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- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

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Finally, brethren

**WHATEVER
THINGS**

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE
IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at christistheway.com.

*"Jesus said that 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh' (Matt. 12:34), and the hearts of these saints were filled with the wonderful truths of the gospel. Thus the gospel spread and thus it would spread in our age - not through some grand scheme by which a centralized organization reaches the masses, but through the dedicated efforts of multitudes of zealous, devoted saints teaching the gospel to those with whom we come into contact" (Johnny Stringer, **Truth Commentaries: The Book of Acts**. 164, comments on Acts 8:4)*

Question from Nigeria about the Wine of the Lord's Supper

Question 1: What is the church fund made for? And what are those things it is not made for?

Answer: From the very beginning the church had funds collected from its own members to do the work God assigned it to do (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4). The work specifically mentioned in connection with these collections is benevolence toward needy disciples of Christ (same references). But the primary function of the church is to support and uphold the truth of the Word of God (1 Timothy 3:14-15), and under normal circumstances most church funds should be used to preach and teach the Word of God, including the support of preachers and elders (2 Corinthians 11:8; Philippians 4:15-16; 1 Timothy 5:17-18). The church is also to assemble to worship the Lord (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; 14:15, 23; Hebrews 10:24-25), so church funds may be used to provide a place for the church to assemble and to conduct classes and for all incidental expenses associated with this, such as toilets.

Question 2: Supposing a brother/sister is sickly, can the church assist after individual Christians have tried their best?

Answer: The first source of help for needy Christians, including those suffering from disease and accidents, is our own family (1 Timothy 5:4, 8, 16). If the needs exceed what the family can provide,

Christians should help each other individually (Matthew 25:31-46), and the church may help on a temporary basis (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35; 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians chapter 8 & 9). Only “widows indeed” should become permanent charges of the church (1 Timothy 5:3-16).

Question 3: Can we use church fund to bury a brother/sister that have nobody to bury him/her?

Answer: The proper disposal of the dead bodies of our loved ones is a legitimate need (Genesis 23:4; cf. Acts 5:5-6, 10; 8:2). As such, for Christians who cannot afford to bury their own dead loved ones, the church may assist as part of its benevolent work (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35; 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians chapter 8 & 9). When I conduct a funeral, it consists of teaching I deem to be appropriate to the occasion, prayers, and religious songs, all of which are proper functions of the church (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:15) It is an African custom for the family to provide a feast to the mourners who attend the funeral. This is no part of the work of the church and should not be paid for by the church (Romans 14:17).

Question 4: Can we use the church fund to transport those attending burial of a sister/brother?

Answer: If the funeral consists of preaching, songs, and prayers, then the church may indeed pay incidental expenses, such as transportation, just as the church can provide toilets. But it should have no part in feasts nor pay expenses to transport people to such (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).

A Conversation with a Rabbi

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

As the Jewish celebration of Hanukkah approached, the Atlanta Journal ran a story, focusing on its observance by a Chabad-Lubavitch sect of the Hasidic movement. This is an ultra-conservative denomination in Judaism. I wrote a letter to the young rabbi mentioned in the article, and from that was able to set up a meeting with Ruvy New.

From the first, it was evident that he desired no sort of discussion. In fact, during our conversation, I recall that he only asked one question: “What can I do for you?” I explained my desire to know more about his faith, so that I could better understand it for myself, and better answer other’s questions. He admitted that he had never read the New Testament, and had never considered the evidence of Christ’s claims to be the Son of God.

This particular sect began in Lubavitch, Russia, as a pietist movement coming out of Eastern Europe in the late 1700s. Hasidic Jews wear the beards, black hats and clothing that are seen in the news from time to time. They tend to live in close-knit neighborhoods, as they cannot drive on the Sabbath, but must walk to their synagogues for worship.

At the time of our conversation, they strongly believed that their rabbi Manachem Schneerson was the Messiah, and that he would soon reveal himself to be so. This gentleman, or rebbe, as he was designated, was in his 90s, and at the time of our conversation (January, 1994) was quite ill following a stroke. When I asked about his qualifications in light of the Old Testament prophecies, particularly Isaiah 53, I was informed that he met the criteria, including suffering, “for he is suffering now in his illness,” for the sins of the world. (I wasn’t real sure about that.) According to Ruvy New, two things are necessary for the revealing of the Messiah. First, the temple must be rebuilt in Jerusalem, and second, there must be enough good deeds by faithful Jews to usher in his coming. New told me that they pray 60 times a day for his coming, and that as the Jews do more and more good deeds, this will hasten his coming.

I inquired about the priesthood, and was informed that they do have priests, whose roles are largely ceremonial, since there is no temple where sacrifices could be offered. Mr. New said that among the Jews, the genealogical records had been kept, even after Jerusalem’s destruction in A.D. 70, and thus a few

could trace their lineage from Levi. Schneerson was said to be of the tribe of Judah through David. It was interesting to hear that they do not believe in the necessity of a virgin birth, for the Messiah is to be just a man, although a righteous and scholarly man. The Messiah is likened to Moses, for they believe there is a Moses in every generation. When the Messiah is revealed, the Jews will return to Israel, and from Jerusalem the King will rule over the earth forever.

This sect reminds us of the Pharisees in their strict observance of the Law. At exactly 18 minutes before Friday's sunset, Mrs. New lights the Shabbat, or Sabbath candles in preparation for dinner, but the dishes remain unwashed until sundown Saturday. They will not turn on a light or use hot water on the Sabbath, for they say this kindles a "fire," which is forbidden. (When the contacts in the light switch connect, it creates a spark, which they say is a fire.) They will even unscrew the light bulb in the refrigerator so it will not come on when they open the door. As to other lights in the house, they will either leave them on during the Sabbath, or if they have non-Jewish servants, they can operate the light switches.

In a 24-page booklet Mr. New gave me, the Jewish scholar Maimonides is quoted: "Whoever does not believe in (Moshiach) (Messiah—jdt) and does not anxiously anticipate his coming, but also the Torah and Moses..."

But He has come, and is coming again! His name is Jesus Christ, and the proof of his identity is solid and cannot be disproven.

What Happened To The Church Jesus Built? (#6)

Tommy G. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

When the word of God is no longer respected as the source of faith, doctrine and practice it leaves the door open for human ideas and schemes to be introduced, adopted, and practiced as matters of faith and doctrine. This can be seen in the acceptance of the doctrine of penance mentioned in the last issue.

The doctrine of penance (involving public shaming and punishment, discussed a little later), was first advocated ca.157 AD, and over the centuries developed into one of the established sacraments of the apostate Roman Catholic Church, 1022 AD. The public humiliation of penance was the seed that produced the doctrine of purgatory (a place of punishment for sinners after death from which they could eventually escape after one had sufficiently suffered), was first advocated 220 AD by Origen. The idea of purgatory was later repudiated in a church council in 533 AD, but reversed again and formally adopted as doctrine in 1070 A.D. These concepts of public punishment for sin, and a place of purgatory then opened the door to the doctrine of Auricular confession, where the sins of the penitents were confessed to, and then forgiven by the priest. This concept was first practiced in the 4th century, and became an established sacrament (doctrine) of the Roman Catholic Church in 1215 AD. These things led to the "sale of indulgences" whereby one could pay a sum of money to a priest and have the priest pray away their sins, and even pay to get their loved ones out of purgatory. Let's examine these things in the light of scripture.

One becomes a Christian by obeying the gospel Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, then, under the threat of persecution, in a time of weakness, might deny the faith, and leave the Lord's church. Later, this person would repent of his/her cowardice in denying the faith, and want to return to the Lord and His church. How could this person return?

Those who are familiar with the word of God know what is required of one that has fallen away from the faith to return. In such or similar situations in which one sins, God's word teaches the conditions required by God for one who has fallen into sin to gain forgiveness and return to the Lord. When a person shows true remorse (godly sorrow) for sin (2 Corinthians 7:9-10), repents of the sin (Acts 8:20-24), and confesses the sin (1 John 1:8-10; 2:2) the person is forgiven by God, and is to be treated by the congregation as one in good standing (2 Corinthians 2:4-8). When a person has done these things, God deems it sufficient

punishment for the one returning.

But, after the church went into apostasy, the clergy imposed certain acts of their own choosing to make sure the penitent had truly repented. Fisher, in *The History of the Christian Church*, writes that the penitent would be given “a special seat in the meetings for worship and had to go through a course of public humiliation, the duration and severity of which was appointed by the clergy” (chapter 2, page 58). Note, it was the clergy who determined this, not the Lord. Returning penitents were publicly shamed and humiliated by not being allowed to enter the place of assembly while services were being conducted. They would have to stand outside the assembly and beg people to pray for them. Others might be allowed to hear the lesson preached, but had to leave before the service was concluded. Some could ask people to pray for them, but were not allowed to participate in the service. These things were the forerunner of what came to be known as “The Mourner’s Bench.”

As already stated, this practice of public humiliation of a penitent person, led to the concept of a purgatory after death. Purgatory was a place of extreme punishment, where one was forced to suffer immense pain for an extended period of time for sins committed, after which the person, having suffered sufficiently for his sins, would then be allowed to leave purgatory and enter heaven. Of course, Purgatory is not mentioned in the Bible. Hades (the place of the departed souls) is much different than the false doctrine of Purgatory. In Luke 16:19-31, Hades is described, divided into two parts, one for the saved, and one for the unsaved. Those in Hades cannot not move from one side to the other.

The doctrine of Purgatory, with the idea that one could eventually escape it, naturally led to the idea of Auricular Confession, in which a person who sinned, could confess the sins to a priest in the clergy, and the priest could forgive the sins, and the person would escape the fires of Purgatory. Once penance was expressed, the clergy could then say, “I absolve thee from thy sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” The idea of confessing sins to a priest was elevating such men to a place that belonged only to God and His Son. What passage of scripture gives man the authority to forgive sins? Read 1 Timothy 2:5. Only God can forgive sins.

But the things just mentioned were not the only things being ushered into the Lord’s church without scriptural authority. History shows that the first mention of the “Apostles’ Creed” (a statement of belief) was 190 A.D. (this creed has been changed 16 times since it was first introduced). Where did the apostles delegate to any man the right to produce a human creed? If the things believed had to be outlined by the apostles, then such would have been revealed in God’s word (2 Peter 1:3).

No Room For Christ

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

“Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:4-7).

Just as there was no room in the inn for Christ when He was born, there is still little or no room for Him in the lives of individuals today. How many people do you know that accept the historical fact of a Man named Jesus who lived years ago, even believing He was/is the Son of God, yet they reject His word? They don’t deny His deity, His power to have worked miracles, His resurrection from the dead, and the fact He is reigning in heaven at this present time. But how many allow Him room to dwell in their hearts by faith, governing their lives by His word?

Can you have Christ and His spiritual blessings without being obedient to His word? The answer is no!

Notice the connection Jesus made between Him and His words. “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). If you reject what He has said then you have rejected Him. You cannot be His disciple without knowing and abiding in His truth (John 8:31-32). It is written on a level so man can know and understand what He has said to us. Yet obedience has always been required by God (Hebrews 5:8-9). Do you have room for His word in your life?

If I truly have room for the Lord in my life I will be willing to give up the practice of sin. Paul, when writing to the church at Corinth, commended them for no longer being fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, etc. Stating they had been washed, sanctified, and justified through Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). When Peter wrote his first epistle to the pilgrims of the Dispersion (1:1), he said “we” have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of Gentiles, walking in the lust of the flesh. They needed to arm themselves with the mind of Christ, ceasing from sin (1 Peter 4:1-4). Those who have room for the Lord will have no room for the practice of sin. Light and darkness do not occupy the same space at the same time. Make room for righteous living.

Not only will one give up the practice of sin, but he will be busy growing in his faith and in his service to the Lord. If you don't have the time (or take the time) to grow and serve Jesus, then you have no room for Him. It takes time and effort for one to mature in Christ. Is there room in your life for Bible study (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Timothy 4:13-15); for prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Luke 18:1); for putting on the spiritual armor to fight the spiritual battles we face (Ephesians 6:11-18); for worship (John 4:23-24); and for serving our great God every day (Luke 9:23-26)? Paul said, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16). Satan is trying to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8); so, we need to be strong in the Lord to overcome his efforts (Ephesians 6:10-11).

Some have room, just not very much. In the parable of the sower, the seed which fell among the thorns, describes the hearts of people who “when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:14). I am afraid this portrays far too many Christians in churches scattered throughout the world. They have some time to assemble for worship but not for every service (Hebrews 10:24-25). They can return a very small portion of what the Lord has blessed them with but not as they have truly prospered (2 Corinthians 9:6-8). They have a feeling of sympathy for the sick but there is no time to visit or help (Matthew 25:31-46). They know many people who are lost, even family and friends, and yet find neither the time nor are they willing to put forth the effort to teach them the gospel so they can be saved by the grace of God (2 Timothy 2:2). Worldliness has such a prominent place in their heart and there little room left for the Lord.

Do you have any room for Christ? What place does He occupy in your life? How much time do you spend reading about Him in His word each week? How often do you talk to Him in prayer? When it comes time to worship Him in the public assembly will you be there? If there is a need for some good deed in the community will you step up and do what needs to be done? When opportunity arises to share the gospel with someone who is lost will you be willing to tell them about Jesus who died for them? Make room in your life for Him. May it never be truthfully said he/she had no time for the Lord. If so He will have no room for us.

A Drop of Water

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

Jesus described life after death as a place where one side is full of joy and ease, and the other side is full of pain and torment. This realm is called Hades: the place of departed spirits. Jesus went there when He died (Acts 2:31) and we'll do the same when we die. From there, we will await the resurrection to judgment as Jesus promised. “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29).

Jesus described Hades in colorful detail in Luke 16:19-31 when He told of two men who died, one who went to comfort (Paradise) and another who went to torment (verse 23). Jesus focused mainly on the man who went to the side of torment. He said this man's pain was so intense that he begged for someone to "dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame" (verse 25). But, no relief was given because of the permanency of both environments. Whichever side of Hades a person finds himself at death is where he will remain until judgment (verse 26).

Since that is so, think about the level of pain a person has to be in to only want a drop of water for comfort and relief. I have seen hospital patients in so much pain that they cherished an ice chip being placed on their parched mouth. Jesus said the people in torment are in that kind of pain and more. They are in an environment that causes them to cry for mercy as they reflect on the bad choices they made in life (verse 25). No relief. No comfort. Just ongoing languish and regret for their rebellion against God.

Water is a gift from God that people enjoy in this life, regardless of their attitude toward Him. This world is filled with many similar blessings because He "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). However, in eternity, wicked people will be separated from all of God's blessings, including water. After judgment, it will be as Jesus foretold: they will "go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched" (Mark 9:43). The rich man in torment (Luke 16) foreshadows this reality.

Now is the time to obey God and walk by faith in His word. For some, this means obeying the gospel in becoming a Christian. Peter told sinners, who believed in Jesus as God's Son, "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). For others, it means repenting of sin and confessing it (Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9). To ignore God's word and act like His blessings will always be available to sinners is a false hope. Jesus gave us insight into the condition of those in torment to convince us to repent. He wants us to know that He "will render to each one according to his deeds" on the day of judgment, which will result in "eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil" (Romans 2:5-9).

Instead of living in a way that will leave us begging for a drop of water in eternity, why not make choices that lead to the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Revelation 22:1)? There will be no regrets for those who live and die in the Lord.

Is Your House In Order?

William J. Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

I'm not asking if your dishes are done, if the floor is swept, the carpets are vacuumed, the light fixtures dusted, etc.. Our title refers to 2 Kings 20, where the prophet Isaiah was sent to an ailing king Hezekiah. He had a very short but vital message for the king, "*Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live*" (20:1).

How aware are you of your own mortality? Have you considered the fact that you are going to die? I'm not suggesting we should obsess over it, but death is inevitable; it is universal. Yet many seem to live with no thought about the brevity of life, and I'm not just talking about unbelievers. Notice what James wrote to Christians:

Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit,' whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.' But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil (James 4:13-15).

The Bible writer is not discouraging us from having a plan, but urges us to realize our blueprint for life is not etched in stone. In particular, if our plans are contrary to the will of God, they will fail. The plans of some are hostile to God's way (king Balak, Numbers 22; the Sanhedrin, Acts 5:35-40; etc.), while others simply do not accord with His timing and purpose (Paul's travel plans, Acts 16:6-7). The words "Lord willing" should be part of a believer's mindset and speech (Acts 18:21; 1 Corinthians 4:19; Hebrews 6:3).

James also reminds us that life is fragile. All man be going as we expected, and then the unexpected comes - time and chance happen to all (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Occasionally time and chance will have life altering or even life ending results. No one plans for a car wreck or severe illness, and yet they happen daily, ranging from minor setbacks to the heartbreaking loss of life.

Back to Hezekiah, he was a good king who trusted in the LORD (2 Kings 18:3, 5). He opened and repaired the temple, and reinstated the priesthood and the feasts (2 Chronicles 29:3-11; 30:1). He tore down the idols in the land (2 Kings 18:4), and when Assyria came against Judah, he prayed in faith that the LORD would deliver them, and He did (2 Kings 19:15-20, 35).

With all this, despite his illness, it is possible Hezekiah clung to the hope that he would get better. And when Isaiah arrived, he may have thought he would be healed. Instead, he was told to prepare for death. "Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live."

The immediate reaction for some is "That's not fair!" May I say to you, the LORD is not unfair. God doesn't guarantee long life for His people, no matter how faithful they may be. His focus is on our soul. Better to have lived a shorter life that has been prepared for eternity than a long life with no view for eternal things. The key, whether young or old, is to get our house in order, to use this life to prepare for eternal life.

Hearing he would die, Hezekiah prayed (2 Kings 20:2-3). Before he left the palace, the LORD sent Isaiah back to the king with a new message. God had heard Hezekiah's prayer, saw his tears, would heal him, and would add 15 years to his life (2 Kings 20:4-6).

The LORD is good! Indeed, He is. It is encouraging to read or hear about answered prayers. It should build our faith in God and in the power of prayer. And in a case like this, we might reason that it was right and just for Hezekiah to live longer.

Given the description of the king before Isaiah brought the news of his impending death, it sounded like he was ready to meet the LORD. But, after he was granted 15 additional years, the LORD used the visit of some Babylonian ambassadors to test him and see where his heart was (2 Chronicles 32:31). Sadly he foolishly and boastfully showed all the treasures and armory to them (2 Kings 20:12-15).

Isaiah returned with a judgment from the LORD. Because of his pride, all the wealth of the king's house and some of his descendants would be taken captive to Babylon (2 Kings 20:16-18). His response is troubling. He affirmed that Isaiah's word was good, for at least there would be peace and truth throughout the rest of his days (2 Kings 20:19).

We would hope that receiving such wonderful mercy would cause greater devotion, but in Hezekiah's case, it appears that he relaxed his faith and opened himself to temptation. I suppose he is a great example of the warning given by Paul, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Let us stand in faith and get our houses in order!

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR BIBLE
Teachings of the Apostles

Sean P. Cavender | Bald Knob, Arkansas, USA

We have studied and shown that the old law has been done away with, nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14) and now we are under the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). Being under a new covenant through the blood of Christ, we can have the forgiveness of sins when we repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). We are then added to the Lord's church (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47).

Once the Lord promised to build His church, He gave to His disciples authority to preach the gospel. He promised to give them the keys to the kingdom of heaven and authority in the church (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). Peter and the apostles were instructed by the Lord to preach "repentance for forgiveness of sins...beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

This was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, after Christ had ascended to heaven (Acts 2:16-38). The apostles Peter and John were called to Samaria to help establish new converts and give the Holy Spirit to those new Christians (Acts 8:14-16). The apostles had the authority to proclaim God's word and perform mighty miracles.

The apostles were also men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to reveal God's word. The Holy Spirit moved men to write and speak the words God intended for men to know (2 Peter 1:21). The Spirit of God made known the will of God so all men may understand the will of God. The apostles wrote down these inspired words, which have been written down, recorded, and preserved for us in the Scriptures.

The apostles and other inspired men wrote instructions to the New Testament churches, giving them understanding of God's word. Paul said, "that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4). Reading the word of God gives us insight into the mystery that has now been revealed in the writings and teachings of the apostles.

This is why we must turn to the New Testament for any practice we want to take part. If it is a matter of doctrine and teaching, worship, nature of the church, or its work—the New Testament Scriptures must be our final authority. The apostle Peter said, "Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God..." (1 Peter 4:11). The word of God is His revealed will and we should seek to follow the divine pattern for all things.

What Is Prayer?

Wayne Goff | Kansas City, Missouri, USA
via **The Preceptor Magazine** (April, 1985)

In its widest and most general sense, **prayer is calling upon God in order to talk to Him**. Prayer is always an act of worship, and as such demands the outpouring of a reverential and grateful heart. It requires an obedient petitioner who meets the conditions of true prayer (1 John 5:14). Prayer, as all acts of worship, must be "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Prayer necessitates an acknowledgment of man's dependence upon the high and lofty One Who inhabits Eternity. In turn, Jehovah favors the humble.

The worshiper does not engage in prayer without reason, and it is the reason or reasons that help characterize prayer in its various aspects of adoration, confession, supplication; thanksgiving, intercession, and petition. One or more of these characteristics will mold prayer and individualize it according to the heart's desire.

Prayer is best seen and understood in the life of our Lord, and naturally so since Christ on earth was the perfect embodiment and blending of man and God (Philippians 2:7-8 and Colossians 1:19). Thus in its highest sense, Jesus declared prayer to be as simple as a child's request to a Father (Matthew 6:8; 7:11), confident of a loving, attentive response, and yet with absolute reverence and obedience of a child for His Father (Matthew 6:10; 26:39, 42), making requests always subject to the Father's will. Jesus' prayers were

always a beautiful mixture of reverence (“Hallowed be thy name”) and subjection (“not as I will, but as thou,” “Thy will be done”) with pure love and rich intimacy (“O my Father”). Thus prayer is best understood and appreciated by a study of the Lord’s personal prayers and habits. Jesus best knew how to lift up His heart and soul, pouring out to God His heart’s desires, communing with the Father on the highest spiritual plain. The prayers and habits of our Lord should be our goal and source of understanding.

Prayer can be further defined by the more technical characteristics employed in reference to it and by a brief historical study as revealed in the Bible.

Some Technical Aspects of General Prayer

(1) “Prayer” (**proseuche**) is the most commonly used word for prayer, and is a word of sacred character, being limited to prayer to God. This word was used of the Lord’s prayer at the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:45), of the prayers of the early church (Acts 2:42), of the prayers of Cornelius (Acts 10:4,31), of the apostles’ spiritual ministry (Acts 6:4), and is frequently joined with “supplications” (Acts 1:14; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6; 1 Timothy 2:1; 5:5). It is the prayer of Elijah (James 5:17, literally, “he prayed with prayer”). And in John’s apocalyptic revelation “the prayers of saints” are represented as “golden vials full of odors” (Revelation 5:8), which are offered up to God in spiritual sacrifice (Revelation 8:3-4), giving us perhaps the most spiritual view of prayer yet.

(2) “Prayer” (**deesis**) is used only about a third as much as the foregoing word for “prayer,” but is used six other times by New Testament writers and translated “supplication.” Its distinction lies in the fact that it is a seeking, asking, and entreating of God by men for that which is needed, and thus may indicate a more intense prayer. Zacharias prayed for a son (Luke 1:13); the prophetess Anna served God with this prayer night and day (Luke 2:37); John’s disciples made prayers (Luke 5:33); Paul’s intense desire for Israel’s salvation produced this type prayer (Romans 10:1); and this word is used often in his epistles. Jesus’ anguished prayers to God were of this sort (Hebrews 5:7), and “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man” (James 5:16) comes from this word. It is obvious from these cases that this type prayer is not casual, haphazard prayer, but is deep, earnest prayer stemming from intense need. It might also be suggested that such prayer can only emanate from one deeply and religiously devoted to God, and who has his own spiritual life in harmony with God’s will to a full degree. A richly cultivated faith will produce just such a praying saint. Thus, this word for prayer is reserved for the petitionary prayer of the spiritual suppliant.

(3) “Supplication” (**deesis**) is the King James translation at Acts 1:14, Ephesians 6:18 (twice), Philippians 4:6, 1 Timothy 2:1, and 5:5 for the word just discussed. It is enjoined as a command upon brethren almost every time and appears most notably in Ephesians 6:18: “Praying always with all prayer and **supplication** in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and **supplication** for all saints.” Certainly intended in this passage is the spiritual protection required not only for self, but for all faithful saints. It is connected, not accidentally, with “the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:13), and should be seriously considered!

(4) “Intercession” (**enteuxis**) is once translated “prayer,” (1 Timothy 4:5), but is more commonly rendered “intercession” (noun) and “make intercession” (verb). Intercession speaks of a conference or conversation with God, and expresses confiding access to God with child-like confidence. Thus it is a word that implies in its noun form free and familiar prayer. Meat is said to be sanctified with such “prayer” (1 Timothy 4:5), and in 1 Timothy 2:1 it appears in a list as “intercessions” and implies seeking the presence and hearing of God on behalf of others. The verb (**entunchano**) indicates more regularly what we generally conceive to be “intercession,” and that is to speak to God in behalf of another. Barclay says of this word, “It speaks of the right to approach God; it speaks of the intimate fellowship which the Christian can enjoy with God...” (**New Testament Words**. 85). But he explains that it went on to become an almost technical term for presenting a petition to someone in authority, and thus “to make intercession” is the frequent translation (Romans 8:27, 34; 11:2, Hebrews 7:25). The Holy Spirit, Christ, and Elijah are said to make intercession for others.

And only once are Christians commanded to intercede for others (1 Timothy 2:1), but importantly noticed is that the command covers all men, and most especially those in authority. Thus, while “intercession” is a rare word, it is so very important to us. While Christ and the Spirit intercede for saints, saints must, in turn, beseech God in behalf of all men. In so doing, intercession falls into the category of general prayer.

(5) “Thanksgiving” (*eucharistia*) is a most important aspect of prayer. It denotes gratitude and thankfulness to God for blessings received, and is sometimes translated with the phrase “giving of thanks” (1 Corinthians 14:16; Ephesians 5:4; 1 Timothy 2:1). There are many things for which thanks should be given to God, and a study of this aspect of prayer in the New Testament is recommended to the serious student. Remember, thanksgiving is the expression of joy Godward. As we thank God and enumerate our blessings, we shall be joyful indeed, even in times of sorrow. The thankless Christian is in grave danger (cf. Romans 1:21) of apostasy, and is in urgent need of reconsidering his condition!

The following five verbs are all translated by the word “pray” and cannot be overlooked in our study. Each word is somewhat distinct from the others and makes more complete our understanding of prayer.

(6) “Pray” (*euchomai*) is used of prayer to God and is also translated “wish” (2 Corinthians 13:9; 3 John 2, Acts 27:29; Romans 9:3). This is so because prayer is involved in one’s true wishes, as in John’s “wish” for the beloved Gaius that he might prosper and be in health or in Paul’s wish for Agrippa’s salvation. Since “wish” involves desire, craving, and longing, the Christian will involve such in his prayers to God so long as they are unfulfilled. Perhaps with this in mind, we might want to examine our wishes more closely! Consider such praying at 2 Corinthians 13:7, James 5:16, and Romans 9:3.

(7) “Pray” (*proseuchomai*), like its kindred noun form, is the most frequently used verb in the New Testament to indicate praying. Jesus used it in His sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:44), in teaching His disciples how to pray (Matthew 6:5-9), in His parables (Luke 18:1-11, etc.), and in His own personal life the word is found (Matthew 14:23; 26:36-44; Luke 5:16; 6:12, etc.). Moreover, it is most often used for praying in the book of Acts (i.e., Acts 6:6; 8:15; 10:9, 30; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5). It is employed also in the epistles regularly (Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 Timothy 2:8; Hebrews 13:18; James. 5:13,14,18, for instance). The word is that of prayer in general.

(8) “Pray” (*erotao*) is the asking or requesting of the petitioner to God. In 1 John 5:16 it is rendered “should make request” (RV). The word may even go so far as to imply strong request, such as “to beg,” or “beseech.” The word is used by Jesus, in requesting the Father to send another Comforter (John 14:16) and of future requests in behalf of the believers (John 16:26). Likewise it is used of Jesus in His prayer in John 17 (verses 9, 15, 20). Each case in John 17 is a request of Jesus for His disciples in the world. In 1 John 5:16 the word is found also. Hence, it would appear that this word, as it is used in reference to prayer, involves, **intercession, asking** something of God for others.

(9) “Pray” (*deomai*) carries with it the idea of **desiring, wanting due to lack, longing** for, and consequently **to ask** or **beg for** the thing desired. Jesus so prayed for Peter (Luke 22:32) and likewise admonished His disciples to pray for laborers of the harvest of souls (Matthew 9:38) and for escape from life’s temptations (Luke 21:36). Similarly, Peter employed the term in admonishing Simon the Sorcerer to repent (Acts 8:22), and Simon complied (verse 24). Cornelius so prayed to God always (Acts 10:2). Paul so begged God exceedingly that he might see the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 3:10). Such examples show us what prayer is from this standpoint, and thus how we should pray too.

(10) “Pray” (*parakaleo*) literally means to call to one’s aid, and is rendered “pray” at Matthew 26:53; Mark 5:17,18; Acts 16:9; 24:4; 27:34. Christ could have so called upon the Father for 12 legions of angels. The man of Macedonia, in Paul’s vision, called for Paul’s aid in receiving the gospel (Acts 16:9). So it is a calling upon God for divine aid in that which otherwise would not be accomplished that is emphasized by this word.

Yet another **verb** is used in the New Testament pertaining to praying, and it is the word “Ask” (*aiteo*). It is found in Matthew 7:7-10, where Jesus teaches us to ask God that He might bless out of His great and matchless goodness. Paul engages this word in his epistles (Ephesians 3:20; Colossians 1:9). It appears in the book of James at 1:5-6 and 4:2-3. The apostle John uses it five times in his first epistle (3:22; 5:14, 15 (twice), 16). Vine says that this word “more frequently suggests the attitude of a suppliant, the petition of one who is lesser in position than he to whom the petition is made.” Nonetheless, **asking** still remains an aspect or characteristic of prayer. In our asking, let us be sure to ask in reverence and humility, with God’s will not only in mind, but as our guide in prayer. Notice also that “petitions” (I John 5:15); and “requests” (Philippians 4:6) come from this word at these two references.

We have noted already that prayer is worship to God as much as it is a privilege and blessing to the suppliant. It is not surprising then to notice certain prayers in the Bible contain words of **praise** and **adoration** to God. This, too, is an aspect of prayer, and one that is most deserving of attention. Notable among such prayers include Hannah’s prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10) and a prayer of Paul (Ephesians 3:14-21). The Psalms likewise contain admixtures of thanksgiving, adoration, and praise in prayer-like song.

A Brief History of Prayer in The Bible

Prayer, generally, had its beginning when “men began to call upon the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4:26; 12:8; 21:3). The patriarchs’ prayers were simple, direct, and familiar. They sought to obtain divine blessings and needs and on at least one occasion, to intercede for others (cf. Genesis 15:2ff; 17:18; 18:23ff; 24:12). Often, these patriarchal prayers were associated, with sacrifice (Genesis 12:8; 13:4; 26:25), apparently to help obtain God’s favor. Jacob’s vow (Genesis 28:20-22) might be considered a prayer in which he offered his devotion to God in turn for his own personal safety.

As time and history progressed, prayer under the Mosaic period maintained much of its original characteristics of simplicity and familiarity (Numbers 11:11-15; Judges 6:13ff; 1 Samuel 1:11ff; 2 Samuel 15:8ff, etc.). Questionings, pleadings, bargainings (?), and vows were all much a part of the prayers still as men poured out their heart’s desires. Sacrifice continued to be offered with prayer (cf. Deuteronomy 21:1-9) in order to expiate guilt and as thanks for such past mercies (Deuteronomy 26:1-11). Yet, gradually, mediation on the part of the priests under the Mosaic law appeared to supercede the less formal, direct, and simple prayers. Prophets were found to mediate as well (Exodus 32:11-13; 1 Samuel 7:5-13; 12:23). And, as national apostasy ebbed and flowed, so did prayer in the lives of Israel’s citizens, till meaningful prayer was all but lost.

However, through the **exile** came a new spiritual path of prayer to God due to the loss of Temple access. Some of the most powerful prayers in all the Old Testament were those of Ezra (Ezra 7:27; 8:23), Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:4; 4:4, 9) and Daniel (Daniel 6:10). Prayer once more held a large place in the individual lives of God’s people.

In the Psalms are preserved some of the highest flights of the spirit of prayer, offered usually by one after God’s own heart. The intense craving for pardon, purity and right standing before God were penned by David (Psalms 51; 63; etc.). “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is” (Psalm 63:1). “Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy” (Psalm 64:1). Such words show the deep humility of lowly man before His great Creator, and yet there is an earnest longing for a living communion with God Himself! Through such words one sees the importance of prayer in developing a right attitude between man and God, not to mention the wonderful blessings given in turn by God!

As history unfolded down to the Fulness of Times, Jesus Christ revealed prayer in a manner unprecedented. As noted at the beginning of this article, Jesus depicted prayer as a simple, childlike request to a loving, dear Father. Child-like subjection and dependence upon the Heavenly Father typified Jesus’ prayers and His teaching on prayer. Always confident of Fatherly attention and response (Matthew

7:7-11; 21:22), Jesus showed us prayer at its highest level - an intimate and trustful approach to God, with reverence and subjection in its rightful place. Thus to spiritual Israel are penned the words of admonition, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." And why not, for Jesus has paved the way from earth to heaven, both in life and in prayer. He has shown us the way to pray and what prayer is. As our present High Priest, He succors us that we might "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16)

The prayers of godly men and women in ages past give us insight to their approach to God and encourage us to develop our thoughts and lives in such a way that prayer becomes a natural response to the God we love and serve already, beseeching His divine forgiveness, aid, and consolation, when we have done all that we can. May we never forget the praise, honor, and glory due His name as we worship God with the fruit of our lips. May this study instill in us all a desire to see God through the avenue of approved prayer.

Thirteen Errors of Premillennialism

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Recently Sandy and I received in our mail box an ad for another "prophecy seminar" entitled "REVELATION OF TRUTH: Your Life Is About to Change Forever." On the back it screamed "IS THE END NEAR?" These seminars promote premillennialism. "Those who believe that Christ will return and set up a 1000 year kingdom are called 'premillennialists,' meaning Christ returns first, then establishes the kingdom on Earth" (Lindsey. 164). (Hal Lindsey is a leading premillennialist. Nonbiblical quotes in this lesson are from notable premillennialists. - KS) Premillennialism is far more than just a false doctrine. It is an erroneous philosophy of Scripture study and a false world view. This study will document and prove false thirteen key elements of premillennialism.

Postponement of Prophecy

"It has been shown in tracing the theme of the Gospel of Matthew that the pivotal point in the Lord's ministry to Israel was reached in the twelfth chapter, where the rejection of Israel by Christ, because of their announced rejection of Him, and the withdrawal of the offer of the kingdom is recorded. Gabelein, speaking of the events in chapters eleven and twelve, says: 'It is the greatest turning point in this Gospel and with it the offer of our Lord to Israel as their King, as well as the offer of the kingdom ceases!'" (Pentecost. 456).

This is absurdly false. First, it implies God did not know the Jews would reject Christ, whereas the Jewish rejection and crucifixion of Christ is the central theme of Old Testament prophecy about Christ and the basis of our salvation (cf. Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Luke 24:44-47).

It also implies the Jews had the power to change the divine plan, although David plainly prophesied their rejection of Christ and announced God would "laugh" at them in "derision" and set up Christ as King despite the opposition of both Jews and Gentiles (Psalm 2).

The time element of the prophecies of the kingdom of the Lord is central to these promises, and to postpone them would be to make the prophecies false. Daniel prophesied the kingdom would be established during the fourth great kingdom from his day, that is, the Roman (Daniel 2:36-45). Either the kingdom of Christ was established during Roman rule, or Daniel was a false prophet.

Christ Not Now King

Premillennialists thus do not believe Jesus is presently in fact King on His throne. But the apostle Peter announced that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead to sit on His throne (Acts 2:29-32). Either Christ is now King on His throne, or He has not been raised from the dead. To deny He presently actually reigns is

to deny His resurrection. Our premillennial friends implicitly deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Church an Afterthought

They believe the church is an afterthought in the mind of God, a “plan B” to replace the kingdom at this time. “The church is manifestly an interruption of God’s program for Israel, which was not brought into being until Israel’s rejection of the offer of the Kingdom” (Pentecost. 201). The church is no “plan B,” it is the manifestation of the eternal plan of God for our salvation, and was in His mind before the world began (Ephesians 3:8-12). In fact, the church and the kingdom are the same (Hebrews 12:22-24, 28).

Jewish Regathering

Premillennialists contend, “The Jews who believe in the Messiah will also possess the land which is bordered on the East by the Euphrates River, and on the west by the Nile (Genesis 15:18-21)” (Lindsey. 165). The land promise to the descendants of Abraham was completely fulfilled in the day of Joshua (Joshua 21:43-45), and the promise of their restoration after the captivity was totally accomplished during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (Jeremiah 27:22; 29:10; Ezra 1:1-4; 2:70; Nehemiah 7:73).

Miraculous Conversion of Jews

They also assert that all living Jews will be miraculously converted to Christ. “This indicates that the real spiritual life would come with the rebirth of the people after, the restoration”(Lindsey. 50). God no longer treats Jews any differently from Gentiles. He is impartial (Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:11) and has one plan of salvation for all (Acts 15:7-9; Romans 1:16-17; 10:12). When the Jewish nation crucified the Son of God, God cast them off as His people (Matthew 21:33-45). Now all, both Jew and Gentile, who have come to Christ in obedient faith are His people, His nation, His kingdom (1 Peter 2:4-10).

Reinstitution of Law of Moses

Premillennialists teach that the Law of Moses will once more be in force during the millennium.

“The main points are these: first, there will be a reinstatement of the Jewish worship according to the Law of Moses with sacrifices, and oblations in the general time of Christ’s return.... We must conclude that a third Temple will be rebuilt upon its ancient site in Old Jerusalem.... Jerusalem will be the spiritual center of the entire world and ... all the people of the earth will come annually to worship Jesus who will rule there”
(Lindsey. 45, 46, 165).

When Christ died on the cross, the Law of Moses and all that pertained to it were “wiped out” and “nailed ... to the cross” (Colossians 2:13-17). Animal sacrifices cannot remove the guilt of sin (Hebrews 10:4). The “holy temple” of the Lord is His people, the church, in which God dwells (Ephesians 2:19-22). Any Jew (or Gentile) who returns to the Law for justification is “estranged from Christ” and “has fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:1-4).

Time of Christ’s Coming Known

These false teachers love to claim they know the return of the Lord is near. “If this is a correct deduction, then within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place.... For all those who trust in Jesus Christ, it is a time of electrifying excitement”(Lindsey. 43, 47). In 1987 I received an anonymous booklet entitled “88 Reasons Jesus Will Return in 1988.” All 88 reasons were wrong! But this is one major appeal of premillennialism - “electrifying excitement. No one but the Father knows anything about the time of the Lord’s return.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that

day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is" (Mark 13:31-33).
Premillennialists claim to know more than the Lord Jesus Christ does!

Secret Rapture

"The word 'rapture' means to snatch out away or take out. But whether we call this event 'the Rapture' or the 'translation' makes no difference - the important thing is it will happen.... Someday, a day that God only knows, Jesus Christ is coming to take away all those who believe in Him. He is coming to meet all true believers in the air.... in the Rapture, only the Christians see Him - it's a mystery, a secret. When the living believers are taken out, the world is going to be mystified" (Lindsey. 126, 131).

The word "rapture" is nowhere found in the Bible, nor is the premillennial idea of the rapture there. Believers will be "caught up" to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17), but this will be at the Lord's coming (1 Thessalonians 4:15), when "every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him" (Revelation 1:7). We won't return to earth after seven years in the air, but "thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Two Resurrections

"... we believe the Bible distinguishes between the Rapture and the second coming of Christ and... they do not occur simultaneously" (Lindsey. 126). Believers will be "caught up" at the time of the coming of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:15,17), and all, both good and evil will be raised from the dead at the same hour (John 5:28-29).

Great Tribulation

"God's word tell us that there will be one generation of believers who will never know death. These believers will be removed from the earth before the Great Tribulation - before that period of the most ghastly pestilence, bloodshed, and starvation the world has ever known" (Lindsey. 127).

The "great tribulation" occurred in the very generation to which Jesus spoke before His death (Matthew 24:21, 34).

Future Kingdom

"... if you interpret prophecy literally it does teach that Christ will set up a literal kingdom in time which will last in history a thousand years..." (Lindsey. 165). If you interpret prophecy literally, the only ones who will reign with Christ for a thousand years are those who have been beheaded for Him (Revelation 20:4). The kingdom of Christ has been here since the first century (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9).

Material Kingdom

"Some contend that neither the Lord nor John ever offered Israel an earthly kingdom, but only a spiritual kingdom. Such a view entirely fails to comprehend the nature of the kingdom preached by John, the Lord, and His disciples" (Pentecost. 455).

"God's kingdom will be characterized by peace and equity, and by universal spirituality and knowledge of the Lord. Even the animals and the reptiles will lose their ferocity and no longer be carnivorous. All men will have plenty and be secure. There will be a chicken in every pot and no one will steal it!" (Lindsey. 166).

The kingdom of God is the rule of God through His Son Christ Jesus in the hearts of His people (Luke 17:20-21; Matthew 28:18). It is not a kingdom like those of this world, upheld by armed might (John 18:36). It does not pertain to food and drink but to "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

Battle of Armageddon

"So here it is - the last great conflict. After the Antichrist assembles the forces of the rest of the whole world together, they meet the onrushing charge of the kings of the East in a battle line which will extend throughout Israel with the vortex centered at the Valley of Megiddo."

"The nature of the forces which the Lord will unleash on that day against the armies gathered in the Middle East is described in Zechariah 14:12.... Has it occurred to you that this is exactly what happens to those who are in a thermonuclear blast? It appears that this will be the case at the return of Christ" (Lindsey. 154, 163, 164).

The kingdom of Christ is not defended by nuclear bombs! (John 18:36)

"For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ"
(2 Corinthians 10:3-5, 20 **English Standard Version**).

Conclusion

Premillennialism is "destructive heresy" (2 Peter 2:1-3). It is far more than just an innocent speculation. Its perpetrators twist the Scriptures all the way from Genesis twelve to Revelation twenty. They deny the present reign of Christ as King, and their doctrine implicitly denies His resurrection. They twist the spiritual kingdom upheld by the sword of the Spirit into a fleshly kingdom upheld by armed might. They slander God by portraying Him as favoring fleshly Jews over Gentiles. They are modern Pharisees who would restore fleshly Israel, the Law of Moses, and the Levitical priesthood.

Christians have one hope (Ephesians 4:4). It is not a future, material kingdom on this earth, in which there is "a chicken in every pot, and no one will steal it," but is an eternal home in heaven (1 Peter 1:3-5).

If you will be born again, born of water and of the Spirit, you can enter the kingdom of Christ even today (John 3:3.5).

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