

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 114

August 1989

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Editorial

Dear Brothers and Sisters and Friends, Greetings in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thank you for all your letters and for the essays, etc. enclosed. I hope to make use of all the items in time.

Bro. Phil Parry, in a letter dated 5th July, writes, "We are sorry to say that Bro. Hampton of Gloucester was admitted to the Gloucester Royal Hospital for an operation for hernia. He went in on Monday 3rd July and had his operation on Tuesday... He is still awaiting an operation for a very delicate operation on his right eye having had a lens implant in the other twelve months ago so he is under stress from both quarters, so it is our earnest prayer he will come through it all with our Father's help." I am sure we are all united in our prayers and our thoughts for you, Brother Hampton for we know that His Blessing is upon all those who are His.

Also Bro. Phil writes regarding what Bro. S. Simmonds says about the curse of the ground (see last months C.L.), "I have always considered it applied in a general sense, and though Noah found grace in God's sight, he was not instrumental in getting the curse removed, but that God would not add to the one He had already made is how I interpret Genesis 8:21, 'I will not again cause the waters to go over the earth to destroy man.' See Isaiah 54:9. It is obvious to us that comparing the earth as it is now with what it will be in the Millennium and beyond - the earth is under a curse because the whole creation has been made subject to vanity (because Adam lost the blessing, not of our will) by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in Hope."

In the past we have suggested a Questions and Answers section for the C.L. but we have had little response, now Bro. Harold Dawson suggests a "Chat Section" in which we can air our views or whatever we care to chat about, and he has offered his services in this direction. Would anyone care to "start the ball rolling," please?

This month there are fewer articles than usual, each longer than average. My essay on The Lord's Prayer was the last Bible Class talk I gave just a few months before my resignation was requested by Erdington Christadelphian Ecclesia.

Sincere Love to all in the Master's service, Russell Gregory.

“I Am The Light Of The World”

John 8:12

“In the beginning God (Yahweh) created the heavens and the earth.” At some later period the earth ceased to be inhabited, for it was said to be without form and void, covered by water and darkness was upon the face of the deep. What then is the first priority in counteracting darkness? The answer is in God’s authority, power, and declaration, “Let there be light and there was light.” (Genesis 1:3).

This was a necessity for all that God was about to create in the natural order, for in God Himself is no darkness at all. We are told that God saw the light that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. Through the introduction of sin into the world by the first man of this natural creation, Adam; God has been disposed in His word to Adam’s posterity, to show His way for dividing spiritual light from darkness and ignorance of the carnal mind, which is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. For to be carnally minded is “death”, but to be spiritually minded is “Life and peace”, says Paul in Romans 8. This carnally minded state he refers to as being in-the-flesh, as opposed to being in-the-spirit, but in both cases the person is a creature of flesh and blood nature, so that Paul’s statement to the Christian converts, “but ye are not in the flesh but in the spirit” shows the contrast between the carnally-minded (unrelated to God), and the spiritually-minded (related to God through Christ) - darkness and light. To the latter the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth, 1 John 2:8.

Could Paul nullify his own state (as a regenerated and converted Christian) by describing himself in his state of spiritually-mindedness, as carnal, sold under sin? Was not Paul among that number of converts Peter addressed when he said, “Ye are not your own but ye have been bought with a price, even with the precious blood of Christ? Let those who use Romans 7 out of context and without discrimination, in order to excuse their lack of effort and will-power, consider Paul’s words in Romans 7:5 and 6 that he was no longer carnal (in the flesh) but in the spirit serving in newness of life, having died to the dominion of sin.

Here we find the necessity for the light of the glorious gospel to enter and shine forth; “for what communion hath the light with darkness?” says Paul. And speaking of himself and the other apostles of Christ he declares, “For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness (Genesis 1:3) hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:6. “We beheld his glory” says John, “as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Paul also beheld His glory, not as in the transfiguration, but after His glorious resurrection. The light of God shone in the face of Moses so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold him and consequently he had to put a vail over his face, and even now, generally speaking, the vail is upon their heart, and not only theirs, but many who profess to believing the Gospel among the Gentiles have the vail over their eyes and heart in refusing the real Christ - the Lamb of God and the commandments of His Father, “Hear ye Him.” Many, therefore, have rejected this advice in allowing the light to shine in their hearts, and listened to men with no authority from God, and consequently remained under the dominion of sin and in darkness.

It is necessary to know why men are born in bondage and under the dominion of sin. “Let there be light.” Why religion? Is it necessary? Yes, for reconciliation to Him from whom man has been alienated and sold under sin, whose wages for services rendered is “death.” Can you enlighten further on this subject? He who provides redemption, reconciliation and forgiveness unto eternal life can, and has, through His inspired Word from Genesis to Revelation. “The entrance of Thy Word giveth light”.

The theme and purpose of God’s atoning work through His Son Jesus can be found in His word, we can direct people to it and help their understanding but only God can cause the light of His glorious Gospel to shine out of darkness into their hearts that they may steadfastly behold Jesus Christ, as the word of God portrays Him in truth, and not as men like to think and describe Him, their darkness not having passed. (1 John 2:8).

Unfortunately there is, and have been in our time, people who profess enlightenment to the Divine message of God through His appointed prophets, but in fact they have not hearkened to those prophets, but to men who have lacked the Holy Spirit in hearkening and interpreting God's message. Some forty odd years ago I listened to a lecture by a man belonging to a well known religious sect, and in the course of his lecture he declared the message of John the Baptist to be "All flesh is grass, etc.," and on that theme proceeded to demonstrate (not from scripture) but with the help of uninspired men, how obnoxious human nature was in the sight of God. Jesus being of this same nature prompted his unscriptural and irresponsible representation of the cry of Jesus, "Thou art righteous, O Father, in putting me to death, all flesh is grass." I have found similar blasphemous statements in some written works of that period and up to the present time, but none have stuck in my mind as that blasphemous misrepresentation of the death of Jesus spoken some forty years ago. Was this blasphemous outburst really a message of John the Baptist? Can it be called a message at all? Surely the Jewish people knew and understood all about the quality of the flesh from their reading of Ecclesiastes 3:18-21 and would also know from experience that the human nature was as limited as the grass of the field without God raising up the Prophet John the Baptist to tell them so, We only have to read from Luke's record to learn that the work and message of John the Baptist was far in excess of a declaration that "all flesh is grass."

What greater authority could be given of John than the words of his own father Zacharias who was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied? (Luke 1:67-80). An important part of that prophecy concerning John is in verses 76 to 79, "To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins." To go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

It is stated that John was in the deserts until the day of his showing to Israel. What better place to be taught of God - no erroneous doctrines and idolatry with which to be snared but an environment where God and His Holy Word could be and was food and drink. This was John's preparation prior to his showing to Israel, and justified his declaration (after giving light and knowledge of salvation to the people) "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight by repentance and change of ways for the remission of sins." In other words "Give your Messiah, who is in your midst, some good ground on which He can work and drop the good seed of the Word of God - do not place obstacles in his path - make His paths straight - a highway for your God, be baptised as a token of your repentance though it be by water only - and bring forth fruits worthy of your repentance - for the glory of the Lord is about to be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.

The glory of the Lord to be revealed was the Messiah of Israel, her appointed time was accomplished, (Isaiah 40:2) her iniquity pardoned, the acceptable year of the Lord had come, (Isaiah 61); "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the Sin (singular) of the world - all flesh shall see the salvation of God - this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Was this to God an obnoxious sight of flesh upon whom His Spirit was caused to alight in the form of a dove that might witness the fact? Speaking after the event about this, John said "And I knew him not (that is as the Messiah) but he that sent me to baptise with water, the same said unto me. Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptiseth with the Holy Spirit. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." John confirmed to two of his disciples that this Son of God was indeed the Lamb of God! John the Baptist also confirmed that this only begotten Son was in the bosom of the Father and was able to declare Him though no man had seen God at any time. Jesus taught by parable what an exalted position for Lazarus, to be carried by the Angels into Abraham's bosom. Would God tolerate obnoxious, condemned flesh in His own bosom? Not likely. This only begotten Son of God was beloved - was filled with Holy Spirit and remained with him, and John said, "I baptise with water but he shall baptise with the Holy Ghost and with fire." Were John's words applicable only to the twelve chosen Apostles? Only insofar as the preaching of the Gospel and Baptising was concerned which Jesus committed unto them, but the Holy Spirit was given to those who by belief and faith were qualified to receive it, their baptism being of water but having also the seal of God, John 3:33, "He (Jesus) that cometh from above is above all - he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; - He that hath received his testimony hath set his seal that God is true. For he

whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.”

Paul endorses the words of John Baptist in addressing the Corinthian believers, “Now he which stablish us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” (2 Corinthians 1:21; Paul also exhorted the Ephesians that if they had been taught by Jesus Christ as the truth is in him, that they must have put off the old man and put on the new which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind - communicate that which is good to the use of edifying that it may minister grace to the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption (deliverance of the purchased possession). Ephesians 4:30. See also Ephesians 1:11-14.

Now it must be understood that the preaching of John Baptist was not to the Gentile; but to the Jews only, who were under the law and his baptism was not with the Holy Spirit, neither can it be said that the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus was conditional upon baptism of John. It was a means of revelation to John from God that this was God’s Son the promised Messiah upon whom would be His Spirit in fulfilling the words of Isaiah 61, “The acceptable year of the Lord,” - Peace to them who were nigh by circumcision, and to them afar off for whom he would break down the middle wall of partition thereby giving access by one Body and one Spirit to the Father. He abolished by His sacrifice, the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain (Jew and Gentile) one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, (Ephesians 2:12-19). By this I understand that the federal Sin of Adam under whom all men were concluded and the personal transgressions under the Law were accumulated into one, as saith the prophet Isaiah 53:6, “And the Lord hath made the iniquity of us all to meet upon him.” As John Baptist said of Jesus, “He must increase but I must decrease.” So also Paul could say of those baptised of the Spirit of Christ, “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ - and you hath he quickened - who in time past walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that works in the children of disobedience who are under the constitution of sin dead in Adamic slavery and ignorance,”

“But God in His great love even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ.” “The last Adam was made a quickening Spirit, (or a life giving Spirit,)” therefore we who believe and understand the meaning of His death believe only in One Body and One Spirit, One Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. Ephesians 4. “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? Know ye not that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of an harlot? God forbid. What? Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined to the Lord is One Spirit.” We have it recorded in Acts 2:33 confirmation that Jesus fulfilled His promise of the Comforter - the Spirit of Truth - the Spirit of Christ to His disciples and that He would be their mouth in all that they spoke. While He was present physically with them, they preached, healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, raised the dead, cast out devils, according as they considered the recipients worthy - and all was done in the name of Jesus for as yet the Holy Spirit was not fallen upon them and would not until after Christ ascended to His Father and had authority from Him to bestow it - this happened on the day of Pentecost. Acts chapter 2, verses 1 to 4 and 33.

You will have noticed that it was Jesus speaking through His disciples though it may have appeared to the hearers that the disciples were speaking the diverse languages by their own power, but Peter is quick to tell them that this was the result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which God had given Jesus authority to do at a certain time when they would be gathered together awaiting His promise of the Comforter, “He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.” Verse 33. But what of the important facts of which we read prior to this outpouring? Did not the disciples do many miracles through the “name” only of Jesus? Yes. But did they not have to show and demonstrate faith in the Name? They certainly did. And now upon receiving the Holy Spirit, faith in that Name was still incumbent upon them as recorded in Acts 3:16. How important it is then to believe in one who Baptises with Holy Spirit. Romans 15:15,16, also verse 13. “For no man,” says Paul, “speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus

accursed, and no man can say that Jesus Christ is Lord but by the Holy Spirit,” so that if a man deny he has the Holy Spirit, he does not know Jesus Christ as Lord and cannot say with any authority that He is, or even that He is the Son of God. This I believe is the lesson taught by John the Baptist concerning Jesus and from which arises the question Paul put to certain disciples, “Unto what then were ye baptised?” Is baptism a mere ritual of immersion in water upon belief of the promises to Abraham and his seed (which is Christ) in the letter of a commandment only, and without any knowledge of its real meaning and significance? Could anyone describe the Baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch in such a superficial manner? Certainly not. After being taught by Philip, he exclaimed, “See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptised? Philip said. If thou believes! with all thine heart, thou mayest.” There must be a lot involved in those nine words. The Eunuch also in nine words. “I believe that Jesus is the Son of God” Did the Eunuch have the Holy Spirit when he said these words before his baptism? If Cornelius and his household did, why not the Eunuch? David called Jesus Lord and David had the Holy Spirit. The Jews could not explain this to Jesus, yet the Eunuch understood Jesus as the Son of God without even a mention of fleshly relationship or descent from David or Adam as a son, for in the male genealogy He was not, His life being direct from God. Certainly He was of the seed of David according to flesh, and though a Son of God by Divine begettal was nevertheless a human being even as Adam was as the first man. 1 Corinthians 1:15.

There are many people today who profess a great knowledge of the Bible and that they know the Truth, yet they cannot explain with any scriptural justification of themselves, the reason for the virgin-birth of Jesus. Certainly they have attempted to do so on the false premise of condemned nature and physical law of defilement and sin-in-the-flesh, by transmission to Adamic posterity, but this is not the teaching of the Spirit and never was. It is the teaching of men, and it appears that the teaching of Jesus is not sufficient for people who follow the precepts of men. There were some in his day who seemed to be tainted with this sort of false view, and they asked Jesus concerning the man born blind, “Lord, who did sin, this man or his parents that he was born blind?” The answer of Jesus was emphatic, “Neither hath this man sinned or his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” It is strange that those who asked the question “Who did sin...?”, were disciples of Jesus and what followed as a result was meant to be a lesson to them and to those who claimed to be Moses’ disciples, that this Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God (not the son of Adam). To those who want Him as Son of Adam and Son of God - a hybrid - part man and part God, the words of Jesus are applicable, John 9:35-41. Such people who deny the Son of God the question of Paul should also be put, “Unto what then were ye baptised?” It is the Spirit that quickeneth, or giveth life, the flesh profiteth nothing. David by the Spirit calleth Jesus Lord even though Jesus was conceived in the fruit of his loins according to the flesh, for David recognised that the method by which conception was brought about in the Virgin Mary was what counted for redemption and salvation - it must be through one who was never alienated from God - He must be a new man - therefore David knew and called Him Lord - my Lord - by the Holy Spirit. So, as the Apostle affirms, “No man can say that Jesus is Lord, i.e., my Lord, but by the Holy Spirit.” There are many printed and large signs erected throughout the country stating “Jesus Christ is Lord” but those people responsible for them are very often found to have a very shallow conception of what the Holy Spirit teaches in the Word of God, why He is Lord and the true significance of His death and resurrection, in fact, some of them reject the necessity of baptism, others immerse their candidates by using the formula “In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” while at the same time not having instructed them in the possible receiving of the Holy Spirit because of their theory that it is not available to believers at present, thus putting such an immersion on the level, (or probably below) the baptism of John.

At this stage it might be as well to consider the events concerning a Jew named Apollos who had come to Ephesus and was an eloquent man, mighty in the scriptures and instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John, and began to speak boldly in the synagogue. See Acts 18:24-28. Here we find Aquila and Priscilla taking him aside in a humble and discreet way to expound unto him the way of God more perfectly, thus adding to what he already knew, Apollos mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ. After this he decided to go into Achaia and the brethren there were exhorted to receive him and on arrival he helped them much which had believed through grace. But what was the position of some in Ephesus who would have heard and believed the preaching of Apollos?

God had not forgotten them, or His promise spoken by Peter in Acts 2:38, the Apostle Paul was on his way to them. It would appear from what followed, that their immersion related only to a reformation of outlook and conduct - that this, and conformation by immersion (the baptism of John) was all that Apollos had taught them prior to Aquila and Priscilla expounding to him the way of God more perfectly. Baptism into the Name and consequently symbolic death with Christ and union of Spirit with His resurrection was unknown to these twelve disciples though they must have believed all that Apollos had preached in the synagogue at Ephesus and were sincere enough to accept from him John's baptism which did not include the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Name of Jesus was the power of God unto salvation and I am sure this was the perfect way of God that Apollos lacked together with these twelve and which Aquila and Priscilla had expounded to Apollos. I believe it shows that the baptism of John was not into the death of Christ and confirms Christ's own words to Nicodemus "Except a man be born of water and Spirit he cannot see the Kingdom of God," this does not mean to say that Nicodemus needed baptism into Jesus Christ in order to receive the Holy Spirit, Jesus said of His immediate disciples, "Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you," so it is evident they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost though they had not been baptised into Him; they were clean through the word which had the power of regeneration as it is recorded in John 1:12,13, "As many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The Apostle James confirms this, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." (James 1:18). The words of Peter also are in harmony with James, see Peter 1:2,3, also 18 to 23, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." This being born again can not be better explained than as Paul does to Titus, chapter 3 verses 4 to 7, "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared. Not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Peter explains that if there is no true belief and conception of why Christ came, the reason for His sacrificial death, and also His resurrection, then immersion in water is but a mere washing of the outward grime of the body, and is not regeneration nor the answer of a good conscience toward God which only a true and grateful knowledge and understanding of God's love and mercy toward man through His Son Jesus can give. (1 Peter 3:18-22).

This subject is so deep and involved, that many questions may arise and many doubts be pondered, but that chapter 1, verses 12 and 13 of John leaves little doubt that to be born again is to be born of the Spirit, or as James puts it, "Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth which liveth and abideth for ever," a result of what Jesus had already stated, "The words that I speak unto you they are Spirit and they are life."

The contrast here is that those who have been immersed as a result of being begotten by the teachings and erroneous doctrines propounded to them as the Gospel, have been born of the will of man and not by the power of the Spirit of God which quickens the understanding and desire to know Him and Jesus Christ whom He sent for that purpose. A re-appraisal of the matter invokes the words of Jesus as we believe His testimony as opposed to those who see nothing more in His death but a false declaration that it was to declare the righteousness of God in showing what was due to sinful flesh, and not rather, what was due to Adam by his own sin, and the fact of God's love, mercy and compassion for man and the whole of His creation. "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness," "For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world; but rather that the world through him might be saved." "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up: (Why?) That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." There was nothing compulsory about the death of Jesus, it was voluntary, for us. The words of John the Baptist are final on this matter to all the gainsayers who receive not his testimony, "The Father loveth the Son (the complete man who was in our nature), and hath given all things into his hand." John 3:34,35. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Amen. Your Brother in Christ, P. Parry.

The Lord's Prayer

A Few Random Thoughts

Introduction

When I was a young man having joined the Christadelphian community and agreed to take my turn as a Presiding Brother it was with some considerable fear and trepidation that I considered the prospect of leading the Ecclesia in prayer. What should I say? What sort of things should I include and what should I leave out? Should I write out my prayers and read them?

All the Presiding Brethren seemed to be so fluent and it was no effort for them to preside, so how did they start? As my very first presiding appointment drew nearer so my anxiety grew and by now I had heard that some had started by writing out their prayers, and so that's what I would do. But what should I write? I asked my mother's advice. Well, that's what mothers are for, isn't it? She said, "Base your main prayer on Sunday morning on the Lord's prayer." Oh! You can't imagine the relief this advice was to me! Now I would know what to say. What a good idea. So out came my Bible - Matthew 6, verses 9 to 13 - it took twenty seconds to read it and it seemed Jesus wasn't saying very much. It was far too short. How could I possibly make use of it? No sooner would everyone be standing up than it would be time for them to sit down again. And all the Presiding Brethren I had ever heard never gave such short prayers but always went on for minutes, occasionally many, many minutes. And they had always so much to say! So I rushed back into my anxiety state once more!

However, I persevered with Matthew 6, verses 9 to 13 and slowly began to realise that Jesus was saying quite a lot after all.

Now these thoughts were brought to mind a few months ago when I went to a Fraternal Gathering and the speaker was talking about prayer. He told of one occasion at which he was present when a young presiding Brother, for the main prayer on a Sunday morning had recited the Lord's prayer and when he said "Amen" about half of the Ecclesia hesitated a moment or two before sitting down as if thinking "is that all we're getting?" Well, whatever we may think about saying the Lord's Prayer on a Sunday morning, I am sure that young Brother was listened to. And what is the point of a prayer if it is so long that most people's minds have wandered off and are no longer listening to what is being said. How often has your mind gone along on a different track to that of the one giving the prayer? Perhaps early on in the prayer he said something that you wanted to think more deeply about, so off you went with your own thoughts. It happens to me all too often, and I expect it happens to most of us; and when the brother says "Amen" we automatically sit down then realise we don't know what has been said on our behalf.

But enough introduction; to our subject:

The Lord's Prayer.

I shall go through this prayer phrase by phrase and the points I make are very much my own personal comments and observations.

Our Father which art in heaven.

It is God whom we are addressing. God, who alone is uncreated. That thought is beyond our comprehension, so at once we are out of our depth! There are I believe, three infinities - time, space and power. Uncreated God is eternal and has always lived throughout the infinity of time. Space is distance in every direction. There is no limit to space; it is unending in every direction. All that God has created by His infinite power extends into space. It may extend into all space. To say it doesn't is putting limitations on God and of course He has no limitations. Therefore He is perfect. Well, that may take some thinking about, but I believe it has to be the case.

Do you find that when you are considering such sublime matters that you can see some things but cannot find adequate words to prove your point? I do. And my next observation, too, is of a similar kind, for I believe that because God is perfect He is also Love. That may not seem an obvious conclusion but surely it has to be true; for God not to love and care for His creation would be unthinkable. So, because He loves His creatures He shows them kindness, mercy and compassion.

God knows all, understands all, and has all wisdom. This is God's power. Again, this is a point which needs some thought. For by His knowledge, understanding and wisdom God created all things and dwells in all things. This is heaven; this is the universe.

When God created the earth. He formed it to be inhabited; the angels rejoiced and God saw everything that He had made and declared it was very good. That is, good in the sense it was pleasing to Him - it gave Him pleasure. And God gave man a free will. Man had a choice - to serve God or not. And the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil was placed in the Garden. The word "good" here is again the word often translated "pleasant", so it was the tree of the knowledge of that which was pleasant and evil. To the mind of selfish man so much that is sinful seems pleasant and desirable and men became lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. Not that all pleasure is sinful - that would be nonsense. We all find great pleasure in God's creation, in the beauty and wonder all around us, but there is much pleasure in selfishness and greed - the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. But those who endeavour to put God first separate -themselves from these desires and lusts for God is separate from them. He sets Himself apart from all sin and evil and this we acknowledge when we say

Hallowed be Thy Name.

Hallowed means set apart; as does "holy". Set apart from all that is not good in His sight, but even more than this. The angels are holy; they give God pleasure, they do His will, but God is separate from them in as much as He alone is uncreate, while all else is created. That makes God holiest of all - to be sanctified and glorified. Do we think of God without due respect? He is our God, our King, our Creator and we cannot esteem Him too highly in our thoughts.

And what a contrast to ourselves. Man is so small and feeble; we are weak erring creatures of the dust; imperfect, frequently untrue, knowing very little, understanding even less, having a very faulty wisdom of our own and in such a state we cannot have access to the Tree of Life.

Is it too difficult to think of the Garden of Eden as being a small part of heaven? A place where God's will was done up until the moment Adam and Eve sinned? God was their King and they obeyed His authority, but when they sinned God was no longer their King for they had obeyed another authority - that of self-will. And over the past 6,000 years most people have been pleasing themselves. But down through the ages there have been some prepared to listen to what God has to say and they find that it is God who devises ways of bringing people back to Him. As a result these are the ones who pray

Thy Kingdom come.

Eden restored, and much, much more, for at this time the elect will become the youngest of the angels of heaven. Their work is to rule over "one, five or ten cities." Immortals ruling over mortals, caring for their needs, teaching, advising, guiding in the ways of goodness, purity, truth and love. All those qualities we see and admire in Jesus Christ will be theirs. The law for the whole world will go out from Jerusalem. Not man's law but God's, and Jesus Christ will be King over all the earth. Psalm 72 tells us a lot about that age. The Psalmist looked forward to the time of Jesus' reign when he wrote: "Give the king thy judgements, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgement. The mountains (those ruling for Christ) shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness..." Verse 16: "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon," is, I believe, a reference to the work of the elect in the Kingdom, for Jesus was that corn of wheat, that single grain,

which fell into the ground and died, which brought forth fruit to the glory of God. And here we have an handful of corn in the earth (the elect) yet to be placed in the top of the mountains - the mountains used so frequently in Scripture as a symbol of ruling powers. This is a picture of the elect in authority, ruling as kings and priests for God ensuring that

Thy will be done in the earth as it is in heaven.

In the Kingdom age all things that offend will be cast out and only God's will will be done. It is my opinion that in the Kingdom, people, that is, the mortal population, will still have temptations to sin just as we have today, but they will not be allowed to sin because that would cause others to suffer as a result. Isaiah tells us of this time (Isaiah 30:21) when "thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee saying, This is the way. Walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left." This is a direct contrast to the present age of which we read in Ecclesiastes 8:11, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

We who look to God in this present age as our King should endeavour to do His will, as Jesus did. But we don't try very hard, do we? Jesus though tempted in all points as we are never sinned. He had the tremendous responsibility of the work of redemption on His shoulders, too. "Not my will but thine be done" did not come easily to Jesus, for Hebrews 5:7 tells us of Him "who in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death." (For surely, had He sinned He would have died - perished). "And he was heard in that He feared." And He overcame. The way for us to overcome in this age is to exercise strong self-discipline - in the Kingdom age the voice behind them will thwart any opportunity for lust to conceive and bring forth sin, as James expressed it. How else can sin and evil and all things that offend be cast out and only God's will be done? Perhaps others would like to express their thoughts on this.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Our daily bread referred to here I feel sure embraces all our daily needs. They are really very simple. Food, shelter and clothing, - it's all we need. Not all we want by any means. In our affluent society our biggest problem is perhaps, that we are thoroughly spoiled; we have lots more than we need and still we want more and more. But our basic needs from day to day are very few. Anyway, God knows our needs and He has provided for them, so why ask "give us this day our daily bread"? Matthew 6:31, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, or yet for your body, what ye shall put on. For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things... but seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things will be added unto you."

So why pray for them? Several reasons. Firstly, it reminds us whose we are and whom we serve. When we ask God to give us this day our daily bread we are acknowledging Him as the Provider, which of course, He is. The words "El Shaddai" are translated "Almighty God" but a better translation is "All Providing God" or "All Sufficient God. Let us think here for a moment of a mother suckling her infant. She is providing love, warmth, comfort and nourishment, in fact, all her infant requires. She is all providing, all sufficient for her child. And the word for breast is "Shad" and has the same derivation as "Shaddai." I think this gives us a very touching comparison in our relationship with God. I am sure all of you have seen how a child will look up into his or her mother's face while suckling, with those wide trusting eyes. I don't know what those eyes do for you mothers but I know that whenever I have seen them it has sent a pleasant tingle right through me. I wonder, do we look up, as it were, into the face of God with that same trust and do we give Him the pleasure and joy He looks for? Remember that underneath each of us are the everlasting arms.

Another aspect of this request to give us this day our daily bread is that we are praying for others. It is not "Give me this day my daily bread" but "Give us". The second commandment is to love our neighbours as ourselves, and so we ask for others the things we would ask for ourselves. Indeed, from time to time we are likely to see that our neighbour's needs are greater than our own, as, for instance, in a time of illness or bereavement. Then we have the responsibility of paying greater attention to others in

our prayers than to ourselves, while we must not at any time overlook the practical and material help we can give too. Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan and go and do likewise, said Jesus. To pray for one another is a duty as Paul so often reminds us, and in the Old Testament we have the example of Samuel (1 Samuel 12:23). Here Samuel is encouraging the people to follow the Lord and he adds “God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.”

What of our desires apart from our needs? “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name I will do it”, promised Jesus. That sounds like having an open cheque drawn on the Bank of Heaven. And it is, but let us not “ask amiss that we may spend it upon our own lusts” warns James. Our asking must not be selfish but in accordance with God’s will. Jesus gave a reason for doing whatsoever we ask in His name and that was that the Father may be glorified in the Son, so perhaps the best guide we can have as to what we should ask is to ask ourselves the question “Is this what Jesus would ask if He were in my place?” “Does this glorify God?” Keep this rule in the forefront of our minds and it will avoid our asking amiss.

Then there is the spiritual aspect of this request for daily bread. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God,” for that is our spiritual bread. Every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God is the Bible - the Scriptures inspired by God. We call it the Word of God and in that Word Jesus is the key. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for without Him the Bible has no value, and Jesus makes it what it is. John, in his first chapter says that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” And in the 6th chapter and at verse 51 Jesus says of Himself that “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever. And the bread that I give is my flesh... Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.” The only way we can feed upon Jesus is to study the Word, the Scriptures daily - give us this day our daily bread. Knowledge, understanding and wisdom come into this, too. The knowledge of the scriptures is our bread. Understanding the scriptures is to gain nourishment from that bread. And wisdom to apply our knowledge and understanding in the right way is eternal life.

Yes, this Bible we have before us is our daily bread just as much as our breakfast, dinner, tea and supper.

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

We entered into a new agreement with our heavenly Father at our baptism and at that time any passed misdeeds were washed away and were gone. We are now in a new relationship, and new covenant; we are His children by adoption and He is our Father. We are Brothers and Sisters of Jesus and in Jesus. He died for our sins of His own free will. In Him we have complete forgiveness. Nevertheless we continue to sin day by day and do not put into our fight against temptation the determination that Jesus did, for will it ever be said of any of us that in the days of our flesh we offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that is able to save us from death and that we were heard in that we feared? Is that the extent of our fight to overcome self will and do God’s will? None of us are tempted above that which we are able to stand, so how hard do we try? There are so many pleasures around us and life can be very easy when we give up trying. And so we sin again and again, and the Lord God, in His great mercy, forgives again and again and again... until we grow tired of asking for forgiveness, or are too ashamed to keep on asking and so comes the further temptation to give up bothering altogether. And that is very sad, because then there would be no future - and the future should be glorious. So we must keep on.

But should we ask forgiveness for sins we have not yet committed? “Lord, please forgive us next weeks sins”. Perhaps we have heard such prayer from the rostrum, but where is our resolve not to sin next week?

And what about forgiving those who offend us? “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” means forgive in like manner, or in like measure. “With what measure ye mete shall be measured to you again.” That is perfectly fair, isn’t it, so dare we ask for preferential treatment? “Lord, I haven’t fully

forgiven my brother but I still want you to forgive me - fully.” If we forgive half-heartedly and with certain reservations we cannot expect more than this from God. But we need His forgiveness in order to enter into life eternal, so we must forgive utterly and completely. No strings attached. It’s not easy; in fact, with human nature being what it is, it is well nigh impossible, but with God’s strength in us we can do it.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

Here let us note first of all that we are asking God to lead us. To lead us where He wants us to go; to do His will and not our own. But is this really what we want? We all too often say, “No. We will go our own way,” and then what happens? We stumble, we fall into temptation and we sin. Temptation is all around us, but God says “Don’t touch.” He allows us to be tempted and that is necessary for our character building. We may indeed find our temptations to be our problems, but our problems are really our opportunities – our opportunities to please God and not ourselves. If it were not for such temptations we could not grow strong in faith and love; so we ask God to lead us, and if we can follow that lead without failing it shows our strength.

Let us look at the relationship between sin and evil in its simplest form, for it is this: the evil I suffer is caused by the sin of others, and the sin I do is going to cause others to suffer evil. It follows then, that if we love our neighbour as ourselves we would not want to be the cause of them suffering evil and so we should not wish to commit sin. Nevertheless, the world is so full of evil that it is part of the natural course of our lives and when we ask God to deliver us from evil we are asking Him to change the course of events for us. I have heard it said that God does not do such things - but He does. Else why did Jesus teach us to pray “deliver us from evil”? So are we delivered from evil? Ultimately we are of course, when we are made immortal, but what of this present time? If we stop to count our blessings I’m sure none of us would be in any doubt as to the answer. But why does God answer prayers the way He does? He doesn’t always deliver from evil for both John the Baptist and Peter were in prison, at different times; John was beheaded, Peter released. Both Stephan and Paul were stoned. Stephan died but Paul lived. Why? The answer may be in Hebrews 11, which great chapter on faith tells us of many who suffered evil and verse 35 tells of those “who were tortured not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonments. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goat-skins being destitute, afflicted, tortured (of whom the world was not worthy). They wandered in deserts and in mountains and in dens and caves of the earth...” Isn’t life easy for us? We just don’t know how much we have been spared. 50 years; ago it was difficult for some - during the war years. Some suffered quite considerable hardships, some were sent to prison for their conscience sake, but that is all behind us now, so what of the future? If we are called upon to suffer for our faith and love of God are we prepared?

For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory, for ever.

And so the Lords prayer ends as it began; in praise to God.

When God formed the earth He formed it to be inhabited and knowing the end from the beginning He purposed to populate it with people who would give Him pleasure and to whom He could show His Glory. In the age to come all the earth will be filled with the Glory of God as the waters cover the sea. And by the grace and the mercy and the love of God we can be there. The choice is ours.

As we have gone through the Lord’s prayer we have seen how it started with praise to God, then requests; firstly, for Thy Kingdom to come, then for daily needs, thirdly, for forgiveness, next for guidance and finally the prayer closes with praise again. As an example of prayer for us to follow it is unsurpassable, but Jesus deliberately left something out! Yes, He did and it is very important that we include it in our prayers. So what is it that Jesus left out of His prayer? It is that Jesus never asks us to say “thank you” - He leaves the thanksgiving to flow naturally from grateful hearts in response to all that

He has done for us in reconciling us to His Father. We cannot help but be thankful and while some feel it is right to pray only to God, through Jesus, it is surely good to say “thank you” to both God and Jesus.

In conclusion I would like to make a few observations of a more general nature regarding prayer. God speaks to us through the Bible and He doesn't like to be ignored any more than we do, so we speak to Him through prayer. “Enter thy closet and pray in secret.” It is something like a telephone really, but far, far better for if we wanted to speak directly with the Managing Director of a large organisation, or to the Prime Minister, or perhaps the Queen, or President, what are our chances of a direct line? Nil, I would think; but God is always available and waiting, never too busy but always ready for our call so that He can answer us. So how often do we call? Once a day? Once a month? Or only that 999 call when something has gone desperately wrong?

Again, do we say grace before every meal, or only sometimes? Do we say grace before having a meal in a restaurant, witnessing for Christ? Or is that rather like the Pharisees standing on the street corners to be seen of men? We cannot lay down hard and fast rules for each other for it is our heart that must be right before God in order that our prayer be accepted. And that is very necessary, for our prayers must be earnest, sincere, and fervent. Paul uses the word “strive” which means “agonise” - agonise in your prayers. And pray without ceasing means pray “stretching out.” The same word is used when Peter was walking on the water to go to Jesus and he began to sink, Jesus stretched out His arm to save Peter. We should stretch out in our prayers, reaching out and up to God.

Let's go back to our illustration of the child. Not an infant now, but grown a little older and able to walk and run about. When he wants to be picked up what does he do? He reaches up - he stretches out his arms and pleads to be picked up because he wants comforting or is tired of walking on his own, and if he isn't picked up he runs in front and gets in the way quite determined that he will be picked up sooner or later. Remember the parable of the importunate man who wanted three loaves so that he could have a midnight feast with his friends? It was his audacity that got him what he wanted!

Whatever it is we want never let us presume to tell God how! Leave that to Him. Paul very much wanted to go to Rome but he didn't expect to be taken as a prisoner chained to a Roman soldier. Hezekiah prayed that he might live and not die, so God told him he had another 15 years of life. Just think how it was for him as the years went by knowing that in year 15 he would die. How did he feel in year 10 or 11, or 12, or 14?

The first miracle that Jesus performed was to change water into wine. All Mary said was “They have no wine.” She left the rest to Jesus and He didn't say, Look here, don't you think they've had enough. If they have any more they'll all be drunk and we don't want that.” No, He provided gallons and gallons, hundreds of bottles, of the very best champagne!

But of course, we don't always get what we want. Why should we expect to? If, when you are cooking the Sunday dinner and your child comes in asking for sweets, you would of course say “No, not before dinner.” And so it is with us, we may not get what we want now, but there is something better for us soon.

God loves a cheerful giver. And I am sure He isn't very different in that respect. Whenever you may feel your lot is not a very happy one and you wish things were so very different, then just remember what the word “cheerful” is in the Greek. It is “hilaros” from which we have the word hilarious. Do we get the picture? Yes, God gives happily and joyfully. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for us; and Jesus gave Himself for us for the joy set before Him in bringing many people to glory.

Brother Russell Gregory.

Jesus said...

No. 2.

“What thinkest thou, Simon, of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? Of their own children, or of strangers?” Peter saith unto Him, “Of strangers.” Jesus saith unto him, “Then are the children free.” Matthew 17:25,26.

This tribute money was that referred to in Exodus 30:12-16, “When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them. This shall they give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the Lord. Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the Lord. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the Lord, to make an atonement for your souls. And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the Lord, to make an atonement for your souls.”

From when Israel became a nation God was their King and required the ransom money to be paid by His subjects. In due time Jesus came, not as a subject who needed to pay the ransom money, but as the King's Son who was free from this necessity. Nevertheless, He paid that others might be free.

Brother Russell Gregory

* * *

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” - 1 Corinthians 2:9 & 10.