

Fulton County Gospel News

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“... 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 Three

by Lee Moses

Back to Attentive Prayer

Prayer and attentiveness go hand in hand. When the Bible speaks of prayer, it often equates prayer with spiritual alertness. In preparing mankind for the judgment to come, Jesus warned, “*Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is*” (Mark 13:33). As Jesus called His disciples to spiritual attention, He said, “*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*” (Matthew 26:41). Prayer manifests concern with spiritual matters and the desire to commune with God.

However, even as we offer prayers, we often fail to give them the attention that they and our God deserve. The apostle Paul exhorted Christians to be “*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints*” (Ephesians 6:18, emphasis LM). This expression tells Christians “to be alertly concerned about” prayer, “looking after” and “caring for” prayer.¹ Paul again urged alertness in prayer as he wrote, “*Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving*” (Colossians 4:2, emphasis LM). Peter likewise admonished, “[B]e ye...sober, and watch unto prayer” (1 Peter 4:7).

Clearly, attentiveness is important to prayer and lack thereof is a potential pitfall; otherwise, Scripture would not require such recurring admonitions. Biblical prayer requires attentiveness. Consider some ways in which children of God must be attentive in their prayers.

Attentive regarding to Whom prayer is addressed. Part One of this

series reflected on Biblical teachings which show that prayer is to be addressed to God the Father. However, there is a danger of addressing the Father with our lips but failing to address the Father with our hearts and minds. Although they knew very well to Whom prayer was supposed to be addressed, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day were guilty of addressing their prayers to the attention of men:

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly (Matthew 6:5-6).

Which devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation (Mark 12:40, emphases LM).

The danger of addressing prayers to the attention of men always exists when leading public prayer. But such is dangerous indeed—as Jesus warns, it can limit one’s potential heavenly reward to earthly acclaim, and can lead to his soul’s “greater damnation.”

Some may not seek the plaudits of men with their prayers, but they do not take real thought of the One Whom they approach. They approach prayer as merely a spiritual exercise of some kind. Not only this, but they approach it as a **mindless** spiritual exercise. There is no

thought to the fact that they are actually communicating with their Creator, that He is actually paying close attention to every word that is said. The Lord promised Solomon He would be attentive to the prayers of His people: “*Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place*” (2 Chronicles 7:15). “*Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven*” (30:27). As New Testament priests, Christians likewise offer prayers that come up to God’s holy dwelling place (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 8:3-4). How would you feel about a person who was holding a conversation with you, yet paying no attention to the conversation? How do you expect God feels when you pay no attention to what you say to Him?

When we approach the throne of God, we need to have reverence for the Omnipotent One upon that throne, and we need to have gratitude for the access we have been given to that throne. He is under no obligation to respond favorably to the prayer of one who would approach Him irreverently. “*Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace [or ‘gratitude’²], whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*” (Hebrews 12:28). “*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 [‘for his godly fear,’ American Standard Version]*” (Hebrews 5:7). It is only as one has gratitude, reverence, and godly fear that one can hope to serve God acceptably. Even Jesus’ prayer of agonizing sorrow was only received by the Father as it was accompanied by godly fear. How it boggles the spiritual mind that anyone would dare approach the Father’s throne

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(continued from page one)

by calling Him “Daddy-O” or “the man upstairs,” as has allegedly been done in public prayers. However, irreverence does not have to be so overt to be irreverent—even thoughtlessness when approaching the Creator smacks of irreverence.

Perhaps some approach prayer as a thoughtless spiritual exercise because they lack conviction of God’s capabilities to answer prayer. A prayer that lacks conviction is useless (James 1:6-7; compare with Matthew 21:22; 1 Timothy 2:8; Hebrews 11:6). As such, the Christian needs to remain very aware of God’s capabilities to perform what the Christian asks. “*Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think...*” (Ephesians 3:20). God may not answer a Christian’s prayer exactly as a Christian expects it to be answered. However, He can answer a prayer in a way that exceeds what is asked and intended. God is Omniscient to hear prayer (Matthew 6:6; Romans 8:26-27), Omnipotent to be capable of carrying out a response (Genesis 18:14a; Job 42:2; Isaiah 26:4), and Omnibenevolent

to desire fulfilling the requests of His children (Matthew 7:7-11; James 1:5, 17). A Christian needs to be mindful of such things as he prays.

Attentive regarding by Whom prayer is addressed. While Christians do not address Jesus directly in prayer, they must never forget the essential role He plays in prayer.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

A key word at the beginning of verse 16 is “therefore”—there is a reason why what is about to be said is so. Why can we “*come boldly unto the throne of grace*”? Why can we “*obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*”? It is only through the High Priesthood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ that we could ever have such assurance. He is a Divine Person in heaven, yet He can directly empathize with the human experience. Such can be said of no other being; human, animal, angelic, demonic, or Divine—“*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 2:5).

Jesus’ opponents did not realize the truth behind their intended insult, “*Behold...a friend of publicans and sinners*” (Matthew 11:19). Sin separates from God, and only Jesus Christ could bridge that tremendous gap. Even as He writhed in anguish upon the cross, He interceded in behalf of His killers, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34). Christians have God’s word to keep them from sin (Psalm 119:11; Ephesians 6:14-17), but thankfully there is still recourse for one who sins: “*My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate*

with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). Jesus Christ is that recourse, and man’s only recourse (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:18). “*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*” (Hebrews 7:25). Again, these are things for the Christian to keep in mind as he offers his petitions to God.

Attentive regarding one’s own relationship with God. Problems in one’s relationships with his fellow man can hinder his prayer from being heard (Matthew 5:23-24; 1 Peter 3:7). How much more is this the case when one has a faulty relationship with God? As we pray, we must share the conscientiousness of the psalmist, “*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me*” (Psalm 66:18). If one’s soul is stained by sin, his prayer has no hope of a Divine reception. That said, the child of God (one who has been Scripturally baptized into Christ and His church, Galatians 3:26-27) has an opportunity to cleanse his soul through prayer: “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9). But one always needs to be looking toward the word of God, not only to know the specific manner in which prayer is to be offered, but also to compare oneself with the perfect standard: “*He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination*” (Proverbs 28:9). To brazenly approach the holy throne of God with no thought toward removing sin from one’s life and soul is the height of presumption. Through Jesus Christ, the Christian can have “boldness” in prayer—but not if he has fallen into and remains in sin. “*Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God*” (1 John 3:21, emphases LM).

Attentive regarding what one is praying. Sometimes people give little thought to what they actually pray. Denominationalists often mindlessly recite the same memorized or read liturgical prayers. Christians may not use the liturgical prayers of the denominations,

but some repeat the same prayers every time, with no real thought to the content.

There are certain matters to which our prayers should regularly attend. *“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty”* (1 Timothy 2:1-2). We should pray for the welfare of our civil leaders inasmuch as those prayers do not contradict the cause of Christ. If there are leaders advocating homosexual “marriage” or the murder of unborn innocents, Christians cannot pray for their success in these matters. But Christians can and should pray even for ungodly leaders. The majority of civil leaders in Paul’s time were ungodly pagans, and he instructed prayers to be made *“for all that are in authority.”* Christians can pray that ungodly leaders do better and make wise decisions.

Christians should forgive and seek forgiveness when praying: *“And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses”* (Mark 11:25-26). Christians must determine that, as the possibility exists, they will forgive those who have done wrong against them. James wrote, *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (James 5:16). No one’s forgiveness should be prayed for who refuses to repent and turn to the will of God (1 John 5:16), but a Christian’s prayers should seek the salvation of others—including his enemies (Matthew 5:44)—as they will turn to God.

The model prayer Christ gave His disciples instructs Christians certain things for which to pray (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). Although part of the model prayer pertained specifically to the pre-Pentecost view (particularly *“thy kingdom come”*), Christians would still do well to pray *“after this manner.”* Prayers for the reverent treatment of the Lord’s name, prayers for the success of the Lord’s church, prayers for necessary

daily sustenance, prayers to be kept from enticements to evil—these concerns are all worthy of regular consideration.

One should pray for Christians who are suffering for the Cause of Christ (Acts 12:5; Hebrews 13:3).

And one essential element that seems to be lacking in many modern prayers is **praise**. One whose heart is filled with the word of God as it should be will have a mouth filled with praise for God as it should be (Acts 4:24; Romans 16:27; Ephesians 3:21; et al.). *“By [Christ] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name”* (Hebrews 13:15).

Attentive to the will of God. There are various reasons why one’s prayers may not be answered as he envisioned, and those reasons may not always be clear. However, for some brethren who were perplexed as to why their prayers were not favorably answered, the reason should have been crystal clear—as James told them, *“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts”* (James 4:3). Even in prayer, they sought only to fulfill their own desires, not the will of God. Christians are not above the possibility of *“ask[ing] amiss”*; and all need to *“examine yourselves”* and *“consider your ways”* lest you be found guilty (2 Corinthians 13:5; Haggai 1:5).

Christians need to be like Christ. He personally desired to avoid the pain and shame of the cross, pleading that *“the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me”* (Mark 14:35-36). But even in such desperation, He added, *“nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt”* (verse 36). Likewise, every Christian prayer needs to seek the will of God first. As Jesus taught His disciples to pray, *“Thy will be done”* (Matthew 6:10).

When offering prayer, it is not difficult for the mind to wander. Perhaps one might try to get a prayer quickly out of the way because he is hungry (praying before a meal) or tired (praying before bed). But inattentive prayers are no more than *“vain repetitions”* (Matthew

6:7), defined as “us[ing] the same words again and again” or “speak[ing] without thinking.”³ But Christians do not want to do *“as the heathen do.”* Christians should strive to be attentive in public and private prayers. In public prayers, such attentiveness is not only required by the one **leading** the prayer, but by all Christians who collectively offer up that prayer before the Father’s throne. And God will surely be attentive to the prayer of the faithful: *“But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer”* (Psalm 66:19).

[To be continued]

¹ Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *agrupneō*, in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. Of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 16.

² Bauer, et al., *charis*, p. 1080.

³ Bauer, et al., *battalogoō*, p. 172.

BEYOND VEXING

by Roelf L. Ruffner

“And delivered righteous Lot, sore distressed by the lascivious life of the wicked (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds)” (Jude 7-8, American Standard Version).

As I read this passage I often think of our beloved country. How far does it all go before America suffers the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah? Notice what has happened in the last few years regarding the **acceptance** of homosexuality in our land:

- ✓ The homosexual **lifestyle** portrayed in the media and Hollywood as normal. Scripts approved/ censored by homosexual activists. (When will someone make a film showing the truth about this filthy, demeaning, destructive, sad, perverted, sinful choice?)
- ✓ A growing number of Americans accept this immoral life style.
- ✓ **Same-sex** marriage approved by a state legislatures and forced upon other states by activist judges.
- ✓ **Hate Crime Laws** (so called) passed by state legislatures and recently by the U.S. Congress.

✓ “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy of U.S. Defense Department declared “unconstitutional” by an activist judge.

✓ A growing number of denominations **accept** unrepentant homosexuals as members and as clergy.

And the list could go on ad nauseum. “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry”(Acts 17:16). In a sense, homosexuality is a form of idolatry—the worship of the human body—or an outgrowth of it (Romans 1:22-27).

There is an old political axiom which states, “There is nothing quite as powerful as an idea whose time has come.” I believe this is true with the issue of homosexual rights. Using money, lobbying and political correctness this **juggernaut** has rolled aside decency and Biblical morality to reach its evil goal—the full acceptance of a perverted lifestyle by society and the ostracism (persecution?) of those that oppose it.

But we must **not** just roll over and play dead! Like righteous Lot we will be delivered IF we do what is right.

1. Continue **to stand** for the Truth and oppose perversion (Genesis 19:9; Matthew 5:14-15).
2. **Demand** fervent preaching concerning this sin; as well as all other sins (2 Timothy 4:2).
3. **Teach** our children and grandchildren that sexual immorality is a sin (Proverbs 22:6).
4. **Be prepared** to be persecuted (Matthew 5:10-12; 2 Timothy 3:12).
5. Don’t fall into **the trap** of hating these enslaved souls. If possible, show them the Truth (Acts 22:18; Jude 22-23).

Friends, we are not the first Christians who have faced this responsibility. It has been written that in New Testament times fornication was as common as breathing. We are fast approaching that scenario in this country. Pro-homosexual bias is becoming **engrained** in our society and **embedded** in the government and the judiciary.

Our brethren back then faced their dilemma head on. They could not picket or protest. They just injected into the world the gospel of Jesus Christ which

can change human hearts; **so can we!** Paul wrote, “*Be not deceived: neither fornicators...nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind...shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*” (1 Corinthians 6:9,11).

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GOD’S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP - COLOSSIANS 3:17

1. **LORD’S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God’s word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men’s doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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