



Church of God-21st Century

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Mankind's Most Powerful "Tool"...

Essentials of Effective Prayer!

by Raymond F. McNair

God Almighty has made available to mankind *a truly awesome power*. This power is far greater than man's most *fearsome thermo-nuclear weapons*—which could literally devastate the *entire earth* and erase *all life* from this planet, including *mankind!*

Yet, since the dawn of civilization on beautiful planet earth, few humans have ever understood how to "tap" into this *divinely bestowed power!* What is this *awesome "power"* which very few have ever learned to *utilize?*

This power is always used for *good*—never for *evil!* Billions have heard of this *power*, and pay *lip-service* to it—but few avail themselves of the full potential of this *infinite power*; and, sadly, this includes many who profess to be spiritually-begotten sons and daughters of God (2 Cor. 6:18)! **By learning to utilize this power you may:** overcome all your *doubts* and *fears*; be *healed* when sick; have the faith to face *persecution* or *trials*; save your *marriage*; avoid *catastrophic accidents*; find ways to *prosper*, or you may even avoid *premature death!*

Pray in FAITH—Never DOUBTING!

The Apostle James says, "**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.** 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. For let not that man suppose that he will receive *anything from the Lord*; he is a *double-minded* man unstable in all his ways" (Jas. 1:5-6).

Furthermore, James then tells us *why* some do not receive *answers* to their prayers. He says, "Where do *wars* and *fights* come from among you? Do they not come from *your desires for pleasure* that war in your members? You *lust* and do *not* have. You *murder* and *covet* and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have *because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss*, that you may spend it on your *pleasures. Adulterers* and *adulteresses!* Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a *friend of the world* makes himself an *enemy or God*" (Jas. 4:1-4).

This scripture explains that many who profess to believe in God, and who even *pray* to Him, do *not* receive answers to their prayers because, spiritually speaking, they are "adulterers and adulteresses." By their *coveting* "physical things," they have become *idolaters* in the eyes of God! We are admonished to shun "fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and *covetousness, which is IDOLATRY*" (Col. 3:5). When anyone *lusts* after evil things, he becomes an *idolater*—that is, a *spiritual* "adulterer [or]

adulteress” in the eyes of a *holy God*, whom we are to worship in “spirit and truth.”

Jesus warned His disciples, “**Take heed and beware of COVETOUSNESS**, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). And Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “*You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews [Rom. 3:2-3]. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him [and pray to Him] must worship Him in spirit and truth*” (John 4:22-24).

Unfortunately, some brethren in the *Churches of God* miss out on many *blessings*—which they could receive from the hand of their Creator—if they truly understood the *infinite power of prayer*, and what *they must do* in order to be able to freely receive that *awesome power*. *God’s people can have constant, instantaneous, direct access to that “Divine Being”* who possesses limitless *energy, wisdom and power*—all of which are *inherent* in the Creator and Ruler of our vast *UNIVERSE!*

KEY QUESTIONS RE PRAYER

Part I

- 1) AN “*UNKNOWN*” FATHER? Did the O.T. Patriarchs and Prophets know of *God the Father and pray to Him*?
- 2) PRAY TO THE FATHER—OR TO HIS SON? To whom should Christians address their prayers—the FATHER, or to God’s SON, Jesus Christ?
- 3) PRAYING IN CHRIST’S NAME When praying to the Father, should Christians always pray in the *name of Jesus Christ*, the Son of God?
- 4) “*ATTITUDE*” IS ALL-IMPORTANT! When we go to the “Throne of Grace” in prayer (Heb. 4:16), what *frame of mind or attitude* should we maintain at all times?
- 5) PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING ARE VITAL! What part should *praise and thanksgiving* play in our prayers?
- 6) PRAYER HINDRANCES If God does *not* answer some of our prayers, *why not*? What are some of the main HINDRANCES that prevent our prayers being answered by God?
- 7) DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD AND HIS WORD Is not *rank disobedience and outright rebellion* against God the biggest hindrance to answered prayer?
- 8) AVOID SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS! Does God answer the prayers of *self-righteous persons*, who maintain a “*holier-than-thou*” attitude toward *God* or toward other *humans*?
- 9) BEWARE OF AN UNFORGIVING ATTITUDE! Will God *hear and answer* the prayers of *hard-hearted persons* who exhibit an **unmerciful, unforgiving, unloving attitude** toward others?

Part II

10) **SLEEPY-TIME PRAYERS AVAIL NOTHING!** Will the LORD answer a “**sleepy-time**” prayer— when the one who is praying is *laid back*, having no *fergency* and deep-down *conviction*?

11) **AVOID COVETOUSNESS!** Does God answer the *covetous prayers* of those who have the “*gi’mes*”—“*Lord, ‘give me’ this,*” and “*Lord, ‘give me’ that,*” etc.?

12) **DOGGED PERSISTENCE IS ESSENTIAL!** What vital role do *persistence*, *perseverance* and *importunity* play in our prayers?

13) **DOUBT AND DISBELIEF ARE FATAL—WHILE FAITH IS VITAL!** How important is it to have unshakeable **FAITH** in **GOD** and **HIS WORD**?

14) **FASTING AND PRAYER** If we don’t use the spiritual “tool” of **FASTING**, along with *prayer*, will we sometimes lack the **FAITH** to accomplish what God wants us to do?

15) **WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY FOR? How can any believer know what to pray for?**

16) **IS GOD “SELECTIVE” WHEN ANSWERING OUR PRAYERS?** Does the **LORD** promise to grant us *everything* we pray for—or does He answer our prayers *selectively*, depending on the circumstances?

17) **THREE POSSIBLE ANSWERS TO OUR PRAYERS:** What are the *three possible answers* to *any prayer request* that we offer up to our Father in Heaven?

18) **DOES GOD SOMETIMES ANSWER US BEFORE WE ASK HIM?** Does the Bible reveal that in certain *critical situations* God often *intervenes* on our behalf even *before* we pray to Him, requesting *His intervention*?

19) **SAINTS OR SINNERS?** Does our Creator only hear the prayers of His *saints*—or does He sometimes *hear* and *answer* the prayers of *sinners*?

Intimate Contact with Our Creator

Precious *few professing Christians* can honestly say they have established a *deep, unshakable*, and *abiding CONTACT* with their **HEAVENLY FATHER**—the Supreme Being, who is in charge of this seemingly **limitless universe!** To establish a **strong, personal relationship** with this Great Being should be the most important goal which any *intelligent beings*—whether *men* or *angels*—could ever accomplish! This article gives God’s people the *tools* that will enable them to *make* and *maintain* a **dynamic, eternal contact** with this Supreme Being of the God Family, our spiritual **FATHER** in heaven! Nothing else that we humans may ever do compares in its importance with our establishing an *intimate, direct CONTACT* with our wonderful *heavenly Father!*

Most of the *over six billion inhabitants* of this earth are in the same position

before their Creator as were the *learned Athenians*. The Apostle Paul gave a very revealing insight into the Athenians' *spiritual state* in the eyes of God, which was similar to that of the vast majority of humans on this planet. Paul was addressing the worldly-wise philosophers of the renowned city of Athens who prided themselves on their great knowledge and wisdom. We are told that many of them "spent their time in nothing else but either to *tell* or to *hear* some new thing" (Acts 17:21).

Paul told these proud Athenians the following: "***Men of Athens***, I perceive that in all things ***you are very religious***; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**. Therefore, the One whom you *worship* without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: **God, who MADE [created] the world and everything in it, since He is LORD [Ruler] of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands**. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands...since **He gives to all life, breath, and all things**. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might *grope* for Him and find Him, though **He is not far from each one of us**; for in Him we live and move and have our being.... Therefore, **since we are the OFFSPRING of God** [created in His "*image*"—Gen. 1:26-27], we ought not to think that the **Divine nature** is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God *overlooked*, but now commands all men everywhere to *repent*..." (Acts 17:22-30).

Worship Only the True God!

By virtue of God being the **CREATOR** of the *earth, mankind, the heavens* and myriads of *angelic beings*, and of all that exists, both *visible* (i.e., *matter*) and *invisible* (i.e., *spirit*), *He and He alone* should be worshiped! To worship anything other than the true God is to become an **idolater**, thereby transgressing several cardinal points of His *holy, spiritual law*, the **Ten Commandments** (Exod. 20; Rom. 7:12-14).

The *Eternal God* spoke His *Ten Commandments* as He was shrouded in a cloud on top of Mount Sinai, and later wrote with His own finger those same *Ten Commands* on two tables of stone symbolizing their **permanence** (Ex. 31:18; Deut. 9:10). Contrary to the teachings of many "Christian" churches, not a single one of the Ten Commandments has ever been *annulled* or "done away"—as some *false ministers* claim! God gave those Ten Commands to Israel, intending they would later be given to *all peoples and nations*.

As the **Creator-Ruler** of heaven and earth, and of all that exists in the entire UNIVERSE, He deserves our deep *respect, adoration and worship*. His *greatness and power, His beauty and perfection, His great knowledge, understanding and wisdom*, and His many other *divine attributes merit the adoration and worship* of all of His creatures, both *angelic and human!* God solemnly declares, "As I live, says the LORD, every *knee* shall bow to me, and every *tongue* shall confess to God" (Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:11).

The All-wise, All-powerful God

Once we come to know the true Creator-Ruler God, then we will truly understand that we should direct our reverence, our godly fear, and our worship solely toward this great Creator God who sits at the controls of the whole universe! He is **ALMIGHTY, ALL-WISE, and OMNIPRESENT**. God asks, "'Am I a God *near* at hand,' says the LORD, 'And not a God *afar off*? Can anyone *hide* himself in secret

places, so I shall not see him?’ says the LORD; **DO NOT I FILL HEAVEN AND EARTH?**’ says *the LORD*” (Jer. 23:23-24).

God—through the power of His *omnipresent Spirit*—sees all things, and can act on **anything, object or being** anywhere in the vast universe. God’s Word says, **“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth,** to show Himself *strong* on behalf of those whose heart is *loyal* to Him” (2 Chron. 16:9).

Israel’s King David understood God was *omnipresent* through the power of His *infinite Spirit*. He asked, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into **HEAVEN**, You are there; If I make my bed in **HELL** [Heb. *sheol*, “grave”] behold, You are there. If I...dwell in the uttermost parts of the **SEA**, even there Your hand shall lead me. If I say, ‘Surely the **darkness** shall fall on me,’ even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the *darkness* and the light are both alike to You” (Psa. 139:7-12).

God commanded a reluctant *Prophet Jonah* to go to *Nineveh*, the capital of Assyria, and tell the people that unless they *repented*, *they* and *their city* would be destroyed. Regrettably, Jonah did not do as God bade him. Instead, he tried to flee from God’s presence by sailing out into the tempestuous *ocean*, but God prepared a *big fish* that swallowed *Jonah*. This got Jonah’s attention. He did some serious thinking, and began *praying fervently* that God would deliver him from his predicament. “Then Jonah prayed to the LORD.... Out of the belly of *Sheol* I cried, and You heard my voice.... So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land” (Jonah 2:1-2, 10). The whale vomited a deeply repentant Jonah up onto the seashore. He had learned his lesson, and was quite willing to go and preach repentance to the people of *Nineveh*, which led them to *genuine repentance*. “Then God saw their works, that they turned from their *evil way*; and God repented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it” (3:1-10).

How privileged God’s own called-out people are, to be able to make contact with God—our *heavenly Father* and *His Son*—by utilizing the valuable “tool” of sincere, fervent *PRAYER*. God always hears any person who prays in a *right spirit* and *attitude*. This is especially true of those who *understand* that the One to whom we are *praying* is our *Creator, Ruler, Lord* and *Master*, as well as our *final JUDGE!*

Answers to Key Questions Re Prayer

Do “God’s people” really know the ANSWERS to the following QUESTIONS?

AN “UNKNOWN”FATHER? Did the O.T. Patriarchs and Prophets know of God the Father and pray to Him? The LORD God (Heb. *Yahweh Elohim*) mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures was the divine Person to whom the Old Testament saints addressed their prayers. That divine Being was later born as the “human” *Jesus Christ*. One of the main purposes for Christ’s First Coming was to “**reveal**” or “**declare**” the Father—who was *unknown* to the *O.T. Israelites*.

Note Christ was “divine” as well as *human*. In the New Testament, Jesus was called *EMMANUEL* (“**God with us**”), as mentioned in Matthew 1:23. He had a human *mother* but no human *father*. He is called the “*Son of Man*,” and was also called the “*Son of God*,” since His Father was the heavenly Being whom Jesus came to “**reveal**” (John 1:18; 17:24-26).

Are Jesus Christ and His Father “Persons,” which are *distinct* from each other, or

are they merely *two personalities*? Historically, the *Church of God* has believed that the Father and Son, together, presently make up the *two Persons* of the Godhead.

Although several Old Testament Scriptures pointed to more than one “Person” within the Hebrew “**Godhead**” (Rom. 1:20), the average Israelite undoubtedly thought of the Hebrew God as only *one Being, Person or Entity*. “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is ONE” (Deut. 6:4). The “Chosen people” who lived in the time of Christ and His disciples *failed to understand* that the word “God” (Heb. *Elohim*, Gk. *Theos*) could include *two divine Beings* (Col. 2:9).

Why did Jesus Christ need to *reveal* the Father? Simply because the Father had *not previously* been clearly expounded to mankind! Jesus revealed to His disciples His eternal, pre-human existence with the Father in glory, “**For You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father!** The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared [revealed] to them Your name [“Father”], and will declare it” (John 17:24-26).

The Greek word here translated into English as “declare” is: “...*exegeomai*...[and means] to lead out, signifies **to make known, rehearse, declare**. In John 1:18, the sentence ‘**He hath declared Him,**’... [means] **to unfold in teaching, to DECLARE by making known**” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, by W. E. Vine, p. 282). One of Jesus Christ’s main missions in the first century A.D. was “to make known” exactly *who* His Father was—although He knew it would be difficult for the people to understand the profound meaning in what He was saying.

PRAY TO THE FATHER—OR TO HIS SON? To whom should Christians *address* their prayers—the **FATHER**, or to **God’s SON, Jesus Christ**? Should Christians pray *only* to the **Father**, or can they also pray to **Christ, our Savior, Lord, High Priest, and our Intercessor**—who now sits in glory and power at the *right hand* of our **Majestic Father** in heaven?

Jesus Christ said His disciples were to pray to His heavenly Father: “In this manner, therefore pray: **Our Father in heaven**, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the EVIL ONE. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen” (Matt. 6:9-13). Clearly, Jesus Christ taught His disciples to pray to the **Father**, and He set the perfect example by Himself always praying to His Father.

But was it wrong for Jesus’ disciples to pray directly to Jesus Christ? Notice what happened to Stephen, the first N.T. Christian *martyr*. Just before he was stoned to death by the Jews, Stephen said he saw Jesus at the right hand of God in heaven: “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, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’” (Acts 7:55-56).

This so angered the Jews that they “cast him out of the city and *stoned him*.... And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘**Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**’ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘**Lord, do not charge them with this sin.**’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (vv. 58-60). Here we see Stephen *praying directly to Jesus* only seconds *before* he died as the first N. T. martyr for the sake of Jesus Christ.

So this verse reveals that it is not wrong to pray *to* Jesus, but the usual **Person** that we ought to pray to is our *heavenly Father*; for, as we have just seen, Christ said we are

to pray saying, “**Our Father in HEAVEN**, hallowed be Your name...” (Matt. 6:9).

ALWAYS PRAY IN CHRIST’S NAME? When praying to the Father, should Christians always **pray in the name of Jesus Christ**, the Son of God?

Jesus told His disciples, “And whatever you **ask in My name**, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything **in My name**, I will do it” (John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-36). The **book of Acts** is replete with many verses which show that Christ’s apostles, including Paul and Barnabas, went out preaching in Jesus’ name, and working miracles in His name. Paul said we are to do *everything* in *Christ’s name*: “*And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3:17).

After Jesus’ resurrection, He told His disciples: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.... And these signs will follow those who believe: **In My name they will cast out demons**; they will *speak with new tongues*; they will take up *serpents*; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will *lay hands on the sick*, and they will recover”—all to be done *in the name of Jesus Christ* (Mark 16:15-18).

God’s ministers and His people are all to pray to the **Father, in Jesus Christ’s name**; and we are commanded to do *everything* in His name: healing the sick, casting out demons, asking God to bless our food before we eat, etc. (cf. Acts 16:16-18; 19:1-20).

“ATTITUDE” IS ALL-IMPORTANT! When we go to the “Throne of Grace” in *prayer* (Heb. 4:16), what *frame of mind* or *attitude* should we *maintain* at all times? When praying to our *heavenly FATHER*, it is important that we maintain a ***humble, outgoing, outward attitude toward GOD and our fellow HUMANS***—instead of a ***proud, self-centered, inward, self-seeking attitude!***

Remember, God always looks on the heart and attitude of the one who prays to Him (1 Sam. 16:7; John 7:24). The Lord loved King David because he was “a man after [God’s] own heart” (Acts. 13:22). “**But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My WORD**” (Isa. 66:2). Further, the *1st* and *15th Psalms* clearly explain the kind of attitude and heart God loves.

In the “Lord’s Prayer,” carefully notice that Christ said we are to pray saying, “*OUR* Father in heaven.... Give *US* this day *OUR* daily bread. And forgive *US OUR* debts as *WE* forgive *OUR* debtors. And do not lead *US* into temptation, but deliver *US* from the EVIL ONE...” (Matt. 6:9-3). Note that Jesus did not state that we should say, “*MY* Father in heaven.... Give *ME MY* daily bread...” Jesus taught us not to be *self-centered*, but to include others in our *thoughts* and *prayers!*

PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING ARE VITAL! What part should ***praise*** and ***thanksgiving*** play in our prayers? Does God take great “delight” in the prayers of the *upright* person? Many of the Psalms are psalms of *praise* and *thanksgiving* to God.

God’s Word says, “**The prayer of the upright is His delight**” (Prov. 15:8). Furthermore, we are told that the prayers of God’s saints are, figuratively speaking, like *incense* that ascends up to heaven. “Now when He [Christ] had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the *twenty-four elders* fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and ***golden bowls full of incense***, which are the *prayers* of the saints” (Rev. 5:8).

Also, remember that God commanded Moses to tell Aaron how to make aromatic, holy anointing oil, and how to use *sweet incense* along with the offerings and sacrifices

which the Priests continually offered up to God as a “sweet savor” in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple at Jerusalem. And if one reads the book of Psalms carefully, he will notice that the words “praise” and “thanks” or “thanksgiving” are used many times. Further, the N.T. scriptures reveal that Christ’s early disciples continually *praised* God and gave *thanks* to Him for His many blessings (Acts 2:47).

The Apostle Paul says Christians are to “be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in *psalms* and *hymns* and *spiritual songs*, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, **GIVING THANKS always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**” (Eph. 5:18-19).

The recorded prayers of the great men and women of the Bible, are all filled with *praise and thanksgiving* to God. To offer up a prayer without taking some time to thank God for the many blessings which He has showered upon you, your family, His Church, His people of Israel—and for dozens of other blessings received from Him, is to miss out on something which means a lot to our Father.

If you do something nice for your *spouse*, or for your *child*, and they express *gratitude* to you (the *giver*) this makes you feel good. Jesus said, “It is more blessed to *give* than to *receive*” (Acts 20:35). God does not *need anything* from any of us, but He receives *great joy* when He sees His children expressing *praise and thanksgiving* to Him for the *many blessings* He daily showers upon His people.

Let us not forget that when Jesus healed *ten lepers* only *one* returned to thank Him for having been healed of hideous leprosy which had afflicted him for some time (Luke 17:12-19). Let us not be like the *nine* ungrateful lepers, but let us always be quick to offer up *thanks* to God, and also to humans, for the kindnesses and blessings we receive from them. This is well-pleasing to God!

Prayer Hindrances

If God does *not* answer some of our prayers, *why not?* What are some of the many **HINDRANCES** that can prevent our prayers being answered? It is a fact that there are many things which we may do, or fail to do, that will *prevent* our heavenly Father *answering* our prayers. Let us look at some of the *hindrances*—or *roadblocks*—to having our prayers answered:

DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD AND HIS WORD God’s Word makes it abundantly clear that if we expect God to hear our prayers, we must *please* and *obey* Him. The Apostle John says, “**And whatever we *ask* [in prayer] we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are *pleasing* in His sight**” (1 John 3:22). Here are some of the major *hindrances* to getting an answer from God when we pray: The *Prophet Isaiah* says, “Behold, the LORD’S *hand* is not shortened, that it cannot *save*; nor his *ear* heavy, that it cannot hear. **But your *iniquities* have separated you from your God; and your *sins* have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear**” (Isa. 59:1-2).

From the very beginning, Adam and Eve would not obey God and His Word, and this has been so of every one of their children—of every person and nation—ever since. That is why this world is reeling under the terrible curse of **gruesome crimes: murder, rape, robberies, oppression, violence** and *horrific wars*. Isaiah says if we are *disobedient to God* and His Word, He will *not* hear us: “When you spread out your hands, I will *hide* My eyes from you; even though you **make MANY PRAYERS, I will not hear....** Put away the *evil* of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do

good” (Isa. 1:15-20)! The **Prophet Hosea** states: “Though it was I who redeemed them, they have lied to me; **they never put their heart into their PRAYERS**” (Hos. 7:14 Moffat).

God inspired Solomon to say, “Because I have called and you *refused*, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because *you disdained all MY COUNSEL*, and would have none of *MY REPROOF*, I also will laugh at your *calamity*; I will mock when your *terror* comes, when your terror comes like a storm, and your *destruction* comes like a whirlwind, when *distress* and *anguish* come upon you. **Then they will call on me, but I will not answer**; they will seek me diligently, but they will *not* find me. Because they *hated knowledge* and did not choose the *fear of the LORD*, they would have none of MY COUNSEL and despised all MY REPROOF, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies.... But whoever *listens* to me will dwell safely, and will be *secure* without fear of evil” (Prov. 1:25-33)

PERNICIOUS SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS! Does the LORD ever answer the prayers of *self-righteous persons*, who maintain a “**holier-than-thou**” attitude toward God or toward other *humans*? The LORD hates to see anyone have a *self-righteous, holier-than-thou* attitude. The Prophet Isaiah mentions that certain people are “*rebellious* people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their *own thoughts*, a people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face.... Who say, ‘Keep to yourself, do not come near me, **for I am holier than you!**’ These are *smoke* in My nostrils, a *fire* that burns all the day,” says God’s Word (Isa. 65:2-5).

God knows the human heart and its many weaknesses (Jer. 17:9). He knows that “all have *sinned*” (Rom. 3:23), and He also realizes that “the wages of sin is *death*” (6:23). Furthermore, God inspired the Prophet Isaiah to say, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6); so Jesus Christ had to die for our sins (v. 7, cf. 1-12).

God therefore tells men to “Seek the LORD while He may be found.... Let the wicked forsake *his way*... [and] let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him.... For **My thoughts are not your thoughts**, nor are *your ways* My ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:6-9).

The *58th chapter of Isaiah*, tells us that if we will *quit sinning*, and learn to live uprightly, by not breaking God’s law, and by not oppressing the poor, but will show *mercy* to the needy, and faithfully keep *God’s Sabbaths*, then He will greatly bless such persons (Isa. 58:1-14). God promises all those who live righteously: “If you turn away your *foot from the Sabbath*... *and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure*, nor speaking your *own words*. Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will...feed you with the *heritage* [blessings] of Jacob your father [for] the LORD has spoken” (vv. 13-14).

Notice the self-righteous attitude of a certain *Pharisee*. Jesus Christ “spoke this *parable* to some who trusted in themselves that they were *righteous*, and despised others. Two men went up to the temple *to pray*, one a **Pharisee** and the other a *tax collector*. 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*. I *fast* twice a week; I give *tithes* of all that I possess.’ 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!**’” (Luke 18:10-14). Jesus said that “*this man* [the *tax collector*] went down to his house *justified* rather than the other; for everyone who *exalts himself* will be abased, and

he who humbles himself will be exalted” (v. 14).

BEWARE OF AN UNFORGIVING ATTITUDE! Will God *hear* and *answer* the prayers of those ***hard-hearted*** persons who have an **unmerciful, unforgiving, unloving attitude** toward others?

Jesus spoke a *parable* to illustrate the attitude of some who had sinned greatly and had been *forgiven* by the Father, yet were unable to *forgive* a brother for a sin or trespass which was not nearly as serious as the sins for which they had to be forgiven.

Peter asked Christ, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I *forgive* him? Up to *seven times*?” (Matt. 18:21). Christ’s reply must have amazed Peter, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to *seventy times seven*” (v. 22).

Jesus then spoke a parable to illustrate the importance of each person forgiving his brother his trespasses. Christ said there was a “certain king” who decided to “settle accounts” with his servants. “And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ***ten thousand talents***. But when he was *not* able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with **compassion**, released him, and *forgave him* the debt” (vv. 23-27).

“But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a [paltry sum] ***hundred denari***; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘**Pay me what you owe!**’... Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! ***I forgave you*** all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had *compassion* on your fellow servant, just as I had *pity* on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him” (vv. 28-34).

Jesus then added, “**So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses**” (v. 35).

Let us never forget Christ’s *model prayer* in which he said His followers should include this important thought: “**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors**” (Matt. 6:12). If any person maintains a hard-hearted, unforgiving attitude toward any of his fellow humans, God will *not forgive him*, and neither will he *answer his prayer!*

Numerous scriptures reveal that a *prevailing spirit* among many people in the end-time will be that they will be “**without natural affections**” (2 Tim. 3:3), and that “because of *iniquity* **the love of many shall wax cold**” (Matt. 24:12 KJV).

Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have **love for one another**” (John 13: 34, 35).

Make Praying Fervently a Habit!

The men and women whom God used mightily in the Bible believed in and utilized the *power of prayer* in their lives. Without establishing a regular, meaningful, sincere contact with our heavenly Father it is impossible for God’s sons and daughters to resist the many evils, and prove themselves victorious in all their difficulties and

tribulations. God's Word tells us to **"pray for one another"** (Jas. 5:16). The Apostle Paul urged the *brethren* to pray for him and the other *ministers of God* (2 Cor. 1:11; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1; Heb. 13:18; Ph'p. 1:4; Rom. 15:30). And **Paul assured the brethren that he was also praying for them** (2 Thess. 1:11; Rom. 1:9).

One of Christ's disciples asked Jesus to teach them *how to pray*: "And it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, **'Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples'**" (Luke 11:1). Jesus then gave them the so-called "Lord's Prayer" (vv. 2-4).

If we don't learn to regularly go to our Father in fervent prayer, we will miss out on many blessings and opportunities that we would otherwise receive. James tells us that we sometimes don't "receive" because we simply do not **"ask"** God for those things which were right and good. We are told to put on God's *spiritual armor*: "the *breastplate of righteousness...the shield of faith...the helmet of salvation...the sword of the spirit*, which is the WORD of God; **PRAYING ALWAYS with all PRAYER and supplication in the Spirit...for all saints...and for me [Paul]...**" (Eph. 6:14-18).

FERVENT PRAYER is one of our most effective spiritual "tools," which every child of God must learn to make good use of.

May all of God's people learn to utilize the spiritual tools which He has provided us so that we may establish a more meaningful relationship with our Creator, and regularly receive ANSWERS to all our prayers!

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