

## **Some Thoughts On, And Issues With, the Scriptures**

**By John Swords**

*(Editor's note: John Swords wrote this a number of years ago and has since resolved these matters in his understanding. However, he has been gracious enough to share this with me. I asked him in return if I might use this in the bulletin as a means of engaging a written discussion of the purpose and power of prayer for Christians. I look forward to sharing this discussion on prayer in future issues of the bulletin. -- prb)*

As children, we often made repeated requests of our parents until we were told that, "Enough is enough" and that our request would funder no circumstancing be granted. We weren't doing, or getting, or going, whatever or wherever it was that we had asked for. In fact, we were often informed that if we dared to ask one more time, it was at our peril.

Is this why we have examples of discontinued prayers in the Bible? Jesus asked three times for the cup to pass from Him before He abandoned His petition. Likewise, Paul asked three times for his thorn in the flesh to be removed before accepting his plight. Does God become annoyed at our repeated petitions? Are we to limit our requests to God when we receive no response? Are we to assume that our requests are to be discontinued once it has been determined that God isn't keen on janting our request? We're told to keep asking in 1Thessalonians 5:17; and in the parable recorded by Luke in Luke 11:5-13, Christ seems to be saying that, if we are sufficiently persistent, God will eventually grant our petition. He repeats this theme in Luke 18:1-8 in the parable of the judge mad the determined widow.

So do we give it up as a lost cause after a few unanswered prayers, or do we continue ad infinitum hoping that God will eventually relent and grant our request? At what point do we simply accept the fact that God isn't going to grant our petition and move on? Christ indicates in more than one passage of scripture that God will grant whatever we ask of Him. The analogy of the loaf and the stone, and the fish and the serpent in Matthew 7 is one example of Christ intimating that God will give us what we desire and not substitute what is undesirable. Is this principle evident today? What value is there to serving God if our requests are summarily dismissed and routinely denied? Live our life struggling and suffering without aid or comfort, relying solely on a promise of life in the hereafter. What reassurances do we have of God keeping His promise of eternal life if He will not grant our occasional 58 requests? Is God now as absent from us as He was from his prophets on Mount Carmel? What do we have to do to get God's attention? Are there no righteous men on the earth? If there is a spattering of righteous individuals on the earth, are any of them capable of effectual fervent prayer? Surely, there has to be a few righteous men in the world, and one of them most certainly must be capable of effectual fervent prayer. How can we identify such a one as this? If we gain God's attention, will He grant our requests? The (apparent - prb) total lack of any evidence that God ever answers any prayers could account for the rise of skeptics and the decline of church membership.

Christians get the same diseases as people in the world, and have the same recovery rate. Sick and suffering Christians, who supposedly benefit from the prayers of the church, are no better off than people in the world. Christians, young and old, endure the same afflictions as their worldly counterparts and benefit only from medical treatment, gaining neither aid nor comfort from the prayers of the saints. Do Christians enjoy a leater recovery or cure rate than those in the world? Are the prayers of the saints beneficial in the healing of those saints for whom others pray? Often public prayers include thanks to God for the families, jobs, and health, of members of the church as though God is to be credited for each. However, God is never assigned responsibility for the suffering and death of a loved one, the loss, through no fault of his own, of one's job, or the decline and failure of one's health.

God expects prayer from us, but results are not to be expected of God. Prayer then becomes an exercise in futility. If it works out, it was God's will. If it doesn't work out, it was

God's will. God is omnipotent; therefore His will is going to be done – whether we pray or not is irrelevant.

If our prayer incidentally happens to coincide with God's will, has He answered our prayer, or just done what He was going to do anyway? If our prayer incidentally happens not to coincide with God's will, has He failed to answer our prayer or just said "No!"?

Since we can't know one way or the other, it is pointless to pray for anything at all. About all we can do is to give thanks for our blessings, but how can we know that any of them come from God? What blessings would those be, anyway?

It is not uncommon to hear some brother publicly thanking our Father in heaven for the freedom of religious assembly that we enjoy in the United States of America. However, in view of Romans 13, we should hold those such as Patrick Henry, Samuel Adams, and Thomas Jefferson, in contempt for defying the British Crown. George III does not appear to have been honored by these founding fathers and revolutionaries who should have simply paid their Tea Tax and been happy to be loyal British subjects. How can we now gratefully accept their rebellion and glory in their sin?

How do I reconcile this inconsistency? Balaam seems to indicate that we (Christians) should recognize a point at which God has, obviously, no intention of answering our prayer, and that we should simply "give it up." If we are to "give it up," then I cannot see the purpose of Christ's parable of persistence in Luke 11, or Paul's directions to the Thessalonians that they "pray without ceasing." (Num. 22:5-22; Luke 11:5-13; 1Thes. 5:16-17; Luke 18:1-8)

Christ Himself did not give up on prayer. God indicated to Him in the garden that His prayer for the cup to pass from Him was not going to be answered in the affirmative. However, His assertion during His arrest that God would send twelve legions of angels to His aid if He wished seems to indicate that He would not hesitate to ask God again for something that had been previously denied.

If you would, please help me reconcile these points and the above scriptures. If I have missed something along the way, please feel free to reprove, rebuke, and/or exhort.

### **A Moments Wisdom**

- Some people are humble and proud of it.
- To belittle is to be little.
- Practice makes perfect, so be careful what you practice.
- Don't pray for a lighter load; pray for a stronger back.
- People rowing the boat seldom have time to rock it.
- When you are in deep water, trust the One who walked on it.
- Wrinkles are the tracks smiles leave behind.
- Be a fountain, not a drain.