

The Power of God

Nearly everything people today believe about prayer is wrong. What they believe is either not in the Bible at all, or is completely twisted and misunderstood. Great significance is tied to the smallest examples in prayer, blowing what was meant to be an isolated example all out of proportion and making it into a “thus saith the Lord” on the subject.

There are so many questions and misunderstandings about this subject, that it will take several lessons to answer them all. But we have to start somewhere. And the best place to start is with an obvious question... why should we pray?

Think about it. I know even asking the question appears as absurd as asking, “why worship God?” – but I’m seriously asking. Look at this way; does God love people more than you do? **1 John 4:8-11**. So God loves people more than you do; more than you possibly ever could; right?

And is God ABLE to do something about whatever you’re praying about? Is it in His power to heal someone’s sickness, get someone a job, give someone understanding? **Jeremiah 32:27, Mark 10:27**. So God LOVES them more than you do; and He is ABLE to do something about it. So that begs the question... **why hasn’t He done something already??**

Don’t just keep reading looking for the answer. **I want you to really think about this!** Wrap your head around this paradox. God WANTS to help people; He CAN; so why HASN’T He? Ponder this well! Then study...

LESSON 36: THE POWER OF GOD

We have three fundamental facts that we are absolutely sure about;

1. God loves people more than we do,
2. Unlike us, God is actually ABLE to make anyone’s problem go away, and
3. God hasn’t done so.

No one on Earth, false Christian or not, can argue with that logic. But what does that mean? What does that logic prove? **That God’s primary purpose is *not* to have people healthy, wealthy, and wise. That something else is more important to Him!**

ACTS OF LOVE

Everyone on Earth imagines a kindly, bleeding-heart wuss of a God, who is aching, ardently, agonizingly anxious to wave a magic wand and make your problems go away if you only “believe”. Now God is compassionate, and merciful, I don’t dispute that, but God is also hard and stern when the situation calls for

it (**Nahum 1:2-15, Hebrews 10:31, Ezekiel 9:1-10, Matthew 10:28, Psalms 76:7**, most of **Jeremiah**, etc.). This is the side of God's nature that the world ignores (and hates).

But God *is* love; therefore, **everything God does is an act of love – including these harsh acts.** Destroying the wicked is an act of love – for them, and for everyone else. Exiling Israel and scattering them among all the nations was an act of love. Killing every man, woman, child, and animal in Jericho was an act of love. The flood was an act of love. This is the hard truth that most of the world ignores. **God did these things. God is merciful and loving. Therefore these things were merciful and loving acts.**

Most of the world believes in a God with such compassion that He wants everyone to be healed of all diseases... so why aren't they? Why are more hospitalized every year? God can surely rid the planet of disease with less effort than it takes you to blink. **SO WHY AREN'T THEY ALL HEALED?**

And since they *aren't* all healed, there must be a **REASON** *why* they are sick – *and a reason why God hasn't healed them!* **And not healing them must be an act of love! The fact that God allows sickness to exist in the universe must also be an act of love!** If not, then either God is not loving, or else sickness and/or the devil is more powerful than God. That option is unacceptable. **Therefore these are all acts of love.**

HOW CAN THAT BE AN ACT OF LOVE?

Let's start with an extreme example – the devil. God has promised to first imprison (**Revelation 20:1-3**), then kill (**Ezekiel 28:18-19**) the devil. It's easy to see how this is a blessing for everyone else. He will no longer be here to torment us, accuse us, tempt us, deceive us; so this being an act of love for us is obvious.

But how is it an act of love **for the devil**? Surely he would prefer some alternative to execution! Remember what love is: *“Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law”* (**Romans 13:10**), and the law is nothing more than doing to others, what you would want them to do to you (**Matthew 7:12**).

If you were hurting people, would you want someone to stop you? If you were killing people right and left, and you refused to stop, wouldn't you want someone to do *whatever it took* to make you stop harming others? If you're a true Christian, you should certainly say “yes” – even if it meant your own death. Thus, doing that to the devil *is an act of love – because you're doing to him what you'd want him to do you if the situation was reversed.*

The devil will not thank you for this, **but he should. A life of sin is not a life of happiness.** It is unending strife, struggle, hatred, bitterness, always seeking fulfillment and never finding it. Sin brings excitement, but not satisfaction. It brings power, but not respect. It can even bring worship – but not love. **Proverbs 1** talks about this, particularly **verses 18, 31-33.**

An eternal life of solitary confinement – the only other way the devil could be kept from harming others – is certainly not an act of love for the devil. When given a choice between eternal life in dark isolation and a quick death, would you choose life or a merciful death? So, giving that to the devil is an act of love.

LESS EXTREME EXAMPLES

It's easiest to reason with clear extremes; but now let's bring this down to us. What causes crime? **Isaiah 54:16.** Who gives nations to be robbed and spoiled? **Isaiah 42:24.** Why? (Same verse). How does God punish people for their sins? **Amos 3:1-7** (especially **verses 2, 6**). Can any do good or evil without God's permission? **Deuteronomy 32:39.**

Will God allow the righteous to be hungry? **Psalms 37:25.** Whom does He punish with poverty? **Proverbs 10:3.** What delivers you from God's anger? **Proverbs 11:4.** Does God always punish us with plagues and boils – or does He sometimes use other people? **2 Samuel 7:14.** When you are righteous, do you have

enemies? **2 Timothy 3:12**. But will those enemies cause you problems? **Proverbs 16:7**. Does any evil happen to the righteous? **Proverbs 12:21**.

We can all agree that sickness is a curse. Do curses come without a cause? **Proverbs 26:2**. Does God like causing grief to people? **Lamentations 3:31-36**. Does God send sickness to punish nations? **1 Chronicles 21:14**. Why did that sickness come? **Verse 8**. Does He use sickness to punish individuals? **Job 33:19-22**. What is God's hope in all of this? **Job 33:23-30**.

That last passage answered the paradox I posed at first; but it bears some explanation, so we'll come back to it after a bit more foundation. What is the purpose of this punishment? **Proverbs 22:15**. So punishment *is for a purpose*. Sickness is one of God's forms of punishment, *therefore sickness is also for a purpose!*

And since it is God's desire that *"you may in all respects prosper and enjoy good health, just as your soul already prospers"* (**3 John 1:2, Weymouth**) and since *"He has no pleasure in troubling and causing grief to the children of men"* (**Lamentations 3:33, BBE**), this greater purpose must be VERY important to God. And if it is that important to God that people suffer – ourselves included – it should be equally important to us!

Whom does God punish this way? **Hebrews 12:6-7**. Whom does God *not* punish like this? **Verse 8**. Is this analogous to being corrected by your parents? **Verse 9**. Why does God do this? **Verse 10**. Does God expect us to like it? **Verse 11**. Once we understand what's going on, should we appreciate this correction? **Job 5:17-18, Proverbs 3:11**.

Is this punishment because God hates us, or because He loves us? **Proverbs 13:24**. What does He want us to do when we have problems? **Ecclesiastes 7:14**. How do people who hate God's way of life feel about these corrections? **Proverbs 15:10**.

Do some people totally reject God's correction? **Jeremiah 2:30, 5:3**. Does God eventually give up correcting people? **Isaiah 1:5**. Does God tire of cursing people, having them repent, forgiving them, and having to curse them again? **Jeremiah 15:6**. Will God always struggle with man, trying to make him righteous? **Genesis 6:3**.

So is there a purpose to all of this; a reason why people are left sick, and a greater purpose whose fulfillment far outweighs the temporary sufferings we go through now? **Romans 8:18**. That's the key to all of this; but before we can explain it further, I have to answer an objection you'll surely encounter.

ONLY BY SIN COMES SICKNESS

What causes sickness? **Matthew 9:2-7**. Jesus made it clear here that telling this man with the palsy to "arise and walk" was synonymous with saying "your sins are forgiven". *That there was no difference!* **Therefore, sickness is the result of sin**. Not *necessarily* that person's sin, but SOMEONE'S sin, SOMEWHERE.

Those who know their Bibles well and are disposed to argue that conclusion, will certainly point you to **John 9:1-3**. The conclusion they draw is that his blindness was *not* caused by sin, but only *"to show the power of God at work in him"* (**Philips**). But let's think about that conclusion; it requires us to believe that, despite living a sinless life, and his parents living sinless lives as well, God smote this man with blindness *solely so that Jesus could come and show off His power!*

What sort of a monster God must be, for that to be true! Imagine taking a knife and cutting your child, just so you could bandage him up and coo over him! **That's what this conclusion forces us to believe God did! That He made this man blind SOLELY BECAUSE Jesus needed someone to heal! This man suffered his entire life, JUST SO that Jesus could impress people with His power! Is that the God you believe in??**

I refuse to believe that, and I hope you do as well. So let's examine the question more critically. What EXACTLY did Jesus say? That this blindness was not due to the sins of this man, or his parents. So Jesus exempted **exactly three people** from blame for this man's blindness – **and no one else!**

Did Jesus say Satan was not to blame? Had the devil not deceived Adam and Eve, would this man still have been born blind? Did Jesus say the man's grandparents hadn't sinned and caused this? Or that the Pharisees' sins had not led to this blindness? No! He only said that THIS man wasn't to blame, or his parents! **When scriptures don't make sense, stop and think about what they ACTUALLY say, and don't assume anything!**

Is the punishment for sin limited to one or two generations? **Exodus 20:5**. Why was Jerusalem still desolate in the time of Daniel (about 66 years after the fall of Jerusalem)? **Daniel 9:16**. Why was the curse poured out on them? **Verse 11**. Where does the curse come from? **Galatians 3:10**. Was Moses' eyesight weakened in old age? **Deuteronomy 34:7**. Will there be blind, sick, and maimed people in the Kingdom of God? **Revelation 21:4**. Why? **Revelation 22:15**. How did death enter the world? **Romans 5:12**.

Had Adam not sinned, death would not have entered the world. Without that, there would have been no reason for a curse to come, for the curse comes from breaking the law. Without the curse, there would have been no suffering, and the man in **John 9** could not possibly have been born blind! So SOMEONE'S sin was responsible for his condition!

What was the job of the Pharisees? **Malachi 2:7**. Were they fulfilling their job? **John 7:19**. And what happened when they didn't? **Romans 2:17-24**. It was the job of the priests, of whom the Pharisees were an important faction, to take the law of God and teach it to the people. They were the shepherds of Israel – and how did God prophetically speak of them? **Ezekiel 34:7-8, 18**. Were the Pharisees helping people to understand God's way? **Matthew 23:15**.

As I said, Jesus only exempted three people from blame for the man's blindness; but if you continue reading in **John 9:39-41**, you'll see Jesus points out who was actually to blame. Their spiritual blindness – their WILLING spiritual blindness in the face of plenty of truth that they WOULD NOT see – caused this man's physical blindness.

Because the law of God is not only abstract spiritual things about faith and salvation and love and so on. It includes everything from the law of gravity to the laws of nutrition and proper farming practices and every single true thing – for where does all this truth come from, no matter what the subject? **James 1:17**.

God's true church has always sought to understand all of those laws that are hidden from the world because they say "we see", when their blindness shows in every decision they make. The majority of sickness in society today is the result of those "corporate sins" made by all of society and that each of us perpetuate, in our eating habits and lifestyle.

We are not to blame for the fact that our ancestors raped the soil and stole all the nutrients out of it, and put none back. We are not to blame for the fact that our ancestors stopped making their own sourdough bread and went with chemically leavened store-bought white bread, or stopped eating fermented foods or organ meats or animal fats, all of which are some of the healthiest foods on the planet.

But we are to blame for following in their footsteps, albeit in ignorance. And each time we knowingly perpetuate their mistakes and don't eat the diet and live the lifestyle God intended, we shoulder a little more of the blame for our sickness.

But regardless of who actually sinned, **the point of all of this, is that all sickness is a result of SOME SIN, SOMEWHERE! And until you're part of the solution, you're part of the sin.** And the point of all this is, in order for you to be healed of your sickness God must forgive you of the penalties of that sin.

THE PRICE OF SIN

So we have established that all of our problems, poverty, sickness, strife, and so on, are the result of sin. This isn't to say that the righteous won't be persecuted – Jesus specifically said we would be (**John 16:33**). But if you are pleasing God, it will slide off of you like water off the proverbial duck (**Psalms 37:22-24**). An excellent example would be Daniel's three friends (**Daniel 3:23-27**). They were certainly persecuted by their enemies – but God saw to it that the persecution didn't affect them at all.

So when we are suffering in any way, it is certain there is something we are doing wrong. This sin which caused our problem can take many forms – for we are judged not just on the Ten Commandments, but on “*every word of God*” (**Luke 4:4, 1 John 3:22**).

For example, you might be poor, not because you stole from someone, **but simply because you handle money foolishly**. If you had followed the monetary advice in Proverbs – part of “*every word of God*” – you might not have been poor. Or you might not be tithing properly, and be stealing from God (**Malachi 3:8**). Or you might not be giving to those who deserve it – or, and this is more common, you might be giving to those who *don't deserve it!* Any one of these things, and many others, will keep you poor in spite of perfect literal obedience to the Ten Commandments.

Then again, it might be none of these things; not so much a sin in the literal sense, but simply failing to live up to God's expectations, a sin in a more abstract sense. For example, Job had no sins to repent of, but Job did not trust God (**Job 35:14-15**). That in itself is a serious enough fault to be worth going through extreme suffering in order to learn the lesson that God is trustworthy.

Similarly, your poor health might not be a result of some half-formed adulterous thought you half-remember having, but simply as a result of breaking the laws of health God gave us in the Bible, and which “*...are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made*” (**Romans 1:19-20**).

The true laws of health are out there to be understood, plainly visible if you “*speak to the Earth, and it shall teach you*” (**Job 12:7-10**). Look at how God intended the Earth to be managed, and how He intended people to live, cook, and eat, and you can find the truth about health. The medical profession doesn't have it, but it is out there. Regardless, sickness is the result of sin – your own sins compounded with the sins of a hundred generations of sinners before you.

Of course, God can “smooth over” some of these more minor infractions when they were made in ignorance; that's what grace is for. And if your faith is sufficient (**Matthew 9:29**), God can and will completely reverse the results of these sins; but He'll always command you to “*sin no more, lest something worse may happen to thee*” (**John 5:14, BBE**).

Because as you learn more, God will expect more from you; if you get healed and then repeat the same mistakes, “*a worse thing may happen to you*”. You'll have less grace, so the punishment will be more severe, and forgiveness will come much harder.

Regardless of the specific cause, all problems we face are a result of some sin, or some deficiency in our character, which would inevitably lead to sin. **Thus, all punishment we receive is an act of God's love to try and turn us from our sins.**

This is why Ecclesiastes says we should rejoice when things are going well, but “*in the day of adversity consider [our actions]*”. In other words, when things are going badly you should follow the advice in **Jeremiah 8:6-7** and say “*what have I done?*”. Knowing that no curse comes without a cause, *what are you doing that is causing this curse?*

And by the same token, before praying for someone *else's* healing you should “consider” why *they* are in “the day of adversity”, and ask yourself why they are sick; why God hasn't healed them already; **and what purpose would be served by healing them now.**

A PURPOSE FOR HEALING

We established that God has a PURPOSE for the world's sicknesses. Therefore, in order for God to change His mind and do something different, there must be an even GREATER purpose served! God has clearly set His mind on a certain goal, that of having someone suffer for their sins; **for God to change His mind, there must be a purpose to their healing.**

Not simply “love”, FOR LOVE IS WHY THEY'RE SICK! So when you ask God to do something – *anything* – you need to be able to offer Him a REASON why this is better than what He was already doing! **Prayer is to improve your situation. Prayer is to get God to stop punishing you for something. Why would He do that if you haven't repented?**

What is the purpose of miracles? **1 Corinthians 14:21-25.** So you see that the signs – here, specifically tongues were mentioned but from the context, miraculous power in general should be included – were not for the believers, but for the UNBELIEVERS. What did the apostle's miracles cause? **Acts 2:43.** Why were signs given? **John 4:48.**

So clearly, the signs God gave served a purpose. If He had just wanted to empty the hospitals, surely there would be thousands of prophets right now doing just that. Jesus healed thousands around Jerusalem when He was here – and what did those miracles and signs prove? **Acts 2:22.** So again, that served a purpose, the purpose of proving that God had sent Him. They were proof that He spoke for God, who “*confirmed the word with signs*” (**Mark 16:20**).

But in all of that, the power of God was serving a PURPOSE. So now jump ahead to our time; if you go to the doctor, have an operation, and pray to God – what purpose does God have in healing you? **If God heals you and you give the doctor all – or even some – of the credit, what purpose has been served?** You might feel better, but **what reason does God have to make you feel better?** If His purpose was merely for you to feel better, you'd have been healed already, and never would have needed to go to the doctor in the first place!

Or if someone comes to you, asking you to pray for them – meanwhile also sending prayer requests to Benny Hinn, their local false church, and Madam Voodoo... what purpose would be served if you pray for him and God heals him? He would give the credit to whomever he truly wanted to follow, or conclude that God works through all of you!

And what GOOD has been done here? What has God's power accomplished in such a case? The temporary relief of a sinner's punishment? To what end? He'll only go out and “sin the more”! This is harsh stuff, but it's fact: **If God wanted them healed, He would have done it Himself! For Him to change His mind, some greater purpose MUST be served!**

What is the greatest purpose of the power of God? **1 Kings 17:17-24.** If you heal them, will this person KNOW that God did it because of YOUR prayer? And therefore, that “*the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth*”? If not, then what is the point?

As you've learned in preceding lessons (and this is one reason why this lesson hasn't been written until now), **it isn't love to forgive a sinner without repentance! In fact, it's a sin to do so!** And you've read today that healing someone is simply forgiving their sins (**Luke 5:23**). So why would you forgive the penalties for their sins – heal them – **without them first understanding and repenting of whatever they're doing that CAUSED it?**

For God to heal someone, one or more of three goals must be accomplished:

1. They repented of their sins, and there is no more need for them to suffer.
2. By showing His power through the person who heals them, they will know that you speak for God, and/or believe that God exists (**Luke 5:24**) and hopefully “*turn from their wicked way*”.
3. Or so that YOU... wait a minute, I can't give that away yet! First study...

THE PURPOSE FOR PRAYER

What you have just read is the foundation that underlies every true understanding about prayer. Without that, you can never truly grasp the purpose of prayer. And in it, we have answered the question of why God *hasn't* healed people already. They are suffering the penalties for sin, and leaving them sick is an act of love.

But now you need to consider if, and when, we should pray to change that. See, God has a plan for mankind. As we've said, God cares more than we do, and surely His plan has their best interests at heart. So why should we meddle with God's plan? How can anything we say in prayer possibly improve on God's perfect plan? **Again, these are not rhetorical questions. I want you to stop and think about them BEFORE you continue reading!** Perhaps you won't find the answer – but by considering the question, you'll better understand the answer when it comes!

If God has a plan, and I ask Him to do something different, then one of two things will happen:

1. God will ignore my request, and nothing will happen; thus, I wasted my time praying – and weakened my own faith by seeing God ignore me.
2. God will follow my advice; thus, God's perfect plan will be replaced with my imperfect, shortsighted, flawed plan (if it were a good plan, God would have already been following it without me asking for it!).

I realize just how different this is from what you've always heard about prayer. But the logic is sound. God will either answer, or not; and either way, it appears that my meddling has made things worse, not better. Oh, actually there is a third option too:

3. God will ignore me, but rather than admit that, I will seek some way to believe He actually DID answer me, and pretend that He's listening to me when in fact He isn't.

#3 is what the incredible majority of today's Christians do. So none of the possible outcomes to prayer, looked at in this light, seem beneficial to anyone! So why do it?

And yet there are many clear examples of prayer in the Bible, along with commands to pray for various things. So what are we missing? Only the most important verse in the Bible: **Genesis 1:26**. If you truly understand it, that answers this question entirely. In fact, most of the Bible is summed up in those thirteen words “*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*”.

THE PURPOSE OF NOT PRAYING FOR SOMEONE

To amplify that rather cryptic answer, let's read **1 John 5:14-17**. In this oft-overlooked and always-misunderstood passage, John makes a statement that flatly contradicts every modern understanding on prayer. We have been taught that prayer is an obligation; that when someone asks us to pray for them, we **MUST**. That it is a Christian's duty to pray for everyone, no matter what their problem is or why they're suffering.

We're told we don't have the RIGHT to refuse to pray for someone – and if you don't believe me, next time someone asks you to pray for them, say “no”. The shocked, horrified response you'll get from everyone involved will prove my point.

And yet John plainly says **there are sins that we should not pray for!** He divides sins into two categories, those “not unto death”, and those “unto death”. He tells us to pray for the one, and refuse to pray for the other. Studying this verse alone, it's difficult to understand the difference; but with our understanding of grace and the unpardonable sin, it is simple to explain what a “sin not unto death” is.

Some sins are willful acts of rebellion. They knew the commandment, and sinned anyway. There is no point in praying for such people, for in order for them to be forgiven, the sacrifice of Jesus must be applied to them. And can the sacrifice of Jesus be applied to a willful sin? **Hebrews 10:26.**

On the other hand, there are sins of ignorance; these can be forgiven, for “*sin is not imputed where there is no law*” (**Romans 5:13**). Simple stuff! But this is a spectrum, with grace and ignorance at one end, and rebellion and knowledge at the other; the closer to that end the sin falls, the closer the sin is to being “unto death”. And how can you tell when the cut-off point is? **You can't!**

That's the beauty of this, and the PURPOSE of it! Back up to the context in **1 John 5:14**. We are *only* supposed to ask for things that are “according to His will”! Are we supposed to know what God's will is? **Ephesians 5:17**. Are we supposed to be patterning our mind – our wills – after His? **Romans 12:2**.

We're supposed to be PROVING what is that “*good, and acceptable, and perfect, WILL of God*”, and this is how we do it! Did God give us power to make decisions about what is a “sin unto death” and what isn't? **Matthew 18:18-19**. Did He give us the authority to forgive sins – **or to refuse to forgive them?** **John 20:22-23**.

The Catholics use this verse to justify the power of their false priesthood and the confessional system. The Protestants, in rebellion against the Catholics, dismiss it altogether. But the truth is, **God gave this authority to every true member of God's church!** Was it only the apostles who exercised this authority? **2 Corinthians 2:10**.

God expects YOU to know what His will is! Not to be “unwise”, but WISE! He expects YOU to transform your mind into a copy of His mind, by comparing what His spirit suggests with what your own spirit wants! So that YOUR WILL becomes a copy of HIS WILL!

He expects you to KNOW when the rebellion has become so great, and the grace so depleted, that a person's sin should not be forgiven! He expects you to “*judge righteous judgment*” (**John 7:24**), and then He expects you to stand behind that judgment and **refuse to pray for that person!** He doesn't tell you exactly where that line is, **because learning where to draw that line in the same place He does is why you were born!**

OUR DESTINY

I don't need to cite the scriptures which you know very well about our destinies; we will be kings and priests, ruling the Kingdom of God by Jesus' side. We will be making life-and-death decisions about people on a daily basis, decisions that affect not only this ephemeral existence but also their ETERNAL future!

When will you “*have your senses exercised by use*” (**Hebrews 5:14**) to do that? Are you ready to do it now? Are you ready to rule 1, 5, or 10 cities in the Kingdom of God? With absolute power and control over the power of God? If not, **when will you learn how to do it?**

As you've no doubt guessed, it is by PRAYING and forgiving, or NOT forgiving, a person's sins today! It is by recognizing when a person's sin is “unto death”, and turning away from them; it is by recognizing when

a mind is blinded, and no longer putting new wine into that old bottle; it is by learning to make the same judgments that God has made, or will make, that you practice learning how to make them on your own!

Those of you old enough to have children remember teaching your children how to do things; whether it is how to drive, how to cook, or even how to walk or ride a bike. In each of these things, in order for your children to ever succeed, they had to first fail. But before they could fail *you had to let go of their hand and give them the freedom to try! And the freedom to fail and get hurt!*

Our Father is grooming us to be judges of the cosmos; He can no more take us as we are and give us absolute power than you could take your toddler and enter him into the Indy 500. In order for your toddler to be able to compete with the other professional race car drivers, he must not only grow up, mentally and physically, *but he must be specifically trained to drive at 200 miles per hour!*

How would you go about giving him that training? Can he read enough books to learn how? Can you talk about it enough that he would know how? Certainly he could learn a lot *about* it, but books can only take you so far; in order to learn to drive, *you have to actually drive!*

But no one starts out driving at 200 MPH! You start slow, creeping along; flattening a few orange cones and perhaps denting a mailbox or two along the way (hopefully without denting the mailman, too). The point is, you don't learn to walk by walking; you learn to walk by FALLING. You don't learn to drive by driving, but by *failing to drive properly!*

It is that process of drunkenly swerving from ditch to ditch that is the first hurdle every driver must overcome! And as you go through that process, an experienced driver is in the next seat, ready to grab the wheel and avoid that tree you're hurtling towards! Without this sort of experience *no person alive would learn to drive!* Or, for that matter, learn how to do anything – for in some degree, every skill we have is acquired this way, whether it's welding or chopping onions or playing poker.

SPIRITUAL APPLICATION

Everyone understands this; so why does no one elevate that to the spiritual level? We learn how to behave like God, *not* by acting like God as most people imagine; we learn how to act like God by *not acting like God!* Adam and Eve had God's perfect example to follow, and yet as soon as they took the wheel of life they swerved right into the tree of the knowledge of good and evil!

On the other hand, each of us has already dented up our metaphorical car quite well before God comes along to help. We've already learned why the ditch is bad and we know the hard way that trees slow a car down *very* quickly. So when God shows us the way, we already have the motivation to steer down the right path – we just need some practice.

So in learning how to act like God, it is not by acting like God that we learn the most; it is by tasting the bitter fruit of sin. It was so that sin "*might appear [as] sin*" – so we could learn the exceeding sinfulness of sin – and learn how bad sin really was (heavily paraphrased from **Romans 7:13**). It is by swerving towards the ditch and being guided back out of it that we learn where the road is.

But in learning how to behave like God we have to learn not only how to avoid sin ourselves, **but how to help others avoid sin.** Surely our own problems must come first, but after that, if we are ever to be "children of the Highest", we must be able to help others become like God, too. We are being made in God's image, after His likeness; but as we "*grow up into him in all things*" (**Ephesians 4:13-15**), we are hampered by one great limitation; we are not yet made of spirit!

We cannot truly act like God without having the power of God; we cannot overcome the challenges and properly shoulder the awesome responsibility that rests upon His shoulders, nor even process the heavy emotional burden that comes with such responsibility – without exercising that power!

And yet we cannot learn HOW to exercise that power – and thus, be worthy of receiving it – without PRACTICE! So to pursue/torture our metaphor a bit more – and this is the real reason I used it in the first place – driving is dangerous. Yet, in order to learn to drive safely, you must practice driving... which, until you know how to drive safely, is dangerous!

Our solution to this chicken-or-the-egg problem is to have students ride with a qualified driver until they have passed certain tests; this way they have a chance to make mistakes, and yet are under supervision so they cannot make *serious* mistakes. And for once, God’s solution is the same as ours.

We are not made of spirit; the power of God does not flow out of us as it one day will. Yet, through prayer, we have access to that power. But safely! Because every one of our decisions must pass through heaven for approval!

Smart decisions are noted, and ridiculous decisions are ignored; for just as you would take the wheel away from a student driver to avoid crashing into a brick wall, God will not listen to any prayers we make that would cause irreparable harm to ourselves or others.

But while you would prevent major accidents, you would give your student driver the freedom to make minor mistakes; for without them, they cannot learn to avoid them. A tire jumping a curb or a scratched fender is a relatively minor problem, and it’s less important for you to use your power to protect the student from a scratch than it is that they see the results of their sin – and learn to avoid it next time.

Likewise – and here is the climax we’ve been building for several pages now – God allows us to make minor mistakes in prayer *so we can learn from them!* God does not NEED us to pray for people! If He truly wants someone to be healed, blessed, cursed, or blinded **He can do it Himself!** What He NEEDS is for the future rulers of the universe to learn HOW and WHEN and WHY to exercise the power of God!

He needs us to learn *when we should* forgive sins – and just as importantly, **when we shouldn’t!** He needs us to learn to balance grace and judgment; to calculate rebellion and ignorance; to judge righteous judgment while showing compassion; in other words, to behave exactly as He Himself would *whether He is watching or not!*

When we pray for something that is not right – but not idiotic, either, just wrong – God will often answer it if possible. **Because it’s one thing to know that God is right; it’s another thing to see WHY God is right.** And only by letting you see what happens after your well intentioned but foolish prayer can you truly understand WHY God let that person suffer.

A PERSONAL EXAMPLE

I have seen many examples of this in my own life, and in the histories of some other true Christians. I try to avoid personal examples in these lessons, because you’re here to learn what the Bible says, not what happened in my life. However, to illustrate this point I feel I should share at least one story.

Early on in the writing of this course, there was a very active student who wolfed down the lessons and loved them. She read Lesson 1 over ten times and filled three notebooks with notes on the first three lessons alone! She truly “received the word with joy”. But when faced with her own sins, she wasn’t able to overcome them and after several months of study I saw her understanding slipping away very suddenly, in a matter of a few days.

Out of compassion and concern, I prayed (privately) that her understanding be opened, and that she be given a chance to understand. Immediately, the next day she was her old eager self; all the problems she'd had with the lessons dissolved, and she devoured more lessons. Yet two weeks later, when she came to a hard piece of understanding, she stumbled across the statement from Lesson 1 about "to be Gods, as God is a God" – and fell hard.

Now you may remember, that phrase is in a paragraph of its own, in bold, and partially capitalized. I wanted it to stand out! **And yet she told me that, despite reading that lesson over ten times, she never noticed that it said that!** What a powerful example of the blindness God protects us under, when we are not yet able to hear something!

But now that she had seen and understood that statement, she was horrified by it; so she searched the internet for arguments against it, easily found some (for there is no shortage of lies on the internet), and rejected not only that understanding **but completely reversed her belief in every single thing I had showed her in the Bible** – including the law, faith, our destiny, why we suffer, and so on. All of which she had enthusiastically embraced and eagerly accepted until then.

The point is, God saw her make a decision, and decided to remove His understanding from her, so "*that the spirit might be saved in the day of judgment*". I meddled, God answered, and reopened her understanding as I had asked.

But what God saw that I didn't is that, much as she loved some of the truth, she had things set in her heart that she would not submit to God, no matter what. So God had shielded her from that part of the truth, hoping that by showing her some of the rest of it, she would love it enough to forsake her sins. When He saw that she didn't, He let her slip into deception once more.

Naturally, I knew none of this, so I prayed for her, and He used His power to give her another chance, for my sake; but despite her temporary recovery, I saw her not only waste the chance to get better, but this time she became far worse than she was the first time; **because now she was less deceived**. And from this I learned a great lesson, and now, so have you; **and this could not have happened had I not had access to the power of God through prayer!**

This type of thing has happened several times with several different people; each time, I have learned why this person was blinded and each time, my decision is better; each time, it becomes more in line with God's own. Had I blindly accepted God's will without understanding it, I'd have learned nothing. Now I firmly understand why God has blinded those people, **because I have seen for myself what would have happened if He hadn't!**

As for her, my meddling gave her another chance at the truth; her rejecting that second chance has cost her some grace, and will make the remainder of this life slightly more difficult and perhaps her position in the next life slightly lower. But she is not permanently harmed, for God would never allow that. And because of this series of events, I learned a great deal; and that in turn has helped all of my students, whom I now treat slightly differently, slightly more like God does, because of that experience.

This person had a call – an opportunity to understand. She didn't want it. Next time I'm in a similar situation, I'll know what happened this time – and my judgment will be better, wiser, based on this experience.

GODLINESS

In Lesson 27, you studied the chain of virtues in **2 Peter 1:5-10** which, in a nutshell, summarizes the path your character must follow to salvation. But I passed over godliness briefly then, because I didn't want to distract from the point of that lesson with the point of this one. But now we're ready for it.

You should review Lesson 27, page 8, because I won't repeat that information here, only the conclusions reached by those scriptures;

1. Godliness has a power associated with it (**2 Timothy 3:5, Acts 3:12** [where it is incorrectly translated "holiness"]).
2. Godliness must be exercised, in a similar way to how athletes exercise (**1 Timothy 4:7**).
3. *"Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come"* (**verse 8**).
4. **Godliness involves the exercise of faith (verse 10).**

Verse 8 is clearer in the Philips translation, which says *"spiritual fitness [Godliness] is of unlimited value, for it holds promise BOTH for this present life and for the life to come"*. Godliness helps us both in this life, AND in the next life! Putting these points together, it is clear that godliness is just a label for what we've been talking about throughout this entire lesson – **Godliness is using the power of God!**

The power of God must be exercised, so that you can be good at using it. That exercise profits you greatly, both in this life where you can use the power of God to make your life and the lives of those you care about better... and in the life to come where you'll be using that power of God to rule one, five, or ten cities in the Kingdom of God!

MISTAKES IN GODLINESS

There are a lot of things men in the Bible did through the power of God that were mistakes. Well, perhaps mistakes is the wrong word. The things they did turned out badly, but they profited greatly from making that bad decision.

It has at times been difficult to explain some of these examples in the Bible, and make them mesh with the rest of the scripture. Remember though, all scripture is PROFITABLE... but not every scriptural example is necessarily a GOOD example! For example, Jezebel worshipped idols. The Bible records, infallibly, that she did so. **But that doesn't mean we should follow her example and do the same!**

Similarly, in **Genesis 12:10-13** Abraham lied about Sarah being his sister (technically, it was a half-lie, since she was his half-sister), because of fear and a lack of a faith. He did this some years before the new covenant of faith God made with him in **Genesis 15**. But the fact that Abraham had this moment of weak faith doesn't mean we should follow his example!

The same goes for David and Bathsheba; Saul trying to kill David; Moses smiting the rock; the spies making a pact with Rahab's family in Jericho; and so on, throughout the Bible. Bad people did good things, and good people did bad things; it is our job to look through the rest of the Bible and find out which things were good examples, and which should be condemned.

In **Acts 15:36-39**, Paul didn't trust Mark, who had abandoned them in the past. Barnabas did. They disagreed sharply, and apparently didn't speak for years. Yet some time later – perhaps 10-20 years – Paul had changed his mind about Mark according to **2 Timothy 4:11**. The point of this – and there are hundreds of examples of the men in the Bible making mistakes – is that they *profited* from those mistakes. God let them make mistakes, just as He lets us, for our profit.

And was this a mistake? Perhaps Paul and Barnabas were both right. Perhaps Paul was right not to trust Mark; perhaps if Mark had been accepted as he was, he might indeed have betrayed them later. Then again, clearly Barnabas was right to see potential in Mark; but without Paul's shaming him, Mark might never have had the motivation to overcome his weakness.

But back to our point of Godliness, Paul expended a great deal of effort on the Galatians; and he wondered, later in life, if that hadn't all been a waste of time in **Galatians 4:11**. Would Paul not have made different choices had he the opportunity to do it again?

Then there is the case of the Corinthians. Paul didn't take tithes or support from them, even though he was entitled to do so, out of misguided concern for them; see **2 Corinthians 11:7-9**. Here, he regrets that decision – which was his to make – and later begs them to “forgive me this wrong”, in not having them support him (**2 Corinthians 12:12-13**). Would he not have done it differently if he could start over?

By making that decision in the church, a well-intentioned decision to be sure, Paul saw the fruits of it, and they proved that it was a bad decision. It was not that Paul NEEDED their money – obviously, he didn't – but THEY needed to give it to him! THEY needed to put their money where their mouth was, because “*where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*” (**Luke 12:34**). If Paul wasn't speaking the truth – fine – listen to someone else.

But if he WAS, then he DESERVED their tithes and offerings, whether he needed it or not. Because they NEEDED to give them – because as long as they held the 10% of their income that belonged to God, they were “robbing God”, and because of that they were under a CURSE! (**Malachi 3:7-12**). And by not encouraging them to give him their support, Paul had WRONGED those Corinthians, and helped to perpetuate the curse God's tithe was bringing upon them by not getting it out of their homes!

As another example, in **Exodus 32:30-32**, Moses begged God to allow him to pay for Israel's sins in their place. I've often heard this touted as the perfect attitude of a leader; but was God impressed? **Verses 33-35**. Moses' heart was in the right place, **but paying for Israel's sins BEFORE THEY REPENTED would have been a waste of a perfectly good saint!**

And by praying, by trying to exercise the power of God and by God refusing to allow it, **Moses learned his viewpoint was wrong – that those who sinned are those who should suffer for it!** For it would have accomplished NOTHING but a temporary stay of execution for a rebellious, wicked people, who would surely re-earn the death penalty in a matter of days!

That's why God said “*Whosoever hath sinned against me, HIM will I blot out of my book*”. Because God “*...is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty...*” (**Numbers 14:18**).

God doesn't forgive the guilty! Not even if a great man offers to die in their place! Christ already bought them grace (which is what Moses was trying to do here), **and His grace was sufficient for them!** Paul was also willing to be accursed from Christ if it would help his brethren (**Romans 9:3**), **but it wouldn't have helped them!** For that wouldn't have taught them anything, so God didn't allow it!

On the other hand, for a positive example of exercising godliness, read **Job 34:35-37**. Elihu knew Job's sin was not unto death but also knew that Job did not deserve to be forgiven yet! So what did he pray for? “*My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end...*”

Elihu prayed that Job's trial should continue until he learned his lesson “*because of his answers for wicked men*”. Elihu believed that Job WOULD repent, but that he needed to suffer more first! **A frightening responsibility to take upon yourself, BUT ELIHU WAS RIGHT!** And it is that same power of God, that same terrifying responsibility that YOU wield every time you pray for – or refuse to pray for – someone!

And it is that process of accepting the responsibility to bind and loose on Earth, knowing that, if made properly, those decisions will be bound in heaven, that is today teaching us how to exercise the power of God. It is preparing us for the unimaginable task of leading millions in the world tomorrow with no fetter on our powers but our consciences.

And it is because of the incredible power, which shall be settled upon the shoulders of the saints, that we must go through such grueling trials and such great responsibility must be learned and practiced today. MANY are called. FEW are chosen, to even begin to exercise this power. But it is only a tiny HANDFUL that truly “*follows the lamb whithersoever He goeth*”, and prove FAITHFUL.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

When the firstfruits are resurrected, the rulers of the millennium will be “*the spirits of just men made perfect*” (**Hebrews 12:23**). Notice He makes the spirits of JUST men perfect. Not the spirit of Charles Manson “made perfect”. Not the spirits of lazy, half-hearted Christians “made perfect”!

And He will certainly not make perfect the spirits of those who never took the responsibility for their own faith, for their own decisions, and most of all the responsibilities for their prayers. Those who merely prayed the same repetitive, meaningless prayers before bedtime for God to bring world peace, feed the hungry, and watch over their soul have no value to God as leaders.

God needs leaders who aren't afraid to make the hard decisions, the tough calls. Christians who stand for something, right or wrong, are of much more value than those who always let someone else do the standing and merely hide behind them (**Revelation 3:15-16**).

Your spirit – you – must learn to stand on your own two feet in this life. To make decisions that you KNOW are right – and stand behind them. You must learn to how to be JUST and use the power of God PROPERLY in THIS life, learn how to make good judgments NOW, while you're here on earth, BEFORE God can make you into a King or a Priest in the next!

2 Samuel 23:3 *The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.*

Being “just” in your own life means you have learned what is good, and what is evil, and learned to choose the right course. You learned this a step at a time – by making dumb decisions, watching the fruits (**Matthew 7:20**), and then NOT DOING it again! This is how you learn how to do EVERYTHING from walking, to reading, to driving, **TO RULING THE UNIVERSE!**

Isaiah 28:9-10 *Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:*

You learn how to do things a step at a time. First you learn to crawl, then to walk. At first you make mistakes and fall down a lot. Eventually, through practice, you use the knowledge gained from these mistakes to learn to walk. Then to run, and ride bikes and drive cars and perhaps even airplanes.

Learning to be like God is no different. Skipping over the basics like not stealing which go without saying, when you truly advance to the stage where you are ready to learn “godliness”, you must learn how to make decisions as God would make them *that involve other people*.

Things like leaving your shoplifting kids in jail. Refusing to pray for a rebellious friend who hates God. Praying for your enemies to break their teeth (**Psalms 58:6**). Or healing someone you think deserves it; or praying for God to open someone's mind. Or close it.

God will not let you destroy this person – He might let you hurt them a little bit, but only if you had their best interests at heart and only if, by hurting them, some greater purpose is served. Something of true, eternal value.

And as I've said once before, suppose you're wrong to refuse to pray for this person. Surely they can't throw a cat without hitting a dozen people who would fall all over themselves to pray for them. If they truly need shallow, meaningless, pseudo-Christian prayer, God can surely see to it that they get one. On the other hand, if you just pray for everyone who comes along, what value will your opinion have to God?

Imagine what the world would be like if God just rubber-stamped "yes!" to every prayer, however inane it might be! What chaos! What a wretched world this would be, even if only 1% of prayers were answered! **So then why would you, when you are supposed to be learning to be like God, just say "yes!" to every prayer request someone sends you??**

You should send God *well reasoned requests*. Don't say "feed the hungry", for if God wanted all the hungry fed, He surely would have – since He knows when even the ravens are hungry (**Psalms 147:7-9, Job 38:41, Psalms 104:24-30**), so surely He knows about the bums. Aren't people of more value than birds? **Luke 12:24**. But is there something MORE IMPORTANT than feeding the hungry? **Verses 22-23**.

If you must pray for the hungry, pray for SPECIFIC THINGS. Pray that such and such a person be fed, "because he knows not what he does", or "that he may know that I told him Your words", or "that he may have time to learn the truth"; but **GIVE GOD A REASON TO HEAR YOUR REQUEST!** A REASON to change His mind! And then WATCH WHAT HAPPENS IF HE ANSWERS! You will know when you did right or wrong *by the fruits!* (**Matthew 7:16-20**).

When you make a judgment, you will watch how your decision worked out – and next time you have a similar case, you'll remember how your last decision turned out. You'll learn what was a good judgment or a bad one, by its FRUITS. By USE, by PRACTICE, by watching and remembering, you'll learn to make good decisions and be USEFUL to God – both now, and in the Kingdom.

Hebrews 5:14 *But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those WHO BY REASON OF USE have their senses exercised to DISCERN both good and evil.*

This is a sobering job, one many people do not want to be bothered with. But this is what we are called to do today. This is strong meat, suitable only for Christians who have passed beyond the milk and are ready to proceed along to the step of learning godliness, so that you can in time pass on and add to your godliness brotherly love, and then finally to add to your brotherly love... love.

When you have so conquered your own will that you have been able to lead others with the same fairness God has showed you; when you are able to use His power to judge with the same wisdom, compassion and, when appropriate, sternness with which He judges; when you are, in short, just; only then will you truly understand all the foundation necessary to truly grasp the subtleties of true love for all; brethren and enemies alike.

When that day comes, you will have finally glimpsed the divine nature; then nothing will stand in God's way when He comes to make your now-just spirit... perfect.

This work is completely non-denominational and is meant to fulfill Christ's great commission to "*preach the gospel to every creature*" (**Mark 16:15**). **This publication is not to be sold**; "*freely ye have received, freely give*" (**Matthew 10:8**).

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