

Prayer ~

A Reader With Exercises



by John Edmiston

Definition of Prayer: Prayer is God's verbal channel of communication between believers (in Jesus Christ) and Himself – through which His heavenly glory, will , blessings, power and provision are being brought into active reality on earth. Christian prayer is “*to the Father, in Jesus name, in the power of the Holy Spirit.*”

2

2

Prayer and Intercession Quotes

Some people pray just to pray and some people pray to know God.

Andrew Murray

I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had absolutely no other place to go.

Abraham Lincoln

Always respond to every impulse to pray. The impulse to pray may come when you are reading or when you are battling with a text. I would make an absolute law of this – always obey such an impulse.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Pray often, for prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge for Satan

John Bunyan

Of all the duties enjoined by Christianity none is more essential and yet more neglected than prayer.

François Fénelon

We must alter our lives in order to alter our hearts, for it is impossible to live one way and pray another.

William Law

Is the Son of God praying in me, or am I dictating to Him?....Prayer is not simply getting things from God, that is a most initial form of prayer; prayer is getting into perfect communion with God. If the Son of God is formed in us by regeneration, He will press forward in front of our common sense and change our attitude to the things about which we pray.

Oswald Chambers

Those who know God the best are the richest and most powerful in prayer. Little acquaintance with God, and strangeness and coldness to Him, make prayer a rare and feeble thing.

E. M. Bounds

How often have we prayed something like, "O Lord, be with cousin Billy now in a special way"? Have we stopped to consider what it is we're requesting? Imagine that you are a parent who is preparing to leave your children with a babysitter. Would you dream of saying, "O Betsy, I ask you now that you would be with my children in a special way?" No way. You would say, "Betsy, the kids need to be in bed by 9 pm. They can have one snack before their baths, and please make sure they finish their homework. You can reach us at this number if there's any problem. Any questions before we go?" We are very specific with our requests and instructions for our babysitters. We want them to know specifics. It should be no different with prayer.

David Jeremiah

There is a general kind of praying which fails for lack of precision. It is as if a regiment of soldiers should all fire off their guns anywhere. Possibly somebody would be killed, but the majority of the enemy would be missed.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

When a Christian shuns fellowship with other Christians, the devil smiles. When he stops studying the Bible, the devil laughs. When he stops praying, the devil shouts for joy.

Corrie Ten Boom

When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don't pray, they don't.

William Temple

Faith in a prayer-hearing God will make a prayer-loving Christian.

Andrew Murray

Do you know what prayer is? It is not begging God for this and that. The first thing we have to do is to get you beggars to quit begging until a little faith moves in your souls.

John G. Lake

Those who do not believe do not pray. This is a good functional definition of faith. Faith prays, unbelief does not.

John A. Hardon

Pray, and let God worry.

Martin Luther

Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers, pray for powers equal to your task.

Phillips Brooks

This is our Lord's will... that our prayer and our trust be, alike, large.

Julian of Norwich

If you can't pray a door open, don't pry it open.

Lyell Rader

God's answers are wiser than our prayers.

Unknown

There are more tears shed over answered prayers than over unanswered prayers.

Teresa of Avila

God does not delay to hear our prayers because He has no mind to give; but that, by enlarging our desires, He may give us the more largely.

Anselm of Canterbury

We waste most of our time trying to get God to do something He has already done—or praying for God to do something He told us to do.

Jacquelyn K. Heasley

We lean to our own understanding, or we bank on service and do away with prayer, and consequently by succeeding in the external we fail in the eternal, because in the eternal we succeed only by prevailing prayer.

Oswald Chambers

The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men... Men of prayer."

E. M. Bounds

Prayer in its highest form is agonizing soul sweat.

Leonard Ravenhill

Let the fires go out in the boiler room of the church and the place will still look smart and clean, but it will be cold. The Prayer Room is the boiler room for its spiritual life.

Leonard Ravenhill

How different the world would look, how different the state of our nation would be, if there were more sanctified priestly souls! These are souls who have the power to bless, for they intercede with sanctified hearts. They never begin their daily time of intercessory prayer without having first brought to the cross all that is unholy in their lives, so that their old self can be crucified there with Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb.

Basilea Schlink

The Church has not yet touched the fringe of the possibilities of intercessory prayer. Her largest victories will be witnessed when individual Christians everywhere come to recognize their priesthood unto God and day by day give themselves unto prayer.

John R. Mott

I must secure more time for private devotions. I have been living far too public for me. The shortening of devotions starves the soul, it grows lean and faint. I have been keeping too late hours.

William Wilberforce

Why is it so important that you are with God and God alone on the mountain top? It's important because it's the place in which you can listen to the voice of the One who calls you the beloved. To pray is to listen to the One who calls you "my beloved daughter," "my beloved son," "my beloved child." To pray is to let that voice speak to the center of your being, to your guts, and let that voice resound in your whole being.

Henri Nouwen

So when we sing, 'Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,' we are not thinking of the nearness of place, but of the nearness of relationship. It is for increasing degrees of awareness that we pray, for a more perfect consciousness of the divine Presence. We need never shout across the spaces to an absent God. He is nearer than our own soul, closer than our most secret thoughts.

A.W. Tozer

The lover of silence draws close to God. He talks to Him in secret and God enlightens him.

John Climacus

Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one's heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell God your troubles, that God may comfort you; tell God your joys, that God may sober them; tell God your longings, that God may purify them; tell God your dislikes, that God may help you conquer them; talk to God of your temptations, that God may shield you from them: show God the wounds of your heart, that God may heal them. If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. Talk out of the abundance of the heart, without consideration say just what you think. Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God.

Francois Fenelon

Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons; but they are helpless against our prayers.

J. Sidlow Baxter

Notice, we never pray for folks we gossip about, and we never gossip about the folk for whom we pray! For prayer is a great deterrent.

Leonard Ravenhill

God never gives us discernment in order that we may criticize, but that we may intercede.

Oswald Chambers

There is nothing that makes us love a man so much as praying for him.

William Law

Rich is the person who has a praying friend.

Janice Hughes

A servant of the Lord stands bodily before men, but mentally he is knocking at the gates of heaven with prayer.

John Climacus

It is necessary to rouse the heart to pray, otherwise it will become quite dry. The attributes of prayer must be: love of God, sincerity, and simplicity.

John of Kronstadt

Whether we think of or speak to God; whether we act or suffer for him; all is prayer when we have no other object than his love, and the desire of pleasing him.

John Wesley

Accustom yourself gradually to carry Prayer into all your daily occupation speak, act, work in peace, as if you were in prayer, as indeed you ought to be.

François Fénelon

The true spirit of prayer is no other than God's own Spirit dwelling in the hearts of the saints. And as this spirit comes from God, so doth it naturally tend to God in holy breathings and pantings. It naturally leads to God, to converse with him by prayer.

Jonathan Edwards

God does not stand afar off as I struggle to speak. He cares enough to listen with more than casual attention. He translates my scrubby words and hears what is truly inside. He hears my sighs and uncertain gropings as fine prose.

Timothy Jones

Prayer is not a discourse. It is a form of life, the life with God. That is why it is not confined to the moment of verbal statement.

Jacques Ellul

In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart.

John Bunyan

When a man has found the Lord, he no longer has to use words when he is praying, for the Spirit Himself will intercede for him with groans that cannot be uttered.

John Climacus

Prayer is not so much an act as it is an attitude—an attitude of dependency, dependency upon God.

Arthur W. Pink

There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God.

Brother Lawrence

Prayer does not fit us for the greater work, prayer *is* the greater work.

Oswald Chambers

"It is wonderful what God can do with a broken heart, if He gets all the pieces."

Samuel Chadwick

"It is a solemn thing to find oneself drawn out in prayer which knows no relief till the soul it is burdened with is born. It is no less solemn afterwards, until Christ is formed in them."

Amy Carmichael

"The evangelization of the world in this generation depends first of all upon a revival of prayer. Deeper than the need for men; deeper, far, than the need for money; aye, deep down at the bottom of our spiritless life is the need for the forgotten secret of prevailing, world-wide prayer."

Robert E. Speer

"A generation which wishes for a religion without tears must find it difficult to adjust its beliefs to the teaching of the New Testament and of the facts of life..."

W. R. Ing

"Wherever the Church is aroused and the world's wickedness arrested, somebody has been praying."

A. T. Pierson

"How terrible is the cost of robbing God of time for prayer. When we rob God of time for quiet, we are robbing Him of ourselves. It is only in the quiet that we can really know Him and know ourselves, and be sure that we give ourselves back to Him. Oh, for God's sake, do not risk keeping the windows of Heaven closed by robbing God of time."

Gordon M. Guinness

"The missionary church is a praying church. The history of missions is a history of prayer. Everything vital to the success of the world's evangelization hinges on prayer. Are thousands of missionaries and tens of thousands of native workers needed? 'Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He send forth laborers into His harvest.'"

John R. Mott

"Why does the Church stay indoors? They have a theology that has dwindled into a philosophy, in which there is no thrill of faith, no terror of doom and no concern for souls. Unbelief has put out the fires of passion, and worldliness garlands the altar of sacrifice with the tawdry glitter of unreality. The Holy Ghost cannot conquer the world with unbelief, nor can He save the world with a worldly Church. He calls for a crusade, a campaign, and an adventure of saving passion. For this enterprise He wants a separated, sanctified and sacrificial people."

Samuel Chadwick

"We give ourselves to prayer. We preach a Gospel that saves to the uttermost, and witness to its power. We do not argue about worldliness; we witness. We do not discuss philosophy; we preach the Gospel. We do not speculate about the destiny of sinners; we pluck them as brands from the burning. We ask no man's patronage. We beg no man's money. We fear no man's frown...Let no man join us who is afraid, and we want none but those who are saved, sanctified and aflame with the fire of the Holy Ghost."

Samuel Chadwick

"The Church gives more time, thought, and money to recreation and sport than to prayer."

Samuel Chadwick

The Amazing Gospel Of The Available God

Jesus came preaching “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” by this He simply meant “God is available, he is at hand, just near you, you can reach out and touch Him.” Why was this a revolutionary message and why did the religious leaders feel that it was going to put them out of a job so that they even plotted to kill Him?

The Problem Of The Pyramid

In the ancient world God was feared and only priests and kings and prophets had access to His power. The king was often seen as a divine “son of God” or even in some cases as an incarnation of God. The priests controlled the ceremonies and the prophets and seers brought special messages from the divinity. But the common people had no real access to God or fellowship with Him. That was reserved for those at the top of the social and spiritual pyramid.

In the case of the Jews real fellowship with God was reserved for the High Priest on one day a year when, after making appropriate sacrifices he would go into the special curtained room known as the Holy of Holies. Just one man got to meet God, for a few minutes, on one day of the year.

Thus God was a special being who lived in a special room in a special building and special people handled His ceremonies. And they were certainly not fishermen from Galilee. If you wanted your sins forgiven you did not just go and ask God for forgiveness. You went to a priest who sacrificed an animal on a special altar in the Temple and you went through the ceremony and you got forgiven. If you lived a long way from the Temple or couldn’t afford the sacrifice or were not Jewish – you were out of luck, your sins were not forgiven and you remained estranged from God.

Paul sums up the situation of the non-Jews, known as Gentiles as follows:

(Ephesians 2:12 NKJV) that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

So God was an inaccessible being at the top of the social and spiritual pyramid, accessible only to Jews and truly accessible to only one Jew, the High Priest. In other words God was exclusive and inaccessible not inclusive and readily accessible. The thought of being able to touch God, shake His hand and talk to Him would have been considered blasphemy but John the apostle writes:

(John 1:14 NKJV) And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

(1 John 1:1-3 NKJV) That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life; {2} the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us; {3} that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus was God in human flesh, dwelling among us, a human being that John heard and saw with his eyes and looked on and handled with his hands. Not a concept, not just a spirit or a ghost. But “the Word became flesh”. Flesh and blood, a down to earth God, available, living, healing, preaching, teaching and dying in our midst.

The apostle Paul explains it this way:

(2 Corinthians 5:19 NKJV) that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

That is God was in Christ. When you see Jesus Christ you see God in a person. What was God doing in human flesh? Reconciling the world to Himself – bringing us back into agreement with Him.

That raises the question of “how much of God was in Christ?”. The answer is ‘all the fullness of God’:

(Colossians 1:19 NKJV) For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell,

(Colossians 2:9 NKJV) For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

In other words God made Himself totally available, fully available to us in Christ by making “all His fullness” dwell in Jesus. This is hard to understand and theologians still ponder it with awe. But for our purposes let's just say that God held nothing back. It was a complete act of self-giving.

God gave Himself completely to us in Christ and God remains available to us in Christ. We now have access to God through trust (faith) in Jesus Christ:

(Romans 5:1-2 NKJV) Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, {2} through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

(Ephesians 2:17-18 NKJV) And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. {18} For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

This access to God does not change over time, nor is it dependent on our physical location near some sacred building:

(Hebrews 13:8 NKJV) Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

(Matthew 28:18-20 NKJV) And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. {19} "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, {20} "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Who Can Know God Now?

Every humble, penitent person can find God - the poor, the lowly, the lepers, the criminals, the prostitutes, the foreigners, the deformed, the blind and even the demon-possessed. God is available to all who humble themselves before Him in repentance from their sins.

This incredible accessibility of God is illustrated in Jesus' parable of the leaven which tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven got mixed up with this fallen world and transformed it :

(Matthew 13:33 NKJV) Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

In other words God got right inside creation like yeast inside a lump of dough - and changed it. He was no longer an inaccessible God staying outside creation and “remaining pure” but the intimate God getting right inside human beings and this world and transforming them.

In fact the way the term leaven is used in this parable is highly unusual. In the OT "leaven" was always used as a negative metaphor for contagion - particularly the contagious nature of sin. Jesus even used it this way when He spoke about the contagious legalism of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:6-12).

Leaven was that which was fermenting, contagious, sinister, defiling. In the Old Testament if the clean touched the unclean - then it become unclean, but the reverse was not also true. Sin was contagious but holiness was contained (Haggai 2:11-13). Thus the unclean could change the clean, but the clean could never purify the unclean. Sin could work its way through a community and ruin it, but righteousness could never spread like

that. It had to be guarded from contamination at all costs. A little leaven was dangerous and could ruin "the whole lump". But this is turned upside down in the Gospels!

When Jesus comes along the Kingdom of the Heavens is incorruptible and when the clean touched the unclean then purity resulted! In the old days of "pyramid religion" if a priest touched a leper then he was defiled and unable to perform his duties. However when Jesus touched a leper He was not defiled - rather the leper became clean!

In the "old religions" if anyone touched a dead body, they were unclean, but when Jesus touched a dead body, He was not defiled, rather that person rose from the dead! Jesus could mix with the real world without fear of contamination or loss of holiness.

The Pharisees went to great lengths to avoid defilement, to not touch leaven, to be pure by separation from all defiling things. But by contrast Jesus went and sought out the most unclean and defiling people - the lepers, the woman with the issue of blood, the prostitutes, the tax-gatherers, the Gentile soldiers contaminated twice by race and contact with death, the foreigners and the Samaritans. He willingly plunged into their midst ate, with them, drank with them, healed them and called them to repentance and transformed their lives.

Jesus was never defiled, never corrupted, never made unholy by them. They did not defile Him. Rather He transformed them! Jesus could turn being touched by a distraught prostitute into a transforming moment of grace. Even close contact with the most "extreme sinners" and defiling situations did not affect Jesus spiritually.

Leaven is all about intimate close contact. Its put right inside, its mixed in, its hidden, its intimate in the closest way with the flour and in that close contact, in that mixing, it leavens the whole loaf. In the OT view where ritual purity was a very important issue intimate close contact was spiritually dangerous "you could catch something", impurity could "accidentally" pass along to you from a menstruating woman, a dead body, even touching a dead lizard defiled you until evening. You had to watch your step and not get too close to anything or anyone. But Jesus got intimate with a sinful world, taking on the likeness of sinful flesh and living and dying amongst sinful people. Jesus died in disgrace, executed by Gentiles, on a cross, between two thieves and even this did not defile and destroy Him but became our purification and salvation.

The Kingdom of God is leaven turned upside down. It is the holy transforming the unholy - impossible by OT standards but possible with God. It means Mother Teresa can minister to lepers in Calcutta and come out a saint. It means Christians can minister among gangs and street kids and prostitutes and remain pure. The Kingdom leaven wins. Kingdom purity is indestructible. It means intimacy with sinners is spiritually safe. You can love a drug addict and still be a good Christian, you can be married to an alcoholic (though I don't recommend it) and the Holy Spirit will not desert you.

What does the parable of the leaven tell us? Firstly that God is prepared to get close to sinful people! He is not floating around on a cloud, inaccessible to only the most spiritual. Jesus was accessible to all who came to Him, including lepers, prostitutes, Samaritans and Gentiles. The pyramid is finished. The "ladder to heaven" is no more. God has climbed down the ladder and dwelt in our midst.

But Aren't Spiritual, Respectable People Much Closer To God?

No, they aren't! Jesus tells a stunning parable to make the point:

(Luke 18:9-14 NKJV) Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: {10} "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. {11} "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men; extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. {12} 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I

possess.' {13} "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat 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 everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The End of “Jacob’s Ladder”

Jacob, the patriarch of Israel had a dream: *(Genesis 28:12 NKJV)* Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

Many people took this image of a ladder between heaven and earth as a picture of our status in God. Some very saintly people were at the top of the ladder, while the unspiritual earthy people were down the bottom with most of us somewhere in-between desperately trying to climb up by our own effort. Each “rung” we ascended was through renunciation of “the earth” and spiritual self-discipline – and like the game of snakes and ladders there were some very quick descents through temptation and sin.

In fact the ladder says the opposite. It says that heaven and earth are connected. Jesus demolished this idea of a spiritual ladder forever by going all the way “to the bottom”. He squashed the ladder flat by becoming a man, living and dying amongst us. Instead of us climbing up, God came down in Christ.

(Philippians 2:5-8 NKJV) Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, {6} who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, {7} but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. {8} And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Paul grasped this and told the Roman Christians to forget about terms such as “up” and “down” but to remember that God was always available through faith in Jesus Christ.

(Romans 10:6-9 NKJV) But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down from above) {7} or, " 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). {8} But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): {9} that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

There is no spiritual ladder, no “up” nor “down”, nor any need to compete for spiritual ascendancy because God has become available to all who call upon Him through faith in Christ Jesus.

But What About The Rules?

Now someone might say: “Surely those who keep lots of spiritual rules and live strict spiritual lives would be closer to God than people who are not disciplined in the way they live? Are you saying that all their effort is for nothing?” Yes, at least as far as salvation goes. Salvation is a free gift and you get it by faith, not by keeping rules, no matter how strict they are:

(Ephesians 2:8-9 NKJV) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, {9} not of works, lest anyone should boast.

God does not want anyone to go around boasting “I got saved because I was really, really disciplined and I worked hard at it for twenty years and I fully deserved it.”. God does not want arrogant, boastful people in His heaven. He wants us all to just simply rely on His grace and love for us and to accept salvation as a free gift.

In fact God has thrown out all the old rules about washings, and sacrifices and Sabbaths and temples and holy days and priests and replaced them with a new rule – the rule of love.

(Romans 13:8-10 NKJV) Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. {9} For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." {10} Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Rules about lipstick, alcohol and dancing do not make anyone holy or unholy. Wearing dull clothes and living a boring life does not make someone spiritual. We are made spiritual through faith in Jesus Christ – that's all. The only rule we have to obey is the rule to love one another. That is the supreme obligation of the Christian. Of course if we love one another we won't be murdering, stealing, lying, cheating or committing adultery because those things are contrary to loving our neighbor as ourselves. Thus the Christian life is one big positive (love one another) not a long list of negatives (don't do this or that).

The mature Christian is someone who is perfected in their ability to love others. This is not measured by how many rules you can keep but how much good flows from your heart in words and deeds on behalf of others. These good deeds do not earn our salvation but flow from it.

(Ephesians 2:10 NKJV) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

After we are born-again we become new creations (2 Cor 5:17) "created in Christ Jesus for good works". After we are saved, we are made into a new kind of person that loves to do good and love others. Thus being a Christian is not about keeping a long list of rules and various "do's and don'ts" – the bible calls this "living under the law" and in Christ we are freed from this.

(Galatians 5:18 NKJV) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

(Galatians 4:4-7 NKJV) But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, {5} to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. {6} And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" {7} Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

(Romans 7:3-4 NKJV) So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. {4} Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another; to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

Christians are freed from rule-keeping as the main dynamic of the spiritual lives. We do not have to go around worrying about whether we have kept this rule or the other or eaten this or touched that. In fact such rules, though they may appear spiritual are actually quite ineffective and a hang-over from the old "pyramid" spiritual order before Christ:

(Colossians 2:20-23 NKJV) Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations; {21} "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," {22} which all concern things which perish with the using; according to the commandments and doctrines of men? {23} These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Rule-keeping doesn't get us saved and rule-keeping doesn't successfully deal with sin. Its useless. So we have been freed from rule-keeping and given the job of living in love by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(Galatians 5:22-23 NKJV) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, {23} gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

(1 Peter 1:22 NKJV) Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

The Holy Spirit Has Replaced The Law

Christians do not live by a law, or even by a rule-book, or a list of requirements but rather by being led by the Holy Spirit of God.

(Romans 7:6 NKJV) But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

(Romans 8:2-4 NKJV) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. {3} For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, {4} that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

(Galatians 5:18 NKJV) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

We Are Sons Not Slaves

Slaves live in a world of “do this, do that” while sons live in a free relationship of mutual respect and love. When Christians try keeping lists of rules they become slaves. Instead we are meant to live freely and happily in love as “sons of God”.

(Galatians 4:6-7 NKJV) And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" {7} Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

The Holy Spirit Gives The Sons Of God Direct Access To God

So we come full-circle back to the concept of God being completely accessible. We don't need to obey a long list of rules or be a priest or a Jew, or observe special religious ceremonies or even be a very good and disciplined person to have access to God. We have access to God through faith in Jesus Christ, and when we trust Jesus God gives us His Holy Spirit who takes up residence in our hearts so that we can complete access to God.

(2 Corinthians 1:21-22 NKJV) Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, {22} who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

(Ephesians 2:18 NKJV) For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

The Holy Spirit Also Gives Us The Spiritual Knowledge We Need To Live the Christian Life

Christians do not need a priest or a guru or a special interpreter so that they can have understand God. They are given the Holy Spirit so they can have direct, meaningful and intelligent access to God without needing any third-party involvement.

(Hebrews 8:10-11 NKJV) "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. {11} "None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

(1 Corinthians 2:12 NKJV) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

(1 John 2:20 NKJV) But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.

(1 John 2:27 NKJV) But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

(Matthew 23:10 NKJV) "And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.

The Amazing Gospel Of The Accessible God

God has become one of us in Christ and reconciled the world to God so that anyone might know Him. Those who believe in Jesus are forgiven of their sins and made new creations and receive the Holy Spirit who instructs them on how to live in love free from rule-books, laws, priests, temples, feast-days, do's and don'ts, special buildings, special foods, religious diets, gurus, and the like. There is no spiritual pyramid and no ladder we have to climb, and no "up" and no "down" but simply a God who is accessible to all who call upon Him in faith.

The Ascension Of Jesus Christ

The consequences of the ascension of Jesus Christ are so amazing that they changed the whole way that people prayed and worshiped God and participated in Him. Jesus took apart the heavenly realm when He ascended and removed the power of the evil principalities and powers to dominate the life of those who believed in Him (Ephesians 4:8-13, Col 2:13-13). Furthermore He took us with Him on His journey into the heavenly realms so that the believer in Jesus Christ is now a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20), a resident of the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12: 22-24) and is seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6) with a graciously given heavenly status that was previously impossible for any human to achieve under the Law (Matthew 11:11-13, Ephesians 2:4-10). Jesus ascension also resulted in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (John 7:39, 16:7, Acts 2:33) and the giving of spiritual gifts to the church (Ephesians 4:8-13).

Perhaps the best starting point is the purpose statement given in Ephesians by Paul. This is the "why" of the Ascension and of Pentecost.

(Eph 4:8-13 NKJV) Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." {9} (Now this, "He ascended"; what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? {10} He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) {11} And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, {12} for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, {13} till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

Now Paul's purpose statement lists a number of reasons behind the ascension-outpouring. The ultimate reason for the ascension is that "**He might fill all things**" (Eph 4:10). See Col 1:15ff for more on that! What does he want to fill all things with? Himself! What then is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit about - filling ALL believers with Jesus! Being filled with the Spirit of Jesus is the purpose of Pentecost and the ascension.

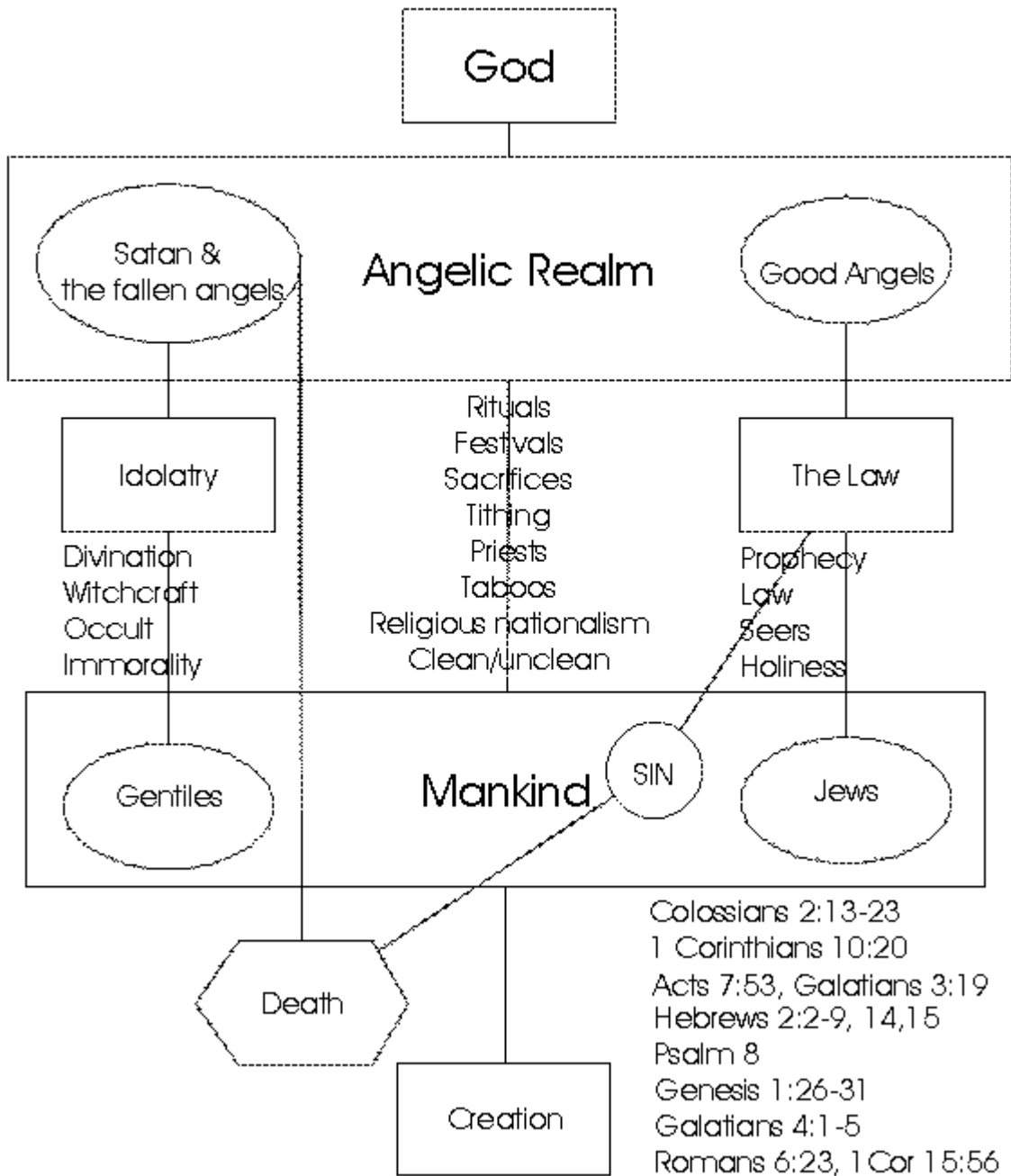
This connects with the other great purpose expressed in this passage. That believers may come to a unity of faith and become "**a perfect man**" in the stature and fulness of Christ. That is the objective we see most clearly now. To build up Christians God sovereignly gives the ability to edify His body to certain people as a gift.

On the way to do this Jesus takes "**captivity captive**" spoiling the demonic world of its spiritual powers. Like the conqueror He is He then distributes spiritual gifts to men. They include the five-fold ministries and the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost and the various spiritual manifestations necessary for the building up of the body of Christ. So we see that the purposes behind the ascension-Pentecost are - that Christ might fill all things, that captivity would be captured, that spiritual gifts might be given to the church, which would then become like Christ. The purpose of Pentecost is Spirit-filled and empowered images of Jesus Christ.

Taking Captivity Captive

The following is a schematic diagram of how things were in Old Testament times. It shows how much both Jews and Gentiles were captives. The Jews were captives under the Law and the Gentiles captives under their demonic religions. Quite obviously not everything can be fitted onto a single diagram and it is not to scale or meant to be theologically normative but it will, I hope, help us to grasp what the state of things was.

The Old Testament



Lets look at what it is trying to tell us. There are four levels - God, the angelic realm (inhabited by both good and evil angels), mankind and creation in general. Mankind rules creation, the angelic realm is more powerful than mankind and God rules over all. It is the middle portion of the diagram that is the most interesting. We can see from Acts 7:53 and Galatians 3:19 that the Law was given through angels. 1 Corinthians 10:20 also tells us that the Gentile religions were the work of demons and that the worshipers worshiped demons and not God. So we see that **before Christ both Jewish and Gentile religion was under the direct control of the angelic realm**. The good angels mediated the Jewish religion and the demons mediated the innumerable Gentile religions. Both systems were **somewhat similar**(though the Law was vastly superior) and listed in the middle of the diagram are some of the similarities. **Both** Jewish and Gentile religions had temples and priests and sacrifices and tithes and offerings and dietary restrictions and special days and festivals and various taboos and categories of clean and unclean things.

Though the Jewish religion was much holier and more moral it operated with much the same basic external structure as the Gentile religions. They had the same externals - though the internals were very different. Judaism however did not resort to witchcraft, divination, sorcery or magic which are exclusively in the domain of Satan. In both Colossians and Galatians Paul calls these external things - the taboos, festivals etc the "elementary principles of this world" or the "stoichea". Thus mankind in the Old Testament was ruled by religions based on the exact performance of rituals and the keeping of numerous laws and taboos. Relationship to God was through a priestly caste and involved sacrifices. Except for a very few individuals there was no ongoing relationship with God. Sin led to death which, at that stage, was under the power of the Devil (Hebrews 2:14,15). The general experience of both Jewish and Gentile believers was one of fear and bondage (Hebrews 2:14,15). All this was to change with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

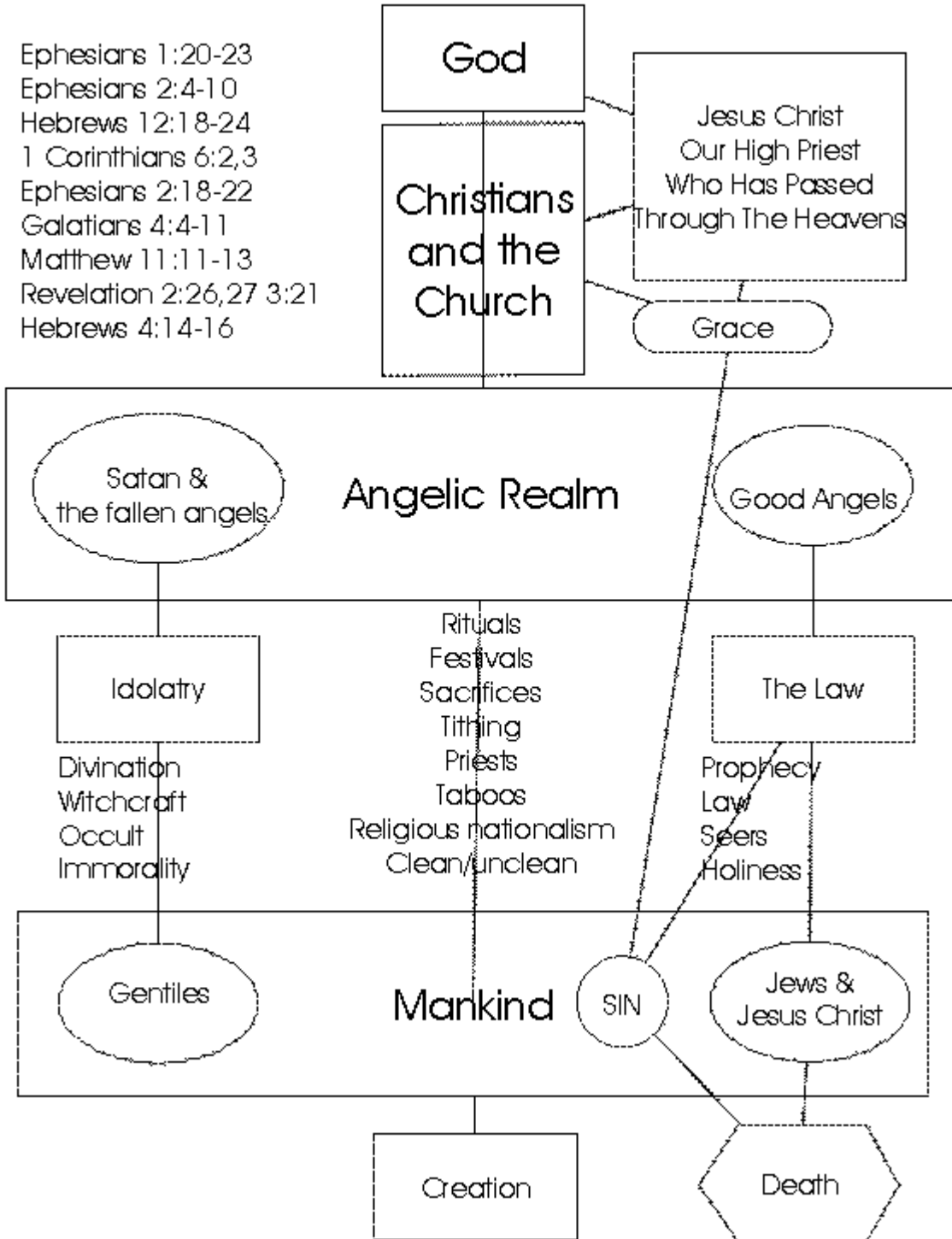
(see diagram next page)

After Jesus' Work On The Cross, Resurrection and Ascension

Again we have a diagram - the main change being the creation of the Church and its high status in the heavenly realms.

The New Testament

Ephesians 1:20-23
 Ephesians 2:4-10
 Hebrews 12:18-24
 1 Corinthians 6:2,3
 Ephesians 2:18-22
 Galatians 4:4-11
 Matthew 11:11-13
 Revelation 2:26,27 3:21
 Hebrews 4:14-16



Lets look at some of the changes and seek to explain them. Death moves out of Satan's control (Hebrews 2:14,15) into that of Jesus Christ who now has the keys of Death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). The accusing power of the law over us is broken (Colossians 2:13-15) because it is nailed to the cross. Jesus has been raised up above every power and principality in the heavenly realms and we - who are "in Him" - are of course seated where He is.

(Eph 1:20-23 NKJV) which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, {21} far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. {22} And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, {23} which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The Church contains you and I so the exaltation of the Church is the exaltation of the believer. Thus the fact that the Church has been made to be the "fullness of Him who fills all in all" has amazing consequences for the believer. Paul continues to show how we have been raised "from the guttermost to the uttermost" ...

(Eph 2:6-7 NIV) {6} And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, {7} in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Thus we see that we **have**(past tense) been raised up with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (verse 6 above). This was done not because we were good but because of God's great grace which Paul calls "**the incomparable riches of His grace..**". Thus we have been taken from being sinners (Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:1-4) and made into people who are "**seated in the heavenly realms**". We are now given a status and authority far beyond anything we deserve so that God may show just how gracious He can be.

This new spiritual status of the believer, this citizenship of heaven, is absolutely central to Paul's teaching. So much so that Paul is quite astonished when Christians do not grasp that we are to rule the world and judge the angelic realm.(1 Cor 6:2-3 NKJV) Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? {3} Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?To Paul it is just a gospel basic that Christ has triumphed and that we share His triumph and rulership as inheritors of the Kingdom. Christ has ascended above the angelic realm and we have also done this "in Him" therefore we have been invested with an authority greater than that of the angels and will one day judge them. (Note: Authority is different from strength, Napoleon was probably not the physically strongest member of his army but he had authority. So Christians do not have the power of angels yet but we do have position and authority and the right to be in command.) Thus Christians can exorcise demons because we are now at a higher level of authority than that of the fallen angels.

Since we are above the angels we are above their systems or the "stoichea". Thus Christians are not to observe taboos, festivals, days, months, years, sabbaths, make sacrifices, or worry about tithes, offerings or priests. Lets look at this because it has been a stumbling block to so many believers.(Gal 4:1-10 NKJV) ...{3} Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world ("stoichea"). {4} But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, {5} to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. {6} And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" {7} Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. {8} But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. {9} But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? {10} You observe days and months and seasons and years. Thus the religious observance of "days and months, and seasons and years" is a sign of being in bondage to the "elements of the world". These external observances are no longer a part of the Christian faith. You can use a calendar - but you must not

attach any religious significance to the dates on it! Faith not festivals is what makes us closer to God.

Paul amplifies this at length in Colossians chapter 2 and I will only quote a portion of it here. Firstly He shows how the cross disarmed the principalities and powers and took away their legal right to enforce their taboos. (Col 2:13-23 NKJV) And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, {14} having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. {15} Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

Then Paul carefully goes through the consequences of being forgiven and of no longer being under the power of laws, taboos and ceremonies. {16} So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, {17} which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. {18} Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, {19} and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

The radical nature of our freedom from these "basic principles of the world" is described as a "death". Just how many responsibilities does a dead person have? None! So the Christian no longer has any obligatory responsibilities to cultural taboos, festivals, sabbaths or dietary regulations. Paul continues. {20} Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations; {21} "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," {22} which all concern things which perish with the using; according to the commandments and doctrines of men? {23} These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. To put it simply all "religiosity" has been put behind us when we enter into the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Freedom

We have freedom, we do not have to live in fear as if we serve a God who will be angry over the smallest error. Its a bit like sending someone to mow the lawn and they come back nervously asking "Which blade of grass do I mow first?" and you say "Start anywhere as long as it gets done". God has given us tremendous freedom and we don't have to live in a spirit of slavery worried about getting everything "just right" - about which blade of grass to mow first. Such is the spirit of religious fear. It is akin to the pagan dread of the spirits - if the ceremony is not done "just so" then curses would come forth. The "spirit of fear" produces people who cringe before God over every tiny detail. However with the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ that is done away with. The situation now is one of love and sonship. (Rom 8:15-17 NKJV) For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." {16} The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, {17} and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

We are beloved sons of God living in freedom. As sons of God, above the angels, we are going to inherit a kingdom prepared for us since the foundation of the world. We are heirs. In that Kingdom we will be seated on thrones with Jesus (Revelation 3:21), we will rule over the nations (Revelation 2:26,27), we will judge the world and even angels (1 Corinthians 6:2,3), we will become beings with immortal and imperishable bodies (1 Corinthians 15:45-55) and dwell safely in amazing wealth, peace and freedom (Revelation 21 & 22). When this occurs what it means to be a "son of God" will be revealed. At the moment it is, at best, vaguely understood. When this occurs the meaning of our being seated in heavenly realms with Christ Jesus will become absolutely clear. Christ will take up His authority over all creation through us and amazing changes will occur. The whole

world will be set free! Paul continues on in Romans 8 to say...(Rom 8:18-22 NKJV) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. {19} For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. {20} For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; {21} because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. {22} For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

Thus the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ was the critical turning point that has ensured the total freedom of all creation! Creation, now in bondage, will move into "the glorious liberty of the sons of God". God is in the business of setting all things free. He desires liberty - not cringing enslavement, for all! However it is a two-step movement firstly there is freedom from the old religious system, our coming out from domination by the elementary principles of this world and from sin and death. Then step two is not anarchy - but having God's moral code written on our hearts through the Holy Spirit. (Hebrews 8:10) We are freed to become who we were always meant to be - righteous, holy, spirit-filled beings of love.(Galatians 5:16-24) This is the work of the Holy Spirit and why the ascension of Jesus Christ is also strongly associated with the sending of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and the Ascension of Jesus Christ

(John 14:12 NKJV) "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.

(John 16:7 NRSV) Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

(Acts 1:4-5 NKJV) And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; {5}"for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

(Acts 2:31-33 NRSV) Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.' {32} This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. {33} Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear.

(Acts 11:15-16 NKJV) "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. {16} "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

During the Last Supper Jesus clearly indicates that when He "went to the Father" something would happen to the disciples would enable them to do great works of power equivalent to His own (John 14:12). Later on in the upper room discourse He reveals this to be the sending of the Helper, the Holy Spirit which could only be sent after His departure.(John 16:7) In his last conversation with His disciples He termed this empowerment the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4,5) and promised them they would receive it soon and that it would make them powerful international witnesses to Him (Acts 1:8). On the day of Pentecost it was poured out in a manner that was both visible and audible (Acts 2:32-33) and likewise during the Gentile Pentecost at Cornelius' place where it is also referred to as "the baptism in the Holy Spirit". (Acts 11:15,16)

The heavenly realms are now occupied by Jesus and since we are in Him, we have been seated with Him in these realms (Eph 2:6). Therefore we can have confident access to God and unhindered participation in the things of the Spirit with Whom we have been baptised (1 Cor 12:13). This does not mean that we all have all gifts or that all will have one particular gift. God is sovereign in how He distributes the gifts of the Spirit. (1 Cor

12:7-11) Within His sovereignty there is evidently some room for us to ask for particular manifestations of the Spirit. (Luke 11:13, 1 Cor 12:31, 14:1)

To sum up.... The purpose of Pentecost is Spirit-filled and empowered images of Jesus Christ. The Pentecost event is known as the baptism in the Holy Spirit which was received by the Jews (Acts 2:32,33), the Gentiles (Acts 11:15,16) and the Christians at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-6) and Corinth (1 Cor 12:13). It is for all the Church. The outcome of the Pentecost event is power for ministry (Acts 1:8) through the Holy Spirit "coming upon" people (Acts 2:32,33) and sovereignly giving spiritual gifts for the edification of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:1-7). The Holy Spirit is not a mere "experience". He is Christ coming to fill all things. (Eph 4:10,5:18) He wants to fill you with Jesus and transform you into His image. (Eph 4:8-13, Rom 8:29-31) He also wants to empower you to be a witness for God. (Acts 1:8) You may ask for Him and God will gladly give the Holy Spirit to you (Luke 11:13) (in new ways..its a puzzle, we have Him but we can still receive His power) though you should ask for "the greater gifts" to be used in love for the edification of the church. (1 Cor 12:31, 14:1)

Conclusion

The ascension of Jesus Christ to "fill all things" was the end of religion as it is generally conceived and the beginning of a Spirit-filled and joyous relationship with God. The main thing that Jesus wants to fill is you! To that end He has sent His Holy Spirit into this world to dwell in the hearts of believers sanctifying them to be like Him and empowering them to do good works. He has also created a new thing - the Church, which is distinct from the world and angels and which will rule over both. He has placed believers in the heavenly realms with Him and freed them from the innumerable fear-filled obligations of the old religious systems. He has brought us into sonship and membership of the household of God. This church is to consist of "images of Jesus Christ" indwelt by His Spirit and living in direct personal relationship with God. Therefore there is no longer any need to observe new moons, sabbaths, tithing, religious festivals, to have a church building, a priest, or to abstain from alcohol, red meat, pork or certain types of seafood. There is no need to be celibate, be involved in rituals of self-abasement or penance or to punish oneself. That is all gone. What has replaced it is a life that flows from being indwelt by God, a life that is characterized not by solemnity and punctilious observation of fearful rituals but by freedom and love and joy and peace.

(Gal 5:22-23 NKJV) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, {23} gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

The Baptism And Early Ministry Of Jesus Christ

The Bible References:

(Matthew 3:13-17 NKJV) Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. {14} And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" {15} But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. {16} When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. {17} And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

(Mark 1:9-11 NKJV) It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. {10} And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. {11} Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

(Luke 3:21-22 NKJV) When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. {22} And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

(John 1:29-34 NKJV) The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! {30} "This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' {31} "I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." {32} And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. {33} "I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' {34} "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

The Redemptive Qualities of The Baptism of Jesus

The baptism of Jesus represents His initiation into Spirit-empowered ministry. Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit and indwelt by the Holy Spirit from His mother's womb. This gave Him exceptional natural giftings unmarred by sin and a clear mind, filled with exceptional wisdom that could challenge the rabbis of His day from an early age. But as wonderful as these gifts were He still needed something more if He was to bear the burdens of the world in ministry. His identification with sinners at the Jordan and His plunging Himself into the stream of human misery and conflict represent a moving into public life and the bearing of not just His own burdens but the burdens of all the lost.

Jesus needed an empowering by the Holy Spirit before He moved out to proclaim the Kingdom of God. This may sound slightly heretical - after all wasn't He God - the fullness of Deity in bodily form, the incarnate Word full of grace and truth? (Col 2:9, John 1:14-18) Yes!! Absolutely, He was, is and always will be God. He did not "become divine" at His baptism or any other time. He was the "Lamb

slain before the foundation of the world" - He was God before the world began and was intimately involved in its creation. (John 1:3, Col 1:17). However as God He "took on the nature of a Servant" and in this limitedness He was born of a woman, grew up as a child in submission to His parents and like anyone else entering ministry needed the anointing of the Holy Spirit before He took on the burden of proclaiming the Kingdom, healing the sick, raising the dead and suffering for righteousness' sake. In some way he limited Himself to what "a perfect believer" can do. He even said to His disciples that: (John 14:12 NKJV) "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." Somehow in the economy of God the believer ("he who believes in Me") CAN accomplish the works that Christ did on earth ("the works I do he shall do also") plus a bit extra (and greater works than these he will do because I go the Father).

Now lets put that in context - Jesus is talking about the works He did in front of the disciples, during His earthly ministry but before He went to the cross (the words were uttered during the last supper). We cannot work the works He did while in heaven - such as Creation. Neither can we take the sins of the world on our shoulders. He has done that and that is His glory alone. But in the power of the Holy Spirit which has been given to us since Jesus has gone to the Father we can work the works He did between His baptism and the cross. Don't take my word for it - its Jesus who said it! And the book of Acts certainly reinforces the idea that the Spirit-empowered believer can do great things for God. Now turning this on its head for a minute... if Jesus said "those who believe" could do what He did during His ministry then His earthly ministry must have been "limited" to that of the "perfect believer". It is as the "perfect believer" that Jesus went and got baptised and it is as the "Spirit-empowered perfect believer" that he went forth in ministry. This leads me to a little theological hypothesis, that the life of the "perfect believer" has two stages. Stage one is that of perfect piety when we fear God and grow in wisdom. We become good in ourselves. Stage two is the stage of public proclamation when we receive God's power in ministry and our piety and wisdom becomes the foundation for a Spirit-filled life where we become "rivers of living water" to a world in desperate need. I must very quickly add that stage two is not "superior" to stage one. Without a foundation in ethics and goodness ministry can be a dangerous place. Its the wrong place to learn wisdom. No-one despises a doctor for going to medical school even though he may minister to no-one there. We understand preparation in secular things and we should be prepared to do the preparatory work on our own life. Power without ethics and wisdom is the last thing God wants in your life. Both stages are necessary if "the perfect believer" is to do and be all that God wants.

NT Christians were generally baptised immediately upon profession of faith. The day of their conversion was also the day of their water baptism. So they spoke of the day of their conversion as "the day of my baptism", not because baptism saves us but because it was the unique external event that occurred on the day they professed faith in Christ. Also, in the revival conditions of the early church their baptism was often accompanied by the laying on of hands and the impartation of a spiritual gift to the new believer in Spirit baptism. This occasionally was not the case. (Acts 18:24-19:7) Apollos was a believer with a great deal of natural speaking ability yet still needed to understand the baptism in the Spirit if he was to proclaim the gospel "accurately". Also some believers who knew only the "baptism of John" and had not "even heard that there was a Holy Spirit". This is not unusual even today as some Christians receive very little teaching due to isolation, misunderstanding or inadequate ministry. Ideally all three aspects of baptism belong together. But they have wandered apart. We have

have people who are baptised but not changed. We have converts who have never had water baptism. And we have strong Christians who have not received the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit.

We need to press on and to desire to be Spirit-filled proclaimers of God's Kingdom. If we are to move beyond this accumulation of wisdom and truly minister to others in an effective way we need a "baptism in the Holy Spirit". This simply means we need an all-encompassing immersion in the Godhead that empowers us for ministry. Baptism in the Spirit is not a private thing and it doesn't belong to any one denomination. It is not always accompanied by speaking in tongues or prophesy. Jesus' baptism had neither. The miracles came after the baptism. This baptism is an initiation not just into the church but into the power of the Kingdom. This baptism is what happened to Jesus as he moved from an obscure life to centre stage. It happened to the disciples at Pentecost who finally got plunged into full revival ministry themselves. And it happened to Wesley and countless other leaders of the Christian faith. The Jordan is a place where we get the power to stand in the flood of human souls and minister Christ to them.

The "baptism in the Spirit" is real, powerful and moves us out of our private pietism into public proclamation of the Kingdom of God. For me this happened unsought when God confronted me with the utter self-centredness of my faith. I saw that I needed to cleanse out the filthy black mess of sin that remained in my life. It was an encounter with the awfulness of selfishness. It was evident that I had no hope apart from what Christ could do in me and with me. This was not a conversion, it was a dealing with the sin that entangled me, I was set free to run the race and I did. I led a huge number of people to God in the ensuing weeks. I was on fire with God because I had met Him in power. It was Jacob at Bethel all over again. This encounter with God, this "deeper experience" was not ecstatic - except that in the middle of it I did have a vision of my sin and of God. It took my faith from the private realm to the public realm; from self-edification to spirit-filled ministry; from a complaining Christian to a proclaiming herald.

Jesus did not have all this selfish sin to deal with, but He did need the power that God would provide in response to humble obedience. And He identified with sinners and "went down the front" with all the people being ministered to. I still struggle with "going down the front", how can I, a Christian leader, admit that I too have needs. I should "be an example" a stainless steel "theres nothing wrong with me" Christian. There is a real live Pharisee in me just waiting to get out. Its hypocritical to say I don't need ministry, that somehow my faith puts me a cut above the ordinary Christian. I do need ministry - lots of it. I go down the front now perhaps more than ever. It still hurts to do it. But Jesus wandered out there and said He was in need of God. He said that "it was fitting to fulfill all righteousness". Many preachers have felt like John the Baptist when they give an appeal and some real saint of God comes down the front and wants prayer to be a better Christian. I think "I need ministry from you, not you from me..." but the saints attitude is "this is fitting..." . Its a humble person who can accept ministry from someone who is "unworthy to untie the thongs of their sandals".

A few quick correctives - the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" that we speak of here is NOT the same as the initial indwelling. All believers are indwelt with the Holy Spirit from the moment of their "new birth" just as Jesus was indwelt with the Holy Spirit from conception. Perhaps a better term would be "the empowering of the Holy Spirit", it is certainly less confusing. Three things are united in one term in

the New Testament - water baptism, conversion and Spirit baptism. At Pentecost they all seemed to occur together. Water baptism is associated with repentance from sin and the appeal to God for a good conscience (1 Peter 3:21,22 Acts 2:38). Conversion represents the change of being from old man to new man that comes as God re-creates the sinner into a "saint" (holy one, believer)(Eph 5:8,9 Col 1:13,14). "Spirit baptism" involves being empowered to take up our place in the body of Christ in the exercise of whatever spiritual gifts have been imparted to us. (1 Cor 12:13) Just as it is bad manners to see a person as a lesser Christian if they have not had water baptism so it is not gracious to categorise people as "spirit-filled" and "un-spirit-filled". Such distinctions are divisive. Certainly to do as Priscilla and Aquila did and take someone aside and explain the way of God more accurately (and in love) is fine and helpful. However I sense a certain spiritual pride in some believers in spirit baptism that leads me to urge caution in the way we approach the issue. Also there is no hint in the New Testament that "tarrying", seeking, or any prolonged anguish is necessary as preparation. It is not some exalted spiritual but a frequently misunderstood part of the gospel along with water baptism and conversion. It is for all believers and like everything else is received by faith in the proclaimed word of Christ.

The Early Ministry

The early ministry of Christ is an outworking and authentication of His baptismal experience. I will deal with the temptations separately next month but here in His early ministry he comes primarily as the anointed one with the power to resist evil and to bring in the Kingdom of God in power.

(Matthew 4:13-25 NKJV) And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, {14} that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: {15} "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: {16} The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned." {17} From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." {18} And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. {19} Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." {20} They immediately left their nets and followed Him. {21} Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, {22} and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. {23} And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. {24} Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. {25} Great multitudes followed Him; from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

The anointing received at his baptism leads Him into a widespread ministry of proclamation. Matt 4:23a "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom,". From Galilee in north of Israel the word went out and many people were attracted to the "great light" (Matt 4:16). His fame caused people to travel hundreds of miles to see Him, people came from Syria in the north, Jerusalem in the south and from beyond the Jordan to the west. People came from the Greek speaking Decapolis and the Hebrew speaking Judea. Like moths to a flame multitudes

were drawn to the ministry of Jesus. The anointing has "drawing power".

Secondly the baptism of the Spirit produces a public and obvious concern with holiness. Not that Jesus was unconcerned with holiness before! But now it is out in the open - His message is "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand..". This holiness is also reflected in a calling of others into ministry to lead lives separated from worldly concerns in the pursuit of the Kingdom. Simon and Andrew are called by Jesus not to be "nice people" but to be "fishers of men", to be apostles of a new Kingdom not just improved worldlings. The baptism in the Spirit imparts that eternal perspective that makes the Kingdom the only thing that really matters.

Thirdly the anointing has power to heal - after His baptism He healed "all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease..." . Before His baptism not a single healing is recorded. After it He puts the physicians out of business. All who came to Him were healed not by His diagnostic ability or His knowledge of herbs but by the power that flowed from Him that He received when the Spirit came upon Him. If we desire to heal others in body or in soul we will end up struggling to heal a handful by our own strength but we may heal thousands if God so chooses to impart His Spirit of elaing in power upon us.

The final authentication of His baptism in the Spirit is the possession of extraordinary spiritual authority over the powers of darkness. This was, of course latent in Jesus from the beginning but it became obvious to all when His public ministry began and He moved in the continual power of the anointing of God. After Pentecost the apostles moved in this same power to heal the sick and to exorcise demons. These abilities are "graces" - no ordinary mortal by their own knowledge can heal the sick with a word or cast out a demon by their own authority. And they certainly cannot do it on the scale that Jesus or the apostles did it. And on Jesus authority we can know that we who believe can "do these works" and "even greater works" not because we are special but because Christ has gone to the Father. Because of this the Holy Spirit - who is God and who can do these things, has been poured out upon us. Jesus early ministry clearly shows that our effectiveness is not of ourselves but lies entirely in the power of God.

Summary

The "baptism in the Holy Spirit" as experienced by Jesus resulted in :

- (1)The proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom.
- (2) An attractiveness to others that draws people widely to hear God's message, this is not natural attractiveness (of which Jesus apparently had very little) but a supernatural blessedness that draws people in like moths to a flame.
- (3) A concern with holiness that calls others to lead a repentant and separated lifestyle.
- (4) Healing of the sick that is way beyond normal expectations in its scope. This wide scope is both in the numbers healed and in the great range of maladies that are cured -including "incurable" conditions such as epilepsy and paralysis. (Matt 4:24)
- (5) Authority over the powers of darkness.

These five things are among the works of Jesus that we can replicate and even exceed (John 14:12) though few have done so or gone anywhere near it. They are the marks of an authentic baptism of

the Spirit. They are the fruit produced by an empowered and prepared believer whose character is without fault. Next month we will take up the relationship between tested character and spiritual empowerment when we look at the temptation in the wilderness - the subject of Milton's "Paradise Regained".

Prayer

Lord so work in me that I may be a fit vessel for your empowering. I acknowledge that any results I may see are because You indwell me or anoint me. I place myself before You and in obedience ask for an empowering of the Spirit suited for this hour and this time and for the mission you have called me to. Proclaim Your Kingdom through me in holiness and in Truth. May I testify to your Kingdom through healing and deliverance. May I set You forth so clearly that many will flock to find You. Amen.

The Blood Of Jesus Christ

(John 6:53-56 NKJV) Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. {54} "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. {55} "For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. {56} "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

It offends our social sensibilities to be told to drink someone's blood and to eat their flesh. It certainly offended many of Jesus' followers who turned away at this point. (John 6:60). The blood of Jesus Christ is not an easy topic and yet understanding it is absolutely central to the Christian life. We will look at twelve benefits of the blood of Jesus Christ.

1. **Eternal Life**(John 6:53-56). Unless we "drink His Blood" we have no life in us (6:53) but when we partake of what Christ has done for us on the cross we have eternal life (6:54). Eternal life has two aspects. Firstly it is life that has its origin in eternity and which flows from the eternal realms. The blood of Jesus Christ introduces us to a life that flows from the throne of God, which is holy, pure and full of praise, and which lifts us up to be citizens of heaven seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6). It is the opposite of a selfish sensual life that flows from the world or a life of envy and hatred energised by evil that flows from Hell.(James 3:15,16) It is life energised by love. Secondly eternal life is eternal and lasts forever because it is made of something incorruptible, something glorious that cannot fade away. It is grounded in God's eternal Spirit. It is immortal, imperishable and undefiled (1 Peter 1:4).
2. **Abiding in Christ**(John 6:53-56) "Abiding" means that we are to have a continuing personal relationship with God. It is like taking a guest in to "abide with you a night". We become God's guest through the blood and are "at home with Him" and also he becomes our guest and is "at home with us". God and man visit each other in love because of the blood of Jesus Christ. (John 6:56)
3. **Purchased by His blood**(Acts 20:28 NKJV) "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.The blood of Jesus Christ is the precious purchase price that bought us back from sin and from the hand of the Devil who is the enemy of God.(Psalm 107:2). This purchase price also bought us out of our useless way of life that we used to live in.(1 Peter 1:18-19 NKJV) knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, {19} but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.To be redeemed means to be purchased from slavery or imprisonment or the ownership of another. The blood of Jesus Christ is the price that has moved us from darkness to light and from a futile and aimless lifestyle to productive membership in God's Kingdom.
4. **Our bodies were also bought by Christ's blood**(1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NKJV) Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? {20} For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.Our bodies were bought for God by Jesus Christ and he now owns them and fills them with His Spirit and His temples. Like any temple they are for the glory of the God to whom they are consecrated. Therefore since both our body and our spirit were bought by the "price" which is the blood of Jesus our bodies should be set apart for God's service. (Romans 12:1,2)

5. **We are washed from our sins by His blood.**(Revelation 1:5 NKJV) .. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,Jesus scrubs us clean from our sins through the use of His blood. 1 John 1:7 explains the process He uses(1 John 1:7 NKJV) But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.There is an "if" that begins this verse. If we walk in the light as He is in the light. In other words we have to bring our sins out into God's light and let Him clean them. Just as its hard to clean the bathroom if the light is off so God needs us to bring our sin-stains into His light if we are to be cleansed. There are two consequences that flow from walking in the light - fellowship with one another and the cleansing of the blood. Being truthful about our sin gets rid of hypocrisy, tears off our masks and makes us able to have true fellowship (instead of Christian pretense with one another. Instead or receiving condemnation we receive fellowship and purification. The blood of Jesus Christ is the effective cleansing agent for the sins we truthfully and honestly bring into the light of God.

6. **We are made righteous.**The term the New Testament uses for "made righteous" is "justified".(Romans 5:9 NKJV) Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.God no longer treats us as sinners. He no longer pours out His wrath toward us. It is turned away by the blood of the Passover Lamb. (1 Corinthians 5:7, Exodus 12:6-13). The blood of Jesus Christ makes us legally righteous - that is no longer the objects of God's wrath; it also makes us actually righteous cleansing us from sin and sanctifying us. (Hebrews 10:29, 13:12). This means that through the blood of Jesus Christ the Christian can appropriate all the blessings that flow to the righteous including boldness (Proverbs 28:1), peace, quietness and assurance (Isaiah 32:17) and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

7. **We are made holy (sanctified).**(Hebrews 13:12 NKJV) Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Jesus went to the cross in order that you and I might become holy. Our holiness is not a religious game, it is something that Jesus died for. He shed His own blood so that our lives may be spotless in every way. Holiness has two meanings firstly it means "set apart for God". The blood of Jesus Christ when applied to our lives marks us as belonging to God and saves us from destruction. The Old Testament example of this was the blood of the Passover Lamb(Exodus 12:12-13 NKJV) 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. {13} 'Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.. This was a "type" or forerunner of Jesus who is our Passover.(1 Corinthians 5:7 NKJV) For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.God's wrath is turned away by the blood and we become a holy people that He spares. The second part of holiness is more well known it means "To be pure and without sin". The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from sin and works practical holiness into our lives on a continuing basis. (1 John 1:7). We work with the blood to achieve holiness. We cannot achieve any degree of holiness by our own efforts without the blood. The blood applied can do much work alone. But the applied blood plus our "working out our own salvation with fear and trembling" is most effective. It is a bit like cleaning an oven. Without the oven cleaner chemical the task is hopeless. A good oven cleaner when sprayed on can get rid of much of the grime. If we add a bit of our own effort a spotless oven results. This is, at best, a very poor analogy to holy things but it may help some of you. The blood of Jesus Christ makes us holy.

8. **The blood of Jesus Christ brings us forgiveness of sins.**(Matthew 26:28 NKJV) "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (Ephesians 1:7 NKJV) In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His graceThe

blood of Jesus Christ brings about the forgiveness of our sins. Nothing we can do can make God forgive us. However the sacrifice of His Son on the cross has brought in a new covenant and basic to this covenant is the idea that God forgives all who believe in His Son Jesus Christ. This is a sheer undeserved gift. It is part of the riches of His grace (Eph 1:7). All your sins past present and future are forgiven by God because of the blood of Jesus Christ.(Hebrews 9;12,28,10;10).

9. **A clean conscience**(Hebrews 9:14 NKJV) how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?What are these "dead works".These are the futile good works of the religious that always fall short of God's standards and which just end up bringing condemnation on us.(Isaiah 64:6 NRSV) We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.If we need to be cleansed from these "righteous deeds" how much more do we need cleansing from our blatant sins! The things that torment our conscience are forgiven, cleansed and removed by the blood of Jesus Christ so that our conscience instead of acting as the accuser is now put into God's service to strengthen and sanctify us.
- 10.**Boldness in Christian living**(Hebrews 10:19-23 NKJV) Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, {20} by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, {21} and having a 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. {23} Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. Once we are fully aware of what the blood of Jesus has done for us then we become fantastically bold. The first place this boldness takes hold is in prayer"boldness to enter the Holiest"it then moves into other areas of our life giving us"full assurance of faith".The author to the Hebrews who was writing to Christians who had apparently lost much of their original boldness (Hebrews 6:12)takes the majority of the epistle to explain the working of the blood. He knew, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the knowledge of the work of the blood is the basis for boldness in the Christian life.
- 11.**Victory over the Devil and his angels**(Revelation 12:11 NKJV) "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. When we testify to what the Word says about what the blood does we defeat the enemy of our souls. The testimony of the saints is about what Jesus Christ has done for them. By proclaiming this testimony they make it possible for others to believe and when these believe then Satan is defeated. Our testimony should always be about the cross and about the blood. Paul knew this when He wrote(1 Corinthians 2:1-5 NKJV) And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. {2} For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. {3} I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. {4} And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, {5} that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.Paul did not rely on persuasive Greek rhetoric but on the simple manifest power of the message of Christ crucified. The testimony of the blood is powerful overthrowing the fortresses of Satan (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Its message leads to a power which is spiritual but not hidden - it can be demonstrated in power. (1 Corinthians 2:4)
- 12.**Unity in Christ**(Ephesians 2:13-14 NKJV) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. {14} For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, (Revelation 5:9-10 NKJV) And they sang a new song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood , Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, {10} And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."These two verses tell us that the blood of Jesus Christ is the basis for fellowship between Christians of every tribe and tongue and nation who have had the dividing walls between them broken down. We have been redeemed out of our cultures and into the church of God. No longer are we many groups but rather we are one group in Christ though our ethnicity will still be part of us. The basis of this unity is not some constitution or set of rules but the sheer fact that we have all been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. And not just redeemed - given a heavenly status as kings and priests to God. And not just status but real power 'we shall reign upon the earth". The blood has bought us back from separation and powerlessness to unity and being "more than conquerors".

Well that is the twelve things that the blood of Jesus Christ does for you. Are you as impressed as I am? Are you "shouting hallelujah through the bunghole" like Billy Sunday? Its magnificent. Why don't we end this article with a prayer of praise. Lets use the one from Revelation 5:9,10.

Prayer

(Revelation 5:9-10 NKJV) And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood , Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, {10} And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."PRAISE THE LORD!

The Heavenly Enthronement of Jesus Christ

After the Ascension, some time in the ten days before Pentecost, Jesus was enthroned in Heaven on the throne of David, at the right hand of the Father. Ancient courts often had a number of thrones and co-regents alongside with the main ruler. So the enthronement did not mean that Jesus replaced God on the throne but rather that He co-reigns with Him in Heaven in the most significant position "at the right hand of the Majesty on high". Later in this article we will find that faithful believers also get thrones and co-reign with Christ!

This was instituted by means two mysterious pronouncements of the Father found in Psalm 110:

A. "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." which institutes Him as King over the nations and over the earth and the course of human history.

B. " The LORD has sworn And will not relent, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." which institutes Him as an eternal High Priest with authority over the heavenly realities and the salvation and redemption of all creation.

This enthronement was a reward for His obedience, suffering and death on the cross and resulted in Him being given "the name that is above every other name" (Philippians 2:5-11) and becoming King of Kings and Lord of Lords, with all authority in Heaven and on earth being given to Him. (Matthew 28:18, 1 Timothy 6:15). It also results in His kingship over the nations (Matthew 25:31-33) and His high priestly ministry for believers (Romans 8:34, Hebrews 8:1) which is discussed more fully in other articles on the [Ascension](#) and on the [High Priestly Ministry of Christ](#).

There are many passages referring to the throne of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures and we will try to deal with most of them (excluding parallel passages) in this article.

The Angel Gabriel announces to Mary that Jesus would occupy the throne of David:

(Luke 1:32-33 NKJV) "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. {33} "And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

When did this enthronement take place?

Mark and Hebrews put it very simply - after the cross and resurrection, before Pentecost and the present time of writing:

(Mark 16:19 NKJV) So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

(Hebrews 10:12-14 NKJV) But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, {13} from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. {14} For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

Peter preaches on this theme of resurrection, ascension and enthronement as having already happened during his sermon during the day of Pentecost using Psalm 110 as his text:

(Acts 2:30-36 NKJV) "Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, {31} "he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. {32} "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. {33} "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. {34} "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, {35} Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" {36} "Therefore let

all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

And three chapters later Peter hammers home the exaltation and enthronement of Jesus to the very people who had Him humiliated and killed:

(Acts 5:29-32 NKJV) But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. {30} "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. {31} "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. {32} "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Stephen seems to have got a glimpse of Jesus in His new role:

(Acts 7:55-56 NKJV) But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, {56} and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

This is a slightly unusual reference as Jesus is seen as "standing" not sitting and some commentators say He was standing to receive the first martyr of the Church.

Hebrews sees the enthronement as a reward for the cross.

(Hebrews 12:2 NKJV) looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Paul expands on the enthronement as a reward for suffering in Philippians 2:

(Philippians 2:8-11 NKJV) And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. {9} Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, {10} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, {11} and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul sees the enthronement as a demonstration of the mighty resurrection power of God and the authority of Jesus Christ:

(Ephesians 1:19-23 NKJV) and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power {20} which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, {21} far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. {22} And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, {23} which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Paul also sees the throne as Christ's present position in the heavenly realms:

(Colossians 3:1 NKJV) If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

For believers the exalted position of their Savior means the assurance of grace:

(Romans 8:34 NKJV) Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

(Hebrews 4:14-16 NKJV) Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. {15} For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. {16} Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

(Hebrews 8:1-2 NKJV) Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, {2} a Minister of the sanctuary and of

the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

All other thrones are subsidiary to this Throne of Christ, Jesus is the King of Kings:

(1 Peter 3:21-22 NKJV) ... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, {22} who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

(Colossians 1:16 NKJV) For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

(1 Timothy 6:13-16 NKJV) I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, {14} that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, {15} which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, {16} who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.

(Revelation 17:14 NKJV) "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."

(Revelation 19:11-16 NKJV) Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. {12} His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. {13} He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. {14} And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. {15} Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. {16} And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

The post-resurrection authority of Jesus is also the basis of the mandate of the Church:

(Matthew 28:18-20 NKJV) And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. {19} "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, {20} "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

And the author to the Hebrews uses the enthronement of Jesus, and His consequent authority, as one of the reasons why He is superior to the angels:

(Hebrews 1 NKJV) God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, {2} has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; {3} who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, {4} having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

{5} For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"? And again: "I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son"? {6} But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him." {7} And of the angels He says: "Who makes His angels spirits And His ministers a flame of fire." {8} But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. {9} You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

{10} And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. {11} They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; {12} Like a cloak You will

fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail."

{13} But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? {14} Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

Many of these passages quote Psalm 110 which prophesies of the Messiah being enthroned as both King and a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek". It is one of the most quoted Psalms in the NT:

(Psalms 110 NKJV) The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." {2} The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! {3} Your people shall be volunteers In the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. {4} The LORD has sworn And will not relent, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." {5} The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. {6} He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries. {7} He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; Therefore He shall lift up the head.

Jesus uses this Psalm to confound the Pharisees:

(Matthew 22:41-46 NKJV) While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, {42} saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "The Son of David." {43} He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying: {44} 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"'? {45} "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" {46} And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

The most puzzling and difficult passage is in 1 Corinthians where Paul is discussing the resurrection of the dead and the course of history:

(1 Corinthians 15:23-28 NKJV) But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. {24} Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. {25} For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. {26} The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. {27} For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. {28} Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

How does Jesus as King put an "end to all rule, authority and power"? The Scriptures give us a few hints of the Kingdom of God shattering the kingdoms of this world as a giant rock or an iron bar:

(Daniel 2:34-35, 44 NKJV) "You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. {35} "Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.... "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.

(Revelation 11:15 NKJV) Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

(Revelation 12:5 NKJV) She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.

(Revelation 19:15 NKJV) Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

This judgment of the nations will occur at the Second Coming:

(Matthew 26:64-66 NKJV) Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

(Matthew 25:31-33 NKJV) "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. {32} "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. {33} "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

Those who faithfully follow Jesus will reign with Him in the new Kingdom that follows the destruction of the "kingdoms of this world" and replaces them.

(Matthew 19:28-30 NKJV) So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. {29} "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. {30} "But many who are first will be last, and the last first

(2 Timothy 2:12 NKJV) If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

(Revelation 2:26-28 NKJV) "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations; {27} 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'; as I also have received from My Father; {28} "and I will give him the morning star.

(Revelation 3:21 NKJV) "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

(Revelation 20:4 NKJV) And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

His disciples James and John understood that Jesus would occupy the throne of David and so their mother asked:

(Matthew 20:21 NKJV) And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom."

Jesus corrects this love of self-exaltation while retaining the promise of a kingdom for believers - who, like He did, suffer for God as sacrificial servant-leaders:

(Matthew 20:22-28 NKJV) But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." {23} So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father." {24} And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. {25} But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. {26} "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. {27} "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave; {28} "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

(Luke 22:25-30 NKJV) And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' {26} "But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. {27} "For who is

greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. {28} "But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. {29} "And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, {30} "that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Finally believers will reign with Christ forever

(Revelation 5:9-10 NKJV) And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, {10} And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

(Revelation 22:5 NKJV) There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

Final Comments

The path to the throne lay through service and the cross for Jesus - and for all His disciples down the ages!

Because Jesus has been enthroned we know that God is just and rewards those who suffer patiently for Him. The Jesus we now pray to is a King - the King of Kings, the Lamb upon the throne. His days of humiliation are over. He has been exalted and pours out the Holy Spirit from on high.

Because Jesus has been enthroned we can know that He is in the process of establishing His kingdom and destroying all resistance to His will. Jesus is in the process of subduing His enemies either through repentance and the gospel or by final force at His coming. Jesus will either convert the nations or judge the nations. Finally Jesus will be the only authority, the final authority in human history.

Because Jesus has been enthroned we can know that we have a faithful High Priest , a king priest of the order of Melchizedek. We can find grace and help in time of need and come to a throne where Christ Himself intercedes for us and justifies us.

Lets worship Him in spirit and in truth!

Jesus - The Better High Priest

In this article we shall look at the present heavenly and High Priestly ministry of Jesus. Just what is Jesus doing now - since the ascension and before His return in glory? Jesus is our eternal and abiding High Priest who has passed through the heavenly realms, who is merciful to sinners, and yet will have all His enemies made as a 'footstool for His feet'.

The book of Acts begins with Jesus ascending into heaven and the angels telling the disciples that He would return one day - just the way He went - that is, in bodily form, and to Jerusalem. A few days later Pentecost exploded and the early church was born in tongues of fire. The "Church Age", that time between Pentecost and the Return - had begun. So just what is Jesus doing now? Acts, Hebrews and Ephesians give us some clues.

Jesus Is At The Right Hand of the Father

There are at least 20 references to this fact in Scripture: Matthew 22:44, 26:64, Mark 12:36, 14:62, 16:19, Luke 20:42, 22:69, Acts 2:25, 2:33-34, 5:31, 7:55-56, Romans 8:34, Ephesians 1:20, Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 1:3, 1:13, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2, Rev 5:7. Some of these are parallel passages so we will just look at the main twelve passages below.

(Matthew 22:44 NASB) 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT THINE ENEMIES BENEATH THY FEET"?'

(Matthew 26:64 NASB) Jesus said[^] to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN."

(Mark 16:19 NASB) So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

(Luke 22:69 NASB) "But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the power OF GOD."

(Acts 2:25 NASB) "For David says of Him, 'I WAS ALWAYS BEHOLDING THE LORD IN MY PRESENCE; FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, THAT I MAY NOT BE SHAKEN.

(Acts 2:33-34 NASB) "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. {34} "For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,

(Acts 5:31 NASB) "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

(Acts 7:55-56 NASB) But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; {56} and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

(Romans 8:34 NASB) who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

(Ephesians 1:20 NASB) which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,

(Colossians 3:1 NASB) If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

(Hebrews 1:3 NASB) And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds

all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high;

(Hebrews 1:13 NASB) But to which of the angels has He ever said, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR THY FEET"?

(Hebrews 8:1 NASB) Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

(Hebrews 10:12 NASB) but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,

(Hebrews 12:2 NASB) fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(Revelation 5:7 NASB) And He (Jesus) came, and He took it (the judgment scroll) out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

What do these verses tell us about the ministry of Jesus? Firstly they say that Jesus is in a position of vast authority, but being at the right hand of the Father Jesus is the Prime Minister of the Universe- Acts calls Him a Prince (Acts 5:31). Those that despised Him when He was on earth would have to reckon with the power He would wield after His ascension and especially at His return. Jesus reply to His critics was " hereafter you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." Hebrews goes further and says that from this position of authority Jesus upholds the Universe by the "word of His power". His commands, His utterances, His "words of power" uphold all the created order! (Hebrews 1:3)

This cosmic and powerful Christ is not just the "tyrant of the Universe" but uses His high position for the benefit of those who love Him. He has "made purification for sins" and "intercedes" for us as our representative at God's right hand. (Romans 8:34, Hebrews 1:3). From His high position in the heavenly realms He pours out the Holy Spirit upon those who believe (Acts 2:33,34) and grants repentance and forgiveness of sins. (Acts 5:31) At the right hand of the Father He is a faithful and merciful High Priest who we can come to for grace and help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:10-16)

However He will also dispense justice and make His enemies a footstool for his feet and it is at the right hand of the Father that he receives and opens the scroll of judgment and brings into action the close of the age. (Matthew 22:24, Hebrews 1:13, Revelation 5:7)

Jesus Is Conquering The Nations

The nations will either be conquered either by evangelism or by the "sword of his mouth". His enemies will either repent and we will "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18-20) or they will be "ruled with a rod of iron" .

(Revelation 12:5 NASB) And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

(Revelation 19:15 NASB) And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

Astonishingly it seems that faithful Christians will also rule over the rebellious nations as Christ's representatives:

(Revelation 2:26-28 NASB) 'And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; {27} AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; {28} and I will give him the morning star.

So we see that Jesus has ascended to a position of vast authority and is on a program to conquer the world. The church Age is about that conquest and the preferred method of conquest is the peaceful proclamation of the gospel. When that is no longer of any avail, force will be used! (Matthew 24:14 NASB) "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.

Jesus Is Baptizing With The Holy Spirit

(Acts 2:33 NASB) "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

(Matthew 3:11 NASB) "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Since Pentecost Jesus has been pouring out the Holy Spirit in revival, in personal renewal and refreshing and in peace and love in the believers' heart (Romans 5:1-5). Jesus has received the promise of the Spirit from the Father and "gives the Spirit without measure" to those who ask Him.

(Luke 11:13 NASB) "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

(John 3:34 NASB) "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.

The Holy Spirit is given to three groups of people (which are really one):

Those that thirst for the waters of life - (Revelation 21:6 NASB) And He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.

Those that believe - (John 7:39 NASB) But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Those who obey - (Acts 5:32 NASB) "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Jesus is Building His Church And Preparing His Bride

(Matthew 16:18 NASB) "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.

(Ephesians 5:25-27 NASB) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; {26} that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, {27} that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.

Not only is Jesus conquering the nations through missionary evangelism He is making something of those converts - a glorious church, holy and blameless, without spot or wrinkle. God has a program of perfection for His Church and it will be implemented! Jesus said he will build His church on the faithful declarations of imperfect men such as Peter and He will! He prepared His Church chiefly through "the washing of water with the word" - we are cleansed as we study and obey the Scriptures. Jesus is purifying, sanctifying and cleansing a church so that it will be a wonderful bride and bring honor to Him on the wedding day!

Jesus Sympathizes With The Frailties And Weaknesses Of The Saints, Interceded For Them And Represents Them Before God As A Faithful High Priest

The book of Hebrews has many references to this sacrificial and sympathetic high priestly role of Jesus (Hebrews 2:17, 3:1, 4:14-15, 5:5, 5:10, 6:20, 7:26, 8:1-8, 9:11,25; 13:11-12) and Romans 8 says that Jesus

intercedes for us from His position at the right hand of the Father (Romans 8:34). This intercession is based on a deep understanding of human nature because Jesus was tempted in all points as we are but was yet without sin, (Hebrews 4:15) so He can be a merciful High Priest who is conscious of human frailty.

Jesus is a high priest of a special and eternal order - the order of Melchizedek, the prototype of all priests and one who is eternal. (Hebrews chapters 6 and 7). Instead of belonging to a human priesthood that perishes and becomes obsolete like the priesthood based on Levi, the priesthood based on Melchizedek is perpetual and heavenly and belongs to the tabernacle that is in heaven (Hebrews 9:11). Thus it is a better and more potent priesthood with a deeper intercession before God- one that can completely remove sins (which the Aaronic priesthood could never do). The supremacy of this priesthood is outlined in the following verses:

- (Hebrews 6:20 NASB) where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.
- (Hebrews 7:26 NASB) For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;
- (Hebrews 8:1 NASB) Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

The main point of the the book of Hebrews is that Jesus, having passed through the heavenly realms and the plurality of spiritual "layers" is now in the highest place anyone can be before God - at God's very right hand. Therefore His priestly ministry is far more effective than that of any Jewish High Priest and therefore Christianity is a better system than Judaism because a resurrected and triumphant Christ, the very Son of God, to whom God has said "THOU ART MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE"; - is the High Priest and main intercessor.

Thus Jesus being a High Priest at God's right hand makes Christianity the supreme world religion - better than Judaism, which in turn was better than Gentile religions. We have a Better High Priest and there lies our hope and confidence.

(Hebrews 4:14-16 NASB) Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. {15} For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. {16} Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are at the right hand of the Father interceding for me that I may become holy and blameless and spotless. You understand all my weaknesses and give me grace and help in time of need. Lord purify my heart and its desires, take all wicked ways from me and put a right spirit within me that I may walk in Your ways. Pour out Your Holy Spirit upon me and fill me with Your life. Allow me o drink from the water of life and to know what it is to have the Holy Spirit without measure and be fully filled with God's love. Glorify Yourself in me I pray Amen.

Little Faith Great Faith Participating Faith

Little Faith

The first thing we shall look at is the times when Jesus says people had little or inadequate faith. I want to say straight off that Jesus never said to any sick person "You remain sick because you lack faith." The closest He ever comes to that is when the disciples fail to heal the epileptic boy..and there He blames the disciples and not the boy. It was the failure of the disciples faith not the lack of the sick person's faith that worried Jesus.

Secondly lack of faith can have many causes and we will look at them later. But basically lack of faith is the inability or refusal to see, grasp and use spiritual truth.

Matthew 6:30 (NRSV) But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you--you of little faith?

Here Jesus says anxiety over God's ability to provide the necessities of life is a lack of faith. God obviously provides food for the birds and clothes the lilies of the field in splendor, then He who knows what we need will not fail to supply. I remember reading this verse as a rather poor missionary and telling God off and saying that I was not well enough clothed and would He kindly keep His promise. Shortly afterwards a friend of a friend who owned a fashion store in Hong Kong sent me two suitcases full of silk clothes of the very highest quality and I lived in silk for years. God keeps His word -even to those of little faith.

(1) Little faith is saying God's clear promises, can't, won't or don't come true.

Luke 8:13-14 (NRSV) The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. 14 As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

Here faith lacks roots in the heart of the person. They are easily discouraged and give up under hard times or become barren and unfruitful Christian worriers rather than God's warriors. (2) Little faith gives up easily on the things of God.

Matthew 8:23-27 (NRSV) And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. 24 A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. 25 And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" 26 And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. 27 They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

What a fantastic passage of Scripture. These faithful disciples follow Jesus into the boat. Then up comes a storm and they are close to sinking. They are terrified and wake Jesus. He says to the wind and the waves "Peace be still" (in Luke) and tells them off for having such little faith. The disciples are expected to believe that God cares for their lives and will not let them come to an untimely end. Jesus expects them to look past the natural circumstances to the power and provision of God.

(3) Little faith only sees the circumstances and cannot grasp and apply God's truths at the necessary moment.

Mark 16:13-14 (NRSV) And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. 14 Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.

Luke 1:20 (NRSV) But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

Here we see people who have put God in a box and said "he can do this much and no more" and "God would not do that for me.." We dare not ever limit God. Jesus knew of this tendency and the gospels record Jesus saying "All things are possible to those who believe" or "Nothing is impossible with God" 9 times. We need to become people who genuinely see nothing as impossible with God.

(4) Little faith limits God. Little faith says "This is not possible - even with God, at least not for me".

John 5:44 (NRSV) How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?

Pride makes it impossible to grow in faith. God does not allow us to rely on other people for our "glory" and self-esteem. Faith needs us to be dependent on God for all things especially for our sense of who we are. Faith says "I am a humble child of God and He is my heavenly father who loves me therefore I am OK". Worldliness says "I am rich and powerful and attractive therefore I am OK" such an attitude is deadly to growth in faith.

(5) Little faith is not humble toward God. Little faith loves the praise of men and seeks human reputation rather than the approval of God. It lacks the spiritual insight to focus on heavenly rewards.

So the five sources of little faith are :

Hardness of heart,

Giving up easily,

Being overwhelmed by circumstances and unable to apply God's truths.

Deciding what is possible and impossible for God,

And pride and the seeking of respectability.

Great Faith

If these things bring little faith then we would expect the opposites to bring great faith - and you would be dead right. The five ingredients for great faith are.

1. Softness of heart (fruitful soil, parable of the sower)
2. Persistence and endurance in the faith.
3. Seeing, believing and acting on God's truths despite anxieties and circumstances.
4. Believing that nothing is impossible with God.
5. Humility, lowliness and glorying in God alone.

Lets see how Scripture supports this:

Matthew 8:5-13 (NRSV) When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him 6 and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress." 7 And he said to him, "I will come and cure him." 8 The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does

it." 10 When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. 11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith." And the servant was healed in that hour.

Matthew 15:21-28 (NRSV) Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." 23 But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." 26 He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Luke 8:15 (NRSV) But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.

If you notice something the same about the Canaanite woman and the Roman Centurion it is that both had a deep sense of their unworthiness before God but an unshakable belief that God would act on their behalf. The centurion is commended for his great faith in understanding the nature of Jesus's authority...that all Jesus had to do was speak the word and his servant would be healed. He does not strut around before God but comes very humbly to Jesus. Jesus was willing to visit this man's house but he did not feel worthy to have Him. His word would be sufficient. Here we see four of the five principles of great faith at work. The Centurion had:

A soft and merciful heart.

An understanding of spiritual principles and God's authority.

He believed that nothing was impossible with God.

He was very humble and did not take up the opportunity to big-note himself in front of the crowd or Jesus or even to have the Messiah for lunch.

The Canaanite woman with the demon-possessed daughter shows the this quality of persistence - to the point of annoying the disciples. She possessed an unshakable faith in the mercy that Jesus would bestow.

Again we see a soft and merciful heart,

A grasping of spiritual truth despite adverse circumstances. In this case the truth that even Gentiles were not outside God's mercy .

Faith that nothing was impossible to God.

Persistence

A humble heart that abased itself before God.

Both the Roman Centurion and Canaanite woman were Gentiles and are the only people in the gospels commended by Jesus for their great faith.

Growing Into Great Faith

Now for the conclusion of the matter - how can you and I become men and women of faith who see things happen when they pray and whose lives please God. What qualities shall we try to work into our lives so that we eventually grow into great faith?

1. We will aim at being soft-hearted caring and merciful, open to the truths of God and the needs of others. As Luke puts it people who "hold fast the word in a good and honest heart".
2. We will aim at grasping spiritual truths and believing them. We will not scoff at the miraculous or the power of God but seek to understand His mercy, justice and power and how it operates.
3. We will believe that nothing is impossible with God and that no circumstance is too difficult for Him to change.
4. We will hold onto our faith like a pig-dog on a bone. We will persist before God with our requests and not let go. We will keep on believing even though circumstances would cause many others to doubt and give up.
5. We will not grandstand around before God or men but be gentle and lowly and humble of heart. We will seek our approval from God, not from the world around us.

May I suggest four steps, the initials of which form the word ROPE.

1. **Repent** of your pride, skepticism and unbelief. Confess to God that you are a person of little faith, that you do not believe as you should and that you want help to grow in faith. "Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief.."
2. Open your heart to the word of God. Treasure the truths of God. Seek to find out how God acts and to trust God in all circumstances on the basis of what you have learned of Him.
3. **Persist** in prayer and faith. Never, never, never give in. If its worthwhile hold on to it - and your faith is worth much.
4. **Expect** great things from God, attempt great things for God. This was the motto of a famous missionary -either C.T. Studd or Hudson Taylor. The centurion and the Canaanite woman expected great things from God.

The apostles after Pentecost were filled with faith and expected great things from God and attempted great things for God - and they succeeded

Lets go over that again R - repentance of unbelief and pride, O - openness to God, P - persistence in prayer and faith, E - expect great things from our great God.

Participating Faith

The Bible doesn't use these exact words but they summarize for me the Hebrews 11 gift of exceptional faith. Though the centurion had great faith it was not the same as a Paul or a David or a Moses or an Abraham. These giants of the faith participated in the plans and purposes of God. They took God at his word and launched out not knowing where they were going. They sought a Kingdom that was not of this world. They ACTIVELY AND DELIBERATELY PARTICIPATED IN THE PROMISES OF GOD. Lets look at this a bit further.

(Hebrews 11:1-8 NKJV) Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. {2} For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. {3} By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. {4} By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. {5} By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. {6} But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. {7} By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. {8} By

faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Each of these people demonstrated their inner conviction by outward actions that participated in the plans, purposes and promises of God. Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice. Enoch lived a life pleasing to God. Noah built an ark. Abraham went out not knowing where he was going. They took on God's plan as their life intent. Faith is the "substance of things hoped for". For these people faith was not wishing or hoping it was reckoning on God's promises as "substantial", as reliable, as something they could walk out on like a plank of wood.

The minimum level of faith is specified as believing that God is and that He rewards those who seek Him. (v6) The maximum is the ability to forsake all for God's Kingdom purposes as Abraham did many times and many saints have done since. These people know that though this life's rewards may be few that they WILL inherit something greater still in the resurrection. For them this is not fanciful theology or religious conjuring but a real hope - a hope with substance. Something that they can and do build their lives on.

(Hebrews 11:13-26 NKJV) These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. {14} For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. {15} And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. {16} But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. {17} By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, {18} of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," {19} concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. {20} By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. {21} By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. {22} By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. {23} By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. {24} By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, {25} choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, {26} esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

The desire of those who have decided to participate in the plans and promises of God is for His purposes alone. They desire the heavenly city - not the earthly. They esteem the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than the treasures of Egypt - and how great those treasures were has only recently been revealed by modern archaeology. This is the true love of God - to enter in to all He calls us to without reserve or hesitation and leaving this world behind as a vapour and a cloud. Will you set your heart on the purposes of God and start the journey, the pilgrimage, of participating faith?

18 Reasons For Unanswered Prayer

(James 1:5-8 NKJV) *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. {6} But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. {7} For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; {8} he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

There are four basic categories of reasons why your prayers are not answered other than "the sovereignty of God". These are :

- **Spiritual sins** - doubt, hypocrisy, pride, flippancy etc
- **Poor relationships** - rudeness, unforgiveness, malice, anger, wrath, divisiveness.
- **Major sin** - things categorized as "doing evil" (1 Cor 6:9,10)
- **Praying amiss** - lack of persistence, not fasting, not using Jesus' name and authority etc.

These form the basis for the following 18 reasons.

Scripture	Reason	Solution
James 1:5-8	Doubting God	Deciding to believe what God says and acting on it.
James 4:2	Not asking God in the first place but trying to obtain it by quarreling.	Ask God in prayer for your needs.
James 4:3	Asking wrongly e.g for worldly pleasures.	A distinct separation from the world/not loving it.
1 Peter 3:7	Treating your wife in an inconsiderate manner.	Living with her in an understanding way.
1 Peter 3:12	Doing evil	Be righteous.
1 Peter 4:7	A flippant attitude to holy things.	Being serious and watchful.
Matthew 6:5,6	Hypocritical attention-seeking.	Pray in private to God not publicly for show.
Matthew 6:5	Using vain repetition (e.g. like Buddhist prayer wheels etc).	Pray concisely knowing that God is hearing and knows your needs.
Matthew 18:19	Lack of unity especially among Christian leaders.	Agreement & fellowship.
Mark 9:29	Some situations need fasting as well.	Spiritual discernment and a disciplined life.
Mark 11:25,26	Unforgiveness	Forgive whoever has offended you from the heart.
Luke 18:1ff	Lack of persistence	Do not lose heart or give up.
Luke 18:10 ff	Spiritual pride	Humble yourself before God.
1 Timothy 2:8	Wrath/anger	Live peaceably in prayer.
1 John 5:14	Not according to God's will (God's broad moral will is meant here)	Ask within the bounds of Scripture.

John 15:7	An erratic life that seldom "abides" in God.	Abide in Jesus words and let them abide in you.
John 14:13,14	Not asking "in Jesus name" i.e asking in the will and clear purposes of Jesus and with His designated authority.	Ask in Jesus's will for God's purposes with a sense that the authority comes from God not you.
John 16:26,27	Not believing in Jesus.	The Father loves those who believe in his Son and will answer their prayers as a result.

You will probably find two or three of the above in your own life. Write them down and write down a plan for doing something about them. Start with asking God for forgiveness for those things and appeal to Him to hear and answer your prayers.

Prayer

Lord we are so weak in many ways. Forgive us our sins and clear us of guilt in our praying. If it was not for Jesus we would not be heard at all. Teach us to pray in ways that are good and acceptable so that we may be heard before Your throne and be answered swiftly. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer As A Pattern For The Prayer Life of the Believer

Introduction

As Christians we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength - which means we will pray to him regularly as the one we love. We are also called to love our neighbour as ourselves - which means, in part, that we will be regularly praying because we love our neighbours and bring the needs of our fellow man to God. So prayer is essential to our relationship to God and part of our duty toward our neighbour. While there is no command in the Bible "thou shalt have a daily quiet time" it is fairly obvious that prayer is to have a large part of the Christians life. Commands such as "pray without ceasing", "pray at all times in the Spirit" indicate regular times of prayer which were meant to be kept up. People who are on fire for God are people who pray regularly. However prayer is an art form and a bit of a struggle at first. Many people give up on prayer because they expect it to come easily and spontaneously. It doesn't - you have to be taught how to pray.

One of the first things you need is a simple flexible structure to direct your praying. If you don't at least have some idea of a structure then daydreams and distractions take over. Our minds tend to run away from prayer. Structure in prayer trains us to be successful in prayer.

Next we need help expressing our thoughts and emotions to God - at least to start with. Praise is a fairly unnatural activity for Australians and we are not much given to outbursts of passion. Our hearts and minds need to be directed upward.

Thirdly we need open-endedness so we can keep on growing in God.

Fourthly our prayer style should guide us into the will of God and the realm of answered prayer.

The Lord's Prayer does all these things when it is used as the structure behind your prayer life. The first five minutes of your quiet time can be spent hallowing God's name, the next five minutes praying for "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." touching on everything from missionaries to wise decisions.

Then on to your needs "give us this day our daily bread", another few minutes asking for forgiveness of self and forgiving the hurts others have done to you, finally asking for protection from the evil one and perceived threats and temptations ending the eyes being raised to God in praise. If only five minutes is given to each section - you can easily pray for half an hour. Without that structure most of us are flat out praying for ten minutes. This sermon will simply teach you how to use the Lord's Prayer as the backbone of your prayer life.

The Lord's Prayer Explained

The "Lord's Prayer" breaks a few of the conventional rules of prayer. For instance confession is one of the last activities, not one of the first. There is much praise and intercession before there is any confession. There is no grovelling in sin. The cross of Christ is foreshadowed in this prayer in that for the Christian sin is not a catastrophe. All your sins past present and future have been dealt with by Christ according to the kindness and grace of God. Sin should never be treated lightly and confession is important to your spiritual health. However its place is last not first. We can come boldly into the presence of God and find grace and help in time of need.

The next unusual thing about the Lord's Prayer is its apparent brevity. It takes only 30 seconds or so to say. It is almost disappointingly short. There are I think two reasons for this - firstly it was meant to be memorised. Secondly it had two uses 1. As a guide to praying 2. As a model prayer. In both uses Jesus wanted His Kingdom prayer to contrast with the "meaningless babble of the pagans", or the extended vain-glorious of the scribes and Pharisees. So His ideal prayer was to the point and focused on the glory of God.

Thirdly the prayer at no points attempts to persuade God. God is presented as a loving Father who knows our needs and is willing to answer them. He is not abstract or far removed but close and personal.

Fourthly it is unusual in that there is only one condition for it being answered - and it is not that we be good boys and girls. The condition is that we forgive those who have been bad boys and girls.

Self-righteousness is the only thing that can stop the Lord's Prayer being answered. We are all seen as in need of forgiveness. We are all called sinners in need of grace by the Lord's Prayer and we are to extend grace. Softness of heart will overflow with blessings from God.

Some verses I often come back to on this topic are found in Luke 6:35-38.

Luke 6:35-38 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Fifthly and perhaps most startling, the Lord's prayer invites us into the very counsels of God. His name, His Kingdom and the doing of His will are now our concerns. We are allowed to call Him Father and ask for heavenly things that are "too high for us". I cannot think of anyone in the Old Testament who called YHWH Father . up until the Lord's prayer and the resurrection and ascension of Christ, the business of heaven was in general, the business of the Lord alone. Now we are invited in. You and I in our quiet time can pray that the angels in heaven may praise and serve God more faithfully, we can pray that nations may bend to the will of God, we direct some of the resources of heaven to places of need in the Kingdom of God. We can pray for the salvation of souls. We can influence angels, men and nations.

Getting Inside The Lord's Prayer

So far we have had a few brief glances at the Lord's prayer and what it means to us. Whole books have been written on that topic and we have to leave that section behind to move on to the "how to " bit. How can we change the Lord's Prayer from a boring ritual into the living backbone of our quiet time? We need to "get inside" the Lord's Prayer and picture what it is about. This is best done one phrase at a time.

Firstly repeat the phrase in your mind, or even aloud until it starts to click - maybe two, three or four times.

"Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be your name.." Let the picture build in your mind , see god on his throne, see the angels praising Him. Maybe you feel like singing a chorus

As you do this a picture may form of a need "Lord help our church to really worship you.." or "Lord make my heart holy, teach me to praise you...As the thought fades come back to the Lord's Prayer and the phrase Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be your name...let it soak in a new w picture might come to mind, pray for that, just keep the thought of hallowing God's name before you, treating him with respect, seeing him as Holy, Beautiful, wonderful, Almighty, worthy of praise.

Then move on to "Your kingdom come, Your will be done , on earth as it is in heaven." Focus on the battle, on God moving forward, on God overcoming, on the wonderful return of the Lord Jesus to judge the living and the dead. Picture what it would be like if God's will was done on earth as it is in heaven. Picture everyone healthy, picture all tears wiped away, picture all wickedness banished forever, picture total love, picture families together, picture glory covering the earth. Picture God's perfect will done in every single life and pray for it.

Give us this day our daily bread. The bills on the fridge spring to mind. Pray for your neighbours needs as well. Pray for the needs of the church. Remind God we need to function. Put down your self-sufficiency and admit to God that you really need His blessing. Grab hold of God and don't let Him go until you are blessed.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those that sin against us. Confess pride, greed, bitterness, self-centredness, desire for glory. Forgive the annoying, the ungrateful, the jealous, the backbiting. picture your sins being put on the cross and nailed there out of the way. Or picture them as balloons that pop when you confess them. Picture your most unfavourite person and then picture Jesus forgiving that person just as Jesus forgave you. Ask God to forgive them of their sins, their failures, forgive them for disappointing you, forgive them for not loving you. Take all your anger towards that person and drop it over the side of a boat travelling over the sea, watch all your anger float away then sink down, turn around feeling lighter. Bless the person you just forgave in the Spirit.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Think of the tough situations you are going through. Ask God to reduce the testing, to have mercy on you, to take Satan out of the way if the evil one is involved.

Think of a temptation. Picture the fridge door with your temptation written in big letters across it. Pray for self-control. See yourself doing the right thing over and over. Picture yourself winning in the strength Christ supplies. Praise God that He will lift you above it. Rehearse in your mind and your Spirit how you will overcome your temptations and tests. Do it until you are sure of God's strength helping you through. Commit your life to Him.

For Yours is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory. Raise yours eyes to God again. See His greatness. See Him in control of the Universe, see Him hearing and answering your prayers. Give Him praise and perhaps sing a hymn or chorus. Rest in God.

God has given us the ability to dwell on His word vividly and to "get inside" Scripture and experience it. We do not do this to empty our minds like in New Age meditation, rather we do it to fill our minds with the truth of God's word. We always come back to the Scripture properly interpreted as the basis for our thinking and picturing. I want you to get inside the Lord's prayer in anyway you can and turn it from a boring ritual into the exciting backbone of your prayer life.

Believing The Lord's Prayer

One of the great advantages of the Lord's prayer is that it leads you to pray in the will of God. Therefore when you use it as a structure for your quiet time you are quite likely to have your prayers answered. It is easier to have faith when you are sure what you are doing and saying is in the will of God. How then can we have faith-filled Spirit filled quiet times?

1. Remind yourself of your position in Christ and of the great grace of God.
2. Open the Word of God and think on it , ask God to allow His word to come alive to you and bring response from the Holy Spirit who dwells in all who believe.
3. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray.
4. Turn to the Lord's prayer, taking one phrase at a time.
Think on and repeat each phrase. Make requests on the same theme as that phrase.
Picture the things happening.
5. Be confident that Jesus taught us to pray that way because it is in the will of God and because it leads to answered prayer. Thank God He has answered your prayers and rejoice.

Lets go over those steps again.

Awareness of Position and Grace

Bible's Inspiration

Spirit's Help

Lord's Prayer

Faith and Thanksgiving

Conclusion

Because we must love God and our neighbour we must pray and pray regularly. However we need a way of overcoming boredom and distraction. I suggest the Lord's Prayer to you as God's Model Quiet Time.

Tonight I want you to go back committed to renewing your times with God, to improving both the quality and quantity of your praying and to learn how to dwell in the Spirit and to walk with God. You and I were made for prayer - let's get on with it.

Some of you may have been touched by tonight's sermon and want to do business with God. Bring the burdens of your heart down the front and set them before God. There will be elders here to talk to you if you want someone. While the front is open to any and every need some of you may want to take this moment to promise God that you will renew your prayer life and ask Him to teach you how to pray.

Come down the front and let it all be dealt with and make a fresh start for God.

Blessing

Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and it will be opened to you." May the Lord teach you to ask seek and knock, and may you see His grace and kindness to in open and obvious ways . May you grow in the love of God and may the peace of God surround your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Spiritual Warfare For The Totally Afraid

Demons are variously caricatured as "naughty spirits" and even portrayed as "sources of wisdom" in some New Age teachings. The Bible however sees demons as truly evil and deceptive beings arrayed in rebellion against God and whose fate will be eternal torment imprisoned in a lake of fire. This latter view is far closer to the reality experienced by demon-possessed people and those who have dealt with demons in others.

A demon possessed person is often deeply deceived - thus showing the deceptive nature of demons, a demon-possessed person often engages in activities that display a lack of conscience toward others or a delight in the evil and the bizarre. This betrays the evil, amoral and actively wicked attitude of the demonic. A demon-possessed person is often angry at ministers, scornful of Scripture, fearful of communion, mocking at morality and may hold bizarre views of Christ. Christian praise and worship can cause strong negative reactions. This displays the demonic hatred of God and rebellion toward His legitimate authority over this Earth that He made. Those who deal with demons sometimes find that demons are both aware of and terrified of the eternal fate that awaits them. They believe in the lake of fire even if some theologians do not. This article will look at what the Bible says about demons, their fate, and how we can stop them hindering our Christian life.

Lets start with the positive.....

Jesus' Triumph Over The Demonic Realm

(1 John 3:8 NKJV) He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

(1 John 4:4 NKJV) You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

(1 John 5:18 NKJV) We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.

The book of 1 John was probably written when the persecutions of the emperor Diocletian really began to bite. Satan and the his instrument - the pagan Roman Empire seemed to be indefinite ascendancy over the church, God and all the forces of good. 1 John is thus a very radical and bold epistle in its claims to victory in Christ. There are three realities described here:

1. The reality of Christ's mission in particular His incarnation. The reason Jesus Christ was manifested in human form was so that He could tackle Satan on his own turf and destroy all his works. Like a hand-grenade exploding in the Devil's face the incarnation brought the awesome power of the Son of God into proximity with evil so that it might completely destroy it.
2. The reality of Christ in us the hope of glory. He who is in us is He who came to destroy the works of the Devil. Jesus overcame the world then, and now, He is in us, and continues to overcome the world.

3. The reality of the indestructibility of our real eternal selves which are based on Christ in us. A person who has been born again has a new self that is created on a new order and a higher plane. It is eternal, imperishable and indestructible, it cannot be defiled. It is sinless and cannot sin. It is born of God and partakes of the very principles of the nature of God (but on a much different scale).(1 John 3:9 NKJV) Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.This new self battles with the flesh in a life long struggle for dominance (Galatians 5:16-18) so Christians still do sin but this sin is not a part of them that will still be with them in Heaven. There will be no need for Purgatory, the new self has been sinless from the "new birth". This new self cannot be "touched" by the evil one. The person we will be for the next ten million years cannot be affected by sin , defilement or temptation and it has already passed out of the judgement of God (John 5:24, Romans 8:1,2). While Satan can destroy your flesh (1 Corinthians 5:5) he cannot touch the real eternal you.(See article on the Inner Man for more detail)

These three powerful realities mean that even though Satan and his demons are at times quite formidable foes they ultimately cannot harm us. They are defeated rebels whose rebellion will come to nothing in the end. Jesus Christ came to destroy ALL the works of the Devil and through His church that task is being completed and will be finally climaxed at the return of Christ. Let's look at how the Devil lost the weapons from his armoury.

(Hebrews 2:14 NKJV) Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

The incarnation gave Jesus the flesh and blood He needed so that through death He could defeat Satan's ability to wield the power of death, keeping the world in fear and abject slavery.

(Colossians 2:13-15 NKJV) And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, {14} having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. {15} Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

(For further expansion on this verse see the article [The Cross In Colossians](#)) These verses in Colossians indicate that the weapon of accusation has been removed. Satan has been disarmed by the forgiveness we have received. He no longer has any basis for accusing us. The Charge sheets are all nailed to the Cross.

Satan's ultimate defeat will be an ignominious vanquishing(Revelation 20:10 NKJV) The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The Christian's Power And Authority Over The Demonic Realm

The Christian's power and authority over the demonic realm is not based on having more "might" than the demonic realm (I do not know of any Christian with the spiritual might anywhere near that of Satan) but on authority. The distinction is important. Joash became king of Israel when he

was 7 years old. Though physically puny and intellectually hardly a match for bad queen Athaliah he had more authority than her or nay of his rivals. He was king. Similarly even a "baby Christian" has more authority in the spiritual realm than the biggest baddest demon on the block. As a small child is more important than the largest fiercest lion so God has deemed that even the least Christian outranks the mightiest power and principality. The authority comes because of their position in the heavenly hierarchy. In God's household we are the "sons" and angels, even the mightiest of them are just servants of God. And sons outrank servants.

(Hebrews 1:14 NKJV) Are they (i.e angels) not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

(1 Corinthians 6:3 NKJV) Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

We have undergone a spiritual transformation as a result of the gospel. In the Old Testament we were " a little lower than the angels", we were like children who, in their minority, have less status than say the butler and are expected to treat the household servants with respect. But with the gospel we have come of age and are now full-fledged sons of God

(John 1:12 NKJV) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

(Galatians 3:24-26 NKJV) Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. {25} But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. {26} For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

This transformation means that a huge change in status has occurred so that inhabitants of the Kingdom of God are truly awesome spiritual beings.

(Ephesians 2:6-7 NKJV) and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, {7} that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

(Ephesians 1:20-21 NKJV) which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, {21} far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

(Matthew 11:11-13 NKJV) "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

We have been raised up with Christ and seated at His right hand in the heavenly realms far above all principalities and power and might and dominion so that Jesus could say of us that the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than the mightiest of the Old Testament saints. This is "amazing grace" and is God displaying His kindness for all the world to see.

Wielding Our Weapons

With this in mind let's look at the authority we have been given and how we are to wield it.

(Luke 9:1 NKJV) Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases.

(Luke 10:1, 17-24 NKJV) After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to....Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." {18} And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. {19} "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. {20} "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." {21} In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. {22} "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." {23} Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; {24} "for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it."

Jesus commissions the twelve and then the seventy to have power over evil..In these verses we discover three things:

1. The power we have over the demonic realm is a gracious gift from Jesus "I give you.."to equip us for ministry (it is in the context of a ministry trip).
2. This power is both offensive give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. and defensive and nothing shall by any means hurt you.
3. That our operating principle is not to be power consciousness but instead humble gratefulness for the grace of God. "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

Binding and loosing....

The Apostle Peter

(Matthew 16:18-19 NKJV) "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. {19} "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Christians in general

(Matthew 18:18-20 NKJV) "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. {19} "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. {20} "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Binding Satan and his demons

(Matthew 12:27-29 NKJV) "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. {28} "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. {29} "Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.

(Luke 11:19-22 NKJV) "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. {20} "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. {21} "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. {22} "But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armour in which he trusted, and divides his spoils

Thus we see that the power to bind and to loose has been delivered over to God's church (Matthew 16:18-19) and can be exercised by any two or three Christians coming together in agreement before God (Matthew 18:18-20). Because of the authority we have been given on the basis of the completed work of Christ we can come against Satan as "someone stronger" and overpower him, binding his activities (Matthew 12:29), neutralising his weapons (Luke 11:22) and taking back the things he claims ownership of. (Luke 11:22).

In The Name Of Jesus

(John 14:13-14 NKJV) "And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. {14} "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

(John 15:16 NKJV) "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you

(Luke 10:17-19 NRSV) The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" {18} He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. {19} See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you.

(Acts 16:18 NRSV) {18} She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

The name of Jesus is the delegated authority of the Son of God. In the Gilbert and Sullivan opera "The Pirates of Penzance" the pirates are arrested and the police say "We charge you yield in Queen Victoria's name...". They confront the pirates in the delegated authority of Her Majesty

Queen Victoria. When we come against Satan and his demons we can say "We charge you yield in the name of Jesus Christ the Son of the Living God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords". The "name that is above every other name" is the ultimate source of authority. Say the pirates in the opera had answered...we resist in the name of the Pirate King..then there would have been a clash of authority (in fact they said "we love our Queen..it was very sarcastic..) In such a clash of authority it is the "highest name" that wins. A queen outranks a counts who outranks knights of the realm that outrank commoners etc. So it is in the heavenly realms. Such is the privilege of Christians that we are allowed to use "the name that is above every other name" when we challenge demonic authority. We come bearing the highest authority in the Universe.(Philippians 2:8-11 NKJV) And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. {9} Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, {10} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, {11} and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So to use the name of Jesus in prayer is a declaration of authority. Even Jewish exorcists found it had enormous authority until it was challenged (Acts 19:13-18). They were operating on "bluff" they were not converted and had no right to use the authority of Jesus name in exorcism. The basis of praying in Jesus name is , first of all, being converted. Jesus name can be used in two ways 1)In declarative mode "In the name of Jesus I command..." e.g. when Peter healed the lame man at the Gate Beautiful(Acts 3:6 NKJV) Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.". Secondly it may be used to request things from God eg, in the verses from John's gospel above"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.". The difference between command mode and request mode is that we command lesser beings but command greater ones. So when addressing a demon, a disease or a mountain or a storm we operate in command mode as sons of God proudly bearing the authority of Jesus name. When addressing the Father or Jesus we do not presume on the authority we have been given but we come humbly as expectant children with every right to ask and to receive but always in wonder and awe for we have a majestic God.

Go boldly into the battle armed with the name of Jesus Christ.

Tearing Down Strongholds

(2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NKJV) For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. {4} For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, {5} casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

Strongholds are built out of thoughts (Gk. noema). When Satan builds a stronghold in a human heart, a church, a nation or across a whole planet he uses thoughts. Thoughts of fear, hatred, envy, enmity and strife. Thoughts that create jealousy and distrust. Thoughts that turn people against God. Thoughts that entice to pride and rebellion. Greedy thoughts, lustful thoughts, evil and cruel thoughts. Brick by brick, thought by thought, constellating together into a demonic aggregate, a wall that blocks out the light and keeps a world in darkness. Note that they are described as "arguments and every high thing that exalts itself". A spiritual stronghold is often characterised by a form of pride known as hubris that exalts itself against God. Herod in the book

of Acts is an example of this when he accepted worship from men and was struck dead by God. (Acts 12:21-23) The Gnostic heresies of Colossae (Colossians 2:8, 18-23) the bizarre "knowledge" of Corinth (1 Corinthians 8:1-3) and the "teaching of The Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6,15) seem also to fit this category. Those with religious delusions are nearly always full of pride and impossible to reason with. That is why Paul calls it a "stronghold" . Bible-based apologetics has its place here on demolishing the "lofty arguments" and replacing them with truth. Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees and Sadducees and His teaching on the Sermon On The Mount were real "stronghold busters" (You have heard it said..but I say. to you..)

Thoughts control emotions and actions. If your doctrine tells you that you are no good then you will feel worthless. If your doctrine demands perfection you will feel constantly guilty. This will lead to actions based on your thoughts and feelings e.g a life of constant striving. A stronghold can become so intense that the person loses touch with reality. To see this in action we need only look at the severely demon-possessed with their destroyed thought life, shattered emotions, lack of contact with reality and constant fear.(Mark 5:1-20) Satan controls us to the extent that he can control our thinking. Yet God has given us weapons against this that are "mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds"so there is no problem with our weapons ! Lets learn to use them. The weapons are listed in Eph 6:10-18.

(Ephesians 6:10-18 NKJV) Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. {11} Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. {12} For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. {13} Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. {14} Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, {15} and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; {16} above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. {17} And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; {18} praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints;

The strongholds of Satan are pulled down by people whose lives show moral integrity and faith and who know the word of God and can pray in the Spirit at all times. It is a soldierly combat. For example say Satan has established a stronghold of lustful thoughts in your mind. You need to pull down those lustful concepts about the opposite sex through a thorough study of God's word and knowing what the human body is, and is not, meant for . (see article [Your Body Is A Temple Of The Holy Spirit](#)) then you need to fill your mind with things that are noble and lovely and true (Phil 4:8)) praying in Jesus name for God to demolish this stronghold in your life. If the stronghold is in your church - say a spirit of parsimony and greed then you may need to teach on generosity and giving prayerfully wielding the sword of the Spirit until the false concepts of stewardship have come tumbling down and the church is renewed in faith. If the stronghold is in your nation you may need to debate publicly, use the media and refute the lies that keep people bound while guarding yourself and your own life from the counter-attacks that will come. As I said earlier our weapons are "mighty in God" they are mazing weapons if wielded rightly. Do not be intimidated the authority of Jesus and the "big guns" of God's weaponry are on our side.

A Tactical Armoury

The following table summarises the ways Satan attacks and the way we should respond to these attacks. I have called it a tactical armoury since it tells us which weapon to select for the battle. You may notice that many of the Scriptures for Satan's tactics also contain the remedy for it close by or in the same verse! God is wise.

Scripture Ref	Satan's Trick	Our Victory
John 10;10	Steal, Kill, Destroy	Take hold of the abundant life in Christ
1 Timothy 3:6,7	Pride leading to condemnation	Wise appointing of those in spiritual authority
Rev 12:10,11	Accusation	The blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony..testifying to what the blood of the Lamb has done for you.
Luke 4:1-13	Temptation through misapplied Scriptures that seem to validate fleshly desires for physical appetite, specialness to God and power.	Knowing the Scriptures so well that you can spot the lie and counter it with a more appropriate Scripture.
1 Timothy 4:1-7	Deceptive false teachings	Reject fanciful tales, teach the Scriptures, sound doctrine, thankfulness, prayer
James 2:17-26 Matthew 7:15-28	False assurance of salvation	A godly life of good works based on Jesus teaching is evidence of having true faith.
Deut 7:25, 18:10-13, 32:7, Lev 19:31 Isaiah 47:13, Acts 19:19 1 Corinthians 10:14	Ensnarement in the occult , divination astrology, and the worship of false gods.	Destroy all objects associated with it. Complete disassociation from it.
2 Corinthians 10:3-5 Ephesians 6:10-21 Romans 8:4-6,.12:1,2 Philippians 4:8 Colossians 3:1-4.	Strongholds made of thoughts that oppose God -especially prideful thoughts and unbelief. These thoughts can control the life and emotions of a person, church or country.	Biblical apologetics, renewing the mind. Setting the mind on the things of the Spirit Use of our spiritual armour combined with faith, the word of God, prayer in the Spirit and humble submission.
Matthew 23:17,19,24,26	Blinding the minds of unbelievers.	Turning to Christ. Having a willingness to

Luke 4:18 John 9;39 Romans 10:7-10,25 2Corinthians 3:14-17, 4:3,4 Ephesians 4:17-24, 1 John 2:10,11	Especially those who stubbornly refuse Christ.	accept the light and seek it further. Renewal of the mind. Loving your brother in Christ Good teaching and intercession can "open the eyes of the blind".
1 Corinthians 10:14-22	Religious ceremonies that appear "cultural" but are in fact demonic.	Awareness of the spiritual realities that undergird such things. Not participating in them.
Matthew 12:27-29, 16:19, 18:18-20, Luke 11:19-22	Unrestrained Satanic activity. Spiritual wickedness in the heavenly realms. Spiritual "strong men" occupying a person, place or nation.	Binding and loosing in Jesus name which may often have a corporate dimension to it.
Matthew 9:32-34 Luke 13:11-16 Matthew 8;16,17 Mark 9:14-29	Disease caused by demons (not all disease is meant)	Healing. Prayer and fasting. Faith. Use of command prayers in the name of Jesus.
Luke 10:17-19 Acts 16:16-18 Mark 5:1-20, 9:14-29 Luke 11:20-26 Acts 5;16, 8:7	Demon-possession	Use of the name of Jesus with authority. Command the demons to leave. Sometimes it may help to identify the demons. Then the delivered person must live a Holy Spirit filled life. Faith and prayer are necessary and sometimes fasting.

Conclusion *I hope you are feeling a bit more confident in spiritual warfare by now. Please answer the following revision questions. They will help you learn the material.*

- What was one of the purposes in Christ's coming as a human being? (1 John 3:8 , Hebrews 2:14)
What victories did He win? (Eph 4:8 , Colossians 2:13-15, John 16:33, 1 John 5:4)
What change took place in the heavenly status of believers between the time of John the Baptist and the day of Pentecost? (Mt 11:11-13)
Are Christians greater or lesser than angels in authority? (1 Cor 6:3, Heb 2:14, Eph 2;6,7))
What is the importance of authority in spiritual warfare? (See section on the power and authority of the Christian)
What are strongholds made of? How do we combat them? (2 Cor 10:3-5)
What are the two ways of using the name of Jesus? (Acts 3:6, 16:18 John 14;13,14, 15:16)
What is meant by binding and loosing? (Matt 12:27-29, 16:19, 18:18-20)
Why can the demonic realm "not touch us"? (1 John 4:4, 5:18)
What is the right tactic for combatting involvement in the occult? (See table above)

Prosperity and Poverty In The Urban Context

Urban ministry is often focussed on helping the urban poor. The key concepts of poverty and prosperity are frequently misunderstood and this article focuses on providing a biblical elucidation of the question of poverty as applied to the urban poor. Thus the following article answers the following five questions:

- a. What is the nature of the question of poverty? What are we asking?
- b. What is prosperity?
- c. How is prosperity generated?
- d. How is that further conditioned by Kingdom interests?
- e. How does that operate in the urban context.

Two Major Reframes Of The Poverty Question

Reframing the Question: Notably missing from this article is the problem-focussed question "why are they poor?" The question being asked in this article is rather the solution-focussed question - "How can the poor be made to prosper?" Thus this is a solution-focused biblical approach to poverty alleviation. When a problem-focussed approach is taken to poverty alleviation among the urban poor there is a whole host of undesirable outcomes. A long list of people and institutions to blame is generated, the poor are told they are poor because either they are victims or they lack values, useless emotions from outrage to hopelessness are generated and those involved become immersed in endless conferences, papers and analysis with little real and tangible transformation of the live of the poor occurring. Two questions are much more effective in helping alleviate poverty. Firstly "How are they finding ways to prosper already? What are they doing that is working for them? How can they do more of it?" This takes advantage of their resourcefulness and acknowledges their informal economy and empowers them giving their current solutions some dignity. Secondly there is the question "What else can be done to help them to prosper? How can business and economic opportunities be generated? How can employment outcomes be increased? How can we find access to cheap capital, training, resources and markets? This unleashes a whole host of solutions that can genuinely create Shalom for the urban poor.

Reframing The Expected Answer: When the question "why are they poor?" is asked a whole list of injustices are brought into view so that the "solution for poverty" seems to be legal action, mass action and even terrorism. However they are not solutions at all. Legal action, mass action and terrorism have not made the poor become rich or even middle class. Pursuing justice has not solved the problem of poverty. In fact it has often made it worse. While issues of justice for the poor are real they need to be placed in a completely different framework. When we ask the question "How can the poor be made to prosper" we get the biblical answer "By giving them the power to make wealth.". Those solutions that have tackled the issue of "the power to make wealth" - such as the Grammen Bank in Bangladesh have been positive and successful in alleviating poverty. The poor have prospered. Their lives have been transformed. While the solution to poverty is money it is not handouts or windfall cash that is needed but rather the ability to create wealth on a consistent basis with dignity and purpose within a righteous and just lifestyle. When we see the issue of the poor lacking the power to make wealth then justice issues are included but in a far more constructive framework such as "we are blocked in access to markets - lets take legal action so we can open up an opportunity for wealth creation".

WHAT IS PROSPERITY?

Prosperity Is The Physical Manifestation Of The Blessing Of God.

Prosperity in the Old Testament is condition by a group of words in the SHLM family such as Shalom and Shalem - meaning peace and wholeness respectively. Those blessed by God experience Shalom and those

whose minds are faithfully fixed on God receive double or perfect Shalom (Isaiah 26:3). However there is no Shalom for the wicked. (Isaiah 48:22, 57:21). Shalom is thus the physical manifestation of the blessing of God.

The underlying picture of this word family is one of rural bliss. The righteous man and his godly wife have seven strong sons and seven beautiful daughters, the sun is shining, the birds are singing, a bountiful harvest is in the field, a warm fire burns in the hearth, the land is at peace, the family is respected, the poor are taken care of out of their bounty, there is joy and singing and gladness of heart, the commandments of God are kept and even taught to others, the blessing of God is felt in every part of their lives and "God is in Heaven and all's right with the world". Prosperity is thus a comprehensive wholeness of life that radiates from the blessing of God to those who fear Him and abide in His commandments. Blessing and prosperity are first corporate before they are individual. It is in the blessing of God on the nation and the city that the individual finds blessing. Even the righteous man does not enjoy great prosperity when God is judging the nation as a whole. The classic example of this is Baruch, Jeremiah's servant in Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian invasion. He longed for some prosperity but was told (Jer 45:2 NRSV) Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: You said, "Woe is me! The LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest."... And you, do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for I am going to bring disaster upon all flesh, says the LORD; but I will give you your life as a prize of war in every place to which you may go." Baruch's "prosperity" was simply being allowed to live while others around him died of plague, famine and war. It was the prosperity of the escaping refugee who "makes it". Thus prosperity has a social component that can place severe limitations on individual prosperity. This will be a key factor when we come to examining prosperity in the urban context.

Because prosperity was seen as the physical manifestation of the blessing of God there is a very close and even absolute link in Scripture between righteousness and prosperity. Job's question to God was basically "I have been righteous therefore it is not just that I should not be prospering but instead be suffering". The times when the righteous suffered or the wicked prospered were major challenges to this world-view. Differences between the righteousness of an individual and their wealth were seen as anomalous. The prosperity of the wicked needed to be explained and a major source of personal grief. (Psalms 37, 69 and 73). This absolute linking of righteousness and prosperity persisted into the New Testament times so that the disciples were astonished that the rich young ruler, who seemed to have so much of the blessing of God on his life, could not enter the Kingdom. And cried out "Who then can be saved?". (Matt19:23-25). Thus a major source of spiritual grief among Third World pastors of the urban poor is their own intense poverty. They ask the searching question "I have served you and been righteous - why then cannot I at least have a car or send my children to a good university or prosper in my finances?" This deep sense of God's injustice feeds a bitterness and disappointment of spirit that can lead to the exploitation of apparently wealthy Western missionaries or even the developing of deep resentment towards them. Prosperity is not just an economic problem but a problem of God's justice towards them. When this justice is long delayed common responses include: loss of faith in God and adoption of a skeptical liberal theology, radicalization, adoption of the prosperity gospel, "tent-making" that is actually a distraction from ministry, study courses involving overseas scholarships, going into "business" which is often ill-founded multi-level marketing schemes, and giving up the ministry in defeat, bitterness and utter dejection. All of the above can be avoided by a simple reframing of the topic. Prosperity is not an issue of justice. It is an issue of power.

Wealth is generated by those who have the power to make wealth. Wealth is fundamentally given and created, not earned or deserved (Deuteronomy 8:18 NKJV) "And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who **gives you power to get wealth.**" As we shall see later "the power to get wealth" is given by God in a specific way that is - the righteous person receives wisdom from God then diligently implements it and it is this diligent wise implementation of wisdom and knowledge that generates wealth.

Prosperity Is Totally Under The Control Of The Sovereignty Of God

This was Nebuchadnezzar's hardest lesson. On the rooftops of Babylon he cried out "Is this not might Babylon which I have made?" For his hubris he was punished by God after his sanity and his kingdom was restored he said:

(Daniel 4:34-37 NKJV)and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation. {35} All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?" ...Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.

God is sovereign over the most might of rulers and "does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth". God is able to influence both position in life and prosperity in life. The following five verses clearly testify to God's absolute control over the financial, social and political realms that influence prosperity: He gives them to whomever He wishes.

Riches , Honour, Greatness and Strength

(1 Chronicles 29:11-12 NKJV) {11} Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, The power and the glory, The victory and the majesty; For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, And You are exalted as head over all. {12} Both riches and honor come from You, And You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; In Your hand it is to make great And to give strength to all.

Political Position

(Daniel 4:17 NKJV) ..In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.'

Riches, Wealth and The Ability To Enjoy Them

(Ecclesiastes 5:19 NKJV) As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.

The Entire Financial Realm

(Haggai 2:8 NKJV) 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts.

An Abundance For Every Good Work

(2 Corinthians 9:8 NKJV) And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have ***an abundance for every good work***.

God is the totally sovereign giver of wealth and honour . He rules in the kingdom of men. His will prevails on Earth. He gives prosperity to whomever he pleases including the lowliest of men. He gives not only wealth but the power to enjoy it. For the urban worker He makes grace abound so the we may have "all sufficiency in all things" and "an abundance for every good work".

This is not a fatalistic but rather an optimistic view. Since God controls all wealth and honour and since God cares for the poor then we have a powerful ally in helping the urban poor! To take these verses to mean "well that is that then, the poor have an allotted station in life, its poverty, God has not given them wealth, so be it" is to deny God's bias to the poor so evident in the Scriptures.

If God loves the poor and is in control of the financial realm why is there still poverty? Because like as in many things God generally works through people and processes. In Scripture He has revealed ways to create wealth

and shown people how to access the power to make wealth that He provides. We shall discuss that at length in part two. That is one factor. The other factor is that there is a spiritual realm that greatly influences our prosperity.

Curses and Blessings Have Great Influence On Our Power To Generate Wealth

In Genesis 1 we find God's initial blessings on mankind bestowed three things that greatly affect our prosperity: Fruitfulness, Multiplication and Authority to "rule over". Fruitfulness is the proper expression of our inner nature. Fruitfulness includes the crops in the field and the seven strong sons and enjoying the work of your hands. The opposite of fruitfulness is barrenness and sterility, dried up crops, a life that peters out and goes nowhere. Multiplication is exponential increase. It is seeing your abundance produce more abundance and then yet greater abundance. Its classic illustration is how Jacob got large herds even though his wages were "the spotted and the speckled". The exponential multiplication of his flocks was a clear sign that God was with him and that Laban was unrighteous. The opposite of multiplication is frustration and futility. By Authority to "rule over" we have dignity, headship, authority, the ability to be ascendant, to be the head not the tail, to be victorious and to maintain our boundaries in peace. Its opposite is being humbled, despised, invaded, to eat the dirt, to be crushed and humiliated, to be unable to rise.

Countering this in Genesis 3 we see the first curses in operation. The very opposite is brought to bear by God the woman is made unfruitful, the man is made to work in futility and the serpent is told he will eat the dirt and eventually be crushed in utter defeat. Prosperity was denied. The power to enjoy Shalom was taken away. Thus blessings are a spiritual influence that brings about fruitfulness, multiplication and authority. Curses are a spiritual influence that bring barrenness, futility and humiliation. Curses and blessings thus "tilt the playing field" and make it either easy or difficult to make wealth. Because the physical world is undergirded by the spiritual world a change in spiritual reality can profoundly affect human prosperity.

The close tie between cursing and blessing and national prosperity is clearly delineated in Deuteronomy 26-28 where the nation would be blessed and prosperous if it obeyed God and destroyed in futility if it served idols instead. The nation's power to make wealth thus depended on whether it was blessed or cursed by God. In the book of Haggai the curse on the nation (Haggai 1:5-11, 2:16,17) that was leading to economic ruin was removed when the people obeyed the prophets and laid the foundation on the Lord's temple (Haggai 2:18,19). Then prosperity was rapidly restored. God's claim in Haggai is that "the silver and gold are mine". The power to make wealth is thus contingent on a spiritual universe - which we know is in conflict.

Prosperity Is Opposed by Evil - Including Satan Who Comes To Steal and Kill and Destroy

Jesus defines the mission of Satan as "To steal, kill and destroy" (John 10:10). In Scripture Satan is portrayed as destroying the prosperity of God's servants such as Job, unleashing persecution and afflicting people with various diseases including mental illness. Satan also lays claim to the commercial and political realms falsely boasting to Jesus that he could give them to whoever he wished (Luke 4:5,6). In the "King of Tyre" discourse Satan is seen as "wise in trade" (Ezekiel 28:5). Indeed there is a kind of demonic and godless prosperity that is purely financial and does not participate in God's Shalom. At the end of history the choice will be between entering a Satanic world of trade and investment and maintaining faith in God (Revelation 13:16-18). For expansions on this theme see the article "The Market and The Kingdom" later in this book. The reality of these principalities and powers can be readily seen in that some of the fiercest and most irrational persecution these days is directed at Christians who help the poor successfully and thus break some of Satan's society-wide strongholds. (Proverbs 31:8,9). Thus success in urban ministry means that the principalities and powers behind social evils need to be addressed as these powers can greatly afflict the power to make wealth of a city or nation. The battle is not only political but spiritual. In fact there are two spiritual battles here, Firstly is the battle to stop the Satanic destruction of the bodies, minds and prosperity of the urban poor - opposing the "steal, kill and destroy" aspect of Satanic rule. This requires a strong commitment to pastoral care, healing and

vigorous intercession by urban workers. The second and more sophisticated battle is against the Prince of Tyre aspects . Against the power of trade turned evil. Systemic injustices, drug trafficking, piracy, the effects of globalization and currency trading and usurious rates of interest can be seen as based in a power greater than mere human ingenuity. This requires a strong prophetic and political stance by urban workers. Success is possible. Many of the Scripture passages that most vividly picture success and prosperity start with the phrase "a new heavens and a new earth".(Isaiah 65:17, 66:2, 2Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1). This implies the heavens have been cleansed of demonic influence. Under the new purified heavens demons no longer torment people's minds or afflict their bodies. The principalities and powers in the heavenly realms have been totally defeated and are now bound so that the heavens are "new" and the blessing of God to mankind can flow freely and without let or hindrance. The power to make wealth is unleashed under the new heavens and great length of life and material wealth is promised in Isaiah 65. It is notable that during times of revival, when the heavens are renewed, there quickly flows correction of systemic injustices (e.g. slavery was corrected by Wilberforce during the time of John Wesley) as well as a correction of social evils. National prosperity quickly follows.

PART TWO - HOW THE POWER TO MAKE WEALTH AND ENJOY PROSPERITY WORKS

Prosperity Flows To Those Who Fear God and Keep His Commandments

The relationship to God is primary as it is He who causes the blessings to flow and grants the power to make wealth. Shalom includes relational peace as well as financial prosperity for "he causes even their enemies to be at peace with them" (Proverbs 16:7). The prosperity of the righteous is stable and develops continually (Psalm 1) continuing even into old age when the normal power to make wealth has departed. (Psalm 92:12-14) and is a total prosperity unalloyed by evil. (Proverbs 10:22 NIV) "The blessing of the LORD brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it." The life course or "paths" of God-fearing and the righteous are "made smooth" and directed by God (Proverbs 3:5,6 16:1-3) and the fear of the Lord and humility bring wealth and honour (Proverbs 22:4). The urban church should become the centre of economic renewal as the place where people find righteousness and the blessing of God to change their circumstances. Introduction to the transforming power of Christ and right relationship to God is the very basis of Shalom. See also *Proverbs 3:5,6; 33; 4:22; 5:21; 10:6,7,11,16,17,22; 27; 11:16; 12:20,28; 13:21; 16:7,22,4, 28:10; 29:18*

Prosperity Comes To Those Who Seek Wisdom and Understanding

It is said of Wisdom -"in her right hand are riches and honour". Wisdom results in righteousness (tsedek) and peace (shalom). Wisdom is characterised by accepting instruction from God and from the righteous and by a readiness to be disciplined for one's good. Wisdom acts wisely in all aspects of life and the outcome is wealth, honour and a long life. The opposite is folly which is our own proud, stubborn and angry way of acting, independent of the wisdom of others or of God. The result of this folly is sin, trouble and turmoil. Wisdom comes from God but is not exclusively religious. The instruction of the Lord can include craftsmanship (Exodus 31:3-5), selection of the most appropriate technology (Isaiah 28:23-29) and Joseph's economic wisdom in rationing during the famine. (Genesis 41:29-38) was seen, even by Pharaoh as being from the Spirit of God. (Genesis 41:38). Wisdom comes at a human level through diligent inquiry and at a spiritual level through prayer so that great scientists such as Newton and Pascal were also men of prayer. In particular wisdom comes through the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:1,2; 28:23-29; 1 John 2:20,27; 1 Cor 2:9-16) and cannot be found in any earthly location like silver or gold can (Job 28). Wisdom and knowledge are vital to wealth creation especially as we enter an information economy. A patent, a technological edge, a better piece of software can be a powerful tool for wealth creation. Wisdom goes to those who seek her diligently and transformation of urban communities needs to involve assisting them in the search for the wisdom and knowledge they need to be able to create wealth. Other verses include: *Proverbs 3:1,2,6,13,16-18,22; 4:10,13,22,23,26; 8:18,32,34; 9:11; 11:14, 13:10,14; 14:30; 15:24; 16:20-22, 19:8; 20:15; 24:6.*

Prosperity Comes To Those Who Are Diligent

Wisdom needs implementation in order to produce wealth and prosperity. Proverbs 21:5 says "The plans of the diligent surely lead to abundance, but everyone who is hasty only comes to want." Diligence takes wisdom and carefully and energetically implements it to bring about prosperity. Diligence and God's blessing work together. Without diligence our blessings are not implemented and the person remains poor. God seems to believe in the saying "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." The main way God imparts the ability to prosper is by giving us the wisdom we need to succeed and encouraging us to work hard. It needs to be said that hard work and diligence on their own are insufficient. In the absence of God's blessing hard work will produce only frustration and vanity - see the section on curses and blessings.. Part of diligence is using "the ox" to multiply your effort – using the powerful technology of the day. Other verses include: *Proverbs 8:17, 10:4, 11:27, 12:24, 12:27, 13:4, 14:4; 21:5,*

Prosperity Comes Through Well Ordered Relationships And Appropriate Personal Boundaries.

As John Donne wrote "No man is an island, do not send to ask for whom the bells tolls, it tolls for thee." Proverbs is explicit in the kinds of relationships we are to develop, the kinds of relationships we are to avoid and the how these relationships should be ordered. Apart from the relationship with God, there are relationships of respect with "the King" representing government and with parents. Filial relationships include the brother and the neighbour and are to be carefully maintained. There are general social relationships such as with "the poor" who are to receive help and compassion. Among the most important relationships are family relationships with our wife/husband, children and parents which are to be ordered out of fear of God. They are to be characterised by a proper order and godly simplicity. Discipline, honour and respect are common themes in Proverbs. Our primary relationships are to be filled with teaching and the imparting of wisdom. Generosity and honesty are important qualities when dealing with brothers and neighbours. We also have relationships with the City and the wise and righteous person is a blessing to their society and is generally in turn honoured by it. Wise communication is seen as a key to good relationships. The economic impact of these relationships and the importance of appropriate boundaries is illustrated over and over again from a person ruined because they angered the King or were enticed by a harlot . Other people had reduced power to make wealth because they employed a fool or sluggard to their cost. In particular relationships with the wicked, the violent or the immoral are likely to cause a severe loss of Shalom. Personal relationships in the family have great impact on the power to produce wealth -or in more modern terms a divorce is expensive! The good wife however is an economic asset. (Proverbs 31). Going surety for a friend is cautioned against and maintaining good boundaries is seen as a path to prosperity. The power to make wealth can be greatly increased if gracious speech, high quality work and faithful service brings the person to the attention of the King and others with the power to help (Proverbs 14:35, 16:13, 22:11,29).

In urban ministry the building of empowered community and business relationships, access to government agencies and the restoration of primary family relationships all contribute to the power to generate wealth in the community. Teaching urban youth to maintain Christian boundaries and to avoid the violent street gangs and illicit sexual relationships is not just good health and morality - it is also good economics. While superficially attractive these gangs detract from the Shalom of the community and severely limit the economic prospects there especially of their members. Learning to communicate appropriately with authority is a major skill to be imparted in urban ministry and there is much good biblical teaching on it. In many communities the ordering of relationships to some degree of functionality is in fact the primary economic task. While these relationships are dysfunctional all other economic efforts will be dissipated and Shalom will not eventuate. Other verses include: *Proverbs 1:10-15; 3:31; 3:28-32; 4:1; 5:1-11; 6:1-5, 20;10:1; 11:11,15,29;13:24; 14:21; 15:4,20; 16:7,21,28; 17:6,18, 19:9,13,18,26; 20:2,20; 21:9; 22:9,10; 22:6, 22-25; 23:13,15,22; 24:21,28; 25:6-9,18;26:18,19; 27:10,14; 28:7,20; 29:3,5,15,22-25; 30:17; 31:27.*

Prosperity Is Accumulated By Paying Attention To The Means of Production And By Cautious Expenditure

The wise person pays attention to their ability to create wealth by 'knowing well the condition of their flocks' (Proverbs 27:23) and even making sure their fields are producing well before building their house. (Proverbs 24:27). Making sure you have the power to make wealth is a high priority for the person who lives wisely. The sluggard pays little attention to his fields and means of production so his poverty "comes as an armed man" and despoils him. (Proverbs 24:30ff) The love of small luxuries and pleasures can fritter away wealth on a barely noticeable daily basis and prevent the accumulation of a powerful capital base. (Proverbs 21:17) Wealth can be squandered - especially by loose living (Proverbs 21:20, 29:3). Injustice can destroy the potential of the poor to create wealth and structural reform may be necessary to enable the poor to use their means of production efficiently. (Proverbs 13:23 NKJV) "Much food is in the fallow ground of the poor, And for lack of justice there is waste." Paying attention to one's ability to create wealth can be as simple as making sure that you are in a good job and that your skills are up to date or it may be as complex as running a major business. The urban worker needs to be able to help people find and retain jobs and help them see the things they can constructively do to make wealth. Wealth creation has to gradually become a higher priority than expending money on pleasures. Budgeting skills will help some to control expenditure. The urban minister should be prepared to demonstrate the economic consequences of fast food, smoking, the excessive consumption of alcohol and the cost of nightclubs, drugs and prostitution. One of the spiritual consequences of the Wesleyan revival was precisely this - the poor gained the ability to earn money, to save money and to control expenditure on alcohol. This is credited with staving off an economically-based revolution in England similar to the French revolution.

Prosperity Is Retained By Righteous Living

(Proverbs 13:22-23 NKJV) "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, But the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous." Inter-generational wealth is based on righteous living and inherited blessing while the wealth of the wicked is transitory at best, in fact the wealth of the wicked is stored up for the righteous. (Proverbs 13:11,22). Habitual righteousness and wisdom protect the possessor from the foolish acts that destroy wealth such as giving into the temptation to be involved in a shady business deal. Furthermore righteousness brings God's favour and the three-fold blessing of fruitfulness, multiplication and authority discussed earlier. The wealth of the righteous grows steadily and is still with them in old age while the wealth of the wicked has "taken wings" and flown away. (Proverbs 23:5). By making wealth a secondary concern to obeying God the wise and righteous person actually ends up better off. Any study of wealthy families in Europe will show this to be true time and time again.

PART THREE - KINGDOM PERSPECTIVES ON PROSPERITY

With the New Testament the power to make material wealth is superseded in importance by gaining the power to have treasure in heaven. The pathway to economic prosperity is the same and still involves blessing from God. However blessing is different from salvation. Today the Jews are still blessed, however they are not saved. The emphasis moves to obtaining "every spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 1:3) and to rewards such as "the crown of life". Even in the Old Testament wealth was secondary and temporary and it is often repeated that wealth would not save on the Day of Judgment but that righteousness preserved its possessor. (Proverbs 11:4) . However this was not prominent and it took some very firm teaching to shift the emphasis of the newly formed Christian church from pursuing material wealth to pursuing spiritual wealth. The change in emphasis was drastic - see article "The Rich and The Poor In The New Testament" ;later in this book.

Prosperity Is Increased By Being Content With What We Have

In the NT we have the counter-cultural proposition that prosperity is not increased through selfish ambition but through contentment. (Hebrews 13, James 3:13-18, 1 Timothy 6:5-10). Jesus warns his listeners against "every form of greed" (Luke 12:15) and said that we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Matthew 6:24);

Paul twice calls greed idolatry (Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 3:5) and maintains that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil and causes us to wander away from the faith and "be pierced with many a pang" (1 Timothy 6:5-10). On the other hand contentment is the grateful acceptance of God's good gifts and prompts Him to give even more because we have received His gifts with faith and joy and not despised His goodness by grumbling. (Matthew 13:12, 25:29; Luke 6:38, Philippians 4:11; Hebrews 13:5)

Character Has Priority Over Prosperity

Proverbs makes it clear that while prosperity is important the real goal of life is a godly character. (Proverbs 16:19, 19:1,22 28:6; 30:8,9) Thus character takes priority over prosperity e.g. "it is better to be poor than a liar". Even in the Old Testament there were some circumstances where it was better not to prosper such as when Abraham refused the spoils from the King of Sodom saying "lest it be said that Sodom made me rich..". Character and riches are not mutually exclusive. Many on both testaments were wealthy e.g. Job, Abraham, David, Barnabas and Philemon but each of these people put Christ before their wealth. In the New Testament the priority of character over prosperity is absolute and part of the calling of each of the disciples involved a renunciation of wealth. The rich young ruler walked away after being asked to sell all and Peter complained "But what about us Lord - we have left all to follow you. What then will there be for us?".(Matthew 19:27). In the New Testament prosperity is allowable but very much secondary and renunciation is seen as normative.

Prosperity May Be Temporarily Set Aside For A Higher (Redemptive) Purpose

Timothy is told "to suffer hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" and not to get entangled in the things of this world. (2 Timothy 2:3,4). This is typical of those who set aside "normal" levels of prosperity in order to pursue the things of the Kingdom. Paul continues to Timothy: *(2 Tim 2:9,10 NRSV) for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.* Jesus Himself set aside His heavenly glory in order to minister to us. *(2 Cor 8:9 NRSV) For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.* However such setting aside of prosperity is for a "short time" only. Just as Job had his prosperity restored and Jesus rose from the dead to sit at the right hand of the Father so the servant of God receives a "crown of righteousness" plus his or her previously foregone prosperity (I think in the Millennium) *(Mat 19:28,29 NKJV) So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.*

Those called by Christ to urban ministry must undergo a "giving up of all things" especially the comfort and safety of the suburbs. The urban worker may never enjoy the same level of prosperity as the cohort she graduated with. Urban churches pay less and incarnation into neighbourhood networks can be costly in every way. They have given up their power to make wealth in order to serve Christ. When Peter left his fishing nets he left the thing that made him rich and his earthly power to make wealth. Even after Pentecost he would say to the lame man "silver and gold have I none but such as I have give I thee..". Paul described himself and the other apostles as "dishonored., the scum of the earth, the off-scouring of all things, like men condemned to die.." (1 Cor 4:10-14). The writer to the Hebrews describes the "urban workers" of faith as not seeking a city here but a city that God has prepared for them! (Hebrews 11).

If That's The Case Should We Just Let Them Be "Poor and Spiritual?"

The New Testament demonstrates a deep concern for the poor and regards poverty as evil. God's great desire is to prosper people. The primary prosperity is the prosperity we enjoy in redemption. The secondary prosperity is wealth and the Shalom of the OT. In Heaven we will enjoy luxury as well as glory. Spiritual and material prosperity abound in the Kingdom. Jesus is honoured with BOTH riches and glory in Heaven.

(Revelation 5:12).

It is not appropriate to ask the urban poor to renounce wealth. You can only renounce what you already have. Thus it was because Christ was rich that his renunciation and earthly poverty had significance. (2 Corinthians 8:9, Philippians 2:5-11). We are to help the urban poor inherit salvation. We are also to help them acquire the power to make wealth and defeat poverty - which may be an intense spiritual battle. If some among them wish to lay down their new found wealth in order to serve God sacrificially then we are to encourage that also. However that is the last phase - not the first.

PART FOUR - APPLICATION TO URBAN MINISTRY

What then is the proper balance in helping the urban poor? :

1. Shalom needs to be defined to include spiritual, relational and corporate aspects.
2. The urban poor should BOTH find riches in Christ through evangelism and discipleship and be given the power to make wealth and enjoy prosperity.
3. However wealth and prosperity is a secondary good. The end to be aimed at is Christ-likeness and New Testament Shalom.
4. Poverty must be reframed from being primarily an issue of injustice.
5. Instead poverty must be seen as an issue of lacking the power to make wealth.
6. Necessary structural reforms and issues of justice can be incorporated into this biblical framework..
7. The urban poor should be incorporated into networks of relationships that truly empower them.
8. Creation of Shalom in the way relationships are handled in the community should be seen as foundational to building true and lasting prosperity.
9. The urban poor should be instructed in managing their relational boundaries to avoid toxic and disempowering relationships including entanglement in crime.
10. The community should become a learning organisation that seeks and finds the practical wisdom and knowledge that most empowers them to create wealth.
11. This includes being exposed to and participating in models of education that are of the highest utility.
12. The community should actively seek access to wealth, wealth generating ideas and technology.
13. The urban worker should facilitate the efforts of the community in gaining access to markets, acquiring appropriate technology and finding loans at low interest rates.
14. It is not uncommon for communities to be inexperienced in business affairs and to initially lack the judgement, wisdom and prudence required for success. In extreme cases they do not even know they need these qualities. The Christian worker needs to make them familiar with the biblical teaching on these attributes and to put them in contact with those who do have them and have the desire to impart business wisdom to the urban poor
15. A caveat here - most Christian workers think they have more business wisdom than they actually possess. While the Christian worker can impart the biblical principles an experienced Christian businessman or CPA is often much better at helping with the actual running of the business.
16. Product excellence is one of the keys Proverbs gives to wealth creation. Community-based enterprises must only enter those markets where they can produce goods of reasonable quality. This principle of excellence is frequently neglected when hopeful urban workers encourage their communities to go into programming and computer based businesses in which the urban poor are at a hopeless disadvantage. Food, clothing and public transport are less glamorous but generally more realistic areas for commercial success.
17. There may be a need to develop an appropriate work ethic among the urban poor. See the article "Is There Any Such Thing As A Christian Work Ethic?" later in this book.
18. The urban worker needs to encourage diligence by creating small successes that show that hard work pays off slowly building faith in the utility of hard work and diligence. It is not necessary to create a false dichotomy between "working smart" and "working hard". That is not a biblical distinction. The

biblical injunction is "Get smart - then work hard".

19. Attention should be given to the spiritual dimensions of their existence and to the powers, principalities, blessings and curses that affect their community and which also affect them as individuals.
20. Urban workers need to challenge the principalities and powers in two domains. Firstly the domain of despoiling the poor ("steal, kill and destroy) through pastoral care and intercession and local church based initiatives. Secondly in the domain of unjust systems of trade through prophetic stances and economic and political initiatives generally as an expert individual, umbrella organisation or NGO.

Practical Prayer Evangelism

Praying for the lost works.

In 1993 I led a bible study series with a group of twenty or so rather boisterous University students who asked to be taught about prayer. In the process we had a book for the prayer points with three columns, Request, Date Entered, and Date Answered. They started praying for their friends salvation, and within a couple of weeks the converts started rolling in, two or three a week, and often ending up at the bible study. Every person “put in the book” for prayer came to Christ, and naturally enough the prayer journal became known as the “book of life”. If memory serves me correctly about 25 people came to Christ, through prayer alone, that semester. Prayer worked, even with inexperienced believers, who hated witnessing, and people were saved.

What are they key ingredients to such successful prayer evangelism?

1. A group of believers gathered in unity. (Matthew 18:19,20)
2. Being taught in how to pray. (Luke 11:1)
3. And praying in faith. (Matthew 21:22, Mark 11:24)
4. For the lost. (Romans 10:1-3, 1 Timothy 2:1-8)
5. Who are their “neighbours”. (Luke 10;25-37)
6. Lovingly by name. (Exodus 33:17, Isaiah 43:1)
7. Regularly and persistently. (Luke 18:1-8)
8. And recording the answers and building faith. (1 Chronicles 16:4)

That said, why does prayer evangelism work?

- Prayer wrestles against the powers and principalities (Ephesians 6:10-20)
- That keep people in spiritual bondage (Ephesians 2:1-4, 4:17-19)
- And which can deceive them away from the truth (1 Timothy 4:1-4)
- Prayer also opens people’s spiritual eyes. (Colossians 1:9, Ephesians 1:17-19)
- And assists with the Holy Spirit’s work of convicting them of sin, righteousness and judgment. (John 16:8)

For more on How To Pray For The Lost go to <http://www.aibi.ph/articles/praylost.htm>

How then can a local church or home church undertake prayer evangelism?

Firstly teach your people how to pray. (Luke 11:1) Christians generally have to be taught in how to pray. It is a process of learning about who we are in Christ, our spiritual authority, and how the promises of God can be claimed in faith. Free material on how to pray can be found at <http://www.aibi.ph/prayer/>

Get a Prayer Journal and use it. Faith is built when we see prayer answered. It is good to record the deeds of the Lord. So get a large notebook and rule it into three columns, a wide column for the prayer request and two narrower columns for date entered and date answered. Make the Prayer Journal part of every prayer meeting and weekly bible study for that group.

Pray regularly and persistently. Pray each week at the bible study or home church meeting. Pray for all the unanswered items, each week. Within four to six weeks you should start seeing people saved.

Pray in faith and expect answers. (Matthew 21:22, Mark 11:24)The Scriptures tell us to pray

“believing we have received”, faith and holy expectation reach Heaven.

Pray lovingly by name for people. Names are important to God who “knows us by name” and “redeems us by name” (Isaiah 43:1 Exodus 33:17)) and for some reason have great power in the spiritual realm. Prayer that is directed personally and lovingly, in faith , on the basis of redemption of a soul, is powerful.

Pray for “neighbors who are lost”. God has put us next to certain people for their salvation. There is often a divine purpose in who we meet and who the Lord places on our hearts. Ask God to give you a prayer burden for specific people of your family, friends and neighbors.

Any group of three believers can do this. It does not require you to “be an evangelist”, to hand out tracts or to knock on doors. If someone wants a gospel presentation you can direct them to an online gospel presentation such as:

<http://www.aibi.ph/articles/gospel1.htm>

You don’t even need to form a committee! Just get your notebook, your bible, a couple of friends – and pray for the lost.

Blessings!

How To Pray For The Lost

Many of us - if not all of us , owe our conversion to friends and family who prayed us into the Kingdom. Prayer is the big weapon for the salvation of souls. Argument and debate without prayer is dry and fruitless. Do not spend all your time bashing your head against the arguments of people. Instead bash into Heaven with strong prayers on behalf of those you want to be saved.

Why should we pray for the lost?

1. Out of love - if we love our neighbour as ourselves we will want him or her to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour too.
2. Out of holy fear - if we realise that Hell is for real and for eternity then we will not want our friends, family or neighbours to go there.
3. Out of knowledge of the nature of God - who loves to be merciful and desires that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.
4. Out of knowledge of the power of prayer - prayer often succeeds when all else has failed. It is the only way we have of asking God to move in someone's life and heart. We know that the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. We know that prayers according to God's will are answered. This is not spiritual manipulation from a distance. Rather prayer grants the person the ability to see clearly and make a free and informed choice, free from the manipulative bondages and blindness that the Devil tries to impose. We can legitimately pray that a person may be able to freely choose between the mercy and glory of God and the temporary trash of this world. We can pray that their blindness be removed and Christ shown to them convincingly and clearly. Imagine if we could present every non-Christian with a clear convincing presentation of the facts. Imagine they were made to choose between the love of Jesus Christ, eternal glory, a magnificent resurrection body , life in heaven etc. versus pain and torment and death and disgrace for all eternity . Only a crazy person would choose to remain a non-Christian. Prayer allows the unbeliever to glimpse the facts for what they are and to make a sensible choice. It is not unfair or manipulative -it is the fairest, most freeing way we have.

Praying for Structures

Paul writes to Timothy about his FIRST PRIORITY in 1 Tim 2:1-8

1 Timothy 2:1-8 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time. 7 And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle--I am telling the truth, I am not lying--and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles. 8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

God wants us to pray - for kings and all those in authority..... in order that people may be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. This points out a sometimes forgotten aspect about praying for the lost - that governments can do a lot to help or to hinder the process of evangelism. For instance in Albania, one of the world's most atheistic communist states a generation of people has been raised without the remotest awareness of Jesus Christ or the gospel. Albania is in ruins as a result and is without the social services or human compassion that the influence of the gospel brings. On the other hand Samoa and some of the Pacific nations are very Christian and the Government actively encourages participation in Christian activities. Everyone has some knowledge of the gospel and many are saved.

God wants "all people everywhere" - that means the lot of you without exception - to pray for those in authority so that we may openly have permission to preach the gospel without hindrance. Please pray that:

Our school system may remain open to Christian chaplaincy and R.E.

That tax concessions for some areas of Christian work may remain in place and that more areas e.g. donations to missionary societies may be made tax exempt.

That anti-Christian laws in some States may be repealed.

That the Government recognise the contribution that true Christianity can make to Australia .

That we change from being a secular country to a Christian nation.

That we may remain able to proclaim Christianity , in all its truths, in all areas of our society.

That people such as nurses who have difficult issues of conscience be allowed to be truly Christian and abstain from practices they consider inappropriate to their faith.

Also as issues such as pornography laws etc. pop up from time to time we can make them a matter of prayer by "all people everywhere". I look upon such praying as paving the way for the gospel - it is very hard to sow the seeds of faith in a mind filled with pornographic trash. Pornography greases the path to Hell and banning it is a positive action not a negative one.

So part of our praying for the lost is praying for structures that block the spread of the gospel to be removed. The second part of praying for the lost is praying for individuals / families/ villages and nations to be saved.

How To Pray for The Lost

The following ideas have been pinched from a small pamphlet called "How To Pray For The Lost" which I discovered years ago and have found very useful. I have also added in a few practical hints of my own.

The first thing you need to understand when praying for the lost is that the price has been paid. When Jesus died upon that cross He paid the price for every single sinner on the earth. When you are praying for the lost remember that the price has been paid and make that the starting point for prayer.

"Lord you bought Joe Bloggs at Calvary, he is yours and so is his wife Joanne Bloggs and now we are asking You to claim Joe and Joanne for yourself, to remove the chains that bind them. Don't let the Devil have those you have bought Lord, be glorified in them and through them Lord. Take them back to yourself , set them free, Christ has done it, now we claim it . Amen "

Knowing that Christ has paid the price gives us confidence to pay boldly. It is not as if we have to bargain at all. The price is paid - that person rightly belongs to God who has bought them back out of slavery and sin. The technical name for this is "praying on the basis of redemption" or in some circles "praying for the lost in the power of the blood of Jesus" . Stand before God, confident that He wants your friend saved and confident that He has already paid the price for that to happen.

PERSISTENTLY AND REGULARLY - praying for people to be saved can at times be a very long battle. We need to pray persistently and regularly for those we want to be saved. In Luke 18:1 ff Jesus makes it clear that persistence pays off and tells us that we ought to "pray and not get weary.."

PRAY WATCHFULLY - It pays to be alert to the spiritual state of the unbeliever and to pray appropriately - are they curious about God yet? Are they convicted about their sin? Are they attracted to Jesus? Are they involved in something they would find very difficult to give up if they became a Christian? Pray specifically for where the person is at spiritually so they can take one or two steps closer to faith in God. "Lord you know how Joe finds it hard to believe your Bible - please show him it is true and that it can be relied on..."

SPECIFIC THINGS TO PRAY FOR:

1. That God will make them curious about spiritual things. The first hurdle is often sheer apathy with regard to the truth. Pray that God will stir them up to search out the truth about Life, The universe and Everything -for themselves.
2. Pray that God will surround your friend with witnessing Christians. Pray that they will feel absolutely surrounded and unable to escape from God. This forces people to consider Christ and the difference between their lives and the lives of true Christians.
3. Ask that they may clearly grasp that they are sinful. Unless there is a clear perception of sin there can be no true repentance from sin. They must know that they are in the wrong.
4. That God will grant them an almighty thirst for God's Word. That even as unbelievers they will want to read the Bible especially Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah and the Gospels.

5. Plead for a clear understanding of Jesus as Saviour and Lord. With some of the heresies abroad today Jesus is often misunderstood. Pray that your friends may see Jesus as real and historical and also as divine. Pray that God may clear up any misunderstandings in these areas and be prepared to answer questions. Be clear about Jesus being the only way to a true and favourable relationship with God.

6. Intercede for your friends at any points where they are being held under Satan's power. Ask for release from wrong ways and bad influences. Their friends may be a real obstacle to their salvation, pray that they may not give in to them but may instead have the courage to believe in God. There is today an increasing interest in the occult and some people are badly hooked -pray for their release from this dark addiction so that they may be free to believe.

7. Ask for grace toward your friends so that they may develop godly tastes which lead them toward God and salvation. Pray that they may start liking Christian music or if they are literature buffs that C.S.Lewis, John Donne, Milton and T.S. Elliot may hold a fascination for them. If classical music - pray that the great Christian works of Bach and Handel may intrigue them. If rock music that the contemporary Christian rock bands with good messages may become their passion. Pray that in everything from bushwalking to building models that somehow their tastes will be drawn to that which witnesses to Christ.

CHALLENGE I am going to leave you with the challenge of making a list of people you will pray for . Also get your home groups to buy a small notebook, rule it up, "Person," "What We Will Pray", "When It Was Answered." We can really see things happen when we persistently pray for the lost on the basis of what Christ has done on the cross.

Praying The Price of Revival

by Stuart Robinson (used by permission)

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Introduction

In 1952 Albert Einstein was asked by a Princeton doctoral student what was left in the world for original dissertation research Einstein replied, "Find out about prayer". English preacher Sidlow Baxter, when he was eighty-five years of age, said, "I have pastored only three churches in my more than sixty years of ministry. We had revival in every one. And not one of them came as a result of my preaching. They came as a result of the membership entering into a covenant to pray until revival came. And it did come, every time (Willhite 1988:111).

Chaplain of the United States Senate, Richard Halverson, advised that we really don't have any alternatives to prayer. He says, You can organise until you are exhausted. You can plan, program and subsidise all your plans. But if you fail to pray it is a waste of time. Prayer is not optional. It is mandatory. Not to pray is to disobey God" (Bryant 1984:39).

Roy Pointer, after extensive research in Baptist churches in the United Kingdom, arrived at the conclusion that wherever there was positive growth, there was one recurring factor: they were all praying churches.

In the United States of America, at Larry Leas Church on the Rock in Rockwall, Texas, numerical growth was from 13 people in 1980 to 11,000 people by 1988. When he was asked about such amazing growth, he said "I didn't start a church - I started a prayer meeting". When David Shibley, the minister responsible for prayer in that church was asked the secret of the church, he said, "The evangelistic program of the church is the daily prayer meeting. Every morning, Monday through Friday, we meet at 5:00 a.m. to pray. If we see the harvest of conversions fall off for more than a week, we see that as a spiritual red alert and seek the Lord" (Shibley 1985:7).

In Korea, where the church has grown from almost zero to a projected 50% of the population in this century alone, Pastor Paul Yonggi Cho attributes his church's conversion rate of 12,000 people per month as primarily due to ceaseless prayer.

In Korea it is normal for church members to go to bed early so they can arise at 4 a.m. to participate in united prayer. It is normal for them to pray all through Friday nights. It is normal to go out to prayer retreats.

Cho says that any church might see this sort of phenomenal growth if they were prepared to "pray the price; to pray and obey." Cho was once asked by a local pastor why was it that Cho's church membership was 750,000 and his was only 3,000 when he was better educated, preached better sermons and even had a foreign wife? Cho enquired, "How much do you pray? The pastor said "Thirty minutes a day." To which Cho replied, "There is your answer. I pray three to five hours per day."

In America one survey has shown that pastors on average pray 22 minutes per day. In mainline churches, it is less than that. In Japan they pray 44 minutes a day, and China 120 minutes a day. It's not surprising that the growth rate of churches in those countries is directly proportional to the amount of time pastors are spending in prayer.

Growth - a Supernatural Process

The church is a living organism. It is God's creation with Jesus Christ as its head (Colossians 1:18). From Him life flows (John 14:6). We have a responsibility to cooperate with God (1 Corinthians 3:6). We know that unless the Lord build our house we labour in vain (Psalm 127:1). The transfer of a soul from the kingdom of darkness to that of light is a spiritual supernatural process (Colossians 1 : 14). It is the Father who draws (John 6:44). It is the Holy Spirit who convicts (John 16:8-11). He causes confession to be made (1 Corinthians 12:3). He completes conversion (Titus 3:5). It is the Holy Spirit who also strengthens and empowers (Ephesians 3:16). He guides into truth (John 16:16). He gives spiritual gifts which promote unity (1 Corinthians 12:25), building up the church (1 Corinthians 14:12), thus avoiding disunity and strife which stunt growth. This is fundamental spiritual truth accepted and believed by all Christians. However, the degree to which we are convinced that all real growth is ultimately a supernatural process and are prepared to act upon that belief, will be directly reflected in the priority that we give to corporate and personal prayer in the life of the church. It is only when we begin to see that nothing that matters will occur except in answer to prayer that prayer will become more than an optional program for the faithful few, and instead it will become the driving force of our churches.

Obviously God wants our pastors, other leaders and His people to recognise that only He can do extra-ordinary things. When we accept that simple premise, we may begin to pray. In the Bible The battle which Joshua won, as recorded in Exodus 17:8-13 was not so dependent upon what he and his troops were doing down on the plain. It was directly dependent upon Moses prayerful intercession from on top of a near by hill with the support of Aaron and Hur. In the Old Testament, not counting the Psalms, there are 77 explicit references to prayer. The pace quickens in the New Testament. There are 94 references alone which relate directly to Jesus and prayer. The apostles picked up his theme and practice. So Paul says, "Pray continually, for this is God's will for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16) Peter urges believers to be "clear minded and self controlled" so they can pray. (1 Peter 4:7). James declares that prayer is powerful and effective" (James 5:16) John assures us that "God hears and answers" (1 John 5: 15). In the book of Acts there are 36 references to the church growing. Fifty-eight percent [i.e. 21 of those instances) are within the context of prayer. We would all love to see growth in every church in the world like it was at Pentecost and immediately thereafter. The key to what happened is found in Acts 1:14 when it says: "They were all joined together constantly in prayer. They were all joined together - one mind, one purpose, one accord. That is the prerequisite for effectiveness. Then, they were all joined together constantly in prayer. The word used there means to be "busily engaged in, to be devoted to, to persist in adhering to a thing, to intently attend to it." And it is in the form of a present participle. It means that the practice was continued ceaselessly. The same word is used in Acts 2:42: "They devoted themselvesto prayer." In Colossians 4:2 Paul uses the same word again in the imperative form "Devote yourselves to prayer. Most significant expansion movements of the church through its history took up that imperative.

In history

When we read the biographies of William Carey, Adoniram Judson, David Livingstone, Hudson Taylor, or whomever, the initiating thrust of the work of their lives began in prayer encounters. About a century ago, John R. Mott led an extraordinary movement which became known as the Student Christian Movement. It was based among college and university students. It supplied 20,000 career missionaries in the space of thirty years. John Mott said that the source of this amazing awakening lay in unified intercessory prayer. It wasn't just that these missionaries were recruited and sent out in prayer; their work was also sustained through prayer. Hudson Taylor told a story of a missionary couple who were in charge of ten stations. They wrote to their home secretary confessing their absolute lack of progress, and they urged the secretary to find intercessors for each station. After a while, in seven of those stations, opposition melted, spiritual revival broke out and the

churches grew strongly. But in three there was no change. When they returned home on the next furlough, the secretary cleared up the mystery. He had succeeded in getting intercessors for only seven of the ten stations. S. D. Gordon (1983:40) concludes "The greatest thing anyone can do for God and man is to pray."

Luther, Calvin, Knox, Latimer, Finney, Moody, all the "greats of God practiced prayer and fasting to enhance ministry effectiveness. John Wesley was so impressed by such precedents that he would not even ordain a person to ministry unless he agreed to fast at least until 4.00 p.m. each Wednesday and Friday. Yonggi Cho (1984:103) says, "Normally I teach new believers to fast for three days. Once they have become accustomed to three-day fasts, they will be able to fast for a period of seven days. Then they will move to ten-day fasts. Some have even gone for forty days." These people seem to have latched onto something which here in Australia we hardly know anything about. We are so busy, so active. We try so hard to get something good up and running. But it doesn't seem to grow much or permanently change many lives. Why? Is it that the ground in Australia is too hard? Compared to other times and places, this could hardly be so.

For example, back in the eighteenth century things didn't look good. Eighteenth century France was working through its bloody revolution, as terroristic as any of the modern era. America had declared its Rights of Man in 1776. Voltaire was preaching that the church was only a system of repression for the human spirit. Karl Marx would later agree. A new morality had arisen. Amongst both sexes in all ranks of society Christianity was held in almost universal contempt. Demonic forces seem to have been unleashed to drive the church out of existence. In many places it was almost down and out. Preachers and people would be pelted with stones and coal in places in England if they dared to testify to Jesus Christ in public. But even before those satanic forces collaborated to confound and confuse it appears that the Holy Spirit had prepared His defence, like a plot out of some Peretti novel.

In the 1740s, John Erskine of Edinburgh published a pamphlet encouraging people to pray for Scotland and elsewhere. Over in America, the challenge was picked up by Jonathan Edwards, who wrote a treatise called, "A Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer For The Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom." For forty years, John Erskine orchestrated what became a Concert of Prayer through voluminous correspondence around the world. In the face of apparent social and moral deterioration, he persisted. And then the Lord of the universe stepped in and took over.

On Christmas Day 1781, at St. Just Church In Cornwall, at 3.00 a.m., intercessors met to sing and pray. The heavens opened at last and they knew it. They prayed through until 9:00am and regathered on Christmas evening. Throughout January and February, the movement continued. By March 1782 they were praying until midnight. No significant preachers were involved - just people praying and the Holy Spirit responding.

Two years later in 1784, when 83-year old John Wesley visited that area he wrote, "This country is all on fire and the flame is spreading from village to village. And spread it did. The chapel which George Whitefield had built decades previously in Tottenham Court Road had to be enlarged to seat 5,000 people - the largest in the world at that time. Baptist churches in North Hampton, Leicester, and the Midlands, set aside regular nights devoted to the drumbeat of prayer for revival. Methodists and Anglicans joined in.

Matthew Henry wrote, "When God intends great mercy for His people He first sets them praying." Across the country prayer meetings were networking for revival. A passion for evangelism arose. Converts were being won - not through the regular services of the churches, but at the prayer meetings! Some were held at 5.00 a.m, some at midnight. Some pre-Christians were drawn by dreams and visions. Some came to scoff but were thrown to the ground under the power of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes there was noise and confusion; sometimes stillness and solemnity. But always there was that ceaseless

outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Whole denominations doubled, tripled and quadrupled in the next few years. It swept out from England to Wales, Scotland, United States, Canada and to some Third World countries.

Social Impact

The social impact of reformed lives was incredible. William Wilberforce, William Pitt, Edmund Bourke, and Charles Fox, all touched by this movement, worked ceaselessly for the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. William Buxton worked on for the emancipation of all slaves in the British Empire and saw it happen in 1834. John Howard and Elizabeth Fry gave their lives to radically reform the prison system. Florence Nightingale founded modern nursing. Ashley Cooper, the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, came to the rescue of the working poor to end their sixteen-hour, seven-day-a-week work grind. He worked to stop exploitation of women and children in coal mines, the suffocation of boys as sweeps in chimneys. He established public parks and gymnasia, gardens, public libraries, night schools and choral societies. The Christian Socialist Movement, which became the British Trade Union movement, was birthed. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was formed to protect animals. There was amazing growth in churches, and an astounding change in society came about because a man prayed and worked, seeing the establishment of thousands of similar prayer meetings, all united in calling on God for revival. Missionary societies were established. William Carey was one who got swept up in that movement. We speak of him as the "father of modern missions". The environment of his situation was that he was a member of a ministers revival prayer group which had been meeting for two years in Northampton in 1784 - 1786 he shared his vision of God's desire to see the heathen won for the Lord. He went on to establish what later became known as the Baptist Missionary Society. In 1795 the London Missionary Society was formed. In 1796 the Scottish Missionary Society was established, and later still the Church Missionary Society of the Anglicans was commenced.

Nineteenth Century

The prayer movement had a tremendous impact, but waned until the middle of the 19th century. Then God started something up in Canada, and the necessity to pray was picked up in New York. A quiet man called Jeremiah Lanphier had been appointed by the Dutch Reformed Church as a missionary to the central business district. Because the church was in decline and the life of the city was somewhat similar, he did not know what to do. He was a layman. He called a prayer meeting in the city to be held at noon each Wednesday. Its first meeting was on the 23rd September 1857. Eventually five other men turned up. Two weeks later, they decided to move to a daily schedule of prayer. Within six months, 10,000 men were gathering to pray and that movement spread across America. Surprise, surprise! Within two years there were one million new believers added to the church.

The movement swept out to touch England, Scotland, Wales and Ulster. Ireland was as tough a nut to crack as any. But when news reached Ireland of what was happening in America, James McQuilkan gathered three young men to meet for prayer in the Kells schoolhouse on March 14, 1859. They prayed and prayed for revival within a couple of months a similar prayer meeting was launched in Belfast. By September 21, 20,000 people assembled to pray for the whole of Ireland. It was later estimated that 100,000 converts resulted directly from these prayer movements in Ireland. It has also been estimated that in the years 1859-60 1,150,000 people were added to the church, wherever concerts of prayer were in operation.

Twentieth century

Many would be aware of the Welsh Revival this century. It commenced in October 1904. It was spontaneous and was characterised by simultaneous, lengthy prayer meetings. In the first two months, 70,000 people came to the Lord. In 1905 in London alone, the Wesleyan Methodists increased from their base membership of 54,785 by an additional 50,021 people. Coming closer in time and nearer to Australia, in the Enga churches in Papua New Guinea there was a desperate spiritual state 20 years ago. To redress the situation, people there committed themselves to pray. Prayer meetings began amongst pastors, missionaries and Bible College students. It spread out to the villages. In some villages, groups of people agreed to pray together every day until God sent new life to the church. On 15 September 1973, without any prior indication, simultaneously spontaneously, in village after village as pastors stood to deliver their normal Sunday morning messages, the Holy Spirit descended bringing conviction, confession, repentance and revival. Normal work stopped as people in their thousands hurried to special meetings. Prayer groups met daily, morning and evening. Thousands of Christians were restored and thousands of pagans were converted. Whole villages became Christian, and the church grew not only in size but in maturity. In the Philippines in the 1980s, as a result of some people attending an international prayer conference in Korea, 200 missionaries of the Philippine Missionary Fellowship each organised prayer group meetings daily at 7.00 p.m. to pray for the growth of the church. They report that within a couple of years this directly resulted in the formation of 310 new churches.

Spectacular growth is occurring in Argentina. Jose Luis Vasquez saw his church explode from 600 to 4,500 with a constituency of 10,000 members in five years following a visit from Carlos Annacondia. Hector Gimenez started his church from zero in 1983. His congregation now numbers 70,000. Omar Cabrera started his church in 1972 with 15 members. There is now a combined membership of 90,000 members. Peter Wagner, who is intensely investigating what lies behind such effective ministry, has arrived at the conclusion that powerful intercessory prayer is the chief weapon. Much of it is happening in a Pentecostal, charismatic environment but the structure or doctrine is not the essential thing. Walter Hollenwager, a prolific researcher into Pentecostalism said that for them, from the earliest Pentecostals onwards, it was more important to pray than to organise (1972:29).

Wherever that principle is invoked, amazing things happen. East Germany started to form small groups of ten to twelve persons committed to meet to pray for peace. By October 1989, 50,000 people were involved in Monday night prayer meetings. In 1990, when those praying people moved quietly onto the streets, their numbers quickly swelled to 300,000 and "the wall came tumbling down. In Cuba in 1990, an Assemblies of God pastor whose congregation never exceeded 100 people meeting once a week suddenly found himself conducting 12 services per day for 7,000 people. They started queuing at 2.00 a.m. and even broke down the doors to get into the prayer meetings. Asked to explain these phenomena, Cuban Christians say it has come because we have paid the price. We have suffered for the Gospel and we have prayed for many, many years" (O'Connor 1990:7-9). When a group known as the Overseas Missionary Society saw that after 25 years work in India all they could report was 2000 believers in 25 churches, they adopted a new strategy. In their homelands they recruited 1,000 people committed to pray for the work in India for just 15 minutes per day. Within a few years the church exploded to 73,000 members in 550 churches.

Will we "pray the price"?

Today there is great pressure from many directions in our society to work harder, to become smarter, to produce results, or to be moved aside. The church in many Western countries is in danger of absorbing this mentality into its own attitudes and practices, forgetting that in the divine-human endeavour, success comes not by might nor by power but by a gracious release of God's Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). Years ago, R. A. Torrey (1974:190) said, "We live in a day characterised by the multiplication of man's machinery and the diminution of God's power. The great cry of our day is work, work, work! Organise, organise, organise! Give us some new society! Tell us some new methods! Devise some new machinery! But the great need of our day is prayer, more prayer and better prayer." Friends, in the church in the west we now have the most up to date, state of the art technology available to communicate the Gospel. Yet comparatively little seems to be happening in so many countries. In terms of the growth and mission of our churches, could it be that whilst the world has learned to communicate with robots on Mars, in sections of the church we have forgotten to communicate with the Lord of the earth? If that is so, then our best course of action is to stand again with the first disciples and, like them, return to the Head of the church - Jesus Christ - and say "Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11 : 1).

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PRAYING LIKE DAVID PRAYED

In this article I would like to teach you to "pray as David prayed", to do this we shall be looking at the book of Psalms. But first we need to look at three aspects of praying as David prayed.

1. The structure of the Psalm. A Psalm is not a poem or a song though it may be set to music or be in poetic format. Psalms are not primarily works of art. A Psalm is an intense personal prayer between a man and his God. Psalms are anchored in life and reality with a vengeance. Psalms vary in structure greatly but a fairly good approximate structure is found in Psalm 25..

Initial Call To God

Situation To God

Thinking About God

God To Situation

Resolution

Final Call To God

Look at Psalm 25, and see how it fits this pattern:

Psalms 25 Of David. To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; {2} in you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. {3} No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame, but they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse. {4} Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; {5} guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. {6} Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. {7} Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD. {8} Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. {9} He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. {10} All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant. {11} For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great. {12} Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. {13} He will spend his days in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land. {14} The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them. {15} My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare. {16} Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. {17} The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. {18} Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins. {19} See how my enemies have increased and how fiercely they hate me! {20} Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. {21} May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you. {22} Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles!

2. Psalms and our spiritual state. The psalm is spirit calling to Spirit and as such comes from the inner being. Some Psalms are very broken , others raw and angry, others sorrowful and deep, whatever the Psalm is it is the spirit of the Psalmist calling out too God. Lets look at Psalm 51 together..

Psalms 51 For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. {2} Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. {3} For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. {4} Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. {5} Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. {6} Surely you desire truth in the inner parts ; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. {7} Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. {8}

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. {9} Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. {10} Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. {11} Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. {12} Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. {13} Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. {14} Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. {15} O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. {16} You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. {17} The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. {18} In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. {19} Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

a) What is David's spiritual state as he begins this Psalm?

b) What changes seem to occur?

c) Would you be game to publish a poem as intimate as Ps 51?

3. Calling for blessings.

Many of the Psalms are bold requests for blessings from God, sometimes they even seem extravagant they ask so much. Read David's prayer for Solomon in Ps 72, how extravagant does it seem? Was it fulfilled?

(Psalms 72 NIV) Of Solomon.

Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. {2} He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. {3} The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. {4} He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor. {5} He will endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. {6} He will be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. {7} In his days the righteous will flourish; prosperity will abound till the moon is no more. {8} He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. {9} The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust. {10} The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. {11} All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him. {12} For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. {13} He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. {14} He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. {15} Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long. {16} Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field. {17} May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. {18} Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. {19} Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen. {20} This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse.

a) What blessings are being asked for?

b) How confident does David seem that Solomon would be blessed?

c) How many of these blessings tie in with promises of God?

4. The "new song" ... This is not licence to indulge so called creativity or a call to Christian musicians to increase their output. It is a call to believers to sing about the marvellous things God is doing in their lives. The phrase a "new song" is used 6 times in Psalms and all of these occasions connect it directly to God DOING something. For instance Psalm 98:1..

Psalms 98:1 "A psalm. Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him."

The other references are, Ps 33:3-4, 40:1-3, 96:1-3, 144:9-10, 149:1-4.

Songs and actions go together in the Old Testament. For instance after the Red Sea, Miriam led the women in a few verses of a new song "the horse and rider thrown into the sea..". The occasion brings about the song. Thus the call to sing a new song is a call to believers to acknowledge God when He acts and sing to Him in praise for His mighty deeds. It is fundamentally a call to thankfulness, celebration and praise.

Psalms 146

Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. {2} I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. {3} Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. {4} When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. {5} Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, {6} the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them the LORD, who remains faithful forever. {7} He upholds the cause of the oppressed and give food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, {8} the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. {9} The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. {10} The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.

a) What actions of God are calling forth this song?

b) Christians are sometimes accused of singing songs they don't really mean about a marvellous active God they have never experienced. Do you think it was the case with the Psalmist ?

c) How would your prayer life change if you could really see what God was doing and thank Him for it?

EXERCISES

1. Compose a psalm the way David did, think of a situation in your life and write a short prayer to God going through the sequence Call To God, Situation to God, Thinking About God, God To Situation, Resolution, Final Call To God. Share your psalm with a friend.

2. Write a "new song", think of a "marvellous thing" the Lord has done in your life and praise Him for what He has done.

3. Call on God for a blessing, write a short call to God to pour out a specific blessing/series of blessings on you/your family/church etc. Tie it in with the nature and heart of God and His promises to us.

4. Pray for one another...

Jesus and Healing

Working Out What The Bible Says On: Jesus and Healing

Introduction

Jesus' attitude is always the "plumbline" for our attitudes. Things "straighten up" when we see things from His point of view. This study aims to work out what Jesus' attitude was towards healing. Its a controversial area for us today but it was very much part of Jesus' life and ministry and as we watch Him in action - we may just learn something. May God bless you as you read this.

Lets start with the obvious!

Jesus always saw sickness as something to be healed

Whenever Jesus came across sickness His attitude was to heal it. (Matthew 4;23-25, 8:16,17, 9:35) Jesus had compassion on the sick. Just as we automatically have compassion on our own children when they are ill. It would be a most cruel and unusual parent that seeing one of their own children ill would think " This child should suffer some more in order to learn a lesson". These natural instincts we have are part of the image of God in us and reflect the heart of God. All who came to Jesus for healing, were healed. None were told to wait until (put whatever you like in the gap).

Jesus sometimes saw sickness as the direct work of the Devil

Sickness can come from the Devil in two main ways - as a direct attack on the life of a righteous person, permitted by God but not "God's will". Job's sores (Job 2:4-7) and the sickness of the woman bound in the spirit of infirmity (Luke 18:10-16) seem to be in this category.

Jesus sometimes saw sickness as the direct result of sin.

Throughout the Old and New Testament there has always been a strong connection between sin and sickness. Except for the book of Job and some cases of barren but righteous women there was an almost universal causal connection between the disruption of fellowship with God and bodily illness. This flows from the Bible's view of the person as a whole being body-soul-spirit knitted into one with each part affecting the other. Consequently spiritual health can also impart physical health and quicken our mortal bodies.(Romans 8:11) There is no record of Jesus being ill, though He was mortal and human and subject to the normal exigencies of human flesh. While Jesus broadens the OT understanding so that not all sickness was due to sin he twice indicated that a person's illness was based in prior sin. (Mark 2:5, John 5:14) Paul is more explicit about it in his writings to the Corinthians who had a strong triumphalistic streak. He indicated that sickness could be the result of Church discipline for gross immorality - "handing someone over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.." (1 Corinthians 5:1-5) . The abuse of the Lord's supper was also seen to result in physical illness (1 Corinthians 11: 28-32). In extreme cases sin may even result in physical death. (1 Corinthians 11:30, Acts 5:5-10, Romans 1:26-28). The normal aim of such illness is repentance and the soul being saved on the day of salvation.(1 Cor 5:1-5, 11:28-32).

Thus it is wise for the person seeking healing to confess any known sin and to get right with God before prayer is administered.

This naturally leads to the question:

Should we heal someone that the Lord is chastening? The answer to this is simple. If they turn to God in their illness and submit themselves to the elders of the church, confessing their sins and asking for healing (as in James 5) then the chastening has done the work of leading them to repentance and we should heal them. Thus there is no contradiction between "healing all who ASK for it" and allowing the Lord to chasten people unto repentance. The very act of asking is a sign of seeking God. Later we will cover how to help people when repentance is needed prior to healing. *While Jesus and the apostles acknowledged a connection between sin and physical illness they never blamed anyone for being ill (or even lacking faith in their healing) but rather always sought to heal them.*

Jesus often drew a direct connection between faith and healing.

Healing is a manifestation of the kingdom of God in our mortal bodies and I think a prefigurement of the resurrection. Like all Kingdom realities healing is received by faith. Jesus explicitly acknowledges this in Matt 8:10, 9:28,29, 15:28; Mark 2:5; 9:24, 10:52 and the parallel passages.

Jesus saw healing as one of the signs of the Presence of the Kingdom

In Matt 4:23, 9:35, and Luke 9:11 healing and the preaching of the Kingdom are tied together in Jesus' ministry. The ministry of the disciples (the 12 and the 70) is to have both aspects: the Kingdom proclamation and the demonstration of Kingdom power (Matt 10:7,8, Luke 9:2). Luke 10:9 is quite explicit (Luke 10:9 NKJV) "And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" In Matt 12:28 Jesus associates exorcism in His name with the Presence of the Kingdom (Matthew 12:28 NKJV) "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." This role of healing in demonstrating the validity of the gospel and the Presence of the Kingdom is graphically demonstrated when the imprisoned John the Baptist sends his disciples to Jesus....(Luke 7:19-23 NKJV){19} And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" {20} When the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'" {21} And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. {22} Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. {23} "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." Jesus saw healing as a demonstration of the real Presence of the Kingdom that would encourage those who struggled to believe.

Jesus saw healing as a work that His disciples and His church could also work

This is partly covered above. Here are a few verses indicating the spread of healing from the 12 to the 70 to the wider church:

(Matthew 10:1 NKJV) And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. (Luke 10:1,9

NKJV) After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go..... "And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

(Acts 5:16 NKJV) Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

(James 5:13-15 NKJV) Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. {14} Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. {15} And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

The theological mandate for this is found in the empowering Presence of God experienced by Jesus at His baptism and experienced by the Church at Pentecost. With this in mind Jesus could say to his disciples (John 14:10-12 NKJV) "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?{11} "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves. {12} "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. "The works" spoken of here are the works Jesus did between His baptism and the cross. It is indicated that the Spirit-filled believer (discussed elsewhere in this chapter and very much in mind) "will do also" some of these works and perhaps do "greater works" because the Spirit's power will be manifest in the believer and in the believing community. We cannot do Jesus's works of creation or redemption but we can do the works He did during his ministry -preaching the Kingdom, healing the sick, driving out demons etc. Jesus seemed disappointed and in fact angry when His empowered and called disciples failed to do these works (Luke 9:39-42) and doing them seemed to be an integral part of his approach to training them for ministry (Luke 9 and 10).

Jesus saw healing as a demonstration of God's mercy and compassion, it was never "earned".

Mercy is a somewhat neglected concept. It means that you have the right to punish or destroy but do not do so. It was used technically when someone had lost a duel and the victorious party had every right to kill them. The victor could lift his sword point thus showing mercy. God's mercy goes much further than "not killing" but even unto restoring the person to wholeness. Jesus gladly responded to those who appealed for healing on the basis of the mercy of God (Matthew 9:27, 15:22, 17:15, 20:30,31). Jesus also frequently healed out of compassion (Matt 14:14, 20;34, Mark 1:41, 5;19, 9:22-24, Luke 7:13-15).

Compassion is Christ's practical response to human need. It includes the practical action of the Good Samaritan and of Christ feeding the hungry multitudes (Luke 10:33, Mark 8:2) it is never just an empty sentiment. The power of God is linked to the compassion of God. However God's mercy and compassion is His to command and should never be taken for granted (Romans 9:15). The gospel record though should lead us to believe that His compassion is readily available to all who seek it. Remarkably it was this aspect, more than almost any other, that enraged the religious leaders of His day. They often sternly opposed Jesus' healings being angered at the mercy He demonstrated.(Matt 9:9-13, 32-34, 12:10-15, Jn 9:13-34) The Pharisaical mindset sees healings as "rewards" perhaps due to the saintly righteous but certainly not due to sinners. I cannot recall a single Pharisee being healed.

This leads to three rough rules of thumb "You will only receive as much grace as you think you need." (Luke 18:9-14) and "No grace comes to those who think they deserve it." (Luke 18:9-14, Galatians 3:2-5, 5:1-11, Romans 11:6) and "You receive more grace than you give but you have to give it first". (Luke 6:35-38)

Jesus saw healing as a sovereign work of the Father not as an act of "Christian magic".

There is a fine line between the "magical" and the "Christian" uses of supernatural power. Supernatural power becomes "magical" when it is seen to operate separately from the will of the Father. For instance the bronze serpent that Moses held up in the wilderness eventually had to be destroyed because its healing properties were attributed to it separately from YHWH and it thus became an idol. (2 Kings 18:4). A similar thing happened to the ark of the covenant in the days of Eli (1 Samuel 4:3,4) when it, not the Lord, was credited with victory for Israel. Consequently it went into captivity for a while. (1 Samuel 4&5).

The temptations Satan used on Jesus were temptations to achieve the purposes of God by means divorced from the will of God. He was asked to turn stones into bread for his own gratification. He was asked to use His new endowment of supernatural power for the purposes of showmanship and jump from the Temple. Finally He was to conquer the world - but acknowledge Satan as the source of his Kingdom. The word of God and fasting kept Jesus from these temptations. It strikes me that these must be very powerful temptations to be able to be used on Jesus and it does seem that certain Christians are in their grip - to their very great spiritual peril (Matt 7:21-23). Jesus kept His integrity in ministry by only doing that which He saw the Father doing. (John 5:19,20, 36 ; 10:32,37,38; 14:10-12). Relationship with God and obedience were keys to His overcoming this most subtle of temptations. Thus the safest way to minister is to minister in an attitude of holy fear, reverence, praise and worship.

Therefore preparatory worship is more than emotionally satisfying it also draws us into the necessary state of humility and obedience that can safeguard us from wrong desires. Paul Tournier treats this aspect of the temptation to magic in healing well in his book "A Doctor's Casebook In The Light Of The Bible" pages 113-116 (written in 1954!). He finishes up by saying " There are then two contrary errors: to refrain, for fear of magic, from every kind of bold and sensational act, even when God requires it of us; this course has been all too common in the Church, and is what has made us as poor as it is today in manifestations of God's power. And, on the other hand, through zeal to demonstrate that power, to run after the sensational, even when God does not will it, and so fall into magic; certain religious sects are guilty of this. In the Gospel, the sceptics sneered at the miracles in Galilee and at the Cross: 'He saved others; let Him save Himself, if this is the Christ of God, His chosen' (Luke 23:35) . Neither the miracles nor the Cross can be taken out of the gospel without distorting it."

Jesus always healed what the person wanted healed

There is a tendency to be wiser than the patient when one is in healing ministry and doctors, counsellors and psychiatrists are particularly guilty of this and I am afraid some Christians are getting in on the act. If a person wanted to be healed of leprosy or blindness that was what got fixed. Even though Jesus knew the hearts of people He did not say "Your real problem is...". Jesus took people's problems at face value and healed them. He was not an arrogant know all and He left people with their dignity.

Jesus remembered the social context when He gave instructions after healing.

Jesus treated the sick as part of a social structure that needed to accept that the person had been healed. Lepers had to show themselves to the priest and be certified as clean so they could resume their place in society. (Matthew 8:2-4, Luke 17:12-19) Certain illnesses can relapse (particularly schizophrenia) if the family does not incorporate the person as "healed" but still views them as "sick". Jesus frequently gives instructions to the family or the sick person that initiates a resumption of normality. (Matt 8:14,15; 9:6; Mark 5:43; 10:52, John 11:44).

Even though Jesus had a powerful healing ministry it was not His top priority.

His redemptive work on the cross, the training of the disciples and the proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom were all given a higher priority than healing the multitudes at various times. Healing was an integral part of the whole and a visual and practical demonstration of His message but it was never of ultimate importance. (Mark 6:12,13 then 30-32 ; Luke 4:40-43 ; 9:51).

Jesus saw healing as a manifestation of Divine authority and power.

The original commission to Adam was to 'subdue the earth' to bring about God's order and perfection in Creation. As the last Adam Jesus subdued evil spirits and even illness which represents a serious imperfection in God's created order. To do this He exercised spiritual authority which He also passed on to others. (Matthew 8:9-13, 9:6, 10:1; Mark 3:15, 6:17; Luke 5:17; 6:19, 9:1, 10:19). Healing requires power and authority to flow from God. Sometimes evil spirits can strongly resist this power and a "power encounter" may take place such as that with the Gadarene demoniac in Mark 5. Healing is a miniature exertion of God's restoring power and is a way of "doing His will on earth as it is done in Heaven" - where there will be no more sickness or crying or pain. (Rev 20:1-3)