

Call to Obedience #378
 PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA
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The Necessity of Prayer

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Our God, our Christ, has lain before every man born into His kingdom certain necessities. Thankfully we have a God of compassion, benevolence and long-suffering. But we also have a God who calls us to duties. If we fail to attend to them, we shall forever die, for there is no cleansing by the blood of Jesus without obedience.

In different times and places, people tend to have different ideas of who Christ is. For example, the early Church portrayed Christ as One seeking intimacy with man. The Song of Solomon became popular. It is the intimate love affair of the early church with our Lord Jesus Christ that helped carry it through ten severe persecutions in the first 300 years. In the Middle Ages Christ was portrayed as a remote, stern Judge to be feared and revered. Under communism, Christ was presented as the great Liberator from social injustice. Today in much of the Western world, Christ is portrayed as having infinite compassion; abounding in tolerance; void of any demands, expectations or disciplines from His people. Much of what we hear is that Christ does it all, we need to do nothing. Once we receive Him, we have a free ticket to heaven that will never be canceled no matter what we do.

How we live our life paints a picture of what kind of God we have. Let us each measure our perception of our Lord from the way He first introduced Himself to us all. Let us allow Him to cleanse us from all kinds of misperceptions. That takes us to Genesis, to God's garden of love supreme, where all theology must have its beginning.

And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:15-17).

Here are the main points of the first Garden conversation:

1. God gives man responsibility - to dress and keep the garden (verse 16).
2. God introduces law into the God/man relationship - He sets limits (verse 16).
3. God reveals consequences if His laws are not obeyed (Verse 17).

These are the first things that God wants us to know about Him, and we must not forget them. This and more but never less, is the God we find in

every chapter of the Bible. And this is the way the Bible ends: *Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city* (Rev. 22:14).

Responsibilities - laws - consequences. Any theology without these fundamentals is worthless.

If our faith is not converted to action we will never touch the tree of life. There is a garden to be kept, a law to be obeyed. There is a consequence to be suffered if we don't obey God's law. The consequence is death: everlasting death.

Now, **part of what it means to keep the garden is that we give ourselves to the necessity of prayer.** *And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint...And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* (Luke 18:7, 8)

I do not know of any passage in the Bible where we find a greater emphasis on the necessity of prayer. Let us look at the very vocabulary Jesus uses to make His point:

- Men *ought*. That speaks of necessity. It means it is a binding responsibility.
- Men ought *always*. That means that prayer must not be skipped.
- Men are *not to faint* at it. That means there are not to be excuses from it.
- Men are to be *passionate* about it by crying day and night.

Friend, is prayer an absolute necessity for you every day without skipping, or is it an option that you attend to when time, circumstance and feelings allow? Can you keep the weeds out of your garden causing it to bring forth much fruit if you allow the seeds of neglect to take it over?

How much prayer do you actually do? I don't mean praying on the run such as when you drive or are at work. I mean the kind of praying mentioned here: when you have nothing else on your mind but God only. That is the kind of praying Jesus did regularly. That is working prayer. *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

Much of the Church does not accept the absolute, the "ought to" necessity of prayer. That is why many churches do not have a single prayer meeting, even though Jesus said, *Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer?* (Mark 11:17) In most of our churches air-conditioning is a necessity, prayer meetings are not. God tells us to pray for the lost, for revival, for the sick, for the leaders of the church, for one another, for the persecuted,

for the poor, the brokenhearted, the bruised, etc. Your pastor and the persecuted are counting on your prayers every day. They are necessary.

Jesus told a rich young man to sell all he had to inherit eternal life. When he disobeyed, he remained lost. We are lost if we don't do what Jesus tells us to do. When we are born of God, we are immediately yoked together with Jesus (Matt. 11:29). But if we don't pull with Him He will unhitch us. Jesus told us to pray; if we don't do it, we will not be better off than the rich young ruler.

Prayer is both a privilege and a duty. It must be on our necessity list, on our "ought to" list. If we don't get into it we are unprofitable servants, with unfruitful lives full of weeds. James said: *You have not, because you ask not.* We are poor because we ask not; the Church is spiritually poor because she asks not. A person who does not give himself to the work of prayer is as a soldier in uniform who refuses to shoot his rifle. He is shirking his responsibility.

Now let us get practical. These are suggestions.

1. Move prayer from your list of "if I feel like it" or "if I can work it into my schedule," onto the necessity list, as something that must be done every day before the day ends.
2. Make a prayer list. Write down people and needs that need to be brought before God every day. Then, as the Holy Spirit leads, accommodate new needs as well.
3. As much as possible establish a regular place and time to pray for every day.
4. Ask God how much He wants you to pray daily or weekly, then commit to doing it as much as you're committed to going to work each day, to keep doctor appointments or to take the garbage out.

Are you tired of saying frequently: I know I don't pray enough? Are you tired of being guilty about this? Well, ask the Lord how much He wants you to pray! You don't have to worry about Him asking you to pray so much that you neglect the needs of your spouse and children or even your need for a walk in the park; although He will ask you to remove clutter from your life to make time for it. Remember *his commandments are not grievous* (1Jn 5:3).

Remember, God wants you strong. You don't make a man strong by putting chains on him, but neither do you tell him to do nothing and allow him to eat junk food. Keep your commitment in prayer. And, beyond your minimum time of prayer, the Lord will occasionally honor you to pray for special needs such as Abraham praying for Sodom. Be faithful but don't panic if on some days you cannot satisfy the required time because things do happen that are beyond your control. Don't unschedule, rather reschedule so that you can say you've kept your commitment at the end of the week.

If you do these things, you will never go to bed with that sense of well-

deserved guilt: I did not pray enough. Rather you have the blessing of a faithful servant reaping the joy of obedience and prepared to drink of the water of life that flows from the throne of God.

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