



Seek The Old Paths

“Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths. . . and walk therein”
(Jeremiah 6:16)

Vol. 24, No. 12

December 2013

PRAYER IN PUBLIC WORSHIP

Ronnie Whittemore

It has been accurately observed that the reading of the Bible is God's communication to man and prayer is man's communication to God. Righteous people have always been prayerful people. In the Old Testament, faithful Abraham and courageous Daniel were prayerful men (Gen. 20:17; Dan. 6:10). Both the devoted David and the meek Moses were men who prayed to God (Psalm 51; Num. 11:2). In the Gospel records, many passages note the prayerful life of Jesus. In turn, Jesus taught His disciples to pray (Matt. 6:9-13) and the early Christians engaged in prayer in the first century. The apostle Paul also believed in and taught about prayer. The New Testament instructs Christians to pray for laborers (Matt. 9:38), enemies (Matt. 5:44), and all men (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer is a blessed privilege of Christians. No problem is too great or too small to take to God in prayer. Prayer is also an important aspect in worshipping God. It is not merely a mechanical part of worship. It involves: 1) the heavenly Father to whom prayers are addressed; 2) the Son who mediates (1 Tim. 2:5); 3) the Holy Spirit who intercedes (Rom. 8:26); and 4) God's children who are the petitioners. Prayer is more than just talking to God. Prayer is not a substitute for speech making. It is the sincere desire of the heart expressed in words unto God (cf.

Rom. 10:1). Prayer involves more than an attitude. It includes expressing matters unto God.

From a positive standpoint, prayer consists of praise (Matt. 6:9), thanksgiving (Eph. 5:20), confession of sins (1 John 1:9), petitions, supplications and intercessions (1 Tim. 2:1-3). From a negative standpoint, prayer is not a substitute for obeying the commandments of the Lord (Matt. 7:21). Someone has well said: "Work as though everything depends on you and pray as though everything depends on God." Prayer is the recognition of man's dependence upon God.

WHY PRAY IN WORSHIP?

Change of location does not change man's need for prayer. Whether one is in the security of his home, confronting a crisis or in the church building, the need to pray remains the same. Paul exhorted that we should "*pray without ceasing*" (1 Thess. 5:17). One cannot pray too much or too often. God's people should always possess a prayerful attitude. Prayer should be a spiritual habit. Whether "*...evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice*" (Psalm 55:17).

When God's children assemble together to worship Him "*in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24), there is always the occasion and need to pray. Every person has a need to pray and an interest in the prayers. The sick,

chronically ill, the lost, the faithful, the weary and the strong need the power of prayer. God will strengthen his people in temptation (Matt. 6:13; 26:41), grant them wisdom (James 1:5-7), forgive their sins (Matt. 6:11; James 1:17) and give peace (1 Tim. 2:1-2). Only the ignorant or arrogant express no interest in prayer unto God.

WHEN PRAY IN WORSHIP?

The command to pray is given by God, but the specific time to pray is left to man. It is customary to open and close worship services in prayer. Though some may consider this to be a tradition and ridicule it merely because it has been practiced for years, it continues to be practiced because it makes good sense. Just as a person begins and ends his day by praying to the heavenly Father, worship services are begun and ended by addressing God in prayer. Worship services generate particular needs. News is learned about the condition of the sick and elderly; therefore, there is a need to pray for them (James 5:13-16). The Gospel preacher who addresses the assembly with a Bible subject needs and wants the prayers of his brethren (2 Thess. 3:1-2). Present in the assembly are men and women who need to render obedience to the Lord as well as wayward and weak members who need

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Prayer in Public Worship...



Editorial...

DESPISE YE THE CHURCH OF GOD? #2

Garland M. Robinson

There were those in the church of the first century who “despised” the church (kingdom) of God (cf. 1 Cor. 11:22). Likewise, some today despise the church of our Lord.

The individual who does not fill his heart and life with God’s Holy Word despises the church. The key word in Second Peter is “knowledge.” It is “through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord” that we have “grace and peace” (1:2). It is “through the knowledge of him” that God has given us “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (1:3). It was “through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” that the early saints “escaped the pollutions of the world” (2:20). How do we expect to gain knowledge if we never read and study?

God wants “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Paul prayed that the brethren in Colosse might be filled with the knowledge of God’s will (Col. 1:9). Such knowledge, when followed, will keep us from sin. David wrote, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11). God’s word is our guide. The Psalmist wrote, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105). We purify our souls “in obeying the truth” (1 Peter 1:22). Therefore, how else can we grow in faith except by studying the WORD. “So, then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

Only good can come from a rich study of the word of God. Are you despising the church of God by failing to study as you should?

The individual who forsakes the assembling of the church is despising the kingdom of God. It is for our good and well being that we attend every worship service and Bible study period set aside for our learning and growth. It goes without saying that if it is beyond our control to meet with

the saints, then there is nothing we can do about it. But that is a far cry from giving the unfaithful church member an excuse for not being in his/her place when the church assembles.

Quite often members do not attend and use the excuse that they were “providentially hindered,” when in actuality, they would have gone to work (or anything else they wanted to do) under the same circumstances. So why not worship God? The problem is, they do not love God as they should. The kingdom is not first in their lives — other things are. The Lord’s kingdom and God’s righteousness must be first in our lives (Matt. 6:33) if we expect to live with the Lord in eternity. How can it be said that God providently hinders anyone from attending church services? That is blaming God for our lack of attendance and commitment.

Brethren often pray at the close of a church service that if it’s God’s will that he “bring us back at the next appointed time.” Every time I hear that prayed I say to myself, “it is God’s will” that we come back the next time the church meets. God’s will is that we assemble. We are warned not to forsake the assemblies. “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is...” (Heb. 10:25). Some mistakenly interpret this to be speaking of our traditional “Sunday morning worship hour.” Who ever heard of such a thing? The verse says “assembling” not “assembly.” That means every time the church assembles constitutes an assembling of the church; and, every Christian is commanded “not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.” When the saints meet together, that assembling contributes to our spiritual growth and determination to render greater service. Where else in the world could we possibly have a greater devotion than to the assemblies of the saints?

Parents who fail to rear their

children in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” are despising the church of God. It is a command for children to obey their parents and honor them, but it is also a command for parents to care for, instruct, and discipline their children (Eph. 16:1-4). When parents fail to do this, they have failed in their duty. Christian parents care for their children. They will not let them “run wild” and never know where they are and what they are doing. Godly parents are constantly molding their sons and daughters into the kind of people that love the Lord, his church and his Word.

In Proverbs 19:18 we read, “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.” When mamma and daddy are doing what they should, then the words of the wise man will apply — “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck” (Prov. 1:8-9). We need to remember the oft quoted words of Proverbs 22:6, “train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Christian parents are fulfilling their duty to God when they love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and are diligent in guiding their family to do the same (Luke 10:27).

Christians who have a foul mouth and loose morals are despising the church of God. Jesus taught that men/women speak out of the abundance of their heart. “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:34-36). Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” This is yet another reason why we are to study and feed our minds and souls all the good things of God. For if we only feed our heart with the good things, that is all we can ever get out.

The Christian’s joy is to be followers (imitators) of God and to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting... For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Eph. 5:1-6).

Are you despising the church of Christ by your foul mouth and immorality?

One despises the church of the Lord when they drink alcoholic beverages, smoke or use other drugs. The Bible says our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). We are to love our own body, “for no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it...” (Eph. 5:29).

When our body hurts, we do our best to take care of it. No one ever wants to suffer in pain, they want to live as long as they can. When it comes time to die, almost without exception, people would give all they have to live longer. How is it then, that some want to destroy their good health by indulging in works of the flesh? This so-called pleasure (that is but for a moment) brings pain, suffering, heartache and even death. Why despise the church? If you never take that first drink, you will never be drunk. If you never take that first puff or chew, you will never have to break that “filthy habit” which will destroy your body and soul. If you never use that first needle or take that first sniff of dope, you will never lose your soul because of drugs.

Friend, do not be guilty of despising the church of Christ!

Prayer in Public Worship...

(Continued from page 89)

to return to their first love. They all need the prayers of the saints on their behalf. Various programs of work in God’s kingdom are usually planned, discussed and executed at times when brethren assemble. God should be petitioned on behalf of every good work (Matt. 9:38).

WHO SHOULD PRAY IN WORSHIP?

Everyone! Every man, woman and child should participate in prayer. Who should lead public prayers? Women cannot lead prayer in the presence of men. Paul instructed that women are not to undermine nor usurp the authority of men. “*But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence*” (1 Tim. 2:12). However, this does not mean that women have no part in public prayer. They are willing and voluntary participants in that they acknowledge and express their sentiments to God in their hearts as do all others who are being led in prayer.

HOW LOUD SHOULD WE PRAY?

As a suggestion to all men who lead in public prayer, please be sure that you can be heard. All worshippers participate together in their worship in prayer unto God. Prayer does little good if the person who leads the congregation in prayer cannot be heard. While it is true that God will hear and the person leading the prayer knows what thoughts are being expressed, what about the rest of the church? Paul wrote, “*What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also*” (1 Cor. 14:15). It is distracting and a hindrance to prayer when brethren are trying to make out the words being spoken. Such efforts are often in vain. Imagine trying to listen to a sermon when you’re unable to hear the speaker. Since acceptable worship is sincere and according to the truth, all participants should be able to hear and understand the prayer.

Though many other things could be said about prayer, these are sufficient to emphasize its importance in

the lives of God’s people. Since God communicates to us through His Word, does it not make sense that we should communicate to Him through prayer?

I often say my prayers;
But do I ever pray?
And do the wishes of my heart,
Go with the words I say?
I may as well kneel down and
Worship gods of stone,
As offer to the living God,
A prayer of words alone.
For words without the heart,
The Lord will never hear;
Nor will He to those lips attend,
Whose prayers are not sincere.
— John Burton

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Anonymous	\$75
Jean Ware	\$40
Anonymous	\$70
Wood C/C, Woodbury, TN.....	\$50
Anonymous	\$25
Anonymous	\$10
Bradford C/C, Bradford, TN	\$100
Beginning Balance	\$9,046.12
Contributions	\$2,060.00
Debits	
Postage	\$1,641.38
Supplies	\$217.06
Ending Balance	\$9,247.68

Elder's COLUMN

WHEN A CONGREGATION HAS ELDERS

Roger D. Campbell

At certain times in the history of the Lord's church (in a particular geographic area), all of the local churches had elders. That was true in at least some of the places where Paul and Barnabas traveled and preached (cf. Acts 14:23). At other times in history, however, in a specific region not even one congregation had overseers. The most common situation is that some congregations in a territory have an eldership, while others do not.

In the language of the New Testament, those who served as leaders in the church in the first century were known as: elders (Acts 20:17), overseers (Acts 20:28), bishops (Titus 1:5,7), pastors (Eph. 4:11), and shepherds (1 Peter 5:1,2). Such designations are still appropriate today.

What do we learn as true about a local church of Christ which has elders?

When a congregation has faithful brothers serving as qualified elders, it is following the New Testament pattern of the organization of the church. The church in Philippi had overseers/bishops (Phil. 1:1). The church in Ephesus had elders (Acts 20:17). It was God's will for there to be shepherds over local flocks (congregations) across the island of Crete (Titus 1:5). There is a scriptural "ring" to the sound of the term "*the elders of the church*" (Acts 20:17; James 5:14).

If a congregation currently does not have elders, it ought to be working toward the goal of appointing qualified brothers to serve as its pastors. Again, early congregations had them, and in a number of cases, they did not wait for generations to appoint them (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 16:5; 20:17; 21:18). While a congregation can exist and function scripturally without having elders when no men are qualified; no congregation can please the Lord if it prefers to remain without elders and has no intentions of laboring to train men to serve in that capacity. The Holy Spirit

it knew what He was talking about when He gave the charge through Paul to "appoint elders" in the churches (Titus 1:5). It is the Lord's will for every local congregation to have elders.

A second undeniable truth is that when a congregation has elders, it has imperfect men leading it. God calls on these leaders (shepherds, overseers) to be blameless (Titus 1:7), but not sinlessly perfect. The Lord requires that overseers be men "*of good behavior*" and have a good reputation among those who are outside the church (1 Tim. 3:2,7), but that does not mean that they must be sinless. Simon Peter was an elder (1 Peter 5:1), yet he clearly was not a perfect person. Like the rest of the flock, the shepherds must "*take heed*" to themselves (Acts 20:28). Just like all other members of Jesus' body, pastors need to grow by adding *virtue* to their *faith*, along with *knowledge*, *self-control*, *patience*, *godliness* and *brotherly kindness*. The task of serving as an elder certainly requires that one be held up to a lofty standard of conduct, but let us be reasonable and be patient with these men as they strive to grow in their capacity as leaders (superintendents).

When a local church goes from having no eldership to having shepherds over it, that is a major change, a change that will require the best efforts of all involved to make it a smooth and fruitful transition. Despite such a huge change, though, when a church appoints elders, there are a number of matters which do not change. For instance, even though a congregation appoints overseers, Jesus remains the sole Head of the church (Eph. 5:23,24). Elders have no authority to try and replace Jesus from his rightful place on the throne and cast aside His preeminence (Col. 1:18).

In addition, the Lord's requirements for acceptable worship remain in place. Worshipping God "in spirit and in truth" is still what He desires

(John 4:24), and no individual pastor or pastorship has the right to overturn or deviate from God's will for the worship of His church. Furthermore, the church's mission and work are not altered simply because a congregation has appointed elders. All of the church's actions must be authorized by the New Testament (Col. 3:17), and that will be the case as long as the world stands. The Lord's church is in the business of trying to help souls be saved through the Lord Jesus (Luke 19:10). It is to that end that we preach the Gospel, build up the saints, and reach out to the needy.

It is God's desire for each member of His church to be steadfast in His service and abound in His work (1 Cor. 15:58). That was true if I was a member of a congregation *before* it appointed shepherds, and it is still true *after* their appointment. The church is the Lord's vineyard. In the Lord's Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16), what did the vineyard owner hire people to do? To go work in His vineyard! That is what the Lord expects from us, whether we have brothers serving as bishops and watching out for our souls or not. We are co-laborers with the elders, "common" Christians, and the Lord Himself. Every soldier in His army needs to step up and give their best effort. It is wrong, completely wrong, to think, "Hey, now we have overseers, so I guess we will just let them do all the work of the church." With such an irresponsible, immature attitude in the heart of certain members, we can understand why some brothers may be a bit reluctant to take on the task of serving as elders. No, brethren, *with* elders or *without* them, we work. We *all* work. We *all* work *together*. We *all* work *together for His glory*.

When a local church has elders, its work has the potential to flow and grow.

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THE LANGUAGE OF PRAYER

Rod Ross

Everyone needs to learn how to pray. Sometimes people think prayer ought to be intuitive. They think that one just ought to naturally know how to pray. However, Jesus had to teach His disciples how to pray. What most people know as “The Lord’s Prayer” is really an “example prayer” Jesus used to teach His disciples how to pray.

There are four passages that deal extensively with prayer. Let us take a look at them and see what we can learn about prayer.

Matthew 6:5-15 — The so-called Lord’s Prayer. What are the lessons to be learned from how Jesus taught His disciples to pray?

THE ADDRESS: “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (v.9). Address God with familiarity, but respect that is deserving of the Creator and Father of all. He is our Father, but He is much more. Address Him as Deity, the Creator, the Maker of All, the Father of All, Lord God Almighty, the Giver of life and all good things, etc. See how He is addressed in the Psalms — many of them are prayers.

THE CONTENT: “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as [it is] in heaven” (v.10). The disciples were taught to seek the will of God in all things. That was their prayer. That is our prayer. May God reign in the hearts of men here on earth as he reigns with the angels in heaven. Words which seek the will of God, in contrast with seeking the will of the one praying, are what are called for.

“Give us this day our daily bread” (v.11). Those things which sustain our physical lives are the gifts of God’s grace. Thanks and supplication are instructed by Jesus. Any statement of thanks and/or asking for food, jobs, weather, soil, seed, etc. are appropriate.

“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (v.12). There is always a need to remember the need for forgiveness. Our sins, our trespasses, our mistakes, however you wish to state it, need forgiven. We are sinners — we falter and fail. But, the language Jesus used to teach His dis-

ciples also includes the lesson that we will only be forgiven as we forgive others. Therefore, we ought to pray that we might remember to have mercy and grace, forgiving others also.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (v.13). Guidance from above is always needed. Pray to understand the will of God. Pray for His providential care and guidance. Pray for deliverance from temptation and evil. God directs our lives so that we will never face more than we are able to endure. Pray that this may be so.

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (v.13). All power and authority is God Almighty’s. He is worthy of all glory and worship. Any and all language that acknowledges this superior authority and the reign of God over all things is appropriate for prayer.

First Timothy 2:1-8 — Paul instructs the young evangelist about public prayer.

“Supplications, prayers, intercessions, [and] giving of thanks, be made for all men” (v.1). Any and all prayers are proper, not only on behalf of Christians or saints, but also on behalf of any or all people. Whether they are good or evil, we ought to pray for them. We should pray not only for our brethren, but even more so for our enemies.

“For kings, and [for] all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (v.2). Whether they are monarchs, dictators, presidents or prelates, we need to recognize that the people in places of authority in this world do have an effect upon our lives, not only in terms of economics and politics, but also in terms of our ability to pursue our spiritual lives. Their decisions can make a difference in how easy it is to live godly and honest lives before God. Their policies effect our physical well-being. Pray that they might make the right decisions. Praying for them does not mean you agree with their decisions, or are endorsing their

principles. Pray that they may make the right decisions and operate with the correct principles.

“For [there is] one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (v.5). Jesus is the only person through whom our prayers ascend to the Father. Neither Mary, nor the apostles, nor the saints, nor the angels in heaven are in the place of mediator between God and man. It is Jesus, and Jesus alone, who pleads our case before our heavenly Father. Our prayers need to reflect that idea.

Acts 4:23-30 — This is the only prayer by the church in the New Testament (other than the one line prayer of Stephen at his death). “Lord, thou [art] God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is” (v.24). They address God as Lord and acknowledge He is the Creator.

It varies from “Our Father which art in heaven,” but it maintains the reverence and respect which should properly open a prayer. It shows that there is no one formula that must be followed. It is the expression of your heart, soul and mind.

“Who by the mouth of thy servant David has said” (v.25). The brethren quoted the Second Psalm. Any language of Scripture, appropriately applied, from either the Old or the New Testament is good in prayer, not just to quote Scripture, but when its language dovetails with the subject being approached as in this instance.

“For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done” (vs.27,28). Here, rather than quote Scripture, they sum up its contents in their own words. That is still appropriate.

They also acknowledge the sovereignty of God. He rules in the affairs of men. He directs events to suite His will. Too many times we forget this. Too many times we seem to feel God is out there somewhere, but He can

and will do nothing about the affairs of men here on the earth. If that is true, why pray?

“And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus” (vs.29,30). This is the meat and the purpose of their prayer. Peter and John had been imprisoned for preaching the Gospel and were released from prison by God. They ask for the strength and faith to continue preaching even though the government (the council of the Jews) is seeking to prevent their preaching in the name of Jesus. They ask for the ability to do what God has commanded. But, all is to be done in and “by the name of thy holy child Jesus.”

John 17:1-26 — This prayer of Jesus is truly “The Lord’s Prayer.” It is not an example of how to pray (though it may serve that purpose), it is the outpouring of Jesus’ heart to His heavenly Father before He departs from this world.

“Father” (v.1). Jesus could say this as the only-begotten of the Father. We can say it through the Spirit of adoption that we have in Jesus Christ.

“I have glorified thee on the earth” (v.4). Jesus refers to the events on earth, describing what has happened. There is nothing wrong, and sometimes everything right on describing the situation as it exists and has existed.

“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast

given me; for they are thine” (v.9). While Paul shows that we are to pray for all men (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1); Jesus shows that certain prayers are for certain people, and certain pleas are for certain persons. There is a purpose in prayer. Do not forget your purpose, and state it specifically. As you read on in Jesus’ prayer, He very specifically speaks of the apostles, and also of us: *“for them also which shall believe on me through their word”* (v.20).

Jesus prays that the apostles: 1) be kept from evil (v.15); 2) be sanctified by the word (vs.17,19); and, 3) be one (vs.21,22). He prays that we be “one” to the glory of the Father. Pray for unity. Pray to be kept from evil. Pray to be sanctified by the word. And, in all of prayer, as Jesus does (read His words), maintain the respect, reverence and awe of He/Him who is God in heaven.

Other considerations...

“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). This is not continual, but continuously. This is not praying every minute, but remembering to pray every day — having always a prayerful attitude and a heart of prayer.

“But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” (James 1:6). Pray with confidence that God will hear and will answer. The answer may not be what we want to hear. Sometimes the answer is yes. Sometimes the answer is no. Sometimes the answer is wait.

“Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume [it] upon

your lusts” (James 4:3,4). The answer to prayer is for our own good, not for our desires. Pray not for what you want, pray for what you need. And, as with a little child, there can be a great deal of difference between what you want and what you need. God knows the difference.

“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen [do]: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Matt. 6:5-8). It is not the length of the prayer, but the sincerity of it that makes it good. The same words can be used again and again, as long as they are not useless and meaningless. Longer prayers are not better prayers, they are only longer. Do not worry as much about the “wording of prayer” (there are no magic formulas) as you do “meaning what you say.”

CONCLUSION

The language of prayer that is acceptable to God is the language of your heart. The language that expresses the respect and awe for your heavenly Father, and for His Son our Savior, is the proper language.

The language of the Psalms is the most eloquent of prayers; but, the heartfelt simple statements of the lowliest of Christians is every bit as beautiful in the ears of God. And remember, whether you are praying in public or private, it is God whom you are addressing and not man. Man is just listening in.

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APOSTOLIC PRAYER

Marvin L. Weir

The word “apostolic” will be used in the sense of the apostles’ **teaching**. What did the apostles teach regarding acceptable prayer?

They prayed at regular times!

“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, [being] the ninth [hour]” (Acts 3:1). It appears the Jews were regular in praying at least three times each day. Daniel was not willing to forego a period of prayer even though threatened

with his life for so doing. *“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime”* (Dan. 6:10). King David seems to list the times of prayer in saying, *“Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice”* (Psa. 55:17).

The lesson for us is that we are to be **regular** in prayer. It was to the Colossian brethren that Paul said, *“For this cause we also, since the day we heard [it], do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”* (Col. 1:9). To the brethren at Thessalonica he admonished, *“Pray without ceasing”* (1 Thess. 5:17) and *“Brethren, pray for us”* (1 Thess. 5:25).

Frequent, regular, fervent, and determined prayer is taught by the apostles.

They prayed with simple unity! “*And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord...*” (Acts 4:24). Speaking of them praying “with one accord,” Coffman says: “This expression occurs eleven times in the Acts, and only once elsewhere in the New Testament (Rom. 15:6). It stresses the unity of the Lord’s followers, and thus reveals one of the great secrets of the success of Christianity during those first years.” The Lord prayed fervently that His disciples be one and united in prayer (John 17:20-21). Division in spiritual matters will keep prayer from being effective. The apostle Paul understood the danger of division and thus said, “*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and [that] there be no divisions among you; but [that] ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*” (1 Cor. 1:10). When religious division because of error rears its ugly head, the prayers of those refusing to stand with the Word of God will not be granted by the Heavenly Father.

They prayed expecting an answer! “*And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness*” (Acts 4:29-31). We must not lose sight that part of what occurred in the above scripture was due to the miraculous age of the early church. Miracles have no part or lot in New Testament Christianity today (1 Cor. 13:8ff).

The principle, however, of expecting God to answer our prayers remains the same. The Lord reminded His disciples, “*And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive*” (Matt. 21:22). Does this mean that if we only believe, then every prayer we pray will be granted in the way we have requested? No, not at all. God’s Word also teaches, “*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing accord-*

ing to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14-15). The Scriptures also declare, “*And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight*” (1 John 3:22). Thus, proper prayer can expect an answer, but the answer may be different from our request as God knows what is best for us. But if we refuse to walk in the light of His Word (1 John 1:7) or if we “*ask amiss*” (James 4:3), our prayers will go unanswered!

They prayed before departing from one another! “*And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid [their] hands on them, they sent [them] away*” (Acts 13:3). “*And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all*” (Acts 20:36). “*And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives*

and children, till [we were] out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed” (Acts 21:5).

It is good for brethren to pray with and for one another at any time, but especially is such meaningful when they will be departing and going separate ways. In this world, friends know not when they will see one another for the last time. Christians can, however, pray one for another and cling to the legitimate hope of being together forever in that “*house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens*” (2 Cor. 5:1).

It is always good to know that others are continuing to remember us and petition the Heavenly Father in our behalf. It is a source of encouragement to know that God hears “*the prayer of the righteous*” (Prov. 15:29). Let us never forget that the “*...effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*” (James 5:16).

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LIVING THE ABUNDANT LIFE

Some times life is tough and hands us a difficult hand. Jesus said, “*The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10). Jesus said that the thief comes to rob and steal. The thief is the devil. The devil desires to take away all our happiness and contentment. He uses various methods with which to do so. Paul said this about the devil, “*Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices*” (2 Cor. 2:11). We need to be alert to his tricks. He uses stress and nervousness. Someone said, “Some people are so stressed out that they would make coffee nervous, give an aspirin a headache or cause a tranquilizer to have a nervous breakdown.” So, how is it that we can enjoy the abundant life in Christ?

One thing we can do to enjoy the abundant life is to **forget the past**. Dale Carniage has a chapter in one of his books entitled, “You Can’t Saw Sawdust.” How true it is that you can’t relive the past. The apostle Paul writing by inspiration said, “*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before*” (Phil. 3:13). Repent when necessary, but then move on to live better.

A second thing we can do to enjoy the abundant life is to **give ourselves away**. That is the essence of the supreme beatitude as written in the New Testament. Here it is: “*I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35). Send a note to someone who is sick or has lost a loved one. Bake a pie and take it to a neighbor. Cut grass for an elderly neighbor. “*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all [men], especially unto them who are of the household of faith*” (Gal. 6:10). Give yourself away.

We can enjoy the abundant life if we follow the principles of the New Testament. That is what all faithful brethren and faithful churches of Christ do.

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SEEK THE OLD PATHS

The Leakesville Church of Christ in Leakesville, Mississippi is looking for a preacher. They are a congregation of about 40. They furnish a house and utilities. Contact Ronald Byrd at 601-394-9565" **...Editor, Garland M. Robinson.** "Thanks so much for the work you do. Doyle Bloomer of Hinton, OK has passed away" **...Larry Bloomer.** "Dear brother Robinson and all the brothers who write for S.T.O.P. Thank you all very much! I am very thankful to God for all of you. The topics have been encouraging and edifying. May God continue to bless you in this work. I wish my contribution was 10 times this much. Thanks, 2 Cor. 9:7" **...Carol Shadell, Greenbrier, AR.** "To the eldership of the Leoni Church of Christ, enclosed is a donation toward the support of the *Seek The Old Paths* periodical" **...Jamie Hampton, Phoenix, AZ.** "Hi. I am currently incarcerated in Tarrant County Jail. I am a born again Christian. I was baptized into Christ's church in 2012, Church of Christ. Yes, I have backslid since then but, I have rededicated my life to God. And I plan to live the rest of my life for Christ and serve others. I am writing in regards to your publication, *Seek The Old Paths*. I have read it before and it was based in Scriptures. So I would like to be put on the mailing list. I would also like to receive any other sound doctrine literature that you may have. I would also like to enroll in your Bible Correspondence Course that I may grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior. Any assistance that you may be able to assist me with in this matter will be greatly appreciated. Thanks for your time and effort" **...Ryan Leatherman, Ft. Worth, TX.** "Please send your STOP to a friend. Small contribution for postage. Check enclosed. God bless and keep up the good work" **...Teddy Medlen, Jonesville, MI.** "Thank you for defending the truth in your paper. It is sad to read about congregations who have 'loved to wonder', Jeremiah 14:10" **...James Dougal, Van Vert, OH.** "We have greatly appreciated receiving STOP newsletter over the years and those faithful soldiers of the cross who are working so diligently to bring this to our home. We have included a check which probably would not equal the postage you have spent over the years, and we would very much appreciate it if you would receive this as an anonymous contribution to be used wherever it is needed to help with this work" **...Brighton, IL.** "Keep up the great work you do for the word of God and his church. May God bless us all with his love" **...Tommy Muirhead, Flora, MS.** "Please change our address. We appreciate STOP. We pray that you will keep up the good work" **...Charlie & Shirley Rector, Dayton, TN.** "Thank you for your publication and your standing for sound doctrine" **...Name withheld by request, Woodbury, TN.** "Enclosed is a check to help with expenses for STOP. My congregation provides copies of STOP and I receive them eagerly. God bless all involved in this work of spreading Biblical truth" **...Name withheld by request, IN.** "Thank your for your wonderful STOP. Please continue to preach the truth. Many may learn the truth there reading your writing. This is a little gift to help with the cost of printing and mailing" **...name withheld by request, Baxter, TN.** "In Amos 2:13 we read: 'Behold, I am weighed down by you, as a cart full of sheaves is weighed down.' How many times have we been heavy-hearted over circumstances in our lives? A load so heavy we thought we could not bare. God, in Amos, tells his children, because of their sin a heavy load is on the Lord himself! Oh how I pray, that we will seek the will of the Lord that we will not cause him to become heavy-hearted! John 14:15, 'If you love me, keep my commandments'" **...Del Brantley, Salem, KY.** "We are enclosing a check to assist in the publication and mailing of *Seek The Old Paths*. We know the expenses of such are costly and continue to climb. We appreciate receiving the publication and the soundness of articles contained in it. We appreciate the

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Seek The Old Paths is a monthly publication of the **Leoni Church of Christ** and is under the oversight of its elders. It is FREE, being supported by the contributions of both individuals and congregations. Its primary purpose and goal in publication can be found in Jude 3, 2 Tim. 4:2, Titus 1:13, Titus 2:1 and 2 Peter 1:12. All mail received may be published unless it is marked "not for publication." The church building is located at: 6818 McMinnville Hwy, Woodbury, TN 37190.

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