each day as Aquila and Priscilla did. However, let us be sure to make the most of the time we do have to share with our spouse.

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## **PUTTING GOD IN OUR PRAYERS**

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Consider your prayers. Your prayer life is one of the most valuable tools that can strengthen your relationship with God. So, why do we pray? Are our prayers filled with self-righteous thoughts? I fear that in our prayers we forget that we are speaking to God Almighty and our prayers can be an outlet for practicing our own self-righteousness. We can

boast in our outstanding prayer life and our excellent relationship with God, but that attitude prompted Jesus to teach His disciples how to pray to God. In light of the hypocrites practicing their righteousness before God, Jesus taught His disciples to pray in a secret place (Matthew 6:6).

Our petitions unto the Creator of all things can often be filled with the vain thoughts and concerns of this life. We can become so caught up in the affairs of our lives that we forget to honor the One who provides life. What motivates our prayers? Are selfish motives why we go to God in prayer? There is nothing wrong in sharing our thoughts with God but if we do not go to God in prayer recognizing His glory and power to provide, then why are we praying? We must not forget that prayer is a demonstration of our faith. Even though God knows what we need before we ask Him, His desire is that we go to Him in prayer, showing our dependence on Him (Matthew 6:8).

"Pray, then, in this way," are the words of Christ. The following prayer that He offers has been misnamed as the "Lord's Prayer" but it is truly the "Disciples Prayer." The Lord is teaching us the appropriate way to address God when we pray so that we may not be like the hypocrites (Matthew 6:5).

### **Recognize God For Who He Is Matthew 6:9**

When we approach the throne of God in prayer, we must first recognize God for His greatness, majesty, glory and power. The close relationship we are able to share with God is compared to a father-child relationship. The Jewish audience was shocked to hear Christ address God as **His** Father and then to teach that **they** might call God "Father" was reproachable. Yet we are capable of having a close relationship with God.

We must approach Jehovah in a reverential manner. In spite of the close relationship we are able to enjoy with God we are to recognize His name as hallowed and holy, distinguished from every other in character and in nature. We are reverencing the very person of God. We are not to take advantage of our relationship with God and call Him "the man upstairs" or "big daddy" or any such disgusting and irreverent name for God!

But when we approach Him in prayer, we are not simply calling Him by name, we are recognizing His character and attributes that make God God. There were several different names for God in the Hebrew language: 'El' meant mighty, strong and prominent (Genesis 28:3); 'Elohim' was a plural form of 'El' and it was always followed by a singular verb, picturing the three persons which are unified within the

Godhead and was used to describe God as the Creator, preserver and transcendent One; 'El Shaddai' was God Almighty or God All-Sufficient (Genesis 17:1); 'Adaonai' was simply master (Genesis 15:2); Yāhweh (YHWH) is the Hebrew of the English LORD describing His eternity, immutability and faithfulness to His purposes and promises.

Each of these names were used to convey a different characteristic of God. So when we pray, "Hallowed be Your name" we are not merely reverences the name of God but the very identity of God.

### **Recognize God For His Rule**

#### **Matthew 6:10, 13b**

Another aspect of putting God in our prayers is praying for His rule and will to be obeyed. The term kingdom is defined as rule, power, authority and government. God's will is to be obeyed. Parallelism exists between the terms 'kingdom' and 'will.' The kingdom of God was in existence, even at the present time that Christ was offering this prayer. "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever" (Matthew 6:13b). While this is possibly a reference to the establishment of the church, there is application to our prayers today. The term kingdom can be applied in different senses, not always referring to the church (see Matthew 13:41; Luke 17:20,21). Every kingdom has citizens which are subject to a law. The citizens of the kingdom of God are subject to God's will. The kingdom is in the world but not of the world. The kingdom of heaven should rule in the hearts of men. So the "kingdom" to which Christ refers can apply to God's will being obeyed in the hearts of men here on earth. Part of the work of the kingdom of God is to teach and proclaim God's word and we should pray for receptive hearts that the word might take root and bear fruit (Matthew 13:23). The prayer of each disciple should be that every person might come to obey God's word. God desires that all would come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Shouldn't our prayers reflect God's will that all might be obedient to Him?

This kingdom is ruled by God and belongs to Him. No other rules over His kingdom but by His power, authority, rule and glory, He has complete dominion (1 Chronicles 29:10-13). Since He is Sovereign over all things then glory and honor belong to Him.

### **Recognize God For What He Does**

#### **Matthew 6:11, 12**

Thirdly, we need to recognize God for what he does. God provides for us on a daily basis and He wants us to show recognition of that. When we pray for our daily bread, we are showing our complete trust and dependence upon God for our most basic needs. Sure, God knows we need basic necessities but Jesus told us not to worry about those things

(Matthew 6:31,32). When we worry about our needs it shows our lack of faith (Matthew 6:30). God is more than capable and willing to provide for us. He desires recognition and gratitude for the blessings which He provides.

Not only is God able to provide for man's physical needs, He provides for our spiritual needs as well. God gives us complete forgiveness and cancellation of the debt that we owe on our account because of sin. Sin has indebted us to God and it is a debt which we are unable to pay. Even if we were to live a sinless life from now till the end of our lives, it would not pay back the debt which we owe--we would still be indebted. Notice that forgiveness is an act of God. The redemption and salvation which we enjoy is based on God's mercy.

Yet, we must also share in the same merciful attitude which God displays. Jesus taught that we must love our enemies and when we learn to do that we may be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). Just as forgiveness is based on God's lovingkindness, we must be willing to reciprocate that towards those who are indebted to us. This is a condition upon our forgiveness (Matthew 6:14) and if we do not forgive others then God will not forgive us of our sins (Matthew 6:15).

Christ continued to teach this attitude of reciprocating God's love towards those who have transgressed us. In Matthew 18:23-35 there is the parable of a king who wished to settle his accounts with his debtors. This one debtor owed a great sum of money, estimations according to our currency ranging from several million dollars to a trillion dollars. The king had the right to collect this money. And this servant did not ask for forgiveness but asked for more time to be given so that he might pay later. Well the king forgave the servant of his debt. The servant was able to walk home debt free!

Then that same servant found a man who owed him money. This man only owed about 1/600,000 of the debt that the servant owed the king. The servant had a right to this money but shouldn't he have considered his great debt which had been canceled and shown a forgiving attitude as well? Should he not have allowed his servant to walk home debt free as well?

Forgiveness is no longer dwelling upon the transgression against us. Forgiveness is putting it out of our minds, never bringing it up to the offender, to others or to ourselves.

### **Recognize God For His Protection Matthew 6:13a**

Finally, we need to recognize God for His protection. God can offer us protection even in the midst of trial, distress and

temptation. God is more than able to deliver us from evil, providing the way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The very idea and thought of sinning against God should repulse us because of the evil nature of sin being directly opposed to the will of God. However, when we are faced with the struggles of temptation how do we overcome?

We will only be able to overcome temptation when our minds are focused on obeying the will of God. If our minds are fixed and purposed on fulfilling our desire then we will give in to sin. But if we purpose in our hearts not to sin against God then we are more than able to not give in. Christ told His disciples to pray that they might not enter into temptation (Matthew 26:41). Prayer is our first line of defense when we are put into situations where we might be tempted. God is able to provide us with protection from the wiles of the devil and keep us from evil.

### **Conclusion**

Prayer is a test of one's personal faith in God. Our prayers should recognize the power, might, majesty, glory and honor of God. He is capable of helping us so much in our lives that we must never forget that our prayers are an extension of our trust in the working of God.

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## **THE MAN OF PSALM ONE**

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Who is the man of Psalm one and what is the secret to his success? I want to be the man described there, I can envision it, but how can I make it a reality?

The man of Psalm one is first labeled as a "blessed" man in verse one, and further described in verse three as a tree. Not just any tree, but a tree planted by the rivers of water. He is a picture of strength and power, he is immovable. Can temptation come his way? Yes, but it will not overcome him. Can false doctrine pass by? It will, but he will not sway (Ephesians 4:14).

He is like a tree that "brings forth its fruit in its season." He produces what is expected out of the kind of person that he is. He is always successful and prosperous, spiritually, and he sees the fruits of his labor. In every season, he doesn't disappoint God, nor his brethren, but continues to bear his fruit.

His "leaf does not wither." He is constant and consistent. Nothing about his life for God is short lived, but everlasting.

"And whatever he does shall prosper." His roots will continue to grow deeper, his leaves will continue to increase in health,

and his fruit will always bring in a grand and juicy harvest.

What is the secret to his success? How can I be described like him? How can I be the man of power and immovable strength, spiritually constant, consistent, and prosperous? I am happy to say that there is a complete answer to this question, and the secret to his success is really not a secret at all, but is laid out for us so clearly within the text.

Verse one tells us that he has made a choice to not bother with three things that most everyone bothers themselves with: 1). He “walks not in the counsel of the ungodly.” 2). “Nor stands in the path of sinners.” 3). “Nor sits in the seat of the scornful.” He neither walks, stands, nor sits according to the manner of the world. His life is not fashioned after their lives. He goes by a completely different pattern. So then, what does he spend his time doing if he is not occupied with everything that the worldly man spends his time doing?

Verse two explains that “his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.” While other men delight in immorality, the blessed man takes pleasure in the words of God, meditating upon them day and night. “Meditate” means to ponder, imagine, speak, study, talk, utter. This man spends his days and nights pondering the words of God. He is a bible student, if you will. He studies, ponders, applies, and talks about it. He talks about it because it is his life; it’s what he thinks about every day. His thoughts become his words to his neighbor, his wife, and his children. This is the revealed secret to his success. He wasn’t born like a strong and powerful tree, he became that way because he dedicated his life to the words of God. All who desire to be deeply rooted, unmoved by the devices of Satan, and spiritually prosperous and blessed, come to psalm one, and be trained in the way you should go. This is who we can become, all of us, if we are only willing to center our lives around the word of God.

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## LOCAL CHURCH ORGANIZATION

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The various denominations divide their membership between the clergy and the laity. The laity are the “people in the pew,” those who are members but not in leadership positions. The clergy is the leadership of the church, the professionals. In some, such as the Catholic Church, their authority is almost complete. The laity depend upon them to tell them what to believe and to administer the “sacraments,” which are supposedly the avenues through which the spiritual blessings come from God. In Protestant denominations their authority is not as total.

In all the denominations, the clergy are supposed to be

divinely called to their office. But if this were the case, they should be able to perform miraculous signs to confirm their calling. Jesus called His twelve apostles to go the lost sheep of the house of Israel and gave them great power to prove they were His spokesmen (Matthew 10:1-5); later He sent seventy to the same people with the same message and likewise endowed them with miraculous power (Luke 10:1,9,17); and later still He sent His apostles to the world and gave them the ability to authenticate their message with miracles (Mark 16:14-20; Acts 1:1-8; 2 Corinthians 12:12). If I am to accept that a man or woman is specially called by the Lord to an office in the church, I want to see him, or her, perform miracles to prove it.

Even the apostles of Christ did not exercise dominion ("lord it over" - NASB, ESV) the faith of others (2 Corinthians 1:24), even though they spoke for Christ as His ambassadors and revealed His will (2 Corinthians 5:18-20; John 16:13-15). Regardless of who speaks to us in the flesh, we, as the Bereans, must search the Scriptures to see if the message is true (Acts 17:10-12).

The clergy/laity distinction is unknown to the Scriptures. None is to "lord it over" others (Matthew 20:25-28), but we are all brethren (Matthew 23:8). The Lord forbade His disciples to wear special clothing to set them apart as holy, to be called by honorary titles of distinction, or in other ways to seek or accept religious honor from men (Matthew 23:5-12). We should refuse to call any man "Father" or "reverend" as religious titles.

When He ascended on high the Lord did set offices in His church for the purpose of building up Christians into the likeness of Christ and achieving the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:7-16).

The Lord selected and appointed apostles for the whole church to bear witness to His resurrection, to reveal His will, and to take the gospel to the world (Acts 1:1-8). The very same apostles still rule the church through the New Testament they revealed and recorded (Luke 22:14, 29-30). They have no modern successors, since there are no living witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:21-26; 1 Corinthians 15:8-9).

Likewise the Holy Spirit endowed both men and women with the gift of prophecy (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Acts 2:17; 21:8-9) to speak the will of God by inspiration (cf. Amos 3:7-8), but with the completion of the New Testament revelation the gift of prophecy ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

Christ Jesus also set the office of evangelist into the church



(Ephesians 4:11). Evangelists (those who bring good tidings) are also called preachers (heralds, messengers; 2 Timothy 4:2,5), and ministers (servants) of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 4:6). Evangelists, rather than being officers in the local church, are preachers wherever they work (Acts 8:5,40; 21:8). They do not have to travel to be evangelists, since Philip the evangelist remained in Caesarea for at least around twenty years (Acts 8:40; 21:8). They have fellowship (share in the work of the Lord) with the congregations where they preach and who assist them in their work (Philippians 4:15-16).

The offices within the local church are listed in Philippians 1:1, and there are only two, “bishops” and “deacons.”

The term “bishop” means “overseer” (Vine) and is so translated in Acts 20:28. The same men called “bishops” or “overseers” in the local church are also called “elders” (Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5,7; 1 Peter 5:1-2), meaning “a senior” (Thayer), and “shepherds” (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2) or “pastors” (Ephesians 4:11). They are to rule in the local church (1 Timothy 5:17) and to care for the spiritual condition of the congregation as a shepherd does the physical condition of his flock (1 Peter 5:1-2). They watch for their souls (Hebrews 13:17) and feed them the word of God (Ephesians 4:11). There was always a plurality of elders/overseers/pastors in a local church (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5), and they serve only in the local church where they are members (1 Peter 5:1-2). Thus, the denominational “one man pastor” system is not found in Scripture, nor should any man or group of men make decisions for more than one congregation. All officers in a local church are to be chosen by the members of the church from among the members (Acts 6:1-6). The qualifications a man must meet to be chosen as an elder are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7,11 and Titus 1:5-9.

The congregation also is to choose deacons (servants) from among the members to serve the local church in material duties (Philippians 1:1; Acts 6:1-4). Their qualifications are found in Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

These offices do not constitute a clergy apart from and superior to the members, but are simply functions that those who have met certain divinely given requirements are selected by the congregation from among the members to perform.

Women must not serve in any position where they teach over men or rule over men (1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12). Women may serve the congregation in ways in harmony with their role of submission to the men (Romans 16:1-2).

All members of the congregation are to actively serve the Lord and one another as they have opportunity and ability (Philippians 1:1; Romans 12:4-8; Matthew 25:14-30). The idea of a laity that simply sits in the pews and contributes money to the church without actively participating in the work of the congregation is also unknown in Scripture. Every member of the local body is to do his/her share (Ephesians 4:16; Romans 12:4-8).

This is the divine pattern for the organization of the local church, and we must hold it fast (2 Timothy 1:13).

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## PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER

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### **Friend at Midnight Luke 11:5-13**

Late in the earthly ministry of Christ, when He had finished a prayer, His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray as John had taught His disciples (Luke 11:1). The Master had taught them how to pray before in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9-13). But that was a very brief prayer, and Jesus sometimes continued a long time in prayer (cf. Luke 6:12). It was evident prayer was very important to Jesus (cf. Mark 1:35; Luke 3:21; 5:16; 9:18,29), even as it must be for us (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Obviously the disciples felt they needed to learn more about prayer.

But the Master may have disappointed His disciples, for, rather than giving them something new to pray, He virtually repeated what He had taught them in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9-13). Except this version (Luke 11:2-4) was even shorter than the brief prayer He had already given them.

Christ was not teaching them to memorize a prayer and repeat it by rote, as audiences do with Matthew 6:9-13, for He condemned “vain repetitions,” the mindless quoting of the same formula over and over again (Matthew 6:7). Rather, He taught the basic composition of acceptable prayer. Our prayers are addressed to God as our Father, a blessed closeness unknown before Christ Jesus brought about our adoption as children of God because of our relationship to Him, the unique Son of God (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-6). We praise Him and set His name apart as holy (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). We pray for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2). Where human hearts submit to the will of God, there the kingdom of heaven is within their hearts (Luke 17:20-21). His will is to reign in the hearts of all people everywhere as they are saved by coming to the knowledge of the truth of

the gospel (1 Timothy 2:3-4). As trusting children we ask him to supply our material necessities (Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3). We acknowledge our sins and ask Him to forgive us, as we forgive those who wrong us (Matthew 6:12-13; Luke 11:4), while at the same time we petition Him to deliver us from temptation and from Satan the tempter (Ibid), which He has promised to do (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The Master did add some further teaching about prayer. He spoke a parable about a man who had unexpected visitors who arrived late at night. In this humorous story the Master places us in the position of a man who, out of necessity, is very rude to his neighbor.

The houses of poor people in Palestine were one room earthen dwellings with dirt floors, covered in the front part with straw on which the animals lay, and having a raised platform in back where the whole family slept. Waking the owner of the house late at night meant awakening everyone and everything in the house! But because hospitality was (and is) such a serious responsibility (Genesis 18:1-8; 19:1-3; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9), a Jewish man, if no food were in his own house for his unexpected guest, would risk seriously offending his neighbor by loudly, insistently asking for three loaves of bread - one for his guest, one for himself, and one spare - even though the entire household of his neighbor was asleep! The angry neighbor would give the needed bread, not out of friendship, but to get rid of the pest at his door!

Christ used an interesting word to describe what would cause the home owner to give the bread. The word rendered "importunity" in the **King James Version** and **American Standard Version**, "persistence" in the **New King James Version** and **New American Standard Bible**, and "impudence" in the **English Standard Version** in Luke 11:8 literally means "shamelessness" (Arndt & Gingrich. 54; Mounce. 1081). The Master pictures us as, because of our need, completely forgetting propriety and shamelessly, persistently standing at our neighbor's door begging for bread in the middle of the night though his entire house is asleep!

The Master's own application of His parable follows in verses 9-13. The passage is virtually a repetition of what He had already taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:7-11). He promises the Father will grant our requests if we keep on asking, seeking, and knocking (Matthew 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-10). What parent would so cruel as to give something harmful or useless to his child who was simply asking for something to eat? (Matthew 7:9-10; Luke 11:11-12). God is good in the absolute, while none of us are (Luke 18:18-19). If we then give our children good things when they request it, will not

our loving Father answer our prayers by granting us what we need and request? (Matthew 7:11)

All spiritual good comes to us by the Holy Spirit, who revealed the Lord's will to us through His apostles and prophets (Romans 8:9; John 16:13-15; Ephesians 3:1-7). All the spiritual blessings from the Holy Spirit come to the children of God in answer to prayer (Luke 11:13; cf. Matthew 7:11).

What is the lesson? "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). If you believe that what you request is in accordance with the will of God, and He doesn't at first grant your prayer, keep on praying. Be shamelessly persistent in making your requests to Him. He is your absolutely good, loving, faithful Father. He will give you what is best.

### **The Persistent Widow Luke 18:1-8**

Jesus later taught another parable about a persistent widow and an unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). There is absolutely no doubt about the application of this parable, for the writer introduces it by explaining, "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (verse 1, **King James Version**). The **International Standard Version**, a modern, essentially literal translation, renders the verse, "Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to pray all the time and never give up." The word translated "faint" in the **King James Version** is rendered "lose heart" by the **New King James Version**, **New American Standard Bible**, and **English Standard Version**. The same word is otherwise translated "grow weary" (2 Thessalonians 3:13). Arndt and Gingrich state it can mean "despair" (214). Thus, the lesson of the parable is the same as that of the friend at midnight - persistence in prayer.

The Master told about a widow coming to an unjust judge demanding justice against her adversary. To fully comprehend the situation Jesus described, we must understand the plight of widows at that time and the teaching of the Old Testament about them. Widows were obviously relatively helpless in that they had lost the husband upon whom they depended for support. In ancient times there usually was no honorable occupation a woman could pursue other than home making. According to the Law people were to see that those unable to procure justice for themselves, including widows, received just treatment (Deuteronomy 24:17-18). Those who perverted justice due the widow were cursed (27:19). It would be easy to oppress them, as they had none to plead their cause and could not bribe a corrupt judge into rendering justice for

them, so Israel was specifically commanded not to oppress them (Exodus 22:21-22). Isaiah thus condemned the apostate Northern Kingdom:

*Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, Who write misfortune, Which they have prescribed To rob the needy of justice, And to take what is right from the poor of My people, That widows may be their prey, And that they may rob the fatherless* (Isaiah 10:1-2; cf. 1:21-23).

He admonished them to “Plead for the widow” (1:16-17). Jeremiah warned backsliding Judah to stop oppressing “the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow” (Jeremiah 7:5-7). Zechariah informed the Jews of the Restoration that God had sent their fathers into captivity because they refused to heed the warning to “not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor” (Zechariah 7:8-14). The Lord scathingly denounced the Jewish rulers of His day:

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation* (Matthew 23:14).

But the judge of the parable “did not fear God nor regard man” (verse 2). No reverence for the Lord led him to do right, and he didn’t care what people thought about him. He saw no reason to give a just judgment for some poor widow who had no influence and couldn’t bribe him.

But she was more than his match. She found the one thing he was concerned about, his own ease, and attacked it. She kept coming back, and coming back, and coming back until at last, in exasperation, “he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out’” (verses 4-5, **NASB**). She was about to drive him crazy, and he finally did what was right just to get her to leave him alone!

What’s the point? “And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?” (Verse 7, **ESV**). No our heavenly Father is not unjust. He is preeminently just. If a rascal of a judge will finally do right if the injured party keeps on pleading, don’t you think the righteous Judge of all will do right if we ask?

By the way, the specific application of this passage had real meaning to the Lord’s disciples. They would go through terrible suffering (Luke 21:12), and they would cry out to God for justice (Revelation 6:9-11). If we are His disciples, we too will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12), and He will speedily hear our pleas for justice.

But the last verse of the passage contains a question that is particularly significant. “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Verse 8). Why faith? I thought the subject was persistence in prayer? Because prayer is the ultimate expression of our faith in God. How do we know the Father hears and answers our prayers? A rank infidel might scoffingly counter any “testimonials” about answered prayers by truthfully claiming, “I have better health and more money than you. Why should I believe God answers prayer?” The only proof I have that God hears and answers the prayers of His people is His promise.

*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him (1 John 5:14-15).*

If we firmly believe His promise, we will pray persistently. Prayer is the ultimate expression of our faith in God. “Unyielding prayer rises from an unyielding faith” (Earnhart. 103). Pray always and never give up.

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