

# WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

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## THE SEEKING CHURCH, PART 2

The professing Church in America and beyond is in deep darkness while it goes on with its carnal pursuits and programs. It thinks and functions like a business and so its standard of success is like that of a business. It thinks that buildings and activity will lead it to more numbers and bigger offerings. Then it thinks that the buildings and the offerings are signs of success and of God blessing it. But these things are also the signs of judgment. In Amos 8 God sent a spiritual famine on the land and the people continued with their business in seeking the Lord. They went from coast to coast and from north to the east looking for the word of the Lord. At various times when Israel was under the judgment of God their activities did not cease at all but God was not with them. In the days after the time of Christ we are in a more spiritual time. The true success of a church is spiritual and the true judgment of a church is also spiritual. One of the surest signs of a people that are religious without being spiritual is the lack of anything resembling prayer but also the lack of a true seeking God in prayer. If this is true, then we are in the depths of judgment in our day. We are given to buildings and to religious activities as the Israelites were but we are not given over to seeking the Lord from the heart in prayer. The Lord has hidden His face from us.

It seems as if we pray for God to teach us to pray and we think that once we have the proper method we know how to do it. Perhaps we should think of being taught to pray as something that must happen each and every time we pray. While it is the case that the Lord's Prayer can be thought of as a method, we must not think we are praying because we have taken the name of God on our lips and offer up requests of Him. Prayer is of the heart and without the heart there is no true prayer. Worship must be done in spirit and truth and prayer must also be done in spirit and truth. Unless prayer is in truth and unless it comes from the depths of our souls it is not true prayer. God alone can con-

form the soul to Himself and teach it to pray. He does not do this just once as a permanent teaching, but since prayer is new each time He must teach the soul each time. God must teach the soul true humility and He must cast pride out of us Himself each time for there to be true prayer.

True prayer is worked in the soul by grace. So often it appears as if we think prayer is something we do that is worthy of praise or as if it is a work. True prayer is the soul communing with God and that only happens by grace alone. True prayer is the precise and exact opposite of the modern professing Church which is given over to self-love, methods, and programs. The modern professing Church goes to God and asks Him to bless its plans and to give it money to carry out its inordinate building programs and all of the things it does that makes it look like a business and the world. True prayer only happens when the soul is delivered from its own plans and seeks the plans of the Lord. True prayer is the soul being conformed to God and asking after the will of God. True prayer is when the soul is in communion with God and its desires are given to it by God and it seeks the Lord in accordance with those desires. While it is thought in our day that prayer consists of words for external things, we must know that the soul is of far more worth than the body and that should be the focus of our prayers. The soul is the dwelling place of God and so we must pray for our souls only what leads to His glory being manifested.

It is the work of the Spirit to work true love and joy in the hearts of the saints of God. Without love and joy there is no true prayer. Love is the language of prayer because it is love for God that should move us in true prayer. The Greatest Commandment is to love God with all of our being at all times and as such that includes our prayers. It seems as if we think of prayer as being a means which we seek things from God for self, but in reality prayer is a giving over of self in order to seek God for Himself. Edward Payson was known as the Praying Payson of Portland. He describes prayer like this: "From the fullness of a heart overflowing with holy affections, as from a copious fountain, we should pour forth a torrent of pious,

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### ***"Girls Night Out"*** ***Retreat***

***October 31-  
November 2, 2008***

***At Tan-Tar-A Resort  
Osage Beach,  
Missouri***

*This conference is for girls ages 6th grade thru adult women. The cost is \$100 per person & registration is due on July 31st. The conference is hosted by Grace Bible Church of Ludlow, MO. For more information, please contact Debbie Jones, [kjones@greenhills.net](mailto:kjones@greenhills.net).*

## THE SEEKING CHURCH, CONTINUED

humble, and ardently-affectionate feelings; while our understandings only shape the channel, and teach the gushing streams of devotion where to flow, and when to stop." It is the Holy Spirit who is referred to as the springs of living water and it is the work of the Holy Spirit to give us such love and joy in God that they will pour out in love for Him in true prayer. Even when the heart is mourning for the state of the professing Church or when the heart aches because of trials, there is an underlying joy in the Lord that should bubble forth. It is true that the Lord will withdraw Himself and give us periods of dryness in order to seek Him by grace alone for grace alone in prayer, so we should not expect rapturous times in prayer each and every time. But where is prayer like this in our day? Is it here at all?

True prayer is to come to God empty of self rather than full of self as many in our day teach. But again, we must come to God asking Him to empty us of ourselves if this is to be done by grace. Even if we teach something of humility it is taught as a virtue and something we must do of ourselves. But the heart that is taught of God knows that humility is the work of the Lord in the soul casting out self and the desires and loves of self so that the life of humility which is Christ Himself may dwell in the soul. Jesus Christ is Lord over His dwelling place and He is the absolute sovereign over our soul. He is the One that can cast things out of the soul and He is the only One that cleanse the soul according to His own will.

If prayer should be thought of as the life of Christ in the soul expressing its desires for the glory of God or the Spirit working in the soul a love for God, then it is obvious that there must be humility in the soul in order to pray. We must also think of humility as the emptiness of self rather than a virtue that can be worked up. So often we hear that Scripture commands us to be humble and so we set out to accomplish that in our own strength. We see all the examples in Scripture of prayer and then we see the commands of Scripture to pray, so we set out to pray in our own strength. Here is a great error in our day. It is the idolatry of man in thinking that he is sovereign over his own soul. It is the idolatry of man in thinking that he can be spiritual by means of his own works and efforts. Yet prayer is a spiritual work and Jesus has taught us that we can do nothing apart from Him (John 15:5). We think of that which is spiritual as that which is non-physical or perhaps that which is for God. But the Bible calls that spiritual which is of the Holy Spirit. Man is not sovereign over God and so God is sovereign in the spiritual realm and not man. Spiritual prayer, then, is not the work of man in his own strength but is the work of the Spirit in the soul of man. True prayer is as much beyond the strength of man as man giving himself a new heart or of working a new heart in another person. How we must learn this lesson in our self-seeking and self-sufficient day.

It is not that the command to pray is a command to do something in our own strength, but that the command to

pray is to show us that we cannot do it and that we need Christ in us to truly pray. The Law of God was not given to us to keep in order to be saved, but to drive us to Christ in order to be saved. So the command to pray is not something we can do but is to drive us to Christ in order to do so. We must be emptied of our self-strength and our self-sufficiency to pray. It is only when the soul is emptied of self does the humble Savior live in the soul and shine the glory of the Father through the soul because Christ is the very outshining of the glory of God. Only the soul that is empty of self will truly desire the glory of God for the sake of God while the proud soul may work up some deceitful form of humility and desire the glory of God for the sake of self. True prayer is far, far beyond the natural power of man and is utterly dependant upon the Spirit of the living God. That is why it cannot be done in accordance with the programs of men and that is why true success cannot be measured by out buildings, numbers, and of offerings. True success is the presence of God. It matters not if we have a million people in attendance in a church on Sunday and our building is the size of Disney. Without God we are not a successful church.

Matthew 26:42 gives us a picture of true prayer. The context is that of Christ in Gethsemane just before He was arrested in order to be tried and then crucified. "He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." Here is the picture of what must be the hearts of the people in prayer rather than just the words. The humanness of Jesus cried out in wanting to be delivered from going to the cross and suffering the wrath of the Father. But His heart was obedient and wanted above all to do the will of the Father. Who would willingly go to a cross and be the most wicked person in the history of the human race because the sins of others were heaped upon him? Who would willingly suffer such shame? Who would willingly do all of this out of perfect love for the Father? Only the Lord Jesus Christ could and would. We see, then, true prayer. It was seeking the will of the Father despite all the suffering that would take place and despite all the shame. It was seeking the will of the Father despite all that the world thought of Him. It was seeking the will of the Father despite the appearance of utter failure. It was seeking the Father for the strength and spiritual strength to have all those human desires in Him to be put to death in order to carry out what must be done. Until the churches in our day learn this lesson, they will be utter failures in the spiritual realm while they bask in the glory of apparent success. Until we learn that true success is dying to self which includes the desire for self to be spiritually successful in its own way, we will have utter failure despite the appearances. If Christ would have become king of Israel and the world and not went to the cross, He would have failed. Let the churches in our day look to the cross and learn what true success is rather than listen to the world. Let that instruct our hearts and our prayers. If we don't, our failure will only multiply in the face of our outward "success" as we blindly go on.

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