

Gospel Gleaner

Vol. 31 ♦ No. 5

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Inside this Issue

Andy Erwin

In this issue of the *Gospel Gleaner* we will be encouraging brethren with regard to prayer. The articles are timely and touching. Our prayer is that this issue will lead to more fervent and meaningful prayers among our readers.

I have a couple of prayer requests. One of our writers in this issue, Robert Waggoner, recently suffered a stroke, but is improving. Also, Ruby Bradd is the 3 year old daughter of one of our writers, Stephen Bradd and Ranea Bradd. She has recently been diagnosed with cancer and is undergoing treatments. Please remember these precious souls in your prayers.

You will also find in this issue a timely article on the problem of plagiarism among preachers. Steve Higginbotham does a fine job encouraging brethren to do their due diligence in their respective ministries and works for the Lord.

Raymond Elliott has also provided an article addressing the promise of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles. Perhaps you know of someone confused by the teachings of the Charismatic Movement who will benefit from this study.

Hugh Fulford has also written an article remembering the great preacher V.P. Black. Many of brother Black's books on stewardship are still available. His sermon books can be found in used bookstores. Anytime you have an opportunity to read one of his books, you will not be wasting your time.

The Basics of Prayer

Robert Waggoner

The prayer life of Jesus must have been impressive to his closest disciples. Many times he prayed alone and in private places (Matthew 14:33; 26:36, 39, 42, 44; Mark 1:35; 6:46; 14:32; 35, 39; Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:28; 22:32, 41, 44). At other times his disciples would have heard him praying.

On one occasion, “Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples’” (Lk. 11:1).

Jesus responded by giving them a short model prayer. “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.” (Luke 11:2-4; see also Matthew 6:9-13).

This prayer has four specific parts. First, it is addressed to the Father. Second, it gives reverence to the name of God. Third, it makes four requests, namely, that the kingdom come, that we have daily food, that our sins be forgiven, and that we be not led into temptation.

The request that the kingdom would come has already been fulfilled. We should now pray that the

kingdom spread. The request that our sins be forgiven requires that we be willing to forgive others who have sinned against us (Luke 3:4; Matthew 6:14-15).

Immediately following Luke’s account of this model prayer, Jesus illustrated it, that just as a friend will give to someone who asks for bread, even though it is at an inconvenient time, so also God will give to those who ask him. Therefore, he exhorted, “ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” (Luke 11:9-10).

Jesus promised his disciples that “whatever you ask in my name, this I will do” (John 14:13-14; see also John 15:7, 16). In order to receive what is requested, you must believe that you will receive it (Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24; James 1:5-7). “Whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him” (1 John 3:22). “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).

Jesus taught that people ought to be persistent in prayer. He told a

parable about a widow who wanted justice against her adversary. She pleaded with a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. Although he refused at first, yet because the widow kept pleading, he relented lest the widow “beat me down by her continual coming.” Jesus said that unlike the human judge, God “will give justice” speedily (Luke 18:1-8).

Paul admonished that we “be constant in prayer” (Romans 12:12) and that we “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17, see also Ephesians 1:16; 1 Thessalonians 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; Colossians 1:9).

Anna was known for “fasting and prayer night and day” (Luke 2:37). Cornelius was a devout Gentile who “prayed continually to God” (Acts 10:2).

Jesus also taught that people should pray humbly, like the tax collector, who said, “God, be merciful to me a sinner,” and not like the proud Pharisee, who said, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.” Jesus said that it was the tax collector, not the Pharisee, that went down to his house justified (Luke 18:9-14).

When giving his sermon on a mountain, Jesus said that “when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the

street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words” (Matthew 6:5-7).

Jesus blessed the food when he fed the five thousand (Matthew 14:19; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16; John 6:11), when he fed the four thousand (Matthew 15:36; Mark 8:7), and when he instituted the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). On two other occasions, Jesus thanked God in his prayers (Matthew 11:25-26; Luke 10:21, and John 11:41-42). We are to be thankful in our prayer lives (Ephesians 1:16; Colossians 1:3, 12; 4:2; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Colossians 4:2).

Jesus prayed for children (Matthew 19:13). He exhorted his disciples to pray for “those who abuse you” (Luke 6:28). On the cross, Jesus prayed for his enemies, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34, 46). He prayed that Peter’s “faith may not fail” (Luke 22:32). He admonished his disciples to pray for laborers to work in the harvesting of souls (Matthew 9:37-38). He prayed that his disciples might be united “so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21). In the

Garden, he prayed for himself, “Father, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Matthew 26:39, 42, 33; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; Hebrews 5:7).

Jesus’ model prayer, his teachings about prayer, and his own prayer life must surely have influenced the prayer lives of his disciples. After Jesus’ ascension into heaven, his disciples stayed in Jerusalem, “devoting themselves to prayer” (Act 1:14). The disciples prayed that the Lord would show them who should replace Judas (Acts 1:24). After the church was established on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples devoted themselves not only to the apostles doctrine, fellowship, and breaking of bread, but also to prayers (Acts 2:42).

When the apostles Peter and John were arrested and placed in custody by the Sanhedrin counsel, the council charged them not to preach in the name of Jesus. But when they were released to their friends, they prayed and then continued to speak the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31).

When the Jerusalem church was unsettled because certain Hellenistic widows were neglected, the apostles determined to select men to serve their needs, but resolved to devote themselves “to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4, 6).

As Stephen was being stoned to death, “he called out, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ And falling to his

knees he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them’” (Acts 7:59-60).

When Phillip went to a Samaritan city and preached the gospel, the apostles Peter and John “came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:15).

At Joppa, Peter “knelt down and prayed” before raising Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:40).

When the servants of Cornelius arrived at Joppa to request that Peter come to Caesarea to tell Cornelius about the gospel, Peter had been praying (Acts 10:9, 30-31).

After James was killed by Herod, “Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church” (Acts 12:5).

After Paul’s conversion, he was in “Jerusalem and was praying in the temple” when the Lord told him to leave because the people would not accept his testimony (Acts 22:17).

When Paul and Barnabas were returning on their first missionary journey, they had elders appointed in every church, “with prayer and fasting” (Acts 14:23).

Since there was no synagogue at Philippi, Paul and others went outside the city to the riverside on the Sabbath day where they supposed was a place of prayer. There, they spoke to the women. Lydia and her household

heard and were baptized (Acts 16:13-15).

As Paul concluded his third missionary journey, he spoke with the elders of the church at Ephesus. Afterward, “he knelt down and prayed with them all” (Acts 20:36).

While Paul and company waited for a ship to be unloaded at Tyre, before leaving, they met with the church and “kneeling down on the beach, we prayed” (Acts 21:5).

When Paul, Luke, and others were on a ship during a stormy voyage to Rome, the crew “let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come” (Acts 27:29). When day was about to come, Paul urged them to eat. Taking “bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat” (Acts 27:34-35). Arriving safely on the island of Malta, Paul visited the father of Publius who lay sick with fever and dysentery. He “prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him” (Acts 28:8).

In addition, the apostle Paul informed others that he was praying for them – not for their natural, physical, or material well-being, but for their faith and spiritual well-being. He informed the Romans that he prayed for all Israel to be saved (Romans 10:1; 11:26). He prayed that the Corinthians would do no wrong and that they would be restored (2 Corinthians 13:7-9). He also requested that the Corinthians “help us by

prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many” (2 Corinthians 1:11).

To the Ephesians, Paul wrote, “I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Ephesians 1:16-21).

To the Philippians, he wrote, “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:9-11).

To the Colossians, he wrote, “we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light” (Colossians 1:9-12).

To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote that “we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:10). He also wrote that “We always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

To Philemon, Paul wrote that “I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ” (Philemon 1:6). He also requested that the Colossians pray that he would have an open door for declaring the mystery of Christ while he was in prison (Colossians 4:3).

Regarding prayers for the sick, James wrote, “Is anyone among you

sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:14-15).

Your prayers can be powerful. “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit” (James 5:16-18).

Although Jesus and others did pray occasionally about individual blessings during this earthly life, their emphasis in prayer was not primarily upon earthly needs but upon spiritual values. John put the emphasis well when he wrote to Gaius, saying, “I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul” (3 John 1:2). Should that not also be the emphasis in our prayers?



The Power of Prayer

Tom McLemore

It was James who wrote, “The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects” (James 5:16b). From this statement, we become aware that prayer’s power is not unconditional. The epistle of James is filled with inspired teaching regarding the conditions under which this principle proves true.

In order that we might understand its power and learn to pray with more power, study with me what James has to say concerning prayer in his epistle. Open your New Testament and read all of James’s words on this vital matter. We will proceed by asking James some fundamental questions regarding prayer.

What Is Prayer?

For one thing, prayer is *asking* (James 1:5, 6; 4:2, 3). Prayer is also *blessing God*, that is, giving thanks or praising God for his blessings (James 3:9; cf. Nehemiah 9:5b, 6; 1 Peter 1:3; Ephesians 1:3).

To pray, says James, is to *draw near to God*, while humbling one’s self before the Lord (James 4:8, 10; cf. Hebrews 4:16; 10:22). Sometimes, prayer involves cries that we utter to the Lord (James 5:4b; cf. Luke 18:1-8).

Why Should We Pray?

James teaches that one reason why we should pray is *God’s merciful and*

generous nature (James 1:5b, 17; 5:11). God is a God who listens and hears. Our cries reach his ears (James 5:4), the ears of the Lord of hosts.

Another reason why we should pray is that prayer is said to possess *great power in its effects* (James 5:16b). When we understand the nature of God, the One to whom we pray, we can see wherein the great power of prayer lies. He is merciful and generous, and he is also the Almighty, the Lord of hosts!

What Are Some Causes of Failure in Prayer?

Sometimes failure is due to a *lack of faith* (James 1:6-8; cf. 5:15—the prayer of *faith* saves the sick). Perhaps the first order of prayer for us might be, “Increase our faith,” or “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Luke 17: Mark 9:24). Since faith comes from hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), God will increase and help our faith when we *open the Scriptures* and *listen to* and *obey* the word of the God to whom we pray!

It also may be *worldliness* that hinders our prayers (James. 4:1-5). It is hardly possible for our prayers to have much power if we live as *enemies* of the One to whom we pray! Our need is to cleanse ourselves in heart and life from worldly things (James 4:6-10).

What Are Some Things for Which to Pray?

James tells us that we should pray for *wisdom* (James 1:5). James 3:13-18 gives a description of the wisdom that comes from above. We should pray for *grace* (James 4:6). In this context, grace is God's generous, active, effective help beyond what we deserve or can rightly expect. It is a conquering grace, manifested in victory over worldliness, evil, and the evil one. It was by means of grace in this sense that Paul accomplished what he did (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15:10; Ephesians 4:7).

What Are Some Occasions on Which to Pray?

From James 5:13-18 we learn when we ought to pray. James urges us to pray *when we are suffering*. We may and ought to pray *when people are sick*. Of course, the specific procedure James describes applied to the time when elders were miraculously endowed by the laying on of the apostles' hands. Still, the prayer of faith heals the sick today, but God now uses *means* rather than *miracle*. We may and ought to pray *when sin is confessed*. And, we must pray *when blessed by God* (James 3:9; cf. 1:17). When God has blessed us, it is always appropriate to bless (thank/praise) God!

Whose Prayer Has Great Power in Its Effects?

As we noted at the beginning of our study, James writes that it is the

prayer of the *righteous* person that has great power in its effects (James 5:16b). Does James refer here to some elite type of person or some superhuman individual? NO! Elijah, who fervently prayed with power, in some features was extraordinary. Yet, he still was *an ordinary man* with respect to human nature (James 5:17). Elijah possessed the same natural limitations and the same human weaknesses that we possess.

Who then is the righteous person James has in mind? The righteous person is *the child of God*, begotten again by means of the word of truth (James 1:18), the one *whom God has chosen*, rich in faith and an heir of the kingdom (James 2:5), the one who *controls one's self*, who *works God's righteousness* (James 1:19, 20), the one who *stands the test and loves God* (James 1:12), and the one who *does the word of God*, rather than just hearing it (James 1:25).

The righteous person is the one who *practices pure religion*, which includes bridling the tongue (James 1:26, 27), the one who *lives by the law of the kingdom* (love one's neighbor as one's self) rather than showing partiality (James 2:8, 9), the one whose *faith works* (James 2:14-17), and the one who is *peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, and a peacemaker* (James 3:17, 18).

The righteous person to whom James refers is *the friend of God* (as Abraham) rather than the friend of the

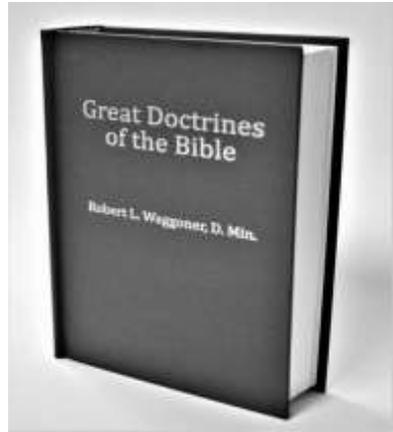
world (James 4:4; cf. 2:23), the one who is *humble* (James 4:6, 10), and the one who is *righteous in conduct* (James 5:6; cf. 1 John 2:2, 29). If our praying seems to lack power, we would do well to examine ourselves to see how closely we fit James's description of the righteous person.

Must Prayer Be Consistent with Speech and Life (and Vice Versa)?

James laments that the same mouth sometimes utters prayer to God and curses a human being, that is, one who is in the similitude of God (James 3:8-12). He emphasizes that it ought not to be this way! It is *unnatural*. (James' illustrations in James 3:11, 12 are examples of an unnatural inconsistency). There must be consistency between *prayer* and *life* (James 4:15). Too often, we do not pray, "Thy will be done," because we are not proceeding on the basis of God's will in life. And, it is more likely that our lives will be *lived* in light of God's will if we are continually *praying* for his will to be done.

Let us pray and live according to the will of God. Let us live by the prayer we ought to pray. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Thy will be done" (Matthew 6:10). In the garden, Jesus prayed, "Thy will be done" (Matthew 26:39, 42 and parallels). All prayer must be uttered mindful of the will of God (1 John. 5:14). Let us pray as Jesus taught and determine to live consistent with our prayer.

Prayer indeed possesses power subject to certain conditions, and James provides much insight into the matter of praying with power. It is hoped that through applying what he teaches us to our own praying, we may experience more fully *the power of prayer*.



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The Necessity of Prayer

Ron Thomas

The necessity of prayer in a Christian's life is so important that one might think it goes without saying. Yet, it can't "go without saying" because so many have failed to appreciate the value of prayer. Even for some who do value it and value it much, their prayer life is not as it should be because they are too distracted or, strangely, they have convinced themselves of its value but live a life that does not reflect that value!

The necessity of prayer in the life of a Christian corresponds to the hymn, "I need thee every hour." Think about some of the lines in the hymn: "No tender voice like thine can peace afford," "Temptations lose their power when thou art nigh," "come quickly and abide or life is vain."

Sentiments like these express the soul's struggle with life's problems. The thrust of this hymn is in relation to a Christian's dependence on Him who is the Creator and One who can "exodus us" from this world of despair.

In a religious world like ours, including the secular religions, people pray fervently. To what do they pray? Buddhism speaks of the importance of prayer associated with rituals; secularists say there has to be more to life than what presents itself to us, but they hardly want to recognize Christianity as being the solution to spiritual

and moral ailments, so they offer their "thoughts and prayers;" atheists and agnostics simply speak into the air as if they are speaking to some being they don't believe exists. It's a marvel, really.

In the life of a Christian, the necessity of prayer is connected to one's devotion to the Lord, determination to stay the course, and dependence on Him who is Deity, that is, God over all.

Devotion

The necessity of prayer in the life of a child of God is in relation to *devotion*. In Acts 1, the Lord Jesus ascended into the heavenly realm, leaving instructions to His eleven apostles about their necessary wait in Jerusalem. While there, the scripture reads, "These all with one accord continued stedfastly in prayer, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14, ASV). The New American Standard Bible reads, "continually devoting themselves" in place of the American Standard Version's "continued stedfastly." Prayer is deeply associated with one's devotion to the Lord.

Some people, however, have approached prayer in a way similar to how some approach being a Christian. By that I mean, one will speak favorably about a person, "He has been

baptized!” but fail to appreciate and understand that baptism is the culmination of conversion, a contrite heart no longer doing something for the sake of doing, but thinking and living in accordance with a righteousness not one’s own. The expression, evidently, is supposed to make all the difference. This morphs into “Let’s teach him how to lead in public prayer.”

When it comes to prayer, one’s prayer is to be a reflection of a person’s conversion to the Lord, one redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, “knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without spot, even the blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Prayer is a reflection of one’s gratitude, an appeal to the Lord to hear the supplications of the heart that knows its own bitterness (cf. Prov. 14:10). This is a life of devotion.

Baptism without conversion is as meaningless as prayer without devotion. “He that is of God heareth the words of God: for this cause ye hear them not, because ye are not of God” (John 8:47). Prayer without understanding and devotion to Him to whom all prayers ascend are like words floating in the air with a desire to land on something somewhere, hoping it will be a place that is agreeable. Because those words get tired floating about (if you will), they land nowhere. “He that turneth away his

ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer is an abomination” (Proverbs 28:9).

When saints are devoted to the Lord, when they continue steadfastly in prayer, the direction of their prayers not only knows where it is going, but lands safely at the desired destination.

Determination

The necessity of prayer in the life of the saved is in relation to *determination*. Devoted saints depend on the Lord for all that life presents to him and her. It was Peter who said unto the saints in his writings, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

It was Paul who wrote, while unjustly incarcerated, “In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6).

When the world thrusts you into a circumstance or circumstances that are unjust, unfair, and evil in all regards, what are you to do? There are two options before each person. You can rely on the Lord for wisdom, courage, perseverance, and guidance; or, you can turn away from the Lord. If the latter is chosen, then where will you go (cf. John 6:68)? After wisely choosing the first option, the devotion, dependence, and determination of the saint will pull him or her through.

Perhaps an illustration will be helpful. You're an athlete who is being called upon by the team to lead the others on the team to victory. You know that without your effort the contest will be lost, and your team needs to win this game to move on. You resolve to accomplish the task; you will not be defeated. Great athletes believe in their ability to put the team on their shoulders and lead them over the goal line (so to speak) for the victory. This determination is crucial in sports, but it applies in other endeavors in life also.

As an athlete, your determination to make it through to the other side, to accomplish what you desire, leaves a positive impression on those who have observed how you handled the circumstances. How much more when others notice your devoted prayer life to the God of all glory? They note your appeal to the Lord for strength, your positive disposition that all will work out, and if it does not work out in your favor, how it is that you respond to the Lord after that.

The Lord is on your side and with that there is no doubt! This is not a willful belief generated on the basis of "I want to believe." This is a response of the mind and heart devoted to Him who is able to do exceedingly more than all we hope, think or can ask. It was the Lord who said to the religious leaders of His day, "you are in error because you (the Sadducees) do not know the scripture, and neither do you

know the power of God" (cf. Matt. 22:29).

Many do not believe in prayer, and these same people are sad, you see!

Doctrine

The necessity of prayer in the life of saints is in relation to the *doctrine* of Christ. If one were not to have any exhortation in the New Testament like "pray without ceasing," the saints still have the life of Christ as their example. The life of Christ is the blessed example, and there are exhortations from His very mouth about the importance and necessity of prayer in the life of the saints.

For instance, consider what is commonly called the "Lord's Prayer" in Matthew 6:9-13 (more appropriately called the model prayer). Here, the Lord taught His disciples how to pray. The Lord taught them to appeal to the *Father* with gratitude about the holiness of His name, the righteousness of the life they are to live, the provisions of life they need in order to survive on earth, the protection from evil each disciple longs to have, and the forgiveness of sins that can come only from God.

In Luke 6:12-16, the Lord Jesus was engaged in prayer to the Father all night before His arose in the morning to call to Himself the twelve men who would serve as apostles (cf. John 6:70). While in the Garden, just before His arrest and kangaroo-court-trial that was forthcoming, Jesus was in prayer (John 17), praying to the

Father for the men He chose to carry His message from Jerusalem to the further parts of the world. When was the last time you spent two hours in devoted prayer to the Father, to say nothing of the whole night?

Deity

The necessity of prayer in the life of the redeemed is in relation to *Deity*. To whom shall we pray? Can we pray to God, the Son as well as to God, the Father? The question is not new although it has been revisited recently.

The Lord plainly said to His disciples, “And in that day ye shall ask me no question. Verily, verily, I say unto you, if ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name” (John 16:23).

We also find the following in John 14:13-14: “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (NKJV). However, due to textual variants in the passage, the ESV and NASB render v.14 accordingly: “If you ask **Me** anything in My name, I will do it.”

The issue continues in the book of Acts, as the disciples prayed to the “Lord.” Often, “Lord” refers to Jesus. For instance, in Acts 1:6, 21, 24, the word “Lord” is used three times. Each time it refers to Jesus, to whom a prayer was addressed in 1:24.

J.W. McGarvey wrote, “Here is a simple address to the Lord, beautifully appropriate to the petition they are

about to present; then the petition itself concisely expressed, and the prayer is concluded” (*Original Commentary on Acts*, p. 23).

H. Leo Boles, however, saw the perplexity of this in his remarks on Acts 1, believing the word “Lord” can be understood to refer to the Father and to the Son (*Commentary on Acts*, p. 30).

Yet, Wayne Jackson succinctly states, “The context here would indicate that they were addressing Jesus, who chose the original group (1:2), and who is designated as ‘Lord’ in verse 21” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 14). Some brethren have also disagreed with brother Jackson on this issue.

Can Christians solicit Christ in prayer today? The norm (if you will) is to address one’s prayer to the Father through the name (by the authority) of Jesus. But, if one offers a prayer to the Lord Jesus, as the apostles did in Acts 1:24, are we to understand that their prayer won’t be heard or accepted? Is it the case one must have in mind, and even say, “Lord Father...” before the prayer is heard?

It seems that since Jesus is “Lord and God” prayers addressed to Him, while not the norm, would be perfectly acceptable since He and the Father are one (John 10:30). It was Jesus who said He was the “I am” of Exodus 3 (John 8:58). Obviously Thomas said to Jesus, not merely concerning Jesus, in John 20:28, “My Lord and my God!”

Whatever we conclude on this matter, essentially we should all agree that when prayer is offered to God through the devotion, dependence, and determination of His faithful children it lands at the feet of Him who sits on His throne receiving our anxiety because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). For that we should be most thankful.

The Language of Prayer

Ronald Bryant

When do you pray? Where do you go to pray? What kind of words do you use? Do you value the blessing of prayer?

Our prayers reveal a great deal about us. They reveal much more about our spiritual health and maturity than we are prone to think. They tell of our grasp of truth and the measure of our devotion. They declare the depth of our reverence and humility.

A prayer is not a speech made to God or man. It is not a performance, nor a ritual. God is the focus; He is the one addressed. Faith in Him, and love for Him leads one to pray, even as it leads one to examine and strive to correctly order every aspect of his life. Empty words, no matter how well rehearsed or polished finally weaken one spiritually!

The Lord Jesus Christ prayed often, and He taught His disciples to

pray (Matthew 6:9-13). His prayer recorded in John 17 is without equal. The requests He made in that prayer were ruled by incomparable reverence, humility, and gratitude. In larger measure, His life exemplified not only His devotion to the Father, but also the language of prayer.

Inspired by God, the apostle Paul, recorded a number of his prayers. The book of Ephesians contains two of those “inspired prayers.” The first chapter contains, what must be finally spoken of as an “anthem of praise” to God (Ephesians 1:3-14). It indicates that the language of prayer is the language of praise. The expression “Blessed be God...” literally means “praise be to God.”

In Ephesians 1:15-16, Paul expressed thanksgiving for the church, and his words stand as an example of the expression of thanksgiving in prayer. Paul was specific in the expression of his thanksgiving.

In Ephesians 1:17-19, Paul made requests for the church. His requests were connected with Christ, and with the power by which He was raised from the dead. Paul was mindful of the fact that the same power was involved in the elevation of the redeemed – the church (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Paul’s prayer (the words he used) stand in dramatic contrast to the words and phrases we commonly use! Questions: (1) Do we pray like Paul did? (2) Can we do so?

Beginning in Ephesians 3:14, Paul recorded another prayer. He began with a heart-warming expression: “I bow my knee unto the Father.” The focus of prayer is “the Father.” He is the one, “from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” The family (the church) is named by Him! (Doubtless this implies more than simply a verbal designation.) The church is the family—the redeemed—those who are one with the Father and with one another. The language Paul used expresses the intimate spiritual unity of God’s people.

Paul then spoke of “the riches of His glory,” and requested that the church be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16). The redeemed are not only recipients of “all spiritual blessings” (Ephesians 1:3), they are also recipients of the virtues of spiritual devotion. Paul expressed this request, “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Ephesians 3:17), thus supplying the sense of belonging; having their hearts and minds molded and revitalized, enabling them to be “rooted and grounded in love” that they may together come to comprehend God’s love and surpassing knowledge.

Paul prayed for their greatest need; their coming to grasp God’s love, to the end they be “filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19). His words illustrate the depth of prayer. Christians are to attain spirituality, and they are to desire to do so.

In this regard, it is to be carefully considered that two things make us strong: (1) A deep sense of need, and (2) A strong hope of supply. That supply, God alone can provide, and furthermore, He desires to do so. In this regard, it is to be insisted that the language of prayer is the language of “need” and of “desire.”

Paul wrote of God’s power for the benefit of the church – “the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe” – and exalted God as being “able to do more than we can think or ask” (Ephesians 3:20-21), “According to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 1:19-23).

To read and reflect upon Paul’s prayers (inspired prayers) is to be drawn to ask a number of questions. The following are only suggestive: Is this the focus and content of our prayers? Do our prayers manifest a genuine desire to know and to honor God? Above all else, do the words of our prayers manifest a reverence for God, and a passion for Him?



God's Answers to Prayer

David O'Connell

Prayer has always been an important part of worship for God's people. Many Christians realize that prayer is not only limited to specific worship periods but is utilized throughout their everyday activities. In corporate worship, many hymns are prayers. The songs "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind," "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah," "Father, We Thank Thee," and "We Praise Thee, O God" are just a few of the prayer songs that are a part of our congregational worship.

Some have accused the Lord's church of believing that God is not active in the world today. It has been argued: "We believe God wrote the Bible and finished it at the end of the first century. Since then, we do not believe God has done anything." Nothing could be further from the truth!

The Scriptures teach that miraculous revelation and spiritual gifts were limited to the first century (1 Corinthians 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:11-13). However, that does not mean that God is not acting in the world today. Certainly, God acts through His providential care.

Joseph is a clear example of this. At the end of his life, he said to his brothers: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 45:8;

50:20). This shows that God does work providentially for his people. Another way that God works in the world today is by answering prayer.

The fact that God answers the prayers of His people is abundantly affirmed in the Scriptures (Isaiah 55:6; 65:24; Matthew 6:5-13; 18:19; 21:22; John 14:13; 15:7,16; James 1:5-7). There are many examples of God answering prayer. Some of these would be: Hannah (1 Samuel 1:9-12), Elijah (James 5:17), and the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:5-12). There is no doubt that the first century church was a praying church, because Jesus was a Man of prayer. Since it emphasizes the prayer life of Jesus so much, the Gospel of Luke has been designated as "the gospel of prayer." Also, the Gospel of John has one whole chapter containing a prayer of our Lord (John 17:1-26).

The question often arises: "Why didn't the Lord answer my prayer?" One might request healing for a sick spouse or child, and then the loved one dies. A Christian might ask the Lord to have a job with a specific company, and then he is not hired. A preacher might pray for the local church to grow, and then this does not happen. People often claim: "God did not hear my prayer." The truth is that God heard and answered the prayer.

People often forget that there are many ways God can answer prayer. First, the Lord could answer a prayer with a “yes.” In effect, the Lord is saying, “Yes - that is exactly what is needed in this case.” Elijah’s request for no rain (James 5:17) and Jonah’s request to be delivered from the belly of the great fish (Jonah 2:1) are examples of God responding with a “Yes - this is exactly what you need.” There are many examples of this in the Scriptures.

Second, the Lord may say, “No.” In effect, the Lord is saying, “No - that is not what is best for you.” The Lord Jesus was praying to His Father to “remove this cup” (Matthew 26:39-44). This was a prayer for God to remove the suffering that He was about to go through.

The Bible teaches that God heard His Son: “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared” (Hebrews 5:7). Yet, the Father said, “No, you must go through this suffering.” In our society today, many people have forgotten that “no” is still an answer. It may not be the answer we desire, but “no” is still a valid answer.

Third, the Lord may answer prayers by saying, “Yes - but not now.” In effect, the Lord is saying, “Yes - but you need to wait a while.” The psalmist cried out, “O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in

the night season, and am not silent” (Psalms 22:2). The Lord was telling David to wait.

Jeremiah, the prophet, had to wait ten days to receive an answer to his prayer (Jeremiah 42:4-7).

Mary and Martha wanted Jesus to come immediately and heal Lazarus. However, they had to wait four days before the Lord came (John 11:17). When Jesus came, it was on God’s timetable.

The Hebrews prayed to be delivered from Egyptian bondage. God knew they needed a deliverer, but Moses was not ready until he had spent forty years in Midian (Acts 7:29-30).

The children of Israel were praying for hundreds of years for God to send the Messiah. The Scriptures state that Jesus came “in the fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4). It was the best time for the Savior to come into the world. Our Heavenly Father answered the prayers for the coming of the Messiah at just the right time. If Jesus had come one or two hundred years sooner, it would have been too early, and the world-wide circumstance would not have been perfect for the spread of the kingdom. God knew when the time was best.

Fourth, the Lord may answer prayers by saying, “Yes - but your request needs some adjustment.” In effect, the Lord is saying, “I hear you and will answer you, but the request should be altered slightly.”

A missionary's heart's desire may be to go to Brazil, but the Lord wants him to go to South Africa. Paul wanted to go throughout Asia (that is, Asia Minor). He wanted to go into Mysia and Bithynia. However, God wanted Paul in Troas so that he could then have the dream about going to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-12). Were there lost people in Asia? Yes. Were there lost people in Mysia and Bithynia? Yes. However, God's plan was for Paul to go to Philippi. Paul's desire to preach the gospel had to be altered slightly, because of God's wisdom and infinite knowledge.

When Paul prayed for the Lord to remove his thorn in the flesh, God said, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). Paul asked the Lord three times to remove this disability and was praying for physical relief. The Lord responded with a spiritual quality (grace) as the answer. Many people are disappointed if the Lord says, in effect, "Let me adjust your request – just a little." People need to remember that the all-knowing, all-wise, all-loving Father in heaven will do what is best for us.

Fifth, the Lord may answer a prayer by saying, "Yes - I will give you what you ask for

and more." When King Solomon prayed for wisdom, the Lord granted him wisdom and enormous wealth and honor (1 Kings 3:5-15). This is an illustration of God giving what was requested and more. The apostle Paul affirmed this point when he wrote that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

In summary, God can say: (1) Yes, (2) No, (3) Yes – but wait a while, (4) Yes – but adjust your request, or (5) Yes – and more.

As the old hymn says: "O how praying rests the weary! Prayer will change the night to day; so, when life seems dark and dreary, don't forget to pray."

God will answer every prayer. It may not be the answer that we want, but our Heavenly Father will answer every prayer. It is wonderful to keep in mind that, oftentimes, He gives us more than we requested.



Plagiarism among Preachers

Steve Higginbotham

I used to receive a church bulletin from a church in Texas and I noticed that nearly every week, the preacher at this church was publishing in their bulletin, articles that I had written. However, he was making one minor change to those articles. He was using “Whiteout” to remove my name under the title and was inserting his name in its place. When I inquired about his practice, he offered no apology, but simply removed me from their bulletin mailing list.

I once received an email from a preacher who asked me if he could reprint some articles I had written. I told him, “of course he could, and that he need not ask for my permission.” He wrote back and thanked me and then asked, “Can I remove your name from the articles?” I wrote back and simply told him that one should never remove an author’s name from his writings. I soon received a final email explaining why he asked this question. He shared with me that he had recently been fired from the church because his elders had discovered he was removing my name from articles I wrote and was passing them off as his own.

I have also learned of another preacher who, for years, has been taking personal illustrations that I use in my sermons and using them in his

sermons as though the events actually happened to him.

On another occasion, I had finished preaching a sermon in a gospel meeting and a preacher who was in the assembly asked me if I had copied that sermon from another preacher. He said my sermon was nearly “word-for-word” of what he heard another preacher preach. Out of curiosity, I went to this preacher’s website and discovered that every week, for the past six years, this preacher has preached my sermons at his congregation, title by title, point by point, subpoint by subpoint, the week after I preach them at mine. He’s not had an original thought to share with his congregation in six years!

These examples are a small sampling of acts of plagiarism by preachers. Because of this, I thought I would share a few thoughts on this topic that might be helpful to all of us who write and preach.

Why Do Preachers Plagiarize?

Laziness. Some preachers are just too lazy to do their own study, research, and sermon preparation. It’s much easier to rely on someone else to do the hard work of sermon development. Some preachers have found it easier to be a “Public Speaker” than a “legitimate Gospel Preacher.”

Pride. Some preachers fail to give credit because they are full of pride. They want to take credit for a memorable thought, a pithy quote, or a creative phrase. They feign insightfulness in order to receive misplaced appreciation and respect of men. Their pride is more important to them than their integrity.

To Look Intelligent. Some preachers fail to give proper credit because they think it will make others think less of their intelligence. However, quite the opposite is true. By taking the time to credit another speaker or writer, a preacher is actually demonstrating that he has studied, listened, read, and researched his subject matter.

Why Plagiarism Matters

It Harms One's Own Influence. It's only a matter of time until someone discovers plagiarism, and when it is discovered, the plagiarist's influence is all but destroyed. A preacher who plagiarizes proves himself to be unethical and consequently, untrustworthy. If a gospel preacher doesn't have respect, credibility, and trust, then of what value is he? Once discovered, people will stop listening and reading to be edified and challenged but will start listening and reading to catch you in another "theft."

It Harms The Influence of Others. I once wrote an article I planned on publishing the following week and shared it with a preacher for review.

Unbeknownst to me, this preacher promptly published my article in our local newspaper, but removed my name from the article and put his own name on it. So when I published my article a week later, people thought that I had blatantly plagiarized his work. I spoke to this preacher about what he had done and he said, "Don't get so focused on who gets credit for the article, just be thankful the truth was taught." I explained to him that my concern was not a matter of "credit" but it was a matter of my reputation and credibility. What he had done caused, who knows how many people, to think that I had plagiarized him, potentially harming my integrity and influence.

It Harms the Cause of Christ. As spokesmen for God, we must give care to protect our integrity. If we show ourselves to be untrustworthy, it doesn't just reflect on us, but it also taints the cause of Christ. Paul told Titus to be a pattern of good works and in doctrine to show integrity, reverence, and incorruptibility, and to speak in a way that no one can condemn (Titus 2:7-8). When our actions don't rise to the level of the faith we preach, God is blasphemed (Romans 2:24).

How to Avoid Plagiarism

Start doing your own research, study, and meditation. Open your Bible and start mining for truths on your own before consulting what others have said about the text.

Start giving credit. It doesn't distract from a sermon to attribute a quote or a well-turned phrase to the person who originally said it. Trying to take credit for another man's work is unethical and places you in opposition to God.

Learn from others, but do your own work. Warren Wiersbe was known for telling preachers to "milk many cows, but churn your own butter." In other words, research, read after, learn from many sources, but take that body of material and work it into something that becomes your own.

Keep your pride in check. Potentially standing in front of hundreds of people who regularly tell you how wonderful, insightful, motivating, and ingenious you are can quickly go to your head. Pride is a plague among preachers. Don't become infected with it. Pray, stay on guard, enlist your spouse to warn you if she sees signs of it, and purposefully practice humility to overcome this sin.

I know that we are all working from a single source, and it is highly unlikely that you will come up with some insight that no one has ever before noticed. Surely, nearly everything we say has been said before. I get that, and that is not what I am talking about in this article. I'm not talking about two men studying a text and coming away from it with the same or similar thoughts. What I am talking about is trying to take credit for another man's work and words. Long ago, God told Jeremiah that he was against prophets who were stealing his words from other prophets (Jeremiah 23:30). Trying to take credit for another man's work is unethical and places you in opposition to God. Let's repent, if need be, and do better!



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October 20-24, 2019

Biblical Preaching in Modern Times

Andy Erwin

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2).

“Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men.”¹ Biblical preaching has always required preaching doctrine or “teaching” in a way that will “convince, rebuke, and exhort” the hearer. Such preaching appeals to the “whole of man”² realizing the spiritual as well as the intellectual nature of man.

Through preaching, we address the intellect; awaken the sensibilities; and appeal to the will of the listener.³ We encourage those listening to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22). We expect them to respond faithfully to the message, but we should avoid gauging our success on the basis of their response.

The Resolve of the Preacher

Preachers must resolve, therefore, to “preach the word” regardless of how God’s divine truth may be received by our fellow-man. Biblical preaching is the declaration of the Lord’s message to man, in order to

save man from sin, so that he might enjoy an abundant life now and eternal life with God in heaven.⁴

Faithful preaching is not just a matter of style, taste, or preference. Whether or not one preaches the word of God is a matter of authority. From whence does a preacher derive the necessary authority to solidify the things he has to say? Or, why should the listener believe his message is any more truthful than one being advocated by a Hollywood icon on a late night talk show? It’s simple. That which distinguishes the message of the preacher from the message of the world is the authority by which the message is spoken. Biblical preaching is a message authorized by God. It is the only message authorized by God, as it is derived from the word of God.

Haddon Robinson observed that preachers face the pressing temptation to deliver a message other than that of the Scriptures, noting, “...when they fail to preach the scriptures, they abandon their authority. No longer do they confront their hearers with a word from God. That is why most

¹ Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1877), 5.

² William, M. Smith, *Twenty Lessons in Homiletics*. (Noblesville, IN: Newby Book Room, 1970), 9.

³ William Smith, 9.

⁴ Thomas H. Holland, *Preaching: Principles and Practice*. (Brentwood, TN: Penman Press, 1988), 13.

modern preaching evokes little more than a wide yawn. God is not in it.”⁵

When preachers forsake the word of God in their messages they forsake their authority and abandon their true usefulness in ministry. Only by preaching the word can a preacher speak with all *authority* (Titus 2:15).

The Intention of the Sermon

In his book, *Saddlebags, City Streets, and Cyberspace (A History of Preaching in the Churches of Christ)*,⁶ Michael W. Casey gave good attention to the impact of speech training among our preachers in the second half of the twentieth century. Casey researched the drift that has taken place from the kind of message/truth-oriented sermons that used to dominate church pulpits to the predominately listener-oriented preaching of today. This shift, though subtle and over a period of time, is one of the ways the contemporary world has affected the modern pulpit.

The primary difference in the two styles of preaching and preacher being considered is that one is devoted to the content of the sermon primarily, while the other is primarily concerned with how the sermon is being received by the listener. One type of preacher judges his sermon on the basis of its

use of scripture and truthfulness to the word. The other type of preacher deems his sermon to be successful when it is received gladly by its listeners. The result of this approach is the avoidance of any sermon that might be deemed even mildly controversial. Every preacher must decide if he is determined to serve man or God (Galatians 1:10).

The desire to please people rather than God prompted H.C. Brown, Jr., to write of the “clown prince of the pulpit.” He observed how “the clown prince of the pulpit...is so addicted to the laughter and applause of the people that he constantly overuses it [humor]. Rather than sprinkling a little salt on steak, he sprinkles hamburger meat on blocks of salt.”⁷

Forty years after H.C. Brown’s comment, it is still commonplace to hear preachers giving lessons filled with personal testimonials and humorous anecdotes, rather than honoring God and pointing the way to Him through His divine truth. Preachers such as “the clown prince” and the one “preaching to please” have devalued the work and the authority of the preacher in the contemporary world.

A third type of preacher must also be considered, and we believe this type should be the pattern for every gospel preacher. He is the preacher who preaches the truth through his

⁵ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 20.

⁶ Michael W. Casey, *Saddlebags, City Streets & Cyberspace*. (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1995).

⁷ H.C. Brown, Jr. *A Quest for Reformation in Preaching*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1968), 18.

personality. Preaching truly is the conveyance of truth through personality.⁸ The preacher must endeavor to be himself as attempting to act or mimic another's personality in the pulpit is "worse that offensive; for it robs the man of that distinctive and individual power which God has given to him for the very purpose of ministering to his efficiency."⁹

A preacher must realize the challenge in every sermon is to present a message that is *both* biblical *and* appealing to man. Being biblical does not require being boring. W.A. Bradfield was one of the most biblical preachers of his day. He was far from boring. He was passionate and persuasive. He was one of the most successful preachers of his era. In the decade of the 1960s nearly 10,000 people responded publicly to his messages. We could use a little of that passion today!

Such a preacher cares about the truthfulness of the message *and* its reception. The people must know that their preacher loves them; but they must also know that he loves God *more*.

The sermon must direct the thoughts of the audience to and through the teachings of scripture. The preacher must be the conduit. Such biblical preaching is of the "very

essence" of Christianity,¹⁰ and we must be able to distinguish between biblical preaching and non-preaching if our pulpits are to be impactful.¹¹

Indeed, much preaching has come to be viewed as a human endeavor to please with the interest centering upon spontaneity rather than substance; and passion above preparation.¹² We are advocating preaching that is full of both passion *and* preparation. The sermon must be true to the text and presented with the utmost desire of helping people to make an application, be reconciled to God, and live a life which honors Him..

A New Homiletic

A "new hermeneutic" and subsequent "new homiletic" grew out of the ideals of a few misguided church leaders and scholars in second half of the twentieth century. They advocated that the Bible must be interpreted and preached experientially, culturally, and relatively. They began with a low view of scripture¹³ and have led their followers to an even lower view of scripture.

The experiential approach causes men to believe the scripture says what "you feel it says." The cultural ap-

¹⁰ Samuel, T. Logan, Jr. (Ed.). *The Preacher and Preaching*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986), 2.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 3.

¹² *Ibid*, 5.

¹³ Jimmy Jividen, *More than a Feeling*. (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1999), 138.

⁸ Phillips Brooks, 5.

⁹ William M. Taylor, *The Ministry of the Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), 5.

proach would have the meaning of the text changing with the times to meet the latest liberation theology, etc.. And the relative view is simply that "...you can have 'your truth' and I can have 'my truth.'"¹⁴

How shall gospel preachers respond to the intuition and intellect of the modern man? First, we must recognize the difference between crafting a message of truth in such a way that our audience will be engaged in the text, and forsaking the text altogether to replace it with jokes, stories, and anecdotal material in order to be in their good graces. On the one hand the audience is engaged with the presentation of the Scriptures through good homiletical skills. On the other hand, the audience is riveted by a message which could have served just as well as an after dinner speech at the Rotary Club.

The real test of a preacher's effectiveness will come after the preacher has left the pulpit. Will his work stand the test of time (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:13)?¹⁵ His works will follow him, for better or worse.

If a man's ministry is only to his personal self-interests, job security, and keeping the majority happy, he is doing nothing more than "peddling the word" (2 Corinthians 2:17), and will eventually find himself "exploit-

ing with deceptive words" (2 Peter 2:3), in order to receive "wages of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2:13). Such an agenda will be reflected in the congregation long after he is gone.

To fulfill one's ministry (2 Timothy 4:5), a preacher must work and preach with the intention that the congregation will be healthy and pleasing to God even after he has left them. Such desire indicates the difference between a preacher who is self-serving and a preacher who is a servant to others, and most of all, to God.

Two Questions

Every preacher should be required to answer two questions. (1) Why do you want to preach? (2) What type of preaching is needed today? If no one is willing to ask him these questions, he should at least be willing to ask them of himself.

Is the preacher's concern to preach Jesus and bring people closer to God (1 Corinthians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Colossians 1:27-29)? Will he preach Christ to the glory God (1 Peter 4:11)? Will he preach the cross in order to save men from their sins (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21)? Will he humble himself to exalt His God? Preachers who will answer "yes" to such questions will likely answer "yes" when called upon to provide biblical preaching. God will use such a man to ensure the congregation has the kind of preacher and preaching which is needed most in this present evil age (Galatians 1:4)

¹⁴ Ibid., 139

¹⁵ Andrew W. Blackwood, *Preaching from the Bible*. (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1941), 224.

THE HOLY SPIRIT PROMISED TO THE APOSTLES

Raymond Elliott

In an effort to understand a passage of scripture two questions among others should be considered, namely: who is the speaker, and to whom is he speaking? This will contribute greatly to the right interpretation of a passage of scripture.

We have no problem in understanding that it was God who was speaking to Noah instructing him to build an ark (Genesis 6); it was Abraham that God directed to offer up his son Isaac upon an altar (Genesis 22); and, it was the rich young ruler that Jesus required to sell all that he had and give to the poor (Mark 10). This principle would also be true in the study of the epistles that men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit wrote to various congregations and individuals.

Some of the most misunderstood passages in the New Testament regarding the Holy Spirit are found in the gospel according to John, chapters 14, 15, 16. It is plain to see that the setting of these particular chapters in John is the occasion when Jesus was eating the Passover Supper with his twelve apostles (See Matthew 26:20; Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14). So, Jesus was the speaker and the twelve apostles were the ones to whom Jesus was

addressing when He spoke of the promise of another Comforter who would be sent to help and assist them in the preaching of the truth after His departure.

Religious leaders of various denominations often apply what Jesus said to the apostles about the Holy Spirit to all believers in Christ. This is also the case among some teachers and writers who are members of the church. For example in a devotional publication that provides wonderful inspirational thoughts for each day of the year one writer asserted, “When Jesus went back to His Father, He sent the Holy Spirit as a Comforter and a Guide to teach us all things and to bring all things to our remembrance. We have the power on our spiritual journey. When faced with a mountain, don’t fear or cry out. Take action! Use the power He has given us. Say, ‘I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me’ (Philippians 4:13).”

While recognizing the sincerity and integrity of the Christian who wrote the preceding words, it must be brought out that this is a misunderstanding and a misuse of this passage of scripture that is found in John 14:26 which reads, “But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the

Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (ASV).

It is also recorded in John 16:13, “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”

The Holy Spirit would therefore assist the apostles in the following: (1) teach them all things; (2) bring to their remembrance what Jesus wanted them to know; (3) He would guide them into all truth; (4) the Holy Spirit would also tell the apostles things that were to come.

In Luke 24:49, prior to His ascension, Jesus spoke these words to His apostles: “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on High.”

Luke records basically the same instructions as recorded in Acts 1:4. In verse 5 of Acts 1, He informed the apostles that they would “be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Jesus also said, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

In Acts 2:1-4 we find the record of the twelve apostles being filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as the Lord had previously promised them.

The apostle wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:10: “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” Paul made it very clear that which He and the other apostles taught were of the Holy Spirit as recorded in 1 Corinthians 2:12-13:

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”

The apostle also claimed that he received what he proclaimed regarding the “mystery of Christ,” “by revelation” from the Lord (Ephesians 3:3-6). Concerning the gospel which Paul preached he wrote in Galatians 1:11, 12: “But I make known to you, brethren that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The writings of both the Old and New Testaments came by the “inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). In the beginning of the church age the inspired word was first in men.

Later, as the men who were inspired of the Holy Spirit began to write the various epistles, the inspired word was both in men and in written form. Eventually, the time came when that “which is perfect is come” that which “is in part shall be done away” (1 Corinthians 13:9, 10). That is to say, the revealed will of God for man was now complete and no longer partly in man and partly in written form.

Eventually, Jude would write in his short epistle these words: “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (verse 3).

The system of faith was once and for all time deposited and there is no additional revelation from God needed. The work of the Holy Spirit in revealing all the truth necessary for our salvation has been completed.



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Remembering V.P. Black

Hugh Fulford



V. P. BLACK (1918-2007)

Vanderbilt Pierpont (V. P.) Black was born on December 15, 1918 in Millport, Alabama. He was baptized into Christ in 1936 and began preaching in Booneville, Mississippi in 1938. He served congregations in Booneville; Avon Park, Florida; and then the Plateau church in Mobile, Alabama for over 20 years.

After resigning the pulpit at Plateau, brother Black continued to serve as one of the elders of the congregation and his association with the Plateau church extended over 40 years. He was highly esteemed by the Plateau church, as well as the Lord's people throughout the city of Mobile.

In 1965, when the churches of Christ in Mobile decided to conduct a campaign for Christ, they immediately chose V. P. Black to be the speaker. The wisdom of their decision lies in the fact that during the campaign 269 people responded to the gospel invitation, with 98 of these being baptisms.

In a meeting with Plateau, his home congregation, there were 52 baptisms. When I moved to Mobile in 1972 to preach for the Pleasant Valley church I was fortunate that brother Black still lived in the city, and while I had known of him for many years, and had heard him preach on a few occasions, I was able to get to know him better.

After giving up regular preaching for the Plateau church, brother Black devoted his time to preaching in gospel meetings all across the country, preaching in up to 45 meetings per year. Even while engaged in local work, he often preached in 12 to 18 meetings each year.

One of the things that always impressed me about V. P. Black (besides his matchless preaching) was the fact that he would go wherever the brethren called him, making no distinction between big churches and small churches, rich churches and poor churches. He was equally at home preaching in meetings in Gaskin, Florida or Quitman, Mississippi as in preaching in meetings at the University church in Abilene, Texas or the Prestoncrest church in Dallas!

Scott Harp tells of hearing brother Black on a sticky, hot summer night in a little country church south of Haleyville, Alabama. He said the

speaker was dressed in an all-white suit, white shoes, “and not a wrinkle could be found in his polished appearance.” Scott continued:

“He began his sermon, as many do, soft-toned, kind and gentle. Not a time did he look at a note, but with exactness and clarity, he proceeded to preach the gospel of Jesus. It was not long before his passion for the message was felt by all in the audience. His voice got louder and more convicting with every quotation of passage upon passage of Scripture.

“That man of God preached on the level of such intensity, that at times his face turned blood red. Contrasted with the white suit he wore, the awe-inspired audience in that little country church in North Alabama sat without so much as a blink of the eye for over an hour. What a preacher! What passion! What a Savior he proclaimed!”

My longtime friend, Alan Highers, shared with me his memories of brother Black who conducted a gospel meeting at the Getwell church in Memphis when Alan served there as the local preacher. Alan wrote,

“He was always a very snappy dresser. He liked Edwin Clapp shoes. His suits were always pressed, his shoes were shined to perfection, he wore a stiff white collar. When he stepped into the pulpit, his appearance was impeccable and you expected to hear something. You would not be disappointed. He was serious about preaching. It seemed every word was meas-

ured. His language was elegant and eloquent. It was uplifting to hear him speak.”

For many years brother Black served as Vice-President of Alabama Christian College/Faulkner University and raised thousands of dollars for the school. He personally gave over \$100,000 to the school from the sale of his books. He helped lead its transition from Alabama Christian College to Faulkner University. He also set up a \$100,000 ministerial fund at Freed-Hardeman University to help train gospel preachers.

It can truthfully be said that V. P. Black was “ready unto every good work” (Titus 3:1). He authored at least three books on stewardship (*My God and My Money*, *Rust as a Witness*, and *Giving Our Way to Prosperity*) and at least two volumes of sermons (*We Persuade Men* and *This Crooked Generation*). J. D. Thomas of Abilene, Texas also published a volume of brother Black’s sermons in the 12-volume series “Twentieth Century Sermons.”

A V. P. Black sermon that I have attempted to preach at various times over the years is titled “Happiness: Is it Just a Word?” Brother Black was strong on the great fundamentals of the faith, but he also could address the everyday concerns of people’s lives. He spoke numerous times on the lectureship programs of Faulkner University, Freed-Hardeman University, as well as other schools among the

people of God. From its inception in 1975 until 2004, he was an annual speaker on the Florida School of Preaching Lectures in Lakeland, Florida.

The 1993 Freed-Hardeman lecture-ship book was dedicated to him. In it Winford Claiborne wrote:

“One of the remarkable features of his preaching is that during his fifty-four years of preaching he has never been involved in a church fuss or a church split. He believes if preachers were busy trying to convert people and teaching on unity and brotherly love much of the trouble in the Lord’s church would never have gotten started or would cease. Brother Black’s influence has been positive and powerful.”

Freed-Hardeman University bestowed on him an honorary LL.D. degree. For the last several years of his life, he and sister Black made their home in Montgomery, Alabama.

Brother Black passed from this life on Sunday, February 4, 2007, at the age of 88. He is buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Montgomery. Beyond question, he was one of the truly great gospel preachers of the past!



LGBTQ in SBL

Andy Erwin

On August 5, I received an email from the Society of Biblical Literature informing its members that “the SBL Council formed an LGBTQ+ Task Force. The Task Force’s charge is to identify how SBL can best support LGBTQ+ scholars and scholarship and to report recommendations to Council.

“Recommendations might include policies, practices, and programs to assure: (1) the full participation of LGBTQ+ scholars in SBL; (2) their contribution to teaching, research, and scholarship; and (3) the advancement of the discipline, including the ways in which the Task Force can impact the public square by promoting SBL’s core values of diversity and inclusivity.”

Here we have another example of so-called biblical scholars advancing a far-left agenda. The list of churches now affirming and defending the LGBTQ movement is growing and includes many major denominations in North America. Once a church begins to compromise with sin, the depths to which it will sink are truly bottomless.

A lesson must be learned from the sins of others. Let us hold fast to God’s word. The best way to prevent compromising with the devil is never to begin.

OUR DUTY TO OTHERS

Titus 2:11-12

INTRODUCTION

- A. Duty to God – put Him first – supreme duty and aim in life.
- B. Duty to self – own soul most important.
- C. Duty to others – our lesson today.

DISCUSSION

A. Love One Another.

- 1. John 15:12 “This is My commandment that ye love one another.”
- 2. John 13:34-35 “A new commandment I give...”
- 3. 1 John 4:20 “If any man says I love God and hates his brother...”

B. Forgive One Another.

- 1. Matthew 6:15 “If ye forgive not men their...”
- 2. Matthew 18:21-22 “How oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?”
- 3. Luke 17:4 “And if he sin against thee seven times in a day and seven times in a day turns and says ‘I repent’ thou shalt forgive him.”

C. Bear One Another’s Burdens.

- 1. Galatians 6:2 “Bear ye one another’s burdens...” Help him.
- 2. Galatians 6:5 “For every man shall bear his own burden...” Some things man must do for himself.

D. Pray For One Another.

- 1. 1 Thessalonians 5:25 “Brethren, pray for us.”
- 2. James 5:16 “Confess your sins one to another...”
- 3. 1 Samuel 12:23 “God forbid that I should sin against God in ceasing to pray for you.”

CONCLUSION

- A. Galatians 5:14 “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”
- B. 1 Corinthians 13:13 “And now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three: and the greatest of these is love.”

-W.A. Bradfield