

THE WORD OF GOD AND PRAYER

Acts 6:1-4

Scripture Reading: Acts 6.

Intro: Back in 1936 Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, who was then the pastor of the well-known Westminster Chapel in London, published a book called, *The Crises of the Christ*. I looked up the word *crisis* in my dictionary to learn exactly what Dr. Morgan meant by that title. The dictionary told me that *a crisis is a decisive moment, or a turning point*. The word *crises* as I am sure most of you know is the plural of crisis. So Dr. Morgan had in mind those times in the life of our Lord which were *decisive moments, or turning points*, in the life of our Lord. And he had chapters on the birth of Christ, on His baptism, His temptation, His transfiguration, His crucifixion, His resurrection, and His ascension. And he mentioned in his introduction that we now await “the ultimate Crisis, when He returns again” (p. 8).

We could all take our Bibles and point out many crises, many decisive moments or turning points throughout the history of God’s dealings with the world, and with His own people in particular. Creation was certainly one of those times. So was man’s temptation in the Garden of Eden. We could follow that with the call of Abraham, the birth of Isaac, the call of Moses followed by the giving of the Law. The death of Moses and the promotion of Joshua combined to make a very decisive moment in sacred history. It would be helpful for all of us to think our way through the Scriptures so as to identify the many times of crises in God’s dealings with His people, and with the nations of the earth.

In doing so, we all might make the mistake of passing over Acts 6, but it was a time when there was *a major crisis* in the early history of the church. The work had grown as many in Israel had been saved. The responsibility on the apostles was tremendous and increasing every day. And they faced the question which we all have to face when our responsibilities become greater than we can handle, and still continue to do the things that must have the greatest priority.

The crisis is described for us in verse 1 of Acts 6. (Explain.)

The problem is stated in verse 2. It is not that the apostles were too important to “serve table,” but it was that serving tables was not their primary responsibility. It is not what they had been called to do, and yet

caring for the needy widows was a work that needed to be done. Whether or not the complaint against the apostles was legitimate or not, we can't say, but I think that we must assume that it was. The prejudice that we see so often in our own day is not new; it is as old as the human race. And the true patriots in those early days of the church looked more favorably upon Jews who regularly spoke Hebrew than they did upon Jews who could only speak Greek. But it was more than a language difference that existed between the two groups. Their manners and customs were different, and sometimes it referred to Jewish people who were born outside of the borders of Israel. Thus, a social problem of the day had found its way into the earth church, and, if the apostles had not been men of deep conviction, they would have allowed the need to dictate to them what they should do. But they were men of conviction. They knew what their calling was, and yet they were not about to ignore the problem. So what did they decide to do?

The solution to the problem is given in verse 3. The work was not just to be turned over to anyone who was willing to do it, but the church was to select *seven godly men* who would see to it that none of the widows were being neglected!

What, then, would the apostles do? We learn that from verse 4: "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word." If the church were to maintain its spiritual vitality for the blessing of sinners and saints alike, *nothing must be permitted to draw the apostles away from the very foundation of the whole ministry, and that foundation consisted of two major ministries. And these had to do with (1) the Word of God, and (2) prayer.*

Where did they learn this?

Well, most recently they had observed it in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord performed many miracles during His public ministry, but His main public work was *preaching*. And, in addition to His preaching, He was known as *a man of prayer!* Take your NT (and I hope you have a red-letter edition)—but take it, and slowly turn the pages and note all of the messages the Lord gave as the very Word of God. And along with all of those messages you will find inserted references like this in Luke 6:12. Luke was speaking of our Lord as he wrote,

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.

In addition, think of all of valuable instruction the Lord gave on the

subject of prayer while He was here on earth.

But we not only find this in the life of our Lord, but we see it even in OT times when they did not have a complete Bible as we do now, but they were gradually getting more and more as God was pleased to make His Word known.

For example, we read of both Enoch and Noah that they were men who walked with God. They couldn't have done this unless God had revealed His will to them (which is His Word), nor could they have "walked with God" if they did not enjoy daily communion with the God in prayer. And we know that both of them were preachers!

Or think again of Abraham, of Moses, of David, of Daniel and of all of the prophets. They were all men of the Word and prayer.

But it was not just the men. Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2 reveals a deep familiarity with the Word of God. And the same is true of Mary, the mother of our Lord, in her prayer which you will find in Luke, chapter 1.

All people have a natural, God-given inclination to pray. But prayer without the Bible becomes only a lifeless or superstitious repetition of words. It is only when we pray in accordance with Scripture that our prayers are heard.

The Lord made sure that David's prayers were the Word of God because as he prayed his prayers and as he wrote his prayers, it was the Word of God which flowed from his heart and his pen. Many OT saints give us illustrations in their prayers of how they turned the Word of God into prayer. And how do we know how to pray except from the teaching of the Word of God?

So I am seeking to establish two things with you from the Scriptures:

- 1) That the people of God have always had prayer and the Word together in their lives—not prayer without the Word, and not the Word without prayer, but prayer and the Word, the two together.
- 2) That it is the will of God that prayer and the Word have the greatest priority in the work of the Lord. The apostles knew this from the Lord and His teaching, and they knew it from their acquaintance with the OT. And what is important for us to see is that they refused to be drawn away from their priorities, even by good and necessary work which needed to be done. *This was truly a crisis in the early church. It was a decisive mo-*

ment in church history. It is regrettable that throughout the history of the church from that day until this, the church leaders have not manifested the same intention to stay by the calling that they have.

But now let us look at our text a little more closely. First, I want to ask a question:

I. ARE WE TO ASSUME THAT THE WORD AND PRAYER WERE NOT IMPORTANT FOR THE SEVEN DEACONS?

I call them “deacons” because the verb used for “serve” at the end of verse 2 is the verb from which the word *deacon* is formed. But also because I think it is generally agreed by most men who have commented on this chapter that these men were the first deacons.

In answering this question we must assume the very opposite. The Word of God and prayer were very important for them. And you can see this from Stephen’s message which followed in chapter 7. It was all from the OT. And it was not just from the history of the OT, but also from the prophets. And Stephen died praying. So you see both were a very important part of his life.

In fact, as I have mentioned to you before, the qualifications for elders and deacons which are given in the Scriptures are not to indicate that elders and deacons were a special elite among the people of God, but to teach that they were examples of what *all believers* should be!

So the apostles, and then the elders who followed them, were pacesetters. And as it is generally true that people rarely rise above their leaders in understanding and character and living, it was important then, and is still important, that the leaders lead the way in making the Word and prayer of primary importance in their lives.

Now I am not asking questions because I want a show of hands nor any kind of a verbal response, but I trust we will all be very honest in examining our own lives. How faithful have we been, each one of us, in reading our Bibles this past week? I am not thinking of *how much* we have read, but simply, *have we been faithful in reading the Word each day? Do we think about what we read? Are we learning from our reading?* The very fact that God has given us a Book, His Word, is evidence that He wants us to read it. Is reading the Word so much a part of our lives that it bothers us if we miss even a day? How are you answering these questions.

But let me ask another question: What about prayer? Do you pray more than just thanking the Lord for your food when you eat? Or do you pray even that much? Do we pray just when we have some special need, or do we pray because we know that we need the Lord, and we enjoy spending time with Him?

Do you see why I say that this was a period of crisis in the early church? The following pages in the book of Acts would have been altogether different if the apostles had allowed busy-ness to minimize the place that the Word and prayer were to have in their lives. I have told some of you about a pastor I knew years ago who had a plaque on his wall with the words, "Beware of the barrenness of a busy life." That is not just a problem for pastors, but one which is a danger for all of us.

So the Word and prayer were important for the apostles. It was important for the first deacons. And it was important for every child of God. And they still are important. It is not enough to attend a church where you hear the Word taught. We all need to read the Word and to spend time in prayer every day that we live, and as many times during the day as we can.

But let us move on to the words we find in verse 4. This verse expresses:

II. THE WAY OF LIFE THE APOSTLES SET FOR THEMSELVES (Acts 6:4).

(Read verse 4.)

"We will give ourselves continually"—all five words in English are the translation of one word in the Greek. It is the word προσκαρτερέω. It is a word of absolute dedication. It expresses the intention to persevere and not to faint. It speaks of giving constant attention "to prayer and to the ministry of the Word."

It is a word which speaks not only of a desire to be faithful, but to be right and to excel, not for personal glory, but because of an intense desire to please and glorify the Lord. It meant that they were not going to let anything else sidetrack them.

Let me deal with "the ministry of the Word" first. What does this require? Well, if we are going to minister the Word, we have to know the Word, and there is no way to know the Word without reading it and reading it and reading it, and then pouring over the Word in careful, prayerful study,

until the truth of the Word really becomes clear to us.

Do you know what Dr. Johnson was doing at our house day after day as he was recovering from his heart attack? He was carefully reading *in the Greek text* the second epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. And he commented to all of us throughout those days what a blessing it was to him. Nobody told him that he had to do that; he was doing it because he wanted to. He was, even as he was recovering, reveling in the Word of God. He was *giving himself* to his ministry. I know that he has taught 2 Corinthians many times, but he was enjoying it all over again. You see, we are *giving ourselves* when we do something just because we want to, and because we know that we need to.

But *giving ourselves* includes something else that is so very important. We are not just seeking to gather a lot of information and knowledge from searching the Scriptures, but we are learning what the Lord wants us *to be* and *to do*. The ultimate objective of all Bible reading and Bible study is that the teacher's life might be changed, and then that the lives of those he teaches might be changed. Taking care of people's physical needs is leaving the job incomplete unless we are seeking to meet people's spiritual needs as well. And if a teacher is going to meet the spiritual needs of those he teaches, he must concentrate on seeing that he is applying the truth to his own heart and life.

The Apostle Paul constantly ran into one problem in dealing with his fellow Jews. And he referred to this in his epistle to the church at Rome. This is what he said to the Jews:

- 17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,
 18 And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;
 19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,
 20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.
 21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?
 22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?
 23 Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? (Rom. 2:17-23).

It all comes down to this: *Do we practice what we preach?* The Lord said this about the scribes and Pharisees:

All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not (Matt. 23:3).

On the other hand, the Apostle Paul had this to say to Timothy, and the same applies to all of us who minister the Word, whether it be to a church, or to our families, or to a single individual:

12 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

15 Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.

16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:12-16).

How sad is the lamentation that we find at the beginning of the Song of Solomon:

Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept (Song of Solomon 1:6).

Concl: What I have been saying about the Word of God, applies equally to prayer. Those of us who teach the Word must pray before we prepare, and pray as we teach, and then pray after we teach. The Word and prayer go together. We can never be what God intends for us to be if we neglect one or the other, and surely not if we neglect both. When we are exhorted in Scripture so frequently by precept and example, to pray, and then we don't pray, we must recognize that it is a sin not to pray. We need to learn to pray for ourselves, and we need to learn to pray for each other. Samuel knew the supreme importance of prayer when he prayed, Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way (1 Sam. 12:23).

THE FIRST PRAYERS

Genesis 4:25-26

Intro: It is very clear from Scripture that it, the Word of God, the Bible, is never to be separated from prayer. In the Scriptures God speaks to us; in prayer we speak to God. And in my first message in this series I sought to establish from the practice of the apostles in the early church that the Word of God and prayer always go “hand in hand,” so to speak. The apostles felt that they were to give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.

This characteristic was to be seen in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was constantly referring to the OT Scriptures, and prayer had a major place in His life. It was not unusual for Him to spend whole nights in prayer.

The same was true of the patriarchs and the prophets of the OT. They were men of the Word, and men of prayer.

I mentioned in my message last week that men, all men and all women, young people, and even boys and girls, have a natural inclination to pray. We don't run into arguments when we teach our children to pray. People who do not know the Lord will often ask for prayer when some urgent need arises in their lives. We learned this summer at camp from our study of the prophecy of Jonah that the pagan sailors on the ship carrying Jonah to Tarshish all prayed to their gods when they were caught in that terrible storm. And this brings me to a point that I want to make in speaking about *the Word of God and prayer*.

We are dependent upon what God has revealed for us in His Word about prayer to know exactly what prayer is, and what it means to pray. It is one thing to pray, but it is more likely that people are going to pray wrongly than it is that they will pray rightly if they ignore what the Bible teaches us about prayer. The Bible teaches us about the God to Whom we are to pray. It teaches us what it means to pray, and how to pray. If it were not for the Word of God we would make the same mistakes that people make when they try to pray, but are ignorant of what the Bible has to say about prayer. The Bible is our Prayer Book, and since we have the Bible, we don't need any other prayer book. If you and I are to learn who can pray, and how to pray, and if we are to learn about the One to Whom we are to pray, then let us read our Bibles.

But let me point out a fact that applies to the doctrine of prayer as much as to any other doctrine in Scripture. The doctrine of Scripture, by which I mean, the teaching of Scripture, always begins at a point early in the Word of God, and then as we go on through the Bible we learn more and more about any doctrine. That applies to what the Bible teaches us about God. It applies to what the Bible teaches us about man, about sin, about the judgment of God, about the Lord Jesus Christ, about the Holy Spirit, about salvation, and all of the other doctrines of Scripture. And so it also applies to prayer. We cannot turn to any one place to learn all that the Bible teaches us about prayer. The truth about prayer is scattered throughout the Bible, from beginning to end. Every detail about prayer that we can learn is very important.

Theologians and Bible teachers have sought to help us understand the doctrines of Scripture by going through the Bible to collect information on any particular subject they might be teaching. And the writings of men who believe the Bible to be the very Word of God, can be most helpful to us. But we must always be careful to examine what we hear in church, and what we hear on radio or television, with what God has given us in His Word. If the Bible supports what you are hearing, or what you are reading in books written to explain the Bible, then accept it. But if there are differences between what you find in the Bible and what others are telling you, then always believe the Bible. The Bible is our authority for all that we are to believe. *It is our sole authority for what we are to believe about prayer.* So all of this shows how important to remember how we need to keep prayer and the Word of God together.

Now, with all of this in mind let me remind you that the first book of the Bible is the book of Genesis.

I. GENESIS, THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS.

It tells not only about the beginning of creation and of the human race, but it tells us about the beginning of marriage, and the family, and of sin. It tells us about the beginning of divine judgment, but it also tells us about the beginning of salvation. It has been said that there is nothing that we see later on in this world that did not have its origin in the book of Genesis. The first murder is recorded in Genesis.

But what is so important to us today is that *prayer* had its beginning in Genesis, that is, prayer between man and God. It may have been that there had been prayer between angels and God before this, but Genesis records

the beginning of things as they relate to man.

What is probably the simplest definition that we can give to prayer? It probably is that *prayer is speaking to God*. It is fellowship with God. We can say that Adam and Eve must have had some very precious fellowship with the Lord before the time when they sinned. Cain, who had killed his brother Abel, pled with God that his punishment was too severe (even though he deserved to die), and God had mercy upon him and protected him from his enemies. *But at the end of chapter 4 in Genesis we read about a very important beginning*. Listen as I read the last statement of Genesis 4. It is at the end of verse 26, and this is what it says: “Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.”

II. MEN BEGAN TO CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD.

So it was truly a beginning: “Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.”

Cain had killed Abel, and God gave Adam and Eve a third son to take Abel’s place. They named him Seth because they realized that God had appointed Seth to take Abel’s place. God was compensating them for the loss of Abel.

In time Seth also married, and God gave him and his wife a son whom they named Enos, or Enosh. And that is where we learn that “then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.”

There are two ideas that men have come up with as to the meaning of this statement:

- 1) That it was at this time that men began to call themselves by the name of the Lord. That is a possibility, but most grammarians seem to have stayed by the older translation of the statement.
- 2) This second idea seems to me to be very odd. It is that men falsely called upon the Name of the Lord, and that this was the beginning of idolatry. That idea seems to me to be ridiculous in the light of the way this statement is used in Scripture.

What, then, does this expression mean?

There are some important things that we all need to learn about the study of the Word of God. One is that the Holy Spirit is our divinely appointed Teacher. The Bible has been given to us as the Holy Spirit moved upon

them, guiding them in the very words that they used. So the true Author of the Bible is the Holy Spirit. And so it is very reasonable that He should be our Teacher. But a second thing that we need to know about is that it explains itself. The Bible is its own interpreter. So, when we come to a new expression like this, instead of *guessing* what it might mean, we take our Bibles to see if it is used anyplace else in Scripture.

We can take a concordance and look for this expression, or we can continue to read, looking for this statement, or one like it. Once we find it (if we do), then we must decide, hopefully under the direction of the Holy Spirit, if the other occurrences of the expression can mean what they mean in this first passage.

Now for the sake of saving time, I am going to pass by two other times in this book of Genesis where this expression is found because, as I hope to show you later, in those two places, one in Genesis 12, and the second in Genesis 13, I believe the meaning is slightly different.

But for now will you turn to the prophecy of Joel.

At the end of chapter two in Joel, beginning with verse 28, we are told about “the great and terrible day of the Lord.” And in connection with that day Joel said this in the last verse of the chapter, verse 32:

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call (Joel 2:32).

Will you notice that there are two callings referred to in this verse? People are calling upon the Name of the Lord, but only those people “in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.”

“That great and terrible day of the Lord” is the time of judgment that is coming on the earth, worse than any judgment the world has experienced, and only those who call upon the Lord will be delivered. But none will call upon the Name of the Lord except those “in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.”

A study of the OT will show us that “the remnant” is synonymous with those who are called in the NT, *the elect*. So the subject here is clearly, not deliverance from physical death because many who call upon the Lord during that time of Great Tribulation will die! In what sense, then, will

they be delivered? They will be delivered from their sins! They will be saved from hell! They will call upon the name of the Lord for salvation from their sins, but only those whom the Lord calls, will call upon His Name.

Now if you will look at the margin of your Bible, you will see that Joel 2:32 is quoted a couple of times in the NT: once in Acts 2 where the Apostle Peter was preaching, and a second time in the book of Romans which was written by the Apostle Paul. That reference is Rom. 10:13.

In Acts 2:21 we are told that Peter told the people who were in Jerusalem on that particular Day of Pentecost,

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

And then this is what the Apostle Paul wrote in Rom. 10:13:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Both apostles were referring to this statement which we find for the first time in Gen. 4:26, and they said that *to call upon the name of the Lord is what it takes to be saved!*

So to take this back to our text at the end of Genesis 4, what are we to understand as the meaning of this expression. *It means that at that point early in human history there was a mighty work of the Holy Spirit, and that for the first time people in large numbers began to call upon the Name of the Lord to save them from their sins.*

I'm not going to be dogmatic about this, but I would not be at all surprised but that this was the time when Adam was saved, and when Eve was saved, and when their son Seth was saved, and his wife, and then Enos. Even though Adam is the head of a fallen race, and because of his sin we are sinners by nature, yet I have believed for a long time that the fact that God clothed Adam and Eve with the skins of animals before He put them out of the Garden of Eden, was an indication that He, the Lord, intended to save them. Take that for what it is worth, but that is my conviction.

Whatever may have been the case, for men to begin to call upon the Name of the Lord meant that for the first time there was a mighty movement of the Spirit, and many were being saved from their sins.

But now I ask again, Just what does it mean to call upon the Name of the Lord?

The Hebrew word for “call” suggests a public, audible calling out and specifically naming the Lord as the One upon Whom a person is calling. It is to call for help. And to call upon Him by Name is to declare that you are forsaking any other possibility of salvation because you are calling upon the Lord specifically by Name, and no other. His Name is Jehovah, a Name greater than any other Name, not a dead idol, but a living God, the only true God, eternal and unchanging. And we know from the Scriptures that we call upon the Lord Jesus Christ Who is also known by the Name Jehovah.

My, how much there is in this little statement of Scripture.

Sometimes God in His mercy grants the petition of people who are not saved, such as He did with Cain, but the first prayer that He promises to answer, is the prayer that we pray when we cry out in the Name of the Lord to be saved. This is the only way of salvation. There are not many Saviors; there is only One, and His Name is the Lord Jesus Christ. Cf. John 14:6.

But, before I close, let me ask the question:

III. IS THIS ALL THAT IT MEANS TO CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD?

Now we are ready for Genesis 12:5-8 and 13:1-4 and 13:18. (Read these passages.)

Now if we are to say that *calling upon the name of the Lord* refers only to the time when a person is saved (and it does refer to that), then we are forced to say from the use of this term in Genesis 12 and 13 that it must be possible for a person to be saved more than once. But we know that is impossible because salvation is eternal, and if it is eternal, then once you have it, you can never lose it, and so a second salvation is totally unnecessary!

What, then, is the meaning of the expression in these two chapters, 12 and 13?

They teach us that the cry of faith which we uttered when the Lord first saved us, is a cry which we continue to make as we trust the Lord day after day to meet our needs as His people. When Abram got into the land, he immediately took his stand as one who was declaring his faith in the living

God. And he did this in a heathen land.

— And then if you read the rest of chapter 12 you will see that Abram's faith faltered when he found a famine in the land, and so he went down to Egypt. And you don't read anything about an altar nor about his calling upon the Name of the Lord until in chapter 13 he arrived back in the land that the Lord had given to him. Fellowship with God was restored, and his faith was renewed. And even after the trouble that he had with Lot, we find that he moved to Hebron, "and built there an altar to the Lord," and we can safely assume that he continued to call upon the Name of the Lord.

Concl: There is a message here in these chapters for all of us.

— First, all of us need to ask ourselves if we have called upon the Name of the Lord for salvation. You see, we all have to call for ourselves. This is where we all stand alone before the Lord. I can't call for you; you can't call for me. I can't believe in the Lord for you; you can't believe in the Lord for me. Husband, you are saved because your wife is saved; you need to call upon the Lord for yourself. Wife, you aren't saved just because your husband is a believer; you must call upon the Name of the Lord for yourself. And young people and children, will you listen carefully to me? You may have a Daddy and Mother who know and love the Lord, but you can't be saved by their faith. Are you sure that you have called upon the Name of the Lord to save you?

One way to check this is to ask yourself, whatever your age is, why are you here this morning? Is it just a habit, or did you come because you want to be with the Lord's people and to learn more about God's Word? Or are you here because someone made you come? Remember that "whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved," but if you don't call in faith upon Him, you won't be saved. Make sure before you leave this place today that you are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation.

— But let me ask all of us another question. For those of us who are assured of our salvation, how much have you called upon the since you were saved? Is it something that you do every day? When Abram called upon the name of the Lord as a child of God, he was on safe territory. But when he neglected his fellowship with the Lord, he got into trouble. The place each one of us gives to calling upon the Name of the Lord day by day is the true measure of our love for Him, and of exactly where we stand in our relationship with Him. If we are not praying, we are telling the Lord by

our actions that we don't really need Him until some special need comes along. You know, and the Lord knows, and perhaps your family knows how important it is to you to call upon the Name of the Lord. Are there some changes that need to be made in your fellowship with the Lord? Do we really love the Lord with all of our hearts, with all of our souls, with all of our strength, and with all of our mind? That is a big order.

We are living in days in our country when we really need to mean business with the Lord. This is no time to go backward; we need to be pressing on for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Instead of praying less, we need to be praying more. Instead of cutting back on our attendance at the meetings of the church, we need to come more often. And when we come, we need to come with hungry hearts. We can't survive in a spiritually healthy way without each other, and we can't hope to be moving ahead if we are not doing what the Lord wants us to do.

What a difference it would make in all of our lives if daily we were calling upon the Name of the Lord, and walking in real dependence upon Him, seeking above everything else to do what pleases the Lord. May God grant that we will experience a real renewal in our lives that together we might become a mighty force in the hands of God to minister to the godless people in our generation.

ABRAM AND HIS ALTAR

Genesis 12:1-8

Intro: From the beginning of time one of the distinguishing characteristics of a child of God has been *prayer*. That becomes clear as we study the story of godly people whose lives are recorded for us in the Word of God. But it was certainly emphasized shortly after the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul. The Lord appeared to “a certain disciple in Damascus,” where Saul had gone, and said this to him,

Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth (Acts 9:11).

Saul of Tarsus had been notorious for his persecution of Christians, and Ananias was well acquainted with what Saul had done in others places. He also knew why he had come to Damascus because he responded to the Lord with these words:

13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name (Acts 9:13-14).

What Ananias did not know was that the Lord had met Saul on his way to Damascus, and that Saul’s heart had been changed. And the evidence that he had been changed was that he was praying!

Now the Lord did not say that he was *saying* prayers, nor that he even he *had been praying*., but, as the Lord’s words indicated, that Paul at that moment was praying. We could translate, “behold, he prayeth, “ with these words, “behold, he is praying.”

It is important to notice that this is the Lord’s statement of what Saul was doing, and it was to be proof to Ananias that he had nothing to fear from Saul because he had become, by the grace of God, a member of the family of God. *And we know from the epistles which the Apostle Paul wrote that from that moment on prayer became a major part of the daily life of the great Apostle.*

No one had taught the Apostle to pray. It was a part of the new life that he had in Christ that he would pray. Anyone who claims to be a Christian but who does not pray regularly should examine the reality of his claim. Paul certainly learned much more about prayer as he grew in his knowledge of the Lord and of the Word of God, but the simple fact remains that

his life was changed by the Lord, and he immediately began to pray. We may be more faithful about praying sometimes than we are at others, but the fact remains that all true believers in Christ pray. They don't just say prayers by rote, nor are they satisfied to read prayers that others have written, but they really pray. Their prayers are always very simple, and they may not always be correct, but this is what the Apostle Paul had in mind later when he wrote to the church at Rome, and also to the churches of Galatia, in almost identically the same words,

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Gal. 4:6).

I have read to you from Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia, chapter 4, verse 6, but you will find the same idea in Rom. 8:15-16. "Abba," This Chaldean, sometimes referred to as Aramaic. It is like our word *Papa*, a name for *father* which a child can pronounce before he has any teeth. Now Paul said that it is the Holy Spirit that causes us to call God our Father, and when we do that we are praying. You and I learn other names for God as we increase our knowledge of the Word, but there is probably no Name, or title, that we can use for God that brings Him greater pleasure than when we simply and sincerely say, "Father," or, "our Father."

Today I want to consider with you three verses from the early history of Abraham, when he was still called Abram. And by the way you will notice in the name Abram, or Abraham, the first two letters of "Abba." "Ab" in Hebrew is *father*. The first passage is Genesis 12:1-8, and the verses are verses 7 and 8 (but I am going to focus my message mainly on verse 8); the second passage is Genesis 13:1-4, and the verse is 4.
Let me read these to you.

All three verses mention an altar; verses 8 in chapter 12 and verse 4 in chapter 13 tell us what Abram did in connection with the altar: He "called upon the name of the Lord." Now, as you would understand, I am sure, *this is prayer*. To call upon the name of the Lord is to pray.

We read about Abram's altar again in the last verse of chapter 13 (v. 18), and then no altar is mentioned until Genesis 20 when Abraham built an altar to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to the Lord.

The only time that the word *altar* is mentioned in the book of Genesis before chapter 12, is in chapter 8, verse 20. The flood was over, and Noah and his family had just come out of the ark. And then this is what we read:

20 And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of

every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

21 And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

22 While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease (Gen. 8:20-22).

So from this passage we can see that the first use of the altar was very pleasing to the Lord, and that continued to be true whenever the altar was used in a proper way.

Now I want to consider especially verse 8 of Genesis 12, not only to see what Abram did, but also to learn what we can from prayer. And as we begin, I want to remind you that in this series we are considering *the Word of God and prayer*, and their relationship to each other. Let me speak about that relationship as it applies to our text for today.

I. THE WORD OF GOD AND PRAYER.

The relationship is obvious, but I want to point it out to you nevertheless.

The book where our text is found is Genesis. Genesis is a part of the Word of God, a very vital part. We have these verses which have to do with prayer, and so we must recognize that we would not have the truth about prayer that we are going to learn today if it were not in the Word of God. So the place to learn about prayer is your Bible. Read other books on prayer. Many wonderful books have been written on this subject, but also many books that will give you the wrong teaching about prayer. We always need to bring what we read elsewhere, and what we hear from any teacher, and examine what we read and what we hear by the Bible. The Bible gives us the truth, and everything on a subject such as prayer must be confirmed by the Bible.

So we see immediately that there is an inseparable connection between the Word of God and prayer.

Now let us go on to a second point and think for a moment about:

II. ABRAM'S ALTAR.

The Hebrew word for “altar” means *a place of sacrifice*. We do not find any instructions for the altar until we get to the giving of the Law. See Exodus 20:24-26. There we are told that it could be a raised place of earth, or it could be made of stones. But it was not to be made of “hewn stone,” that is stones which were cut to make it ornate and attractive. Nor were altars to have steps leading up to them. It seems that the restrictions were to keep the people of Israel from building altars like the heathen did. If they made it elaborate, then the danger was that they would worship the altar instead of the Lord—which at times was exactly what happened.

However, the point that needs to be made is that the altar, which was also the place of prayer, was a place where animals were sacrificed. It was always to be very simple, but, at the same time, it was extremely important! The sacrifice always preceded the calling upon the Lord.

Now let us think about:

III. ABRAM'S PRAYER.

*“There” - 12:7, 8; 13:7, 18.
Cf. Isaac - 26:25.*

It is merely stated that he “called upon the name of the Lord.”

Abram would have been very familiar with the offering of sacrifices because this was a part of the heathen worship in which he had been raised. But the difference was that now he “called upon the name of the Lord.”

Calvin pointed out in his commentary on Genesis that the building of an altar to the Lord was evidence of Abram's great devotion to the Lord, but also that it was a dangerous thing to do among a people like the Canaanites. They were cruel and intolerant of worshiping any gods but their own. In fact, Calvin said, “It ought indeed to be referred to the wonderful favour of God, that he was not often stoned” (p. 356).

But what does it mean that Abram “called upon the name of the Lord”?

Gesenius, in his Hebrew lexicon, says that this expression means that Abram cried out to the Lord, and what apparently is important in the expression, *using His Name*, so as to make it perfectly clear that he was calling upon Jehovah!

His purpose in calling upon the Lord would have been twofold:

- 1) Worship.
- 2) Supplication.

In a sense Abram was claiming the land for Jehovah since the Lord is God of heaven and earth, and He had promised Abram the land where his descendants would become a mighty nation. This in itself would have been a dangerous thing for Abram to do in the hearing of the Canaanites because it meant that they would be driven out of the land. But Abram was there by faith. His trust was in the Lord, and he was preserved from the Canaanites just as our Lord was preserved from His enemies, and as Moses was preserved from Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Abraham seems to have been more convinced that the Lord could protect him and his family from the Canaanites than he was that the Lord could provide for them during the famine. Our faith is often that inconsistent.

But perhaps the reason that Abram's faith was as strong as it was, was because he was a man of worship. That seems to have been his primary prayer as he came into the land. We worship the Lord when we have our attention focused upon Him as God, and we rejoice in the glorious attributes of His character. This is the statement that we had first in Gen. 4:26 when men began to call upon the name of the Lord.

Now let us think in terms of:

IV. THE APPLICATION OF THIS STATEMENT TO US TODAY.

Let me remind you, as I have done before, about what the Apostle Paul had to say in Rom. 15:4 about our use of the OT. This is what he said:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

There are those who teach that since Christ came, we no longer need to pay any attention to the OT. *Nothing could be farther from the truth.* In fact, if we did not have the OT, we could not understand the NT. In the same way, if we did not have the NT, we could not really understand the OT. So obviously there are important lessons for us even in this brief statement which was recorded concerning the life of Abram. It was important to the Holy Spirit, or we would not have it in our Bibles. So let us make sure that we have the applications in mind.

A. First, will you notice that Abram "buided," or *built*," an

altar unto the Lord.

Nowhere that Abram went did he already find an altar where he could worship the Lord. *He had to build one!*

Now we know that we don't have altars where we offer animal sacrifices today. The death of our Lord put an end to that, as it put an end to the Levitical priesthood. So I don't have in mind building up a mound of earth, or piling some stones up to make an altar. But what I mean is that each one of us has to build our own altars where we can call upon the Lord. And, like Abram, that place can change as often as we move around.

I hope you have a place in your home where you can quietly meet with the Lord by yourself. It may be in your study, or family room, or bedroom, but you need a place where you can call upon the name of the Lord.

When you go out of town and stay in a motel, or a hotel, or stay with friends in their home, do you think of where you can be by yourself even for a little while where you can read your Bible, and call upon the Lord in worship and prayer? This is often a problem with our young people when they go off to college; it is sometimes hard to find a place where you can quietly meet with the Lord by yourself. If your roommate is a Christian, perhaps you can arrange times when each of you can have your room by yourself. If your roommate is not a Christian, perhaps you can find some time when your roommate is in class, or at work, when you can have the room to yourself. If we really want to have time with the Lord, there is always a way that it can be arranged. But you and I have to build our altars. And, parents, you need to think about your children in this connection. If each child can have his or her own room, that is the best. But keep radios and tv's turned down or off while members of your family are meeting at their altars. The point is that just as Abram had to build his own altar every place he went, we have to do the same. And the Lord will show us how this can be done.

B. What are we to learn about the altar?

I have already said what we all know, that we don't offer animal sacrifices like they did in OT times. But what do their altars mean to us? What is the sacrifice by which we call upon the Name of the Lord?

We all should know that *every animal sacrifice which the people offered*

to the Lord was a type of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every animal sacrifice offered in faith pictured the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross.

The sacrifices of the OT teach us that *the only way* we can come to God, *the only right* we have to call upon God, is through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me give you a verse to prove this. It is found in Heb. 10:19-22:

19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

21 And having an high priest over the house of God;

22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

You see, Christ not only died to take away our sins, but He died to provide us with access to God. Every privilege we enjoy as the people of God, every blessing we have, was purchased for us by the sacrifice of our Lord, the blood of His Cross. We can only bring our praises to God through Christ and what He has done for us. This is what Heb. 13:15 tells us:

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

As I understand it, this is the meaning of our building an altar today. We come to call upon the Name of the Lord knowing that it is only because of His death for us that we have a right to come, or that we are welcome to come.

Finally,

C. What does it mean that we call upon the name of the Lord?

It means that the Lord is the One to Whom we come. We call upon Him. We set Him before us.

Would you understand what I mean if I said that I am afraid that many times we simply say prayers, but we have little or no realization that we are calling upon *the Lord!* Prayer is coming to the Lord. Prayer is speaking to Him. Prayer is seeking Him. Prayer is worshiping Him. We are not just talking into the air; we are coming into the presence of the LORD, Jehovah, the living and eternal and unchanging God, our heavenly Father,

the source of every blessing we have ever received. When we read His Word, He is speaking to us, and when we set up our altar we do so to speak with Him.

Concl: When the Lord had washed the disciples feet in the Upper Room, He said to them, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17). I say that about our text today. And I say it to myself as well as to you: “If we know these things, happy are we if we do them.” It doesn’t help us to know that Abram built an altar and called upon the Name of the Lord, unless we ask, “How can I build an altar and call upon the Lord like Abram did?” I have tried to tell you how. Always be on the lookout for places where you can meet with the Lord alone to read the Word and to pray. Then go there, and call upon Him, remembering that the privilege that we enjoy was purchased for us by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. How we should treasure such a privilege which was purchased at such a cost! Let us not neglect it.

EYES TO SEE

Psalm 119:18

Scripture Reading: Psalm 119:1-24.

Intro: I am bringing a series of messages on *The Word of God and Prayer*. My text for today is Psalm 119:18. The verse is a prayer, and the subject is the Word of God. The Psalmist prayer was that he might “behold wondrous things out of thy law,” as he called upon God. We might be inclined to think of “thy law” as referring only to the first five books of the OT, or possibly just to the passages which deal specifically with the Mosaic Law, but the fact is that the term, “the law,” became a term which referred to *all of the Word of God*. Let me cite two passages of Scripture which justifies my making that statement.

The first is in John 10:34, but let me begin reading in that chapter with verse 30 so you can see what the Lord was talking about.

- 30 I and my Father are one.
 31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.
 32 Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?
 33 The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.
 34 Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? (John 10:30-34).

What passage was our Lord quoting? It was Psa. 82:6, and the Lord called it, “your law.”

A second passage is John 15:24-25 where our Lord said this:

- 24 If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.
 25 But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause (John 15:24-25).

From what passage was our Lord quoting when he said “that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law”? He was quoting Psa. 69:4.

There is a third passage that I would like for you to notice. It is in 1 Cor. 14:20-21. Notice what Paul said, especially in verse 21:

- 20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in

malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

21 In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.

From what OT passage was the Apostle Paul quoting? He was quoting from Isa. 28:11-12, and he called it “the law.”

Now if I said to you today that, when the Psalmist prayed that the Lord would show him “wondrous things out of thy law,” he was making a request that applied to *all of the Word of God*, I doubt if any of you would question my saying that. But it comes with really authority when you see these NT passages, two from our Lord Himself, in which he referred to the Psalms as the Law, and then this one passage in 1 Corinthians in which Paul quoted Isaiah, calling it “the law.” They may be other passages also.

We know that the Psalmist did not have even all of the OT when he made this petition, and it may have referred then more to the Law of Moses, but now that we have the completed revelation from God in our Bibles, this is a prayer that we all *can pray*, and certainly a prayer that we all *need to pray*.

I am sure that most of you have noticed that the Word of God is referred to in almost every verse of this Psalm. In fact, it can rightly be called, *the Psalm of the Word*. However, different titles are given to the Word of God. Notice what we have even in this third stanza of Psalm 119.

- 1) In verse 17 it is called “thy Word.”
- 2) In verse 18, “thy law.”
- 3) In verse 19, “thy commandments.”
- 4) In verse 20, “thy judgments.”
- 5) In verse 21, “thy commandments” again.
- 6) In verse 22, “thy testimonies.”
- 7) In verse 23, “thy statutes.”
- 8) In verse 24, “thy testimonies” for the second time.

The word “thy,” referring to God, is used over and over again throughout the Psalm. The Psalmist was concerned with God’s Word, God’s law, God’s commandments, God’s judgments, God’s testimonies, God’s statutes. So we are not dealing with Moses’ book, nor with David’s book, nor with any man’s book. It is true that men were used to write this book which we call the Bible, but it is God’s Book. And let us never forget that simple truth. It is the most wonderful book that has ever been written. It is a living and powerful Word. And Psalm 119 is a tribute to that wonder-

ful Word of God. And much of this Psalm is a prayer, thus combining for us *the Word of God and Prayer*.

— Notice in this third stanza that we have the Psalmist passionately seeking an understanding of the Word, on the one hand, and then we see how he spoke against those who scorned him and treated him with contempt because of his delight in the Word of God. And this is what made him realize how very, very important it was for him to know the Word.

We see also that the Psalmist desired to be obedient to the Word. He wanted to know it, but he wanted to live by it as well. And he felt that it was only by the Word of God that he would be able to survive in the kind of a world that he was living in. *How wonderful it would be if all of us, and every child of God throughout the world, felt about the Bible the way the Psalmist expressed himself here in just this one stanza! The world has not changed. It is still under the curse. It still has no place for God, nor any place for His Word. And it is impossible for us to survive if we are not reading and meditating and feasting daily on the Word of God.*

— This is a verse I learned many years ago, and I suppose that many of you can say the same thing. But let me remind all of us that it is not just a verse for us to learn, but it is a prayer for us to pray! And there is a difference—a big difference! It is recorded here for us not only that we might see how the Psalmist prayed, but to teach us to pray the same prayer. The next best thing to reading the Word through, is for all of us to pray our way through our Bibles. That will make the Bible come to life for us.

Let us examine this verse carefully so that we will really see what it means. And we can only do this with the Lord's help.

The first thing that the verse teaches us is that:

I. WE ALL ARE NATURALLY BLIND TO SCRIPTURE.

— A person who has closed eyes is no better off than a blind person. And that is the way we all are by nature. We do not have the ability to understand the Word of God. Oh, we can become acquainted with the stories of Scripture. We can trace the history that is recorded for us there. But as far as getting the point of Scripture, as far as understanding the truth that is to be found in our Bibles, we cannot understand the Bible on our own. The Apostle Paul expressed it with these words:

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14).

— “The natural man” is a person, man or woman, young person, or child, who does not know God. By nature he is no different from the what he was when he was born. He does not have the capacity to understand the truth of God, and he is not interested in the truth of God. He doesn’t want to know the truth of God. A person can be very brilliant as far as human learning is concerned, but the most intelligent people in the world are just as bad off as the most ignorant when it comes to understanding the things which God has revealed for us in His Word. We could translated that word “natural” with the word “sourish.” This is what we all are by nature.

Paul was describing what we all are by nature, by birth in two passages in the book of Ephesians. The first found in chapter 2, beginning with verse 2, says this:

2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:2-3).

— The second is in chapter 4, verses 17-19:

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness (Eph. 4:17-19).

But we have a slightly different situation in Psalm 119:18. Here we have the words of a man who wants to see, who has a desire, yes, even a deep longing, to know the truth of God’s Word. And so we can say that:

— **II. THIS IS THE PRAYER OF A MAN WITH A CHANGED HEART.**

He has become a child of God. He is what the Bible calls, “a new

creature.” He has been born again. God has done a work of salvation in him. The change is not something that he has done for himself; it is work of God in his soul. He once was spiritually blind, but now he sees. He once did not know God, nor did he want to know Him. But now he knows God, and he wants to learn all that he can about the Bible. Although the Psalmist lived long before Christ, he had even then experienced the salvation that would require the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We would say today, “He had become a Christian.”

But you might ask, if he has been saved, and his old blindness has been taken away, why is he praying that God would open his eyes?

It is because only God can give us an understanding of the truth. He first gives us life. He gives us the ability to understand the truth, and the desire to know it, but God Himself must teach us. And so this is why the Psalmist prayed as he did.

There is a prayer recorded for us in the NT, a prayer prayed many times by the Apostle Paul which helps us to understand this verse in Psalm 119. You will find it in Ephesians, chapter 1, beginning with verse 15. Let me read it to you:

- 15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,
16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;
17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:
18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,
19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,
20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:15-20).

In verse 18 when Paul said, “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened,” he actually said, *The eyes of your heart being enlightened.* Did you know that your heart has eyes? I am not speaking about that organ in

your body which we call the heart; I am speaking of your inner being where you understand spiritual truth, the truth of the Word of God.. We see the truth on the pages of our Bibles, or we hear it as someone reads it to us or explains what it means, but it is God Who through His Holy Spirit enables us to understand the truth of Scripture. And so a Christian, even though he has the capacity to understand the truth, still is dependent upon God to teach him. And so that is the reason for the prayer in our text. As you read your Bible this morning, even though you may not have used the exact words of Psalm 119:18, this is the prayer that you should have prayed as you began to read your Bible. "Open Thou mine eyes..." This is the prayer we all should have prayed before we came to Sunday School and church. *The only truth that we know from the Bible is truth that the Holy Spirit has taught us. He opens our eyes. He is our Teacher. He guides us into the truth.* A seminary graduate with a Th. D. degree is just as dependent upon the Holy Spirit as the most uneducated person in the body of Christ. Let me say it another way. A professor in a theological seminary is just as dependent upon the Holy Spirit as any other member of the church, the body of Christ. We read the truth with our physical eyes, and the Holy Spirit gives us understanding of the truth in our hearts.

The Lord helps us in our understanding of all things. But the truth that the Holy Spirit is mainly concerned with is the truth of the Word of God, and so we see in our text the reason that the Psalmist prays that the Lord will open his eyes.

III. THE REASON FOR OPEN EYES.

We all need, and should want, *eyes to see!* To see what? To see, "that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," or out of Thy Word.

The word "open" actually means *to uncover*. We could really translate this verse, "Uncover my eyes, and I shall behold wondrous things out of thy law." It is not that we are to look for some hidden meaning behind the words of Scripture. It is all right there in the very words of Scripture. It is just our dullness that keeps us from understanding what the Scriptures tell us. The Bible is full of "wondrous things." These are truths that will make us marvel. We will be overwhelmed with amazement. The things of God are so wonderful that we will find it difficult to believe all that God has revealed for us.

But there are many things that can cover our eyes and keep us from understanding the truth. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the

pride of life” will do it. “The care,” the anxieties, “of this world” will do it. “The deceitfulness of riches” will cast a veil over our hearts. And so will the lust of other things. The more we live for the present, the more we love the world and the things of the world, the more the truth will be concealed from us.

Concl: Do we really marvel at the Word of God? Is it our meditation all the day long? Is it the joy and rejoicing of our hearts, like to was to Jeremiah? Do we esteem the Word of God more than our necessary food, as Job did? When we read a book like Paul’s epistle to the Romans, do we respond like he did? This is what he said:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Rom. 11:33).

Let us make Psa. 119:18 our prayer, and then give ourselves to the Word, trusting the Holy Spirit to uncover our eyes, and to lead us in a greater way to love and to understand and to obey this precious book which He has given to us.

PRAYER AND THE WILL OF GOD

1 John 5:14-15; 2 Samuel 7

Intro: I am thankful to the Lord for all of the men who ministered the Word while Lucille and I were on vacation: Jim Wierson two weeks ago at the Lord's Supper, Kelly Spafford last Sunday night, Ralph Weeks at the Saturday morning Men's Prayer Meetings, Dr. Darrell Lockwood on Wednesday nights, and Gary Custis at the Sunday morning services the two Sundays we were away. And I appreciate Gary taking the Tuesday Bible Classes for two weeks also. And I am always thankful for the men who teach our Sunday School classes. And those of you who pray and who give faithfully are not forgotten. I am thankful for all of you. Lucille and I miss you when we are away, and I can assure you that you are all prayed for even when we are not here.

We had a very enjoyable and restful vacation, spending the first week (or most of it) with Don and Pat Rutledge, Lucille's sister and her husband, on Orcas Island. And then the last week we had the use of a beautiful condo where we enjoyed the beautiful surroundings and had a lot of time to rest and to pray and to read. But it is always good to get back home, and we look forward to getting back into the work again.

I didn't tell Gary what I had been speaking on at our Sunday morning services. I like for him to be perfectly free to follow the leading of the Lord as to his messages. So the fact that he spoke on prayer, and that I had been speaking on prayer, must mean that the Lord wants all of us to be reminded not only of the importance of prayer, but of how much each one of us individually needs to pray. *We place a very strong emphasis here at Trinity Bible Church on the ministry of the Word of God, but we need to make sure that we have an equally strong emphasis on prayer.* The Word of God and prayer—the two are equally important as far as the Scriptures are concerned. There are many, many prayers recorded for us in the Bible. And there is a great deal of teaching about prayer. In fact, if it weren't for the Bible, we wouldn't know how to pray. And yet in the Bible we have all that we will ever need to know about prayer. But we need to learn what the Bible teaches about prayer, and then we need to pray accordingly. As I have expressed to you before, the tendency among us as Christians, and with Christians generally in every generation, seems to be that we are either strong on the Word, but weak on prayer, or we are strong in prayer, but not so strong in the Word. The Lord makes it clear in His Word that we need to be strong in both: strong in the Word, and strong in prayer. Not a day should go by but what we are spending time

reading the Word, and then spending time in prayer. *This is one of the main purposes for this present series on "the Word of God and prayer."* It is up to each one of us to learn all that we can, and then to make sure that we are doing each day what the Lord wants us to do in reading and studying our Bibles, and in fellowship with Him in prayer. God speaks to us through His Word; we speak to Him in prayer.

Most of us have probably learned to pray by listening to others, and that is good providing we are listening to the right people. But the more we study the Word, and more our prayers will change to be like the prayers that are recorded for us in Scripture. *The Bible is our Prayer Book.* We all have it. There is no other Prayer Book that can possibly compare with it. So let us read it, and then let us go to the Lord in prayer, *turning what we have read into prayer.* This is what I want to speak to you about today: TURNING THE WORD OF GOD INTO PRAYER.

To do this, I want to begin with a very familiar passage of Scripture, a passage which teaches us a very important point about prayer. The passage is 1 John 5:14-15. (Read.)

I. PRAYER HAS CONDITIONS.

This is one of the first lessons that we all have to learn about prayer. *God never has promised to give us whatever we want regardless of what that might be.* However, that is the idea that most people have until they begin to pay attention to what the Bible says about prayer. These two verses in 1 John 5 tell us that "if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." The "whatsoever we ask" must be understood in accordance with the will of God. So the Apostle John did not say that the Lord would give us "whatsoever we ask," but it is "whatsoever we ask" *within in the limits of the will of God.*

The Bible teaches us that our Lord Jesus Christ prays for us, and it also tells us that the Holy Spirit prays for us. In **Rom. 8:26-27** we read about the way that the Holy Spirit prays for us. Let me read those verses to you:

26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will of God.*

If you are using a Bible which uses italics to show words that the translators have added to make the message of Scripture clearer, you will have the words, “the will of,” in italics. Without those three words the text would read that “He,” the Holy Spirit, “maketh intercession for the saints according to God.” I think that we would all have to agree that if the Holy Spirit prays for us *according to God*, that it means that He is interceding for us “according to the will of God.” If it were not according to the will of God, then it certainly could not be according to God. So the translators have not violated Scripture by adding those three words “the will of” because that is what this verse means.

All Three Persons of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, all act within the limits of the will of God. The Lord Jesus demonstrated that when in the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39b).

Our Lord’s entire life on earth was devoted to doing the will of God. For example, in John 6:38,

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.

And He did not do the will of God reluctantly, but again I quote from Scripture where it tells us that our Lord said,

7 Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me,

8 I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart (Psa. 40:7-8).

In **Romans 12:1-2** we learn that in our lives as Christians we are to be concerned about the will of God. Let me remind you of what those verses say:

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Before we were saved, we were not concerned about doing the will of God. But afterwards it became all-important to us. The Apostle Paul said in another familiar passage: 1 Cor 6:19-20,

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not

your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

How do we glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits, which means *outwardly* and *inwardly*? We do it by doing the will of God.

So it should not surprise us that when the Apostle John spoke of prayer, he said that our praying must be according to the will of God. This is one among many things that we must always remember about prayer. It has to be according to God's will. Our requests have to be within the limits of the will of God.

And so the crucial question is, *Where do we find out what the will of God is?* This is what brings us back to our Bibles. *God's will is revealed to us in His Word.* Now you can see why I have been saying that the Word of God and prayer go together. If we are to pray according to the will of God, we must pray according to the Word of God. And so it follows that the more we are acquainted with the Word of God, the richer, the more blessed, will our fellowship be with God in prayer.

But you might say, "There are many decisions we have to make which are not specifically mentioned in Scripture. What do we do about them?" That is another subject which we can take up at another time. But let me just say that questions like where we should live, where our children should go to school, what home we should buy, who we should marry, and the many little decisions which we face every day, are not specially dealt with in Scripture. But we have the Lord's promise that He will guide us continually, and we know that He providentially orders and controls every detail of our lives. So, if it is our purpose to please the Lord, and to bring glory to His Name, we can be sure that He will lead us. We need to be patient, to learn from others, to learn from our own mistakes, and to look for the peace of God to "reign" in us. When we really don't know what to do, or when our opinions go back and forth, the best thing to do is to wait until the guidance of the Lord becomes clear.

But today we are talking about the place that the Word of God has in our prayers. And to provide us with an illustration as to how the Word is to be used in our prayers, I will ask you to turn again to the seventh chapter of 2 Samuel where in the first 17 verses we learn about what the Lord was going to do for David, and the last twelve verses give us David's response.

II. WHEN DAVID TURNED THE WORD INTO PRAYER (2 Sam.

17:1-29).

Now I realize that this was an unusual case. In fact, the promise that the Lord made to David in the first part of this chapter will find its ultimate fulfillment in the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the earth. You and I have not had any such revelation given to us, nor will we. But God has given us, His people, many promises in the Word, and we can take those promises to the Lord and claim them in prayer just as David did with the special promises which were given to him.

David wanted to build a house for the Lord, that is, a temple. But that was not the Lord's will for David. Instead, the Lord said that He would build a house for David, not a house to live in, but *a dynasty*. It was the will of God that David's family would be established as the ruling family in Israel, and the promise is contained in verse 16 of this chapter. (Read.)

This message was given to David by Nathan the prophet. It was in every sense of the word, a revelation from God. It was a special word from God for David. In verse 18 we see David's initial response, and then his prayer which followed.

In verses 18 through 21 we see how overwhelmed David was with the message that Nathan had given to him.

In verses 22 through 24 he worshiped the Lord for His greatness and His grace. And David particularly was impressed with the fact that this message meant that God had chosen to be the God of Israel forever! No other nation could claim this unique blessing.

In verses 25 through 29 we have David's prayer. Notice that he emphasized that the message which had come to him was indeed the word of God. In verse 25 notice the expression, "the word which Thou hast spoken concerning Thy servant." In verse 27 notice the words, "For Thou, O Lord of hosts, hast revealed to Thy servant..." In verse 28 we have "Thy words are true, and Thou hast promised this goodness unto Thy servant." And then in verse 29 we read, "for Thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with Thy blessing let the house of Thy servant be blessed for ever."

Now having seen how David recognized that the message which had come to him through Nathan was the very Word of God, I want you to see what David did with it. And you can see it in verses 25 and 27 (especially the

last part of this verse), and then in verses 28 and 29.

Do you see what David was doing? He was taking the promises that had been given to him through Nathan, and they became the basis of his prayer to the Lord. *He was turning the Word of God back to God in prayer. This is undoubtedly the most powerful kind of praying we can pray.* David would never have thought of praying such a prayer if it had not been for the promise of God.

Now let us return to our original text in 1 John 5:14-15.

III. APPLYING DAVID'S PRAYER TO 1 JOHN 5:14-15.

The Apostle John said that “if we ask anything according to His (God’s) will, he heareth us, And if we know that He hear us, we know...”

How can we know that we are praying “according to His (God’s) will”? It is when we are praying according to God’s Word. And when the Word of God is not specific about the special needs that we may bring to the Lord, we must always say, “May your will, O Lord, be done.” And by the illustration we have had this morning from the life of David, we can see that God has given us His promises because He wants us to claim them in prayer—even if it only means that we thank Him for what He has promised to do for us.

But before I close, and thinking about asking according to the promises of the Word, let me point out one other thing that the Apostle John said in 1 John about prayer and the will of God. And for this please turn with me to 1 John 3:22. (Read.)

Doesn’t it seem to you that what the Apostle John was saying in this verse, and placing it along side of 1 John 5:14-15, that we cannot really pray according to the will of God if we are not seeking to live according to His will? Just to take a promise to God in prayer when we may be living in some sin which has not been confessed and forsaken, means that we cannot be asking according to the will of God. Do you remember the OT verse which says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me”? You will find that in Psa. 66:18. And 1 John 5:14-15 tells us that if He doesn’t hear us, He won’t answer us. *So it is not just my knowledge of Scripture that is going to be enough when I pray, but my obedience to the commandments of Scripture, obedience which comes from the heart, must be a part of any true prayer we expect God to hear.*

Concl: I seriously doubt if there is a single chapter in all of Scripture which cannot be turned into prayer. There are different kinds of prayer, you know. You will find promises that need to be claimed, sins that need to be avoided or confessed or both, truths which we need to understand and to believe, commands we need to obey, blessings for which we need to give praise and worship to God, examples which we need to follow, people for which we need to pray, needs and problems for which we need to trust the Lord.

We need not only to be reading continuously through the Bible, but we need to pray our way through the Bible—day after day, week after week throughout the whole year, and every year. If we are faithful in praying through our Bible reading each day, or even a portion of it, our prayers will never be the same, and it will not only increase our joy in prayer, but it will also increase the blessing we receive from reading because it is all being made more personal and more practical in our relationship with the Lord and in the ways in which we will seek by our lives to bring greater glory to God.

PRAYING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jude 20-21

Intro: Today I am continuing my series of messages on *The Word of God and Prayer*, and my text is Jude 20 and 21. (Read.)

The phrase that I am especially interested in is the phrase at the end of verse 20, “praying in the Holy Spirit.”

The only other time in Scripture that we have a similar statement is in the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 18, following the Apostle Paul’s description of the Christian’s armor. There we read these words:

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (Eph. 6:18).

The epistle of Jude and the latter part of Ephesians 6 have a great deal in common.

Both of them have to do with spiritual conflict. This is an ongoing conflict, and every child of God is involved in it. Paul, in Ephesians, wrote about the conflict with have with unseen, spiritual, demonic forces. Most of you will remember his words which are found in Eph. 6:10-13:

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Now much of this conflict brings us into contention with people, but Paul was emphasizing the real character of our spiritual conflicts.

Jude, on the other hand, was thinking about the ungodliness which has always been characteristic of life in this world, and will continue to be “in the last time.” See Jude 18. To bring in another passage where the Apostle Paul was writing along this line, I would call your attention to 2 Tim. 3 where the Apostle Paul began by saying, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come” (2 Tim. 3:1). And then he went

on to describe what those “perilous times” would be like. “Perilous times” are *dangerous times, often life-threatening*. They are times that are *difficult to go through*. They are times that *sap our strength, both physically and spiritually*. They create many problems and many temptations for the people of God. The world and its people never have been an encouragement to the people of God to live godly lives, but rather a snare, and often one of outright warfare.

Therefore, we need to be in a constant state of preparedness so that we will be strong enough to avoid the temptations that are continually before us, and, at the same time, strong enough to maintain the kind of a testimony in the world that may be used of God to awaken others to their need of Christ.

There are different ideas among expositors as to who this Jude was, but it is very likely that he was a brother of our Lord Jesus Christ—actually, a half-brother. It is a mark of his humility that he did not claim the relationship that he had with the Lord. He simply called himself, “the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James” (Jude 1). The Lord had two brothers by these names (see Matt. 13:55), and so this adds strength to the idea that the writer of our epistle was a brother of our Lord.

He intended to write about “the common salvation” (Jude 3), but compelled, by circumstances present even those days, to write to them that they “should earnestly contend for the faith which was once [for all] delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Some, because of persecution, were departing from the faith. But Jude had no sympathy with that. The stronger worldliness became, and the greater the opposition, the more important it was for the people of God to maintain a strong testimony.

Verse 4 tells us what was happening. (Read.)

Then Jude cited various examples from the OT to show not only how certain ones in the past had departed from the faith, but how God had brought judgment upon them. The problem was *ungodliness* (v. 4). Finally, Jude recorded the preaching of Enoch in verses 14 and 15 to encourage the people of God to be faithful to the Lord.

Then his exhortations began in verse 17. (Read.)

He asked them first to remember the words of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have this in verses 17 through 19. The enemies of the

truth were ungodly mockers who were divisive, “worldly-minded” (NASB), unregenerate men who did not have the Holy Spirit. *And then Jude told those to whom he was writing to do six things, and I want to spend the rest of our time today on the first four of those seven:*

- 1) “Building up yourselves on your most holy faith” (v. 20).
- 2) “Praying in the Holy Spirit” (v. 20).
- 3) “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (v. 21).
- 4) “Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (v. 21). The NASB renders it, “Waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

You can see that the last two are:

- 5) “Of some have compassion, making a difference” (v. 22).
- 6) “And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (v. 23).

The NASB makes two out of the sixth point. But we won’t concern ourselves with these today because I want to focus upon the first four because they are the main exhortations that Jude was giving to the Lord’s people in those days. *And they are extremely important for us today!*

Why do I say that?

Because it is very evident that we are living in “perilous times” right now. Even the people of the world know how dangerous the world has become. With crime running rampant, and drugs affecting even young children; with murders becoming a daily occurrence in all of our major cities, we all have many reasons to be concerned. However, in addition to all of this, the Christian faces temptations from the world in a special way. We are tempted to covet everything that we don’t have. Sexual restraints have been cast off. The marriage bond is violated in so many ways that more and more people look upon the marriage relationship as unnecessary. I could go on and on, but you know the problems that you face living in this world, and the dangers that your children are subjected to every day. Unless we are living according to the Word of God, our spiritual strength will soon be exhausted, and we will find ourselves carried away by the godlessness of the world in which we live.

What can be done not only to keep us from the sins of the day, but what can be done to make us positive influences for godliness in our ungodly world? This is where Jude 20 and 21 are extremely important.

Before we examine the four statements found in verses 20 and 21, let me

mention a very obvious point that arises out of these two verses (as well as many, many other verses in our Bibles). It is this:

I. WE ARE RESPONSIBLE.

Verses 20 and 21 are addressed to us. It is true that the Lord never leaves us alone to do by ourselves what He has commanded us to do, but that does not mean that we don't have anything to do. The Bible is full of commandments which the Lord has given to us, commandments which we are expected to obey. And we must begin immediately to do what the Lord wants us to do, trusting Him to make us willing to do it all, and then to enable us to do it. It is an erroneous idea of the Christian life that the Lord does everything for us and that we have no responsibility as far as our lives are concerned. God doesn't read our Bibles for us; we must read, and He gives us understanding as we read if we are trusting Him to do that. No child of God becomes holy without realizing that, by God's grace, there are certain things that he or she must do! We definitely have a responsibility toward God and toward His Word. I hope we all realize this.

But let me point out a second thing that is important to realize from these verses. Grammar is just as important in Scripture as it is anyplace else, and probably I should say, more important, because we Scripture we want to be sure that we understand what it means because it is the Word of God.

Looking at these two verses we have three verbs which end in "-ing," and one verb which does not. Therefore, this is my question:

II. WHICH IS THE MAIN VERB?

What is the main thing that Jude was telling his readers to do? Think about this for a moment before you answer it even to yourself.

The main thing that he was telling the believers of his day was, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." We will come to the meaning of that in just a moment, but for now I want you to see that this is the main thing that Jude wanted the people of God to do.

Now let us look at the other three verbs: "Building up yourselves...praying...looking..." What are these?

III. THERE ARE THREE PRESENT PARTICIPLES.

The other three verbs are participles in Greek, and they are participles in English. What is a participle? A participle is a word which has the nature of being both a verb and an adjective. That is, in this case, it is a verb which is used to describe what is necessary if we are to realize what it means to do the main thing that Jude is here telling us what to do.

Jude has told us to “keep ourselves in the love of God.” If we are to do this, we must be “building up ourselves in our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ...looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” And since the first two precede the “keep yourselves in the love of God,” it means that they come first, and the fact that “looking...” follows, means that it will be the result.

Now let me add this.

The fact that the three participles are in the present tense means that, as long as we live, we must be “building up” ourselves in our most holy faith, we must be “praying in the Holy Spirit,” and we must be “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

IV. THERE IS ONE AORIST IMPERATIVE.

The verb “keep” is in the aorist tense which emphasizes the fact that what you are told to do is going on, but it does not imply anything about its completeness. Robertson, one Greek authority, said that this is *an imperative of urgency*. It probably means that the believers were doing this, but they needed to keep doing it, but with great fervency and joy and faithfulness.

I hope you all have been able to follow me in all of this, and that we are now better prepared to understand the four things that Jude told the believers in his day, and us today, what we need to do in the light of the times in which we live.

Now let us consider:

V. THE MEANING OF THESE FOUR STATEMENTS.

A. “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith” (Jude 20a).

It is very obvious that this is one thing that we have to do for ourselves,

and that we are the primary beneficiaries of what we are to do. What does this mean?

— “Our most holy faith” is our understanding of the truth of the Word of God. And to be *building ourselves up* means that we are seeking to make ourselves stronger as Christians by our understanding of the great doctrines of Scripture. Jude speaks of false teachers. There were false teachers in his day, and we have plenty of false teachers today. And the only way we can distinguish the false from the true, is by understanding the truth of Scripture. This is an appeal for us to be constantly growing in our knowledge of the Word of God. Hopefully you have been doing this, but you need to do it today, and tomorrow, and every day for the rest of your lives. *And so do I!*

And how wonderful it is to know that the Lord Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit to be our Teacher. So we read, and we listen to messages, and we read good books that will help us in our understanding of the Word, but the Holy Spirit is always there to guide us into the truth.

The second point is:

— **B. “Praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20b).**

The little preposition “in” is very important in Scripture. As it is used here it signifies *by means of*, or *with the help of*.

We are in a series on *the Word of God and Prayer*. Do you see that is the order in this verse? We build ourselves up in the Word first, and then we pray. And the same Holy Spirit who teaches us the Word, also teaches us how to use the Word in prayer. We can’t understand the Word without the help of the Holy Spirit, nor can we truly pray without the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Praying is probably the most difficult thing that we ever do, if we are concerned about true prayer. And this is one place where each of us is in desperate need of the Spirit’s guidance and blessing.

— Now what is the purpose of spending time building ourselves up in the faith, and then praying in the Holy Spirit? This brings us to the third statement:

C. “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 21a).

This is a rather strange statement, isn't it? Does it mean that the Lord will not continue to love us if we aren't faithful in building ourselves up in our most holy faith, and if we are not praying in the Holy Spirit? Of course not! The Lord's love for us never ceases, nor does it change in any way.

What Jude was talking about here was our personal obedience to the Word of God. This statement, "Keep yourselves in the love of God," should always remind us of what our Lord said according to John 14:21-23:

21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

22 Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?

23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

You see, to keep ourselves in the love of God is to maintain our personal fellowship with God and with His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. That is where we experience the fulness of His love and the joy of His presence in our lives. Bible reading and study, and prayer, are to result in a growing fellowship with the Lord, and that is where we need to "keep" ourselves. It means that we are to exercise the greatest watchful care to make sure that nothing adversely affects our fellowship with the Lord. That is to be our greatest concern.

Finally,

D. "Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 21b).

This will be the result of the first three. We will not only believe in the coming of our Lord, but it will be an event which we eagerly expect every day that we live. If we are walking daily in fellowship with the Lord through the Word and prayer, we will understand why the Apostle Paul said that "to depart, and to be with Christ...is far better" (Phil. 1:23).

Concl: I mentioned a few moments ago that the tense in which Jude put the word "keep," suggested that this is the way the people were living, but that his exhortation was to encourage them to do all of this more, and more faithfully, and with greater joy than they had been doing it up to that time. How does it relate to us? Do we see what a dangerous time we live in, and how easily we can be swept along with the way

people live who don't know the Lord, or who know Him, but are not careful about their daily fellowship with Him.

And if you have been walking with the Lord, can you see where you can be more diligent in the Word and in prayer, and where you can be more careful about your obedience to the commandments of Scripture? Do you see how dependent you are upon the Lord for understanding the Word, for being faithful and fruitful in prayer, and for the maintenance of a close personal fellowship with the Lord?

Perhaps the last of these four points is meant to be a test of how faithful we are about the first three. The closer we walk in fellowship with the Lord, the more we will love Him, and the more we will long for that day when our Lord shall come, catch us up into His presence, "and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

May the Lord help us to see ourselves today, and our spiritual needs, and then, by His grace, to make the changes that need to be made so that we will not only be kept from the sins of the day in which we live, but that we will be able to live so as to point others to our blessed Lord Who alone can take away the sins of the world.

THE GREAT ENEMY OF PRAYER

Psalm 66:18

Intro: *The Word of God and Prayer.* I can't emphasize too much the close relationship between these two: *the Word of God, and Prayer.* One of the first things that a new-born Christian realizes is his or her daily need to read and meditate upon the Word of God, and to spend time daily in prayer. In fact, is one is truly saved, he will probably recognize his need for the Word of God and prayer even before someone talks to him about it. The more we read the Word, the more we will be inclined to pray, and the more we pray, the more the Holy Spirit will open our hearts to the Word. The Word teaches us how to come to the Lord in prayer. It teaches us what we should pray for, and the conditions which God Himself has established if we are to see our prayers answered. It is not unusual for a young Christian to experience many answers to prayer, but as he grows in the Lord he undoubtedly will have to deal with unanswered prayer. This causes all of us in such times to search the Scriptures to determine why our prayers are not being answered. That is what I want to deal with in part today. I say "in part" because there are many reasons for unanswered prayers. We all know that there have been times when we have prayed for a long time for particular people, or for special needs, with no results—as far as we can see. Sometimes matters may even get worse so that we wonder what is the purpose for praying any longer. This is when we need to turn to our Bibles so see what the Bible has to say about prayers that are not being answered. Often we can learn a great deal from the lives of people whose walk with the Lord is recorded for us in the Word of God.

Verse 18 of Psalm 66 is such a verse. This is what it tells us: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." But it should be encouraging to us to go on to read verses 19 and 20. (Read.)

The Bible makes it very clear that the Lord wants us to pray, and that the Lord intends to hear and answer our prayers. Just yesterday in my morning reading of Proverbs, I am across two verses which I had read many times before, and they are always a blessing to my soul. Both are in Proverbs 15. The first is verse 8:

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight (Prov. 15:8).

The second is in verse 29 of the same chapter:

The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous (Prov. 15:29).

These, and many, many other verses teach us how the Lord is delighted when we come to Him, seeking His fellowship, and pouring out the burdens of our hearts before Him.

— But it is also a part of Scripture, as Psa. 66:18 informs us, that “if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” That is what I want to consider with you today in this service.

But before we get to that verse, let me point out some features of Psalm 66 which I hope will be a blessing to you, and which will help us to have a greater understanding of this entire Psalm.

— Just reading it through, you can see that it is a *Psalm of praise*. In fact, it is a *Psalm of overflowing praise!* The Psalmist was not only celebrating God’s blessings in the past over the whole nation, but he was commemorating a great deliverance during his own lifetime. It is generally thought that this was written at the time of Hezekiah’s reign when the Lord delivered His people from the Assyrians. But it could actually fit into many different situations.

— Graham Scroggie, in his book on the Psalms, said that in the first twelve verses we have the part that was sung by the entire choir, but that from verse 13 to the end we have a solo. He said that because at the end of verse 12 the Psalm changes from the plural (we, us, and our) to the singular (I). That is to personalize the last part where our text appears. It would have been just as true for the Psalmist to have said, “If **we** regard iniquity in **our hearts**, the Lord will not hear **us**,” but it makes all of us think more about ourselves and our iniquities to read, “I...my...me.” After all, prayer is a very personal matter between each one of us and God. We can pray together as a church, but the effectiveness of praying together as a church is dependent upon the personal condition of each of our hearts. I find it a very solemn thing to lead in congregational prayer. It is just as easy to be a hypocrite in prayer as it is to be a hypocrite in anything else—maybe easier. And I can assure you that I don’t want to be a hypocrite anywhere in my life.

So we have the choir, and then a solo.

— But there are other divisions that we need to pay attention to in this wonderful Psalm.

The word “Selah” appears three times in this Psalm. These are musical

markings which point out the divisions in the Psalm—marking placed there by the Holy Spirit. You will see one at the end of verse 4, a second one at the end of verse 7, and the third one in verse 15. This means that we have four stanzas:

- 1) Vv. 1-4.
- 2) Vv. 5-7.
- 3) Vv. 8-15.
- 4) Vv. 16-20.

So the choir sang all of the first stanza, all of the second stanza, and five verses of the third stanza. At that point the soloist began to sing. He finished the third stanza, and then sang the fourth stanza where our text is located.

The first two stanzas are addressed to the nations of the earth. In the both of these stanzas there is a special emphasis upon *the power of God* (see vv. 3 and 7), but in the first the emphasis is upon the glory, the majesty, of God—although not ignoring His works. In the second stanza the nations are reminded of what God did against Egypt and for His people when He delivered them from Egypt—the passage of the Red Sea being the final stroke of God’s victory.

Consequently the nations are *now* to praise the Lord, knowing that the day is coming when verse 4 will be fulfilled. This verse is prophetic of the millennium when our Lord will rule upon the earth. So this classifies this Psalm as Messianic, that is, referring to Christ.

The end of the second stanza (v. 7) sounds a warning to the nations.

Beginning with verse 8 the people of God are addressed, and in verses 10, 11, and 12 the people are told how to praise the Lord. (Read emphasizing the plurals that are used.) Here we have trial and affliction, but ultimate victory!

Then the choir suddenly stops singing, and the soloist begins to sing. I believe that the point that the Spirit of God is making here is that the effects of the mighty works of God are not just to affect the nation as a whole, *but every individual within the nation is to feel the impact of the mighty works of the Lord*. We are gathered as a congregation, as a church family, today to worship the Lord, but it only gives the Lord His greatest delight if the praise comes genuinely from each of our hearts. So in verses 13 through 15 the soloist declares what he will do in acknowledgment of

the Lord's blessings.

Then, finally, addressing the people of God, the whole nation, the Psalmist wants all of the people to hear his testimony that God hears and answers prayer. We need to remember to thank the Lord when He hears and answers our prayers.

This is clearly an encouragement for the people to thank the Lord for answering their prayers when they were all in danger. But it is also an encouragement for all of them to continuing praying.

However, there is one word of warning. And that is found in verse 18, our text: **"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."**

Notice, will you,

I. HOW PERSONAL THIS IS.

You might think that here the soloist would be preaching, and he was! But not to the people; *he was preaching to himself!* He did not say, "If **you** regard iniquity in **your** heart, the Lord will not hear **you**," but he said, **"If I** regard iniquity in **my** heart, the Lord will not hear **me**."

Of course, the same is true of you. If you regard iniquity in your heart, the Lord will not hear you. But you are not my primary concern. My primary concern is how this statement affects me. Am I regarding iniquity in my heart. And you all need to ask if you are regarding iniquity in your heart. Well, this calls for an examination of this text, doesn't it? What did the Psalmist have in mind when he wrote this? Or, better yet, what did the Spirit of God have in mind when He caused the Psalmist to write this?

It is very clear that second only to not praying at all, *the great enemy of truly effective praying is "iniquity."* So this should lead us inevitably to ask,

II. WHAT IS "INIQUITY"?

The simplest definition that I can give you is one that most of you already know. *Iniquity is sin.* But what is *sin*? That is a word which modern man has tried desperately to eliminate from his language, regardless of what language he may speak. But there is such a thing as *sin*. And it is larger and more pervasive and invasive in human behavior than most people will

admit.

Let me give you a definition of sin. *Sin is any and every departure from what God has told us in His Word either either to do, or not to do. Sin is any and everything that is contrary to the nature of God Himself. It is God Who by His very Being determines what sin is. To disobey God is sin. To obey God is to do righteously. And the word "iniquity" is one of almost a dozen words in the OT which are used to describe what sin is. And this word in Psa. 66:18 which is translated sin speaks of the fact that sin is vanity.* One writer has this to say about it:

Iniquity "presents the evil devices of man in their false, hollow, and unreal aspect" (Girdlestone, p. 83).

Sin promises pleasure, and in some respects it gives pleasure. But in the end it is no pleasure at all. It is like an empty vision, or, better still, a mirage. A man dying of thirst in the desert thinks that he sees a body of water ahead of him, but when he heads for it he discovers to his great dismay that there is no water there. And so he dies.

Sin is like that. It promises so much, but delivers only condemnation and death. It promises joy, but brings only sorrow. All of us were born in sin. The Bible says that

3 The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.

4 Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear;

5 Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely (Psa. 58:3-5).

Regardless of how people may be warned against sin, they go ahead and sin anyway, thinking that they will find the joy that they are looking for. But they never find it, and never will, in sin. That is the idea that the word "iniquity" which is used here is meant to convey to our minds.

But let us go on to another point.

III. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "REGARD INIQUITY"?

It really means that we deny what the Bible indicates that it means. The Bible says that sin, all sin, is bad. The person who denies that, or excuses sin, and looks upon it as a thing of pleasure, is *regarding iniquity*.

Such an attitude, if not forsaken, ultimately will lead to sin. That is why it is so dangerous to contemplate sin in any way. Even to look upon sinful

things is a form of regarding it. And, as our verse indicates, this is done in the “heart” where no one but the person doing it knows what is going on, that is, no one else *but God!*

This is:

IV. THE GREAT ENEMY OF PRAYER.

We feel satisfied that we are not involved overtly, that is, outwardly, in sin, but God knows our hearts. And remember that our text has to do with what is going on *in the hearts of the Lord people*. Christians can have divided hearts. The Lord said that the first and greatest commandment in the Law was to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts, souls, strength, and minds. And if we love the Lord, then we are going to want to do whatever He says. To come to Him in prayer with our hearts toying with sin, is to render our praying ineffective. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” You see, the important thing for us to remember is that our lives are never separated from our prayers. If our lives are faulty, so will our prayers be faulty. We know that none of us is perfect yet, but the Psalmist was here speaking of one who wanted the Lord to answer his prayers, but he was not doing what the Lord wanted him to do. Isn’t this what we read over and over again in the Word, both in the OT and in the NT?

To begin with today I read two verses to you from the fifteenth chapter of the book of Proverbs. Let me read them to you again emphasizing a part in each verse which you may have missed. The first was Prov. 15:8:

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

The second was Prov. 15:29:

The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.

You see, it is not just that we pray, but that we are “upright” and “righteous” *in our lives* as we come to the Lord. This is why our times of prayer should be preceded by a time of heart-searching and confession of sin.

The NT says the same thing. Listen to James 5:16:

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.

Again, it is not just that our prayers are fervent supplications, but that we

are living righteous lives as we come to the Lord.

Another verse is one I have quoted a number of times in this present series: 1 John 3:22:

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

We like to think that we will receive whatever we ask from God, but we need to read the condition that is necessary.

Disobedience is not the only cause for unanswered prayer, but it would seem that it is a major cause. And if you and I are not experiencing answers to our prayers, this is certainly one place where we need to look for the possible cause. Unanswered prayer, like the observance of the Lord's Supper, are to be times when we search our hearts before God to make sure that our sin is not standing in the way of the blessing of God.

Let me give you one more verse before I close. Again, it is a very familiar verse, but it may be that we have really been missing what the Lord was saying. I am referring to John 15:7:

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

To abide in Christ is to be depending upon the Lord for all that concerns your life as a Christ, or my life as a Christian. To have His words abiding in us is to know what He has said, and then to live the way He wants us to live. Every need we face in our lives is a call for us to examine our lives in the light of the Word of God, to confess our sins and forsake them, and then to seek God's grace to live as He wants us to live.

Concl: What do all of these words tell us about God's blessing upon the Psalmist as expressed in the last verses of Psalm 66? Look back to verses 13 and 14 of the Psalm. The Psalmist was in trouble. It caused him to search his own heart, and he not only made things right at the moment, but he vowed to the Lord that his life would be different from that moment on. And when the trouble was over, he kept his promise to the Lord, and paid his vows.

And then when we get down to verse 16 he addressed his call to those who feared the Lord. What is the characteristic of a person who fears the Lord? Let Solomon, directed by the Spirit of the Lord, give us our answer:

By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil (Prov. 16:6).

Do we really fear the Lord? If we do, it will be seen in our attitude toward

sin. We won't "regard iniquity in our hearts." In Prov. 8:13 Solomon made his declaration concerning evil even stronger:

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

You see, God often withholds the answers to our prayers because of His eternal purpose to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ. The writer of the book of Hebrews was quoting from Psa. 45:7 when he said this about our Lord as evidence of the superior greatness of our Lord:

Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows (Heb. 1:9).

The Lord always did that which was pleasing to the Father. Cf. John 8:29. As a result He could say to the Father as He stood outside of Lazarus' tomb. Listen to the account as the Apostle John recorded it:

41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

42 And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me (John 11:41-42).

I don't believe that it is taking anything away from the Lord at all to say that He knew that the Father always hear Him because He always did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight, loving righteousness and hating iniquity.

How serious are we about wanting to be like our Lord Jesus Christ? If we are, we will ask the Lord to give us a real love for righteousness, and a real hatred for sin. If that is what we really want, it will mark a new beginning regarding the answers to our prayers.

THE THANKSGIVING OF THE SAINTS

Colossians 1:12-14

Intro: As all of you know, next Thursday is our national Thanksgiving Day. People in our country speak freely about being thankful for various things, but not much of our thanksgiving as a nation is directed to God, the God of heaven and earth, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of the Bible. Instead, they are just thankful.

Well, it is good to be thankful, but where do our blessings come from? Is it just a matter of “good luck” that we live in this nation, and have enjoyed all of the blessings that we enjoy every day? Those of us who know the Lord, know that our blessings come from God. As the Apostle Paul said to Timothy, we are to “trust...in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17). And earlier when Paul was preaching in Lystra, he told the people that God not only “made heaven and earth, and the sea, all things that are therein,” but that he is the One Who gives us “rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:15, 17). That is why Christian people sing, -

Praise God from Whom all blessing flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host:
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The Psalms are full of references which tell us not only that we should be thankful, and offer our praise, but always our praise is to be directed to the Lord. Perhaps that is one reason we have that shortest of all Psalms which says this,

1 O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people.
2 For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD (Psa. 117).

So we are not just to be thankful, but we are to give our thanks to the Lord. And our thanksgiving is not to be limited to just one day out of the year, but every day is to be Thanksgiving Day. However, I’m thankful that in this country we still have a day in which we are reminded of our need to be thankful. Perhaps the only reason this day has survived in our increasingly pagan country is because so little is made of the Lord on that day.

It seems that the Apostle Paul characteristically touched on this note

whenever he was preaching the Gospel to heathen Gentiles. So in Athens where Paul found that altar inscribed "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD," he told the Athenians that it was "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth," and that "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:24-25). And then he added in the following verses,

26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring (Acts 17:26-28).

So on Thanksgiving Day let us offer our praise to the Lord, and then make sure that we do the same every day that we live.

There are some blessings for which every person needs to give thanks to God—the blessing of life itself, and health, and safety, and the way the Lord provides for us every day. We need to be thankful for our families and for our homes, for the friends that the Lord has given us, and the work that He has given us to do. The list is really endless. Our blessings are all traceable to God, and the Bible says that He loads them upon us every day. See Psa. 68:19:

Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.

But we as Christians, those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin, have special reasons to be thankful to the Lord every day that we live, and they ought to be emphasized on Thanksgiving Day. Those are the blessing of our salvation. When Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers, after his introduction, he began the message of his epistle with these words:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Eph.1:3):

He was speaking of the blessings of salvation, and he went on to mention some of them down through the fourteenth verse of that chapter. That is what I want to talk to you about this morning, but not from Ephesians. Instead, I have chosen for my text three verses from the first chapter of Colossians, which, because of its similarity to Ephesians, has been looked

upon as a companion epistle.

The verses are 12 through 14 in Colossians 1. And I have entitled my message, THE THANKSGIVING OF THE SAINTS.

I. WHAT, OR WHO, IS A SAINT?

I have used the word “saints” because that is what the Apostle Paul called the people to whom he was writing. See Col. 1:2. (Read.)

“Saints and faithful brethren” are not two groups, but two titles for the same group. In the city of Colosse there was a church, and that church was made up of “saints and faithful brethren.” The word “saints” is used in the NT for all of the people of God. They were called that because God had saved them, setting them apart from the world for Himself, and the name suggests that they were “holy” before God and expected to live holy lives in this world. There is a church which claims to be able to make people saints after they die, but the Bible makes it very clear that if you are not a saint before you die, you won’t be one after you die. That is another way of saying that if you are not saved from your sins before you die, there is no possibility of being saved after you die!

A saint is not a special kind of a Christian; *a saint is one who is a genuine Christian*. One reason the word sounds so strange even to many Christians today is because there are many who claim to be Christians who are not very *saintly* in their lives. God intends for those of us who are His people to be holy in our lives. None of us is perfect, but a Christian, a true Christian, is a saint, and his life is to be pleasing to God.

Now we all have every spiritual blessing that is a part of this wonderful salvation that we have in Christ, and knowing what these are, and then thanking God for them continually, is the unique privilege of those who are the people of God. We all have all of them. The one who has most recently become a Christian has all that the oldest, most mature Christian, has. This is what makes us “saints.” And these blessings enable us to live saintly lives, lives that are pleasing to God.

Perhaps you have already noticed that these three verses come toward the end of the prayer Paul said that he was praying for the “saints and faithful brethren” at Colosse. And from what the Apostle Paul said in verse 9, he prayed this prayer, or one very much like it, over and over again for the Christians at Colosse. And I have no doubt but that he prayed the same

prayer for believers in other cities as well. And what a wonderful prayer it is! His two main burdens for them were (in verse 9) that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will., and second, that they might live lives that were pleasing to the Lord in all things. And the reason he prayed those requests was because they would make it possible for the saints at Colosse (or any other place),

- 1) To be fruitful in every good work,
 - 2) To grow in their knowledge of God,
 - 3) To be strengthened with all might...,
- and finally, they would be
- 4) "Giving thanks unto the Father" for the three blessing mentioned in verses 12, 13, and 14. This gives us an illustration of the blessings that we should treasure the most of all of the blessings that the Lord has been pleased to give to us. Let us examine these in detail, and I trust that as we leave today these blessings will be included in the thanksgiving of our hearts which we offer to the Lord.

And so let me focus upon what needs to be included when we as the "saints" of God are

II. "GIVING THANKS UNTO THE FATHER" (Col. 1:12-14).

Notice first, if you will, that Paul emphasized here what I have been emphasizing already today.

A. We give our thanks "unto the Father" (Col. 1:12a).

Going back to verses 2 and 3 you will notice that in verse 2 Paul spoke of God as "our Father," that is, He was the Apostle Paul's heavenly Father, and He was the Colossian saints' heavenly Father, and since we enjoy the same salvation today that they had then, *God is also our Father!* And we all can call God our Father because we are His children. When He saved us, He made us members of His family. Most of you will remember that the Apostle John taught this very clearly in the first chapter of his Gospel when he wrote:

11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons [children] of God, even to them that believe on his name:

13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:11-13).

And then the Apostle John emphasized the same subject as he began the

third chapter of his first epistle:

1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God... (1 John 3:1-2a).

So every person who has been saved through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a child of God. That makes God our Father, and we are brothers and sisters in His family. So this kind of praise can only come from the mouths and hearts of God's children, and it ought to come from all of us all of the time.

But what was the Apostle Paul thankful for? Let me point out the blessings.

B. The blessings Paul was thankful for (Col. 1:12-14).

1. Blessing #1 (Col. 1:12).

Notice that the Apostle Paul began his prayer by saying in verse 9, "you" and "ye" (plural). The same is true in verse 10. But when we get down to verses 12, 13, and 14, he said "us" in verses 12 and 13 (2x), and "we" in verse 14. So he was really including himself and Timothy in these blessing which, as I have said, belong to all of us in the family of God. Paul had what they had, and Timothy had what they had and what Paul had, and they had what Paul and Timothy had. And you and I who are in Christ have what they had.

What is the meaning of the blessing as Paul stated it here?

All of these blessings have been given to us by the Father. This is one thing that He has done for us.

"Hath made...meet," those three words, are the translation of one verb in the Greek. It means that God our Father has fully qualified us to share fully in the inheritance that has been provided for all of the saints. This is an amazing truth. Nothing needs to be added to what the Father has already done for us and in us when He saved us. As I have said many times, if you are saved one minute, and die the next minute, you are fully qualified for heaven and all that will mean for you (and for each one of us). Or, if you were saved one minute, and then the Lord would suddenly come, you would be ready and fully qualified for your inheritance.

Now we give thanks to the Father because this is certainly something that we could not do for ourselves. God has made us fit for heaven.

— One writer spoke of us being “meetened” (spell it). And then he described it this way, speaking of all of us who are God’s children:

The Father meetens them: and from Him are the blood that pardons, the Spirit that purifies, the truth which nourishes, the hope that sustains, the charter that secures—the whole preparation which meetens for the heavenly inheritance (Eadie, John, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians*, p. 35).

“In light” should read, *in the light*, because the Greek has it that way. And it is in contrast with “darkness” in the next verse. That is where we are now, “in the light.” This means that “in the light” of the very presence of God (“God is light”) where every possible defect would be immediately seen, we stand qualified, accepted, and certain to claim our inheritance.

But what is our inheritance? What is “the inheritance of the saints”? The Apostle Paul answered that question for us in Rom. 8:17 where we read (including verse 16 with it):

— 16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together (Rom. 8:16-17).

Our inheritance is not only that we will be in heaven, and with the Lord, but that “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

2. Blessing #2 (Col. 1:13).

Notice that in all of these blessing the Apostle Paul was speaking of what we already have. We are not yet like Christ, but God has fully qualified us for that inheritance by the work that He has done in our hearts.

— The same is true of our deliverance. We have been delivered from Satanic authority, from the rule and reign of sin in our lives. We were hopeless and helpless to deliver ourselves. Worst of all, until the Lord began to deal with us, we did not know that we were in bondage, and, if we had, we would not have wanted to be delivered. That is how bad our case was. “The power,” the authority, “of darkness”—what ominous words those are!

Paul described our past in Eph. 2:2-3:

2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Do you wonder why some people persist in destroying themselves, and why others are so indifferent to the things of God that they will not listen to the Gospel? It is because they are the slaves of Satan and sin. Only God can set us free, and He delivers us from Satan's power when we are saved, but He translates us, moves us out from under Satan's authority into the Kingdom of His dear Son, or lit., *the Son of His love*. When our Lord died on the Cross, He not only died to save us, but He died to seal the doom of Satan and all of the forces of evil.

And being set free, we are no longer under the power of sin, but are set free to live lives that are pleasing to God.

3. Blessing #3 (Col. 1:14).

We are fully qualified for our inheritance. We are delivered from Satan and are now living under the gracious and mighty authority of our Savior. But we are also *redeemed!*

We have it! "Redeemed." This is another deliverance that we have. We have been *released* from the penalty of our sins. Why? Just because God is a loving, gracious, and merciful God? No! We have been released from the penalty that we were under because another has taken that penalty for us. And, oh, what a terrible price He had to pay! He "Who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord (our Father) hath laid on Him (the Son) the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). "Who His own self bare our sins in his body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

How many of our sins are forgiven? All of them! If one had not been

included at the Cross, that would be sufficient to keep us out of heaven.

But He took the penalty for all of our sins. Look at Col. 2:13:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

Concl: If these three blessings were all that we have in Christ, we still are under an eternal obligation to praise the Lord incessantly for what He has done for us. But these are not all! And yet what could possibly be more wonderful than these. And to think that there is not one of them that we deserve, and we could never have provided any of these for ourselves. So let us thank God. Let us do it with joyful hearts. And let us live saintly lives by the grace of God to show how we love God our Father and His dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the blessed Holy Spirit, for all that They have done for us, and for all that is guaranteed to us by the terrible sacrifice Christ made that we might be redeemed, released, from the penalty of our sins.

Come, Thou Fount of ev'ry blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above;
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
Mount of God's unchanging love.

THE PLACE OF PRAYER

Matthew 6:5-6

Intro: When it comes to the subject of prayer, none was a greater Teacher on this subject than our Lord Jesus Christ. And from the Scriptures we can see that among the first of His teachings, was the importance of having a good place to pray, a secret place. He did not mean that no one should know where that place was, but that it ought to be “secret” in the sense that it would be a place where each of us could be alone with God. That is what I have in mind in choosing as my subject, THE PLACE OF PRAYER.

Now let us look at these two verses in Matthew 6, verses 5 and 6, so that with the guidance and blessing of the Holy Spirit we may learn this basic truth concerning our personal fellowship with the Lord. And will you note first of all that:

I. IT IS ASSUMED THAT A TRUE CHRISTIAN WILL PRAY (Matt. 6:5a).

Verse 5 begins, “And when thou prayest...” Our Lord did not command them to pray, nor did He say that it was a good idea. He spoke of it as that which all of His people would do.

If you look back to the beginning of the chapter you will see the same thing with reference to *doing their alms*. The meaning of this expression has no reference to giving except in a secondary way, as we might at first think, but it has to do with *the practice of righteousness*. A true Christian is going to want to live a life that is pleasing to God. Nothing short of living righteously can possibly satisfy God. But the Lord issued a warning. The NASB has it translated this way:

Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven (Matt. 6:1, NASB).

You see, it is very possible for us to get proud of our attempt to be holy, and that is what spoils it all. That is the person who wants to impress others with how godly he is, or how godly he wants to be. And that is what leads to that “holier than thou” attitude.

So the Lord did not say that a true Christian will live a righteous life, but He was pointing out one of the common pitfalls we all have to face in seeking to please God, and that is the danger of making sure that others

can see how godly we are, or want to be!

— A true Christian will want to live a righteous life, and a true Christian will want to pray, but good things always have false substitutes, and it was those dangers that the Lord was concerned about. We need to be righteous so that we can please God, not so we can have the commendation of men. And we need to pray, not to have the approval of men, but so that we can draw near to God, and be pleasing to Him.

— These are very important lessons for all of us to learn, and then to remember. But these are also two points on which we need to examine ourselves. And first it should be, do I seek to live a righteous life? And second, do I pray? If we have to answer either of those questions, or both of them, with a “no,” then there is a strong possibility that we are not really saved. But if we can answer both of them very truthfully with a “yes,” then we need to ask ourselves. Why do I want to be righteous, and why do I pray? Is it so that others will see what I am doing, and commend me for what I am doing? If so, then the Lord said in so many words, “That is as far as it will go. You have your reward.” We all know that it has always been possible to pretend to be a child of God, sometimes sincerely, and yet never to have experienced the grace of God in salvation. Or, it is possible to be saved, and yet to fall into the trap of wanting people to see what we are doing so that we can have their approval. Again reading from the NASB, the Lord said, “Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full” (Matt 6:2, NASB).

So let us make sure that our hearts are right with the Lord in these matters, and that our motive in all that we do is not to please men so as to receive their praise, but to please the Lord and to have His blessing.

II. THE BAD EXAMPLES (Matt. 6:5m).

One way to find out how to do the right thing, is to observe those who were doing it the wrong way. And so the Lord said, “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.”

What is a hypocrite?

— He is an actor. An actor represents a person who is different from what he is. He is pretending to be someone he is not. Now this word took on the meaning of a person who in real life is pretending to be someone he is not.

And who were the chief actors, the chief hypocrites, in our Lord's day? We can be sure that there were many. Anyone who is trying to convince someone that he is somebody he is not, is an hypocrite. But, when you see the use of this word in the NT, it is apparent that it is used more of the scribes and Pharisees than of any other people.

Now this ought to make us sit up and take notice. *It was the religious leaders of the day who were strongly rebuked by our Lord as being hypocrites!* Read Matthew 23 and you will see this. I am sure that they were not the only hypocrites during the time that our Lord was here on earth, but it seems clear that hypocrisy was altogether too common among the men who were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the people, *their examples.*

What does this tell us? It tells us that the more we are in the public eye, the greater is the danger that hypocrisy will be a problem to us. The scribes were what we would call *the Bible teachers of the day.* It was their responsibility to teach the Law, and to apply it in the lives of the people. They exercised great power over the people of the day because not only the sons, but also their fathers, were subject to the scribes, and the Pharisees were their chief supporters. But do you remember what the Lord said about them? He had just finished a time of controversy not only with the Pharisees, but also with the scribes. And He had asked the Pharisees if the Messiah were David's son, how could He also be David's Lord. And none of the Pharisees answered Him at all. Then Matthew tells us this:

- 1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,
- 2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:
- 3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.
- 4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.
- 5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,
- 6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,
- 7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.
- 8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.
- 9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your

Father, which is in heaven.

10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted (Matt. 23:1-12).

Our Lord's words, "They say, and do not," describes a hypocrite. He told the people what to do, but they did not abide by their own teaching. And yet they gave the impression that they did do what they were trying to get others to do.

Now the Lord said about hypocrites that "they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets." The Lord did not say that they were praying aloud, just that they were standing in the synagogues and assumed a posture as though they were praying. The illustration that the Lord gave in his parable of the Pharisee and the publican in the temple proves this. Listen to Luke 18:9-14:

9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

The Pharisees might be able to deceive the people, but they could not deceive the Lord. In their intent to appear pious, they would even stand "in the corners of the streets" in an attitude of prayer. The corners would be at an intersection where they would be seen by the greatest number of people. Their sin was all the more despicable because they were intentionally trying to impress the greatest number of people. And their robes gave them greater visibility.

It might be said that hypocrisy is peculiarly *the preacher's sin*. And we need to be very careful that we don't fall into that trap. But the fact that

the Lord also warned the people, is evidence that we all are liable.

Now we come to the good part. Here we have:

III. OUR LORD'S DIRECTIONS ABOUT THE PLACE TO PRAY (Matt. 6:6). (Read.)

The first thing that the Lord said to do when praying was this:

A. "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet" (Matt. 6:6a).

The closet was an inner chamber in the home, a place where a person could not be seen nor heard. But there are many places that can qualify as a "closet."

When Jacob was on his way home, facing the prospect of seeing Esau again, he put his family in what he considered to be a safe place. And then the Scriptures say very significantly, "And Jacob was left alone" (Gen. 32:24). And there he spent the night wrestling with a Man Who turned out to be "the angel of the Lord," none other than our Lord Jesus Christ." And he came out of the experience with the name Israel, because he had prevailed with God and with man.

It is very likely that when our Lord used the expression, "enter into thy closet," that He was thinking about Isa 26:20 where we read the Lord's words when He said,

Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.

Our Lord often found his closet in the mountains. Listen to Matt. 14:23:
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.

And He also loved to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives. This is what we read in Luke 22:39:

And he came out, and went, as he was wont [as was His custom, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.

The Apostle Peter had his closet on one occasion on a housetop in Joppa. We are told this about the men who went from Cornelius' house to get

Peter:

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour (Acts 10:9).

Andrew Murray said in his book, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, That inner chamber, that solitary place, is Jesus' schoolroom. That spot may be anywhere; that spot may change from day to day if we have to change our abode, but that secret place there must be, with the quiet time in which the pupil places himself in the Master's presence, to be by Him prepared to worship the Father. There alone, but there most surely, Jesus comes to us to teach us to pray (p. 25).

And there alone with the Lord we can really pour out our hearts to Him. We can pray when we are alone with the Lord as we pray at no other time.

Let me ask you, "Do you have a closet, an inner chamber, a bedroom, or a study, perhaps the dining room or kitchen table where the Lord can speak to you through His Word, and where you pour out your heart to Him in prayer. It is as Andrew Murray said, "That secret place there must be.

My secret place is my study downstairs in our home. Lucille secret place is our bedroom where she meets each morning with the Lord. When we are on a trip, we like to be in a place where we have access to two rooms. That is one reason we don't like most motels. When we were with Don and Pat Rutledge, who will be with us this week, all four of us had separate places where we could meet with the Lord—and that was wonderful. And then after breakfast we spent most of the morning reading the Word together, and praying.

When we left them we went over to Victoria, but just had one room, and so we decided that we would head for home. We knew that we had secret places at home. But on our way, while we were in Bellingham, Doris Wierson found out that we were on our way home, and she offered us the use of their condo up at Welch's for the rest of our vacation. And what great secret places we found there. Lucille was at one end of the condo each morning, and I was at the other. My "closet" that week was their dining room table, and what a great place that was to pray!

B. "And when thou hast shut thy door" (Matt. 6:6m).

But before I say more, let me call your attention to the Lord's words, "And

when thou hast shut the door.”

Shutting the door is often the big problem when you get to your “closet.” Of course it means to literally shut the door of your room. Up at the Wiersons’ it meant keeping the shades drawn until our quiet times were over. Their condo is located in such a beautiful place that to open the shades meant being distracted by the birds who were outside, or by the beautiful view, including the Salmon River. So it was best to leave the shades closed, and afterwards we could drink in the beautiful scenery.

But closing the door also means getting distractions removed from our desks or tables. And reading the Word, getting our thoughts centered on the Lord and on His Word instead of on the business of the day or anything else that might distract us. How important it is to close the door.

But then there is another point that the Lord made:

C. “Pray to thy Father which is in secret” (Matt. 6:6m).

Don’t forget to pray. It is easy to read the Word, and then not pray. But we must pray to our heavenly Father. You and I will find Him in the secret place, in our closet wherever that may be. Each time you pray, before you begin, give some thought to what it means that He is your heavenly Father, and that He is there with you! Think about Him before you start to pray.

And then notice:

D. The promise (Matt. 6:6b).

What is the promise? Listen to it: “And thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” There is only One Who sees you and me when we are in the secret place, and that is our Father. I don’t see Lucille, and she doesn’t see me. But the Father sees both of us, but others are able to see how the Lord rewards us with answers to prayer. You see, what we see “openly” is the reward of what goes on between us and our heavenly Father in secret.

I know that the word “openly” is not the more recent translations, but it is in the AV, and I don’t see why it can possibly be wrong. Even if the answers to prayer only have to do with what the Lord is doing in our hearts, others are going to be able to see evidence of our time with the

Lord.

Concl: But let us remember the pitfalls. It is so easy for us to want others to know what we are doing. And in the language of the day, it is easy for us to “feel good about ourselves,” especially if we are with others who are not using their “closet” every day. But let us remember that to do this to be seen of men, or so men will think well of us, is to lose our reward. This is a secret between ourselves and the Lord. The only reason I have told you what Lucille and I do each morning is in the hope that it will be an encouragement to any of you who are not meeting in secret with your heavenly Father. But we must do it because we love the Lord, and because we want to be with Him, and because we realize how much we need His blessing, and the blessing of the Lord Jesus, and the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

The secret place is the lifeline of our fellowship with God, our heavenly Father. Don't neglect it, and don't get proud if you are doing it. Seek the Lord with all humility of heart, and pray that all of the Lord's people will realize how important it is every day to make their way to their closet, and to shut the door, so they can pray in secret to the Father, trusting Him to give the blessings which we need so very much.