

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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BACK TO BIBLICAL PRAYER

Part Four

by Lee Moses

Back to Frequent Prayer

The Christian knows he has “*the whole armour of God*” to fortify him for spiritual battle. Paul followed up his description of the Christian armor by adding, “*Praying always*” (Ephesians 6:18). Although not directly equated with a piece of a Roman soldier’s armor, prayer is clearly presented as an essential defense in the battle against wickedness. And Paul did not hint that **occasional** prayer would be sufficient—Christians are to pray “*always*”; literally, “at every time.”

And such exhortations to frequent prayer echo throughout the New Testament. Jesus taught “*that men ought always to pray, and not to faint*” (Luke 18:1). As He warned His early disciples about the impending destruction of Jerusalem, He said, “*Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man*” (Luke 21:36). Similarly, while waiting for our Lord’s return—from now until the end of time—Christians are exhorted to “*watch and pray*” (Mark 13:33; compare with Matthew 26:41). To exhibit “*love without hypocrisy*,” a Christian must “*continue] steadfastly in prayer*” (Romans 12:12, American Standard Version; compare with Colossians 4:2). “*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God*” (Phil. 4:6). We are commanded to “*Pray without ceasing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17; all emphases LM).

Not only were early Christians **told** to pray without ceasing, they **prayed** without ceasing. The early church “*continued steadfastly...in prayers*”

(Acts 2:42; compare with 1:14; 6:4; 12:5; Colossians 4:12). Paul informed the brethren at Colossae, “*we... do not cease to pray for you*” (Col. 1:9); and he prayed similarly for other brethren (Romans 1:9; Philippians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 4).

The exemplary life of Jesus exemplifies constant prayer. When Jesus was baptized, He prayed (Luke 3:21). When massive crowds were thronging Him, He sought solitude in prayer: “*And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed*” (Mark 1:35). “*And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed*” (Luke 5:16). His prayers could turn into marathon sessions by most Christian’s standards: “*And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone*” (Matthew 14:23). “*And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God*” (Luke 6:12). He prayed with others, and He prayed alone (Luke 9:18). He prayed at His highest moments (Luke 9:28), and He prayed at His lowest moments (Matthew 26:36-44).

Christians are urged and commanded to pray frequently. To fail to do so is to neglect one’s own spiritual need and to disobey God. The early church’s example of frequent prayer should motivate the modern church to frequent prayer. And if Jesus, Himself **Deity**, had such need of constant prayer, how much more do you and I need frequent prayer?

Christians must have lives characterized by constant reverent prayer, and

it begins with days characterized by constant reverent prayer. As the psalmist exulted, “*Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice*” (Psalm 55:17; compare with Daniel 6:10; Acts 10:9). Throughout the day, the Christian needs to have times where he stops what he is doing and acknowledges his dependence upon, and gratitude toward, his Creator.

Mealtimes for Christians should always be accompanied by prayers of thanksgiving. As the inspired apostle Paul wrote,

... God hath created [foods] to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4:3-5).

Notice three things about this passage: (1) Giving of thanks at mealtime pertains to the direct purpose of God. God created foods, both animal (verse 4; Genesis 9:3) and plant (Gen. 1:29), “**to be received**”; that is, **for the purpose of** human consumption. But they are not to be received thoughtlessly—God created foods to be received “**with thanksgiving**.” (2) Notice the “**if**”¹ in verse 4—If food is **not** received with thanksgiving (expressed gratitude), it no longer necessarily carries God’s approval as “*good*” and as “*not to be refused*.” (3) Food that no prayer has addressed has not been “*sanctified*,” or set apart for use.

There may be occasions when we are going to be eating in a public place, and want to avoid the possibility of “*praying to be seen*” (Matthew 6:5-6). If this be the case, we should make it a point to say a prayer ahead of time. Regardless, God expects those who “*believe and know the truth*” to offer thanksgiving for whatever food they

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(continued from page one)

receive. Gluttonous pagans of the day were known for their callous disregard for the One Who made their meals possible. Of such, Paul said that their “*God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things*” (Philippians 3:19). Jude warned, “*These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear*” (Jude 12). In opposition to such fearless feasting, Paul commanded, “*In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you*” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Scripture-led Christians will “*Giv[e] thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Ephesians 5:20). There is indeed a great gulf fixed between the reverent, thankful mealtimes of Christians and the thoughtless gluttonies of the pagans. As commentator Adam Clarke reprimands, “Those who thank not God for their food, and pray not for his blessing in the use of it, are unworthy even of a morsel of bread, and of the breath they breathe.”

Sadly, it seems that the constant prayer that typified the Lord Jesus and

the early church is scarce among God’s children today. Prayer has become an occasional matter. C.R. Nichol spoke of the “prayerless spirit of the present age.”³ Some believe they are too busy to take time out from their day to pray. “Too busy” is dangerously close to “too proud to acknowledge my dependence upon God.” Some remain largely prayerless because they astoundingly operate under the assumption, “The less often we do something, the more special we make the occasion.” Such thinking is reinforced by those who believe observing the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week makes it too commonplace (contrast with Acts 20:7). That might be true with regard to some matters, but it is rarely, if ever, true with spiritual matters. Prayer has been called “the very breath of the Christian”⁴—does breathing ever become too commonplace? Or is it rather the case that the more often one does it, the more able he becomes and the healthier he becomes? Those who engage in more frequent prayers tend to have far more thoughtful and sincere prayers than those who only say a prayer when they are called upon to lead a prayer in the public assembly—one can usually tell it is the only time they lead prayers.

Some fail to pray as regularly as they should because they fail to see the good effects of their prayers. But Christ reassures Christians, “*And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily*” (Luke 18:7). Christians might find their patience tested when God “bears long with them,” but He will assuredly respond in a quick and decisive manner when He responds. Christ goes on to say, “*Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*” (verse 8). It is of utmost importance that when Jesus comes, He finds men and women in steadfast devotion to God, particularly with regard to their prayer. Cornelius was “*A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always*” (Acts 10:2, emph. LM). Years apparently passed before he saw any response to his prayers, or even learned what he needed to do to be saved. Yet

after all that time, an angel appeared to him, and told him, “*Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God*” (Acts 10:4). While years may go by without observing the positive results of prayers, the faithful Christian persistent in prayer can look forward to a time when he can be Divinely assured that God has positively received and responded to his prayers.

Conclusion

The Spirit warned, “*Some shall depart from the faith*” (1 Timothy 4:1), and it is not difficult to observe that some have. While such departures are easily seen in the denominational world, New Testament Christians ought to consider very seriously whether we have departed from Biblical prayer in any respect. If we are to get back to Biblical prayer, we must practice prayers directed to the Father, public prayers led by holy men, attentive prayer, and frequent prayer. Let each Christian say with the psalmist, “*I give myself unto prayer*” (Psalm 109:4).

[NOTE: Portions of this series on prayer were derived from Lee Moses, “What About Innovations in Prayer?” in *Some Questions About Worship*, ed. Jeff Sweeten (Odessa, TX: Eisenhower church of Christ, 2005), pp. 181-206. However, this series is based directly upon material this writer delivered at the 2010 Bellview Lectures in Pensacola, Florida directed by Michael Hatcher, themed *Back to the Bible*. In the lectureship book, the material is presented entirely in narrative (story) form, and provides a good introduction to non-Christians particularly on such subjects as prayer, grace, Biblical authority, the church, and similar fundamental and essential subjects. The book from the 2010 Bellview Lectures, *Back to the Bible*, is available from the Bellview church of Christ at (850) 455-7595 or bellviewcoc@gmail.com.]

¹ This is accurately construed as a **conditional** participle in the Greek, as all 8 English translations consulted by the writer translate this “if...”

² “Without fear” in Jude 12 “can be rendered either **boldly** or **without reverence, shamelessly**, the point being arrogant disregard of responsibility for one’s manner of life.” Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *aphobōs*, in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. Of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 158.

³ “Prayer,” in *Sound Doctrine* (Clifton, TX: Nichol, 1921), p. 68.

⁴ *Ibid.*

THE LORD'S CHURCH WAS NOT ESTABLISHED TO ...

by Marvin L. Weir

The Lord's church is the **one** that was established in A.D. 33 in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. The Lord's church is the **one** that Jesus built (Matt. 16:18) and purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28). The Lord's church is the **one** body that the apostle Paul recognized as being valid (Eph. 4:4). There is only **one** body that the Savior has promised to save (Eph. 5:23). It is imperative to understand that we are not discussing what denominations were established to do. Denominations may do whatever their founder desires them to do, and please men, but they will never please God. If the church of our Lord is to be faithful, it must only do the bidding of its founder, Jesus Christ, and such will never please most men.

The Lord's church was not established to exist incognito! It makes one want to gag to hear those who profess to be Christians utilize politically correct language to avoid telling people they are a member of the church of Christ. These modern daydreamers will tiptoe for miles on eggshells before they will admit they are a member of the church of Christ. Upon being **forced** to make the admission, they then apologize by saying, "But we don't believe we are the only ones going to heaven."

How Christ must grieve at such lack of loyalty from those who claim to be Christians! What is wrong with the name church of Christ? Am I ashamed that Christ built His church? Am I embarrassed that the church wears His glorious name? Do I not want the church to be connected with the Savior? Will members of denominations be saved? Brethren, these questions deserve an honest answer. Many members need to begin thinking for themselves and cease following the liberal change agents who would hide the church under a bushel (compare

with Matthew 5:13-16). Faithful soldiers of the cross will boldly proclaim the **essentiality** and eternal destiny of the Lord's church. We cannot keep the church a secret and save the souls of men!

The Lord's church was not established to provide entertainment to its members! One can search the Bible from beginning to end and never find **one** incident where God has sought to entertain His people. It can be proved, however, that God "*would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Timothy 2:4). It is also true that "*the Son of man came to seek and save that which was lost*" (Luke 19:10). We read that it was the Lord's desire "*that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem*" (Luke 24:47). When the early church was persecuted and scattered, they did not offer all types of entertainment to attract people. They did, however, go "*about preaching the word. And Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed unto them the Christ*" (Acts 8:4-5). The early church realized that the gospel was the only "*power of God unto salvation,*" and they were not ashamed to proclaim it (Romans 1:16).

The early church did not seek to **attract** people with eloquent dramatized skits laced with fingernail biting excitement! Neither did the early church have "youth ministers" to entertain and baby-sit the young or a "39'ers minister" to transport the older saints to every play and flower garden within driving distance. Didn't they know that because of severe persecution they would have to cater to the **wants** of both young and old in order to grow? The wisdom of man says that the early church is destined to fail. The result—the early Christians

who feared God and unashamedly proclaimed the gospel grew by leaps and bounds (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31).

The Lord's church was not established to provide a soothing answer to man's sins! The majority of men want to live in sin, enjoy the pleasures of the moment, and be told that all is well with their souls. Thus, alcoholics have a **disease**, homosexuals have a **defective gene**, fornication is simply an **affair**, lying is **misinformation**, and sin is tolerated as a **mistake**. Brethren, we can ill afford to pat members on the back, accept their contributions, and **overlook** sin! This is exactly the course that many congregations have chosen to take – to offend no one and appease everyone! All sin is deadly (Romans 6:23), and all must repent (give up) their sins or lose their souls. Even though not "politically correct," Christians will teach sinners that they **must** repent or perish (Luke 13:3). It is not an act of kindness or love to allow one to believe that he is saved when in reality he is lost!

May we keep in mind that the Lord's church was established to do what no man-made institution can do! Let us therefore not lose sight of the glorious purpose and mission of the Lord's church—to seek and save the lost and keep the saved traveling the narrow road that leads to Heaven.

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CORRECTION

In last month's issue of the *Fulton County Gospel News* (November 2010, Vol. 44/No. 11), there was a mistake printed in Roelf Ruffner's article "Beyond Vexing." The opening Scripture reference is given as Jude 7-8, but should instead read **2 Peter 2:7-8**.

WHERE TRUTH IS

by Gary W. Summers

Newspapers seldom print all of it; the entertainment media usually hides it; philosophers ignore it because of its simplicity. There is only one place that one can find the truth—all of the truth that will enable a person to live righteously here before God and prepare one for heaven—in the Word of God.

Some truths are discovered through research and exploration—but none of a spiritual nature, because they have been available for hundreds of years. In one sense, they are discovered afresh by every generation, but it is not as though they have never before been known.

A person must go to the source in order to get the full benefits because Satan has distorted many of its teachings; he is skillful at misrepresentation and deception. Just as the news media withholds pertinent data about the source of a problem, he will emphasize grace and faith, keeping people's attention away from repentance and baptism.

For that reason, people must not be satisfied with anything less than learning "*all the counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27). "*Thy word is true from the beginning and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever*" (Psalms 119:160). Too many people have camped on a particular verse or passage, thereby excluding others that modify or explain it. Sometimes useless divisions have occurred by a failure to properly approach the sacred Word.

"*Buy the truth and sell it not*" (Proverbs 23:23) means that once we understand its teachings, we must hold on to them. First, however, we must be certain that our understanding is correct. Many are easily susceptible to error because they have not hungered or thirsted after righteousness (Matthew 5:6), nor have they been **diligently** seeking Him (Hebrews 11:6). No one is a success in business because of a casual interest in the marketplace. No one sets eight world records in swimming because he had a mild interest in the sport. No one becomes a champion runner because he or she possesses a nominal interest in jogging.

Truth is only located in one place—the Bible. Therefore, we must have the Book open frequently; we must study at home consistently; we must be present for Bible study always when the saints meet. There is no danger of an overdose; overexposure might be a problem with the sun—but not from the Son. Searching the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11) not only serves as a good precedent, it is the pathway to eternal life.

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GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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