

VIGIL



“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

~ I Peter 5:8

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Blessings

The Blessing of Prayer **Kerry Richardson**

James was dead... having been killed because of Herod's desire to harass the church. Realizing the commendation of the Jews and the promise of additional political favor to be gained, Herod proceeded to arrest and imprison his brother Peter... with the probable intent of publicly delivering his death sentence as well. Only one thing stood in the way of executing Herod's evil plot... the arrest of Peter occurred during one of the great festivals of the Jews: the Days of Unleavened Bread (*which culminated in the observance of Passover*). Since Jewish law customarily did not approve of trying and sentencing people during this time period, Herod's intention was clear... wait until the Passover was completed and then bring Peter before the people for his trial/execution.

With the good fortune of obtaining a “stay of execution” in this case, Luke records one of the strangest stories found in the Bible with his narrative in Acts 12:5-17. With deep concern for the beloved apostle

awaiting almost certain death, the brethren in the Jerusalem congregation offered “ceaseless prayer” on Peter's behalf... with their pleas toward God likely centering upon his deliverance from this terrible situation. After the series of events observed in verses 6-11, we suddenly find Peter freed from prison... at the door of a house where prayer was being offered on his behalf (v.12). Following his knocking on the door of the gate, Rhoda (*possibly a servant*) came to answer. Hearing and recognizing the voice of Peter, she excitedly ran back into the house to tell those in the gathering of the good news... leaving Peter standing at the gate.

As she announced her marvelous discovery to this group of praying people, a strange reaction ensued... those who had fervently been praying for Peter's deliverance did not believe Rhoda, claiming that Rhoda must have seen Peter's angel. According to Luke's account in verse 16, it was only because of Peter's persistent

knocking that the group of praying people finally realized the truth on the matter. Did you notice the “strange idea” that was told by Luke? It's the fact that these people were passionately praying for this situation... and when God answered their prayers, they refused to believe it!

Sadly, I suspect that many Christians today resemble the brethren at Jerusalem... we realize that we should pray and we do... but frequently we doubt God will answer these requests that we bring before His throne of mercy. Of all the blessings that children of God have been given, prayer is one of the greatest. Yet, many Christians may not fully realize the great benefits found in prayer. With these statements in mind, consider with me some things that prayer provides in our lives.

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Blessed

EDITORIAL

Ronnie Hayes

“Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation” (Psalms 68:19). We are of all people the most blessed! Isn’t it astounding when we fail to see this? *Vines* defines blessings as “to cause to prosper, to make happy, to bestow blessings on” (133). No doubt God has caused our “cups” to overflow. In Psalms 68:19 we can read about the blessings we receive.

We can see who bestows our blessings. **The Lord** is the one who bestows blessings upon us. God has always blessed His people. God promised to bless Abraham. “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:1-3). These were not idle promises. In Genesis 24:1 we read, “And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things”. It is important to recognize that the blessings of God are conditional. In dealing with Israel God promised to bless them if they would continue in His commandments. “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known” (Deuteronomy 11:26-28). God’s blessings are still available. Do

we choose to obey His commandments or to reject them?

We can also see “when” our blessings are given unto us. The Lord blesses us **daily**. In a physical sense, God blesses us daily. Christ in teaching His disciples to pray, taught them to ask, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). Truly this passage shows God’s goodness to provide, but also, it shows man’s dependence upon God. Burton Coffman in his commentary on *Matthew* writes:

“‘Daily bread’ brings one back to the level of actual need. Dependence upon God is also taught. True, man may have a month’s provisions stored up, but whether he lives to use them or not is totally dependent upon the Father’s will. In the comprehensive sense of this prayer, daily bread comes only from God” (81).

Space would not allow us to innumerate every blessing we receive daily, but this multitude of blessings should cause us to be exceedingly thankful. There is also a spiritual sense in which God blesses us daily. God made His promise to Abraham to bless him with a great land, great nation, and that all families of the earth would be blessed. (cf. Genesis 12:1-3). In Christ this promise to bless all nations is fulfilled. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:26-29). This is not an “off and on” blessing. Christ says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

The Lord does not bless **sparingly**. We can’t out give God! Christ said, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38). W. Wayne Coats writes of this verse in the *Firm Foundation Lectureship Book on Luke*:

“The Law of reciprocity will usually find its way back into our bosom either with a blessing or curse. We must not give with the mere expectation of getting in return, but in the manner we measure, the same manner will be measured to us. God can out give us any day and he promises that his measure will be good, pressed, shaken down, and running over. How can we disbelieve God? He has proved his beneficence many thousands of times, yet we still remain skeptical” (155).

How could we fathom that God would be stingy? Remember this is the God who has given His Son (cf. John 3:16). Christ makes the argument that man, with all his faults, knows how to give. Don’t you think that God, who is good and faultless, knows whom to bless. “Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him” (Matthew 7:9-11).

Could any words sum up God’s blessings toward His children better than what David said? “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed” (Psalms 37:25,26). God is merciful and His seed is blessed.

Forgiveness

Ashley Kizer, Associate Editor

Our God is holy (Leviticus 11:44). He is all wise and powerful (Romans 16:27; Psalms 62:11). The Creator is eternal (Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 33:27). He “knoweth the secrets of the heart” (Psalms 44:21). But above all, “God is good...” (Psalms 73:1). By inspiration, the Psalmist wrote, “O taste and see that the Lord *is* good: blessed *is* the man *that* trusteth in him” (34:8). Will we ever fully appreciate the goodness of God and the great blessing of forgiveness?

The world at large is always amazed to see acts of human forgiveness. In the spring of 2005, when Jennifer Wilbanks faked her own kidnapping and jilted her husband-to-be on the week of their wedding, the public was most amazed, not at the actions of the bride, but at the groom’s response. CNN.com reported that her fiancé, John Mason couldn’t wait to see her. The preacher who had been scheduled to conduct the ceremony responded with sheer incredulity, “I have never met such a strong person in all my life...He’s an incredible man.”¹

Recently, an Amish community in Pennsylvania received a wealth of unwanted, worldwide publicity when their one-room schoolhouse was taken hostage by a sick, maniacal gunman. CBS News reported that the community responded with forgiveness, prayer, and mourning. A spokesperson for the killer’s family told reporters, “[An] Amish neighbor came that very night, around 9 o’clock in the evening, and offered forgiveness to the family.”² We are so

impressed by gestures such as these which merely mimic our Lord’s holy nature (cf. Luke 23:34).

In a world where forgiveness is more the exception than the rule, we should learn to appreciate our heavenly Father, of whom the Psalmist said, is “...good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon [Him]” (86:5). Truly, He is the “Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above...” and one of these gifts is the forgiveness of sin (James 1:17).

When Jesus wanted to describe His Father, He told the parable that we often refer to as the story of “The Prodigal Son.” Many of us read this story and focus on one of the father’s sons, attempting to compare ourselves with one of the two. Are we wasteful like the first son who squandered his inheritance with loose living? Perhaps we must be careful not to have a selfish attitude like the other son who could not see fit to rejoice at his brother’s repentance. It could be that the story is not about the sons at all, but rather about the goodness of the Father. You may notice that the story begins, “A certain man...” (Luke 15:11). As I am sure you recall, the climax of the story is found in verse 20, when the father sees the return of his errand son: “But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”

We should be thankful that our Father runs to us when we turn from our sin to serve Him once again. The scriptures are plain in regard to God’s will for mankind: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all

should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). What a joy and a blessing it is to know that, though I have sinned, “*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1). We will continue to fall prey to temptation at times, but for those who walk with God, “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Have we considered the blessing of such freedom from the slavery of sin? Paul the apostle asked the Romans, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). Ask the addict what it is to be a slave. He will tell you! Ask the one who lives in adultery, or the lover of money. Each of these might deceive themselves into thinking that they are in control of their lives, but the truth is evident. Everyone is a slave to someone or something. Be a slave to the truth, and it will make you free (John 8:32).

When we realize the consequences of sin and the blessings of forgiveness, we will respond as did the woman that Luke wrote about in chapter eight of his gospel account. This woman had come into a Pharisee’s house during mealtime to wash the Savior’s feet and anoint them with ointment (Luke 7:36-38). However, throughout the episode, she never ceased weeping and kissing His feet. The Pharisee noticed only that she had been a sinner, but Jesus said that her many sins were forgiven (vv. 39, 47). He went on to say that this is why she loved Him so much; because she had been forgiven of so much. Then He reassured her, “Thy sins are forgiven” (v. 48). She must have realized what a priceless blessing she had received. May we all do the same.

¹ Associated Press, “U.S. & World.” Runaway Bride Back at Home. April 30, 2005. Fox News. 23 Oct 2006 <<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,155119,00.html>>.

² CBS Broadcasting, Inc., “U.S.” Amish Forgive, Pray and Mourn. October 4, 2006. CBS News. 23 Oct 2006

<<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/10/04/national/main2059816.shtml>>.

Praise Ben Wright

The Hebrews writer challenged his readers to go outside the camp, the world, and be with Christ because they were to seek heaven (Hebrews 13:12-14). He then charged them to praise God, saying, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Hebrews 13:15). "Praise" literally means, "a thank-offering" (Online Bible Greek Lexicon, #133). It originates from a Greek word meaning, "to praise, extol, to sing praises in honor to God" (#134). In the Old Testament, a thank-offering, was a free-will offering given to God to thank Him for some blessing bestowed upon the giver (2 Chronicles 29:31; 33:16). The picture in Hebrews 13:15 is that of children of God offering praise to God, the reason for doing so being the giving of the blood of Christ in order to sanctify the people (verse 12). We should never be negligent to praise God because of this tremendous gift.

Over 200 times the word "praise" is found in the Bible. The Psalms use this word more than any other book. This is fitting because the Hebrew title for this book means, "praises." Throughout this magnificent collection of inspired psalms, the joy of praising God is extolled. Early on in this collection we read, "I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness..." (7:17). Later the sweet psalmist would write, "...his praise shall continually be in my mouth" (34:1). Notice his reason for praise: "Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee" (63:3). The final words of this grand book are, "Praise ye the Lord" (150:6).

As we think about the blessing it is to have the ability to praise God as His children, we should think of the words of Peter: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye

should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We would do well to ask the question, "Why is God to be praised?"

There are numerous reasons for praising God. The fact that God created man in His own image should cause us to praise Him (Genesis 1:26-27). The fact that God loves us enough to have sent His only begotten Son into the world should cause us to praise Him (John 3:16). The fact that God gives us all spiritual blessings in Christ should bring praise to His name (Ephesians 1:3). The fact is, it is our duty and privilege to praise the heavenly Father.

Another question that must be asked is, "How can I praise God?" One way to offer praise to God is through song. James wrote, "Is any merry? Let him sing psalms" (James 5:13). "Psalms" means, "to celebrate the praises of God in song" (#5567). One version translates it as, "Let him sing praises." Throughout the Old and New Testaments singing and praising God go hand in hand. In our worship, we sing songs of praise to God (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16 - "psalms" has as its root word the word for "psalms" in James 5:13).

Another way that we offer praise to God is through our prayers. Jesus told His listeners that, when praying, a right way to begin a prayer is, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Matthew 6:9). The word "hallowed" means, "to render or acknowledge, or to be venerable or hallow; to separate from profane things and dedicate to God" (#37). Its root word is a Greek word that means, "most holy thing" (#40). Surely we can see that this indicates praise to God for His holiness and greatness. Jesus taught His followers to praise God in prayer and did so Himself (Matthew 11:25-26). Most of the prayers that are recorded in God's Word include praise for the greatness

of God, the protection of God, or some other blessing bestowed by God upon the one offering the prayer.

We also praise God by being obedient to His will. Paul wrote, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). If sin fails to glorify God, and it does, then obedience must glorify God. When we bring glory to God that is bringing praise to His holy name. Just calling His name does not mean that He is being praised. "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Those about whom Jesus then speaks did great things. They prophesied, healed and did great works. They were lost because they were not obedient to the entire will of God. When we are what we should be we bring glory to God. Earlier in this sermon Jesus stated, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). One version of the Bible renders that last phrase, "...and praise your Father in heaven." When we are obedient, we praise God, and cause others to praise Him as well.

In order to truly praise God, one must be a member of the church of which we read in the New Testament. Paul stated, "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus..." (Ephesians 3:21). The word for "glory" here is translated "praise" in other passages. In order to properly praise God, we must be obedient to His will by being placed in Christ Jesus by baptism (Galatians 3:26-27). Christians praise God through song, prayer and an obedient life. Let each of us examine our lives in order to make sure that we are properly praising our great and glorious God who truly is, as the great hymn says, "worthy of praise."

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The Blessing of Worship

Lennie Reagan

Our society has been and is being influenced by a pop culture and the decisions we make and the attitudes we reveal are being shaped and even sometimes dictated by that influence. Where entertainment and a self-satisfying individualistic attitude prevail, there is a misunderstanding of what worship means, who is involved, who the audience of our worship is, what the responsibilities are, and who receives the glory.

The word “worship” is a contraction of an old expression in the English language “woerth-scipe” and it denotes the ascription of reverence to someone or something of superlative worth. For the child of God, worship is an act by a redeemed man toward God and in the actions of worship the will, intellect and emotions of man gratefully respond to the Father and His revealed goodness.

The Hebrew word for worship means “bowing down.” When Moses was on Mt. Sinai and the Lord descended in the cloud: “...Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped” (Exodus 34:8). Abraham fell on his face before God (Genesis 17:3). So, the Old Testament teaches us that humility and servanthood accompany true worship.

But, the New Testament also teaches us about true worship and service or offering reverence is a part of worship. Paul writes: “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3). In other words, true worship is descriptive of our spiritual relationship with God. And folks who do not like to worship and chose not to gather with the saints to worship are indicating a very real and serious problem in their relationship with God.

Another word from the New Testament relating to worship means to make obeisance, to do reverence

and it is the most frequently used word rendered “worship.” It is a word which conveys respect and submission. Christ taught the Samaritan woman: “God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

Worshiping in spirit refers to worship being for the obedient and it must be from our heart. We must be living spiritually. Worshiping in truth is worshiping as we have been commanded; but, it also demands that we worship with sincerity. We must be authentic and genuine in our obedience to Christ. So to worship in spirit and in truth relates to our heart and the outward display of our life. That was part of the problem God had with the Old Testament people. They had the acts of worship correct. They were offering the sacrifices and they were praying as they were commanded; but, their lives were a spiritual disaster area. As a result their worship was not being accepted: “To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood” (Isaiah 1:11, 14-15). Friends and brethren, we will do ourselves and our children and grandchildren a great injustice if we think this response of God is limited to only the Old Testament.

To worship God in true worship demands that we know who we are and Who God is. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). It is not known as an user friendly

paradigm. Our Lord taught us to “...enter in at the strait gate...” We will strive to enter in the narrow way (Matthew 7:13-14).

It takes commitment and dedication and not everyone is willing to pay the sacrificial price and that is evident from the words of Isaiah: “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here *am* I; send me” (Isaiah 6:8).

There is a sense that few would be willing to hear and accept that self-denial was needed. We know that many of the Jews did reject the pleas of repentance and many of their children would continue that sinful rejection of the worship of and obedience to God. But Isaiah’s response was prompt and clear: “Here am I, send me!”

Imagine what could happen in the Lord’s church if all who attended the worship assembly each week, had the same response as did Isaiah. Not only would we come prepared to worship enthusiastically, not only would we come with the right view of who we are and who God is, not only would we come seeking the holy and pure relationship with God; but we would leave eagerly awaiting to serve in the opportunities which would come our way throughout the week. Worship is a wonderful blessing which God has given His children. May we all strive fervently to worship in the proper manner so we may be a blessing to God.

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Hope Dale Hubbert

Hope has been described, as an inner feeling that what one desires will happen. Hope cannot be bought, sold, or transferred. It can and should grow day by day. There will be no hope in heaven for all our longings and needs will have been met in an incredible way.

Hope is a blessing that is offered to all but accessed by too precious few. Financial status does not determine the availability of hope. The poor can have hope (Job 5:16) while the rich often place too much emphasis and effort on the temporal and too little emphasis on our eternal future.

The right response to God and the teachings of the Bible are crucial to hope that will end in victory. The hope of the hypocrite will perish (Job 8:13). Psalms 78:7 remind us to set our hope in God, forget not His works, and keep His commandments. Readers of the New Testament are to know that the things written in earlier times were written so we might learn. This learning provides comfort of the scriptures which will in turn enrich our hope (Romans 15:4). Hope and obedience are inseparable.

God is our hope (Psalms 71:5). Because of God we not only have hope in life but also in death (Proverbs 14:32). In God's word we can have great expectations in this life and across the river we call death (Psalms 119:114, 130:5). God strengthens our hope because of His faithfulness. He always keeps His promises and has always treated humanity with justice. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore I will hope in him" (Lamentations 3:24).

To his friend and "son in the faith" Paul professed that Christ is our hope (1 Timothy 1:1). What a

wonderful thought! Jesus gives us hope because He understands us. He knows our joys, fears, sorrows, and our every thought. Jesus delivers hope by living an example that offers us the blessing of walking in His steps (1 Peter 2:21). Jesus suffered and died that we might have hope. The words of the song are surely appropriate; "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness".

The absence of hope is a scary and depressing thought. If we only have hope in this life Paul says we are the most miserable of all people (1 Corinthians 15:19). When we do not maintain a covenant relationship with God we have no hope and are without God in this world (Ephesians 2:12). Children of God have a different sorrow than those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). The pain of death for Christians is soothed by the great expectation of eternal bliss and a wonderful reunion of the redeemed.

There is a quiet and calm assurance provided by hope for the child of God. Lamentations 3:26 expresses the need to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. In a hurried world often filled with chaos and uncertainty it is good to embrace the promises hope gives. We are saved by hope (Romans 8:24).

The Psalmist rightly stated that hope would build courage and strength (Psalms 31:24). Boldness has always been a necessary trait of God's soldier. Our hope should stir within us the willpower to stand up and speak up while refusing to ever give up our inheritance to a land that is fairer than day. As we study more we recognize the increase in spiritual strength as we allow our longings and faith to motivate us.

To be effective hope must have a goal and a destination. The longing of the Christian is the greatest of all. Our hope is in heaven (Colossians 1:5). Our hope is in eternal life (Titus 1:2, 3:7). Through the eyes of faith we can with confidence envision an eternity of bliss in the paradise of God. Jesus has promised to prepare a mansion for all who would be true to the Father (John 14:1-3). Blessings in this life are enhanced by the expectation of the things that await on the other side of Jordan. It is no wonder that we are challenged not to be moved from our hope (Colossians 1:23).

The gift of hope is one in which we should not be ashamed (Psalms 119:116, Romans 5:5). Hope is not in a productive stage if there is hesitation to rejoice in our faith. Christians should be uplifted by our anticipation so that we might not only be blessed but encourage others to secure this treasure. We are to rejoice in hope (Romans 12:12) not be ashamed.

Hope brings joy. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Psalms 146:5). Hope is one of the three abiding treasures Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 13:13. The God of hope fills us with joy and peace (Romans 15:13).

We are engulfed with certainty and assurance as we allow our hope to become the anchor of our soul (Hebrews 6:19). This hope provides stability through the storms of life and enriches us, as the good times are ours to enjoy. It is a hope that we should hold firm to the end (Hebrews 3:6, 6:11).

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Fellowship Chuck Webster

It is almost unfathomable that in some sense fallible human beings can experience an intimate relationship with the sinless, sovereign, perfectly holy Creator of the world. This vertical relationship makes possible horizontal relationships that are unlike anything else this side of heaven: God's children have a familial bond that flows from our having a common Father. To describe this gift Bible writers used a family of Greek words which emphasized commonality and joint participation (*koinós*, common). The English words most often used to translate them are fellowship (1 John 1:3,6,7), partner (Luke 5:10; Philemon 17), communion (2 Corinthians 13:14), and sharing (Hebrews 2:14), among others.

What does fellowship mean?

As Christians we share a common faith (Titus 1:4) and a common salvation (Jude 3). Early Christians perhaps more than we do today had all things in common (Acts 2:44; 4:32). These usages of *koinós* help understand the various derivatives: fellow, partner, participant (*koinónos*), to share in (*koinónéo*), and fellowship, participation (*koinónía*). James and John were thus fishing partners with Peter (Luke 5:10). In becoming a man, Jesus shared in our mortality (Hebrews 2:14). We can become partakers of the Lord's divine nature by His vicarious death (2 Peter 1:4). This word group implies sharing, participation, and commonality.

What kind of fellowship do we experience? In the opening verses of 1 John, the apostle writes that he wants his readers to experience complete joy, linking it to fellowship: "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:3-4). How do we have

the joy God wants us to have? The answer is clear: we embrace fellowship with God and with all in His family.

We have fellowship with God. Thousands of years ago, Adam rebelled against God and violated His perfect holiness and justice. The Edenic fellowship between Adam and God was marred as Adam created a chasm that separated humanity from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). All accountable human beings since him followed the same path of rebellion. For thousands of years people sought reconciliation with God, seeking to restore fellowship through animal sacrifices, annual feasts, and myriad laws. Yet the barrier remained. By God's grace, though, God became a man and offered Himself as the propitiation for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2), bridging the gap between sinful humanity and perfect Deity. Because of that, Paul could write that God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:9). Christians have the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14; cf. Philippians 2:1). Since Jesus completely mended the relationship between humanity and God, John wrote, truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3). God restored our relationship to Him--something we could never have done.

When we experience fellowship with God, we are blessed to enjoy another kind of fellowship... *We have fellowship with other Christians.* When we have fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ and walk in the light as He is in the light, John says (1 John 1:3,7), we have fellowship with one another (v. 7). Paul referred to Philemon and Titus as his partners (*koinónos*, Philemon 17; 2 Corinthians 8:23) and thanked the Philippians for their fellowship in the gospel from the first

day until now (*koinónía*, Philippians 1:5). One interesting implication concerning fellowship with other Christians is how that relationship is proclaimed each Sunday in the Lord's Supper. Paul writes that the cup of blessing and the bread are the communion [*koinónía*] of the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16). Together they proclaim that we have fellowship with Christ (vv. 20-21). They also, Paul argues, demonstrate the fellowship that exists within the body of believers: For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread (v. 17). When Christians assemble around the table and drink of one cup and eat of one bread, we portray our oneness with Christ and with one another not just at the local congregation but also with other believers who sit at the same table each Lord's Day. We have fellowship because of the cross and our relationship to the One who died there. This is one of God's greatest blessings.

Fellowship among believers is contingent on our being in fellowship with God, which itself is contingent on our walking in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7). We fellowship all who are faithful to Jesus Christ, and we withhold fellowship from those outside of His body.

Perhaps there is no greater blessing this side of heaven that compares with knowing we are at peace with God (Romans 5:1). The barrier that we erected was torn down at the cross, and we have unhindered access to God's throne (Matthew 27:51; Hebrews 4:14). But we do not stand alone, of course, but rather as part of a community of believers, who with one voice praise the One who graciously forgives us and allows us to live in harmony with one another and with Him.

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The Blessing of Prayer by Kerry Richardson -----Continued from page 41

First, prayer provides pardon. On a trip one time, a young lady approached me with an important request: "I need to be baptized again." Knowing that she was already a member of the church, I inquired as to the reason for her request. "Since I have been a Christian," she replied, "I've done some things that are wrong and I need forgiveness of those sins." Evidently, no one had pointed her to passages like James 5:16 "confess your faults to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" or the example found in Acts 8:22 "repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee". Obviously, it is through prayer that a child of God receives forgiveness after he/she has obeyed the gospel.

Second, prayer provides peace. In Philippians 4:6-7 we read, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with

thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." When you examine the idea of "peace" in verse 7, many desire this type of peace in their lives. Yet, the keys to obtaining this trait are found in verse 6...be careful (anxious) for nothing and take every concern of life to the throne of God (with thanksgiving). For those searching for peace... do you pray?

Third, prayer provides perspective. Every time we approach God with our request, it should be with a correct sense of awe. In 1 Peter 5:7, God encourages us to cast our care upon Him. However, often forgotten are the words immediately before this admonition in verse 6 "humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." One aspect of humility is the realization of one's

self...especially in relation to our God. Consider the story found in Luke 18:10-14 when two men went in the temple to pray. Which one (publican or Pharisee) prayed with a sense of humility? Which one prayed in such a way that he understood his broken spiritual state before Almighty God? It was not the Pharisee who prayed with this realization. Rather, it was the publican...who went to his house justified that day because of his understanding.

Today, prayer can provide marvelous things for the child of God. However, we must approach God in the proper manner to receive them. According to James 1:5-8, we must pray to God in faith...having a strong belief that God will answer our requests. Brethren at Jerusalem didn't seem to pray "in faith"... What about us today?

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