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Conducted by  
Alf Marsden

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**“What is prayer. When should we pray. How should we pray?”**

THERE is obviously much that could be said in answer to this question and I am quite sure that my answer will leave many things unsaid, but if the reader's interest is kindled to pursue the subject further then the study will have been amply justified.

### **What Is Prayer?**

I believe that prayer, quite simply, is the Christian seeking God. King David, in a psalm of thanksgiving to God on the occasion of the ark of the covenant being brought to Jerusalem said, “Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually” 1 Chron. 16:11. This we can do in prayer because of what Christ has done previously. Commenting on the high-priesthood of Christ, the writer to the Hebrews says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” Heb. 4:16. Prayer is the channel of communication between the aspirations of the soul of the believer and God. It is the wing for the tremulous cry for help and assistance. It is the vehicle for the outpouring of praise and thanksgiving to God. It is the yearning of the soul for participation in the divine nature, the sincere desire to have God as a constant companion. prayer is all of this and much more. It is not the ‘open sesame’ for every whim, wish or desire that we may have, nor is it to be looked upon as the means whereby we try to bend God's will to ours. It is not to be looked upon as an excursion into the occult, neither is it the expression of a form of divine magic. It might be as the poet expressed it;

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
Uttered or unexpressed;  
The motion of a hidden fire,  
That trembles in the breast.

### **When Should We Pray?**

1 Always. Paul wrote to Ephesian Christians, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints”. Eph. 6:18. See also Acts 10:2.

2 Incessantly. To the church at Thessalonica Paul said, "Pray without ceasing". Now this does not mean that we should adopt a certain posture and pour out incessant words unto God; as a matter of fact, brevity of prayer is enjoined by the Lord himself. "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" Matt. 6:7. Also, in Ecclesiastes we read, "Be not rash with thy mouth and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven and thou upon the earth; therefore, let thy words be few" Ec. 5:2. There is a sense in which the christian life lived in its fulness is a prayer unto God, and if this is so then we shall never cease to reach God, whether in word or deed. To the Colossians Paul wrote, concerning their love in the Spirit, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you" Col. 1:9. This is the idea, isn't it? The christian will go on praying. He won't wait until the eyelids are heavy before he begins to mumble a few words which trail off in sleep; when he wants to speak with God, he will do so. Having said that, however, it might help us to look at the times when the Lord prayed. In Mark 1:35 we read, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed". In contrast to that, Mark records evening prayer. "And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land" Mark 6:46,47. We often say that we follow the Lord's example, but if we do, how many of us can pray as he did? Luke records, "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God" Luke 6:12. How necessary the all-pervading power of prayer is. Who can tie it down to time? Indeed, who dare, when we are happy; when we are troubled; when there is sorrow in the body of Christ; when the going is difficult and our faith seems to waver; when we look at the world and see people dying in sin — these are the times to pray

#### How Should We Pray?

It may very well be that the questioner is asking (a) What postures should we adopt, and (b) What attitude should we have; I shall attempt to answer along these lines.

##### (a) What postures should we adopt?

- 1 Bowing the head — concerning the children of Israel we read, "then they bowed their heads and worshipped" Ex. 4:31 see also 12:27; 34:8
- 2 Kneeling — "And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed" Luke 22:41. See also Acts 7:60; 9:40; 20:36.
- 3 Standing — "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any" Mark 11:25.
- 4 On the face before God — "And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed" Matt. 26:39. This, of course, relates to Jesus in the Garden.

All of these are scriptural examples. I have always considered posture to be important when praying. The thing to remember is that when we pray we approach the presence of God, I feel sure that we men should not stand with our hands in our pockets jingling our money, nor should any of us be chewing gum or toffee, or looking around the assembly while the prayers of the church are going on. Snuggled in the sleep-inducing warmth of bed may not be the right way to approach God either. There are many postures adopted, I feel, which God may find offensive.

##### (b) What attitude should we have?

When we pray to God our prayers should be:

- 1 Earnest — "So Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church" Acts 12:5 (R.S.V.).

- 2 In faith — with reference to receiving wisdom, James says, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind" James 1:6. We should ask in faith because of what Jesus said to his disciples, "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you" Luke 11:9.
- 3 With the realisation that others need help — Paul, speaking about his trust in the deliverance by God says, "Ye also helping together by prayer for us" 2 Cor. 1:11.
- 4 As a suppliant before God — writing to the Roman church Paul says, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer for Israel is, that they might be saved" Rom. 10:1.
- 5 In the name of Christ — Jesus said, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" John 14:13,14.
- 6 With the realisation of the help of the Spirit — Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (with sighs too deep for words R.S.V.) Rom. 8:26.

There is obviously much more that could be said on this subject of prayer. For instance, we have not asked or said what we should pray for, nor have we examined why some prayers are successful and others are seemingly unsuccessful, together with the attached conditions. We have said little about the impact of prayer on the church, and how neglect of prayer had a detrimental effect upon us. Perhaps we can examine these points at a later date, but I feel sure that what has been said should stir us to examine this great subject in greater detail in our private study.

(Please send your questions to Brother Alf Marsden, 66 Mitchell Street, Newtown, Wigan, Lancs.)

#### ATTITUDE...

##### First Century and Today

An English writer has said; "The early Christians did not go around saying, 'Look what the world is coming to'. Rather, they went out with great joy and said to all men, 'Look what has come to the world'."

There is a great difference between these two attitudes. Yes, the world is in bad shape, but read the first chapter of Romans and you will find that the world was in a terrible condition in Paul's time. Nearly all wise men agree that man is in a terrible predicament, but the unique gospel of Christ offers the solution to man's problems. Look! See what has come into the world — God's revelation of HIMSELF in all His power, wisdom and love through Jesus, His only begotten Son. This is indeed glorious news! This is a message which we cannot keep to ourselves, but we must tell everyone about it. Selected

IF you live as though Christ had never died you will die as though Christ had never lived.

A PREACHER of the gospel has a responsibility to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable.

SIGN outside a church building in Inglewood, near Los Angeles: "God is alive and well. Visiting hours every day".

#### AN OLD RECIPE

SOMEONE recently came across an old 17th Century recipe for mincemeat and by following it closely produced mincemeat exactly similar to that produced so long ago. The recipe for producing Christians is considerably older — about 2,000 years old but by following it closely we can produce disciples of Christ exactly similar to those around in Paul's day. Thus we can produce the church of Paul's day. The recipe, by the way is to be found in your New Testament.