

Prayer And Fervency

Real Faith

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You might recall in last week's sermon that I said it was my concern during that sermon for both prayer *and* faith; that I was more concerned with faith's *relationship* to prayer than anything else. And this faith that we are talking about, I want us all to understand, is not an abstract belief in the Word of God. It is not a simple assent to understanding the Word of God. It is not a passive acceptance of facts *about* God.

People all over the world have that kind of faith—people who give no thought at all to Christianity. They certainly think about God, or I should say—*a god*, because that is what they have their faith in. And they have a faith. But what I am talking about here is a *real* faith that we will get into a little bit more. These people have no relationship at all to Christianity, but they do have a religious faith, a spiritual faith, and in many cases it is very zealous. Yet there is no knowledge of, or acknowledgement of, the true God.

I want to show you some scriptures here—at the beginning of this sermon—in I Corinthians 8. That is where we are going to begin. I want to show you the kind of faith that these people have. Even though it will be very strong and even though they will be quite zealous and enthusiastic about their worship of this god (it is a spiritual faith)—it is not *real faith*, it is not *true faith*. It is not the faith that we have—that we want to have—in the great God.

Paul writes,

I Corinthians 8:1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

We can see the subject here is going to be about idolatry. And this kind of faith that I began talking about here—a religious faith—is a spiritual faith. It

can be a very zealous faith. **But it can also be an idol.** Now let us drop down to verse 4,

I Corinthians 8:4-7 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is only one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

We are actually looking at a couple of different groups of people that Paul is speaking of here. The one that I am speaking of, though, is the group of people who are sincerely and faithfully worshipping with a real zeal. They have faith in their god. There is a spiritual faith there, but it is not in the *true God*. So can we say then that it is a true faith? I do not believe so. In chapter ten, verses 19-21, Paul is reaching a conclusion here. And he says,

I Corinthians 10:19-21 What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons [It is a religious faith. It is a spiritual faith—because their faith is in a demon, a spirit being. "They sacrifice to demons..."] and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. [That is pretty clear.] You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.

What we are looking at here is a faith that motivates a people to sometimes a very zealous submission to their god. But it is a faith that any human being is capable of, as we can see, because obviously the true God is not involved in this faith that they have. If the true God were involved in it, these people would not be worshipping demons. But they *are* worshipping demons. They are doing it in ignorance. But they nonetheless believe very sincerely and

devoutly. And in some cases are willing to go to great sacrifice in order to submit to what they believe the demands of their god is. But this is a *human* faith of which the human spirit is capable apart from the revelation of God.

I want you to begin to think about this in comparison to what you understand these people are able to do *humanly* in relation to their god—the sacrifices that they make in relation to the god. And is your faith anywhere near as zealous, as fervent, as the false faith (human faith) these people are able to offer to their god?

I know that you know stories of times past when people, with all sincerity, offered their living children to an idol. And the child was burned. A despicable thing in the eyes of God, an abomination to you and me; and, yet, these people did it in all sincerity believing that they were doing the right thing. Perhaps you heard on your television newscast that some people, both men and women, permitted themselves to be nailed to crosses in the spring, around Easter.

You and I know that this is not something that the true God wants His people to go through in relation to Him. But these people did what they did in faith, with a great deal of fervency and zeal. The *faith* about which I am speaking, is an operation of God. "We have what we have," according to I Corinthians 2 and other scriptures, "only because we have been enlightened by that God." He has revealed them by His Spirit. And you know full well that the things that you believe are far different from what these Gentiles believe. Again, I ask the question. *Is your faith as fervent as their faith is?* Their faith is in something false and is a faith that can be generated apart from the true God.

God, operating through His Spirit, has implanted an "energy" (I called it)—a power enabling us to respond in faith to His Word. Real faith enables us to "see" them (This is the word that I have used in the past)—to *see* God as Creator, Father, Sustainer, Son, Savior, High Priest, Elder Brother. But this is not merely in an academic sense, but in actual practice—to such an extent that they are a part of our lives in a way that is more real than the world around us. This is not something that we have by the mere acceptance of fact. It is something that we have had to grow into. We have a great deal more growing yet to do.

This faith responds to the Word of God by accepting it wholeheartedly—*as truth*. It is interesting. I believe it is in Genesis 17 somewhere around verse 1 or verse 8. (Those are the verses that come to mind. I do not have this in my notes. It is just happened to come to mind.) But God said to Abraham (the father of the faithful), "Walk before Me and be you wholehearted."

Wholehearted. The faith that God instills in us is empowered to walk before Him wholeheartedly with all of our being, fervently submitting to Him.

This faith keeps God's Word with the same zeal and the same kind of concern and the same kind of fervency as a person on a desert seeking water. In fact, this faith rests its whole weight on the veracity of God's Word. You cannot see *Him*. I think in most cases the kind of faith that we began talking about here—where people had this zeal so that they would offer even a living child to a fire in offering to a god—had to have something that they could *see*. But we have to have faith in a God we *cannot* see, but whose Word we can see. We accept it wholeheartedly as truth.

If we have this faith, it is going to give birth to other things. And one of the things, or elements, or adjuncts that it is going to produce is prayer. And I think that we can go so far as to say that *prayer has no existence outside of faith*. Prayer is very important to our relationship with this God.

God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ are the object of this faith. You might recall the time that Peter was walking on the water (on the Sea of Galilee), walking toward Christ. I think this illustrates this very clearly. As long as he focused his mind on the object of his faith, which was Jesus Christ the Son of God, Peter actually walked on water! But when he became distracted, began looking at the water and the waves and hearing the roaring of the wind, he immediately began to think—because his mind became focused on the around and the about—and his faith began to diminish. He said to himself, "I'm vulnerable. I'm going to sink." And, sure enough, he did.

There is a great lesson there. Our faith has to have as its object, a personality, a powerful personality—a living, *powerful* personality.

Hebrews 3:12-14 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort

one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.

All of us need to guard against unbelief—as if it were an enemy that we are going to grapple, wrestling with, battle against, overcome. I mentioned in the sermon last week that this is not a heart in which unbelief is merely present—because that occurs to everybody. Doubts will creep into our minds regarding some areas. And God expects that. He knows that is going to occur. That is not what Paul is talking about here. Rather, he is talking about a heart that is *controlled* by unbelief. It is that kind of heart which will drag a person down, just like Peter who was dragged down into Galilee's water. The peril of unbelief is that it breaks the trust on which our relationship with God is based.

Paul says here, "an evil heart of unbelief *in departing* from the living God." "Departing" means "*walking away from*." And "unbelief" leads to walking away from or falling away—which is the opposite of drawing near. Again, recall in the sermon last week that I said this is the major theme in the book of Hebrews—that we are to **draw near** to God. We are to make an effort to do that—to draw near to Him.

In fact, the book of Hebrews shows very clearly that Jesus Christ, as High Priest, has preceded us into the heavens for the very purpose of enabling us to draw near to God. So He is there to help us come close to God. But unbelief (as we see here) or lack of faith (if I put it that way) causes us to fall away—to depart from the living God.

Remember this. It is essential to us. I think that if our faith is going to grow, we have to understand that when Paul talks about falling away, that he is talking about falling away from a Personality. Not merely falling away from, let us say, "a word, or a group of doctrines, or a doctrine;" but we are walking away from—falling away from—a living, dynamic Personality. This is going to have very much to do with the theme of this sermon.

The supreme disaster of life, the ultimate defeat, is to fall away from this Personality. Why? Because it completely thwarts God's purpose. He wants

us to be so near to Him that we are exactly like Him! And the way that we become like Him is to associate with Him—be around Him. I will use a verse that illustrates this, I think, very clearly in just a little bit.

This faith needs to be cultivated. It grows, as we find, by reading and hearing the Word of God—meditating upon God's Word. It grows in an atmosphere of trial because it is exercised *by use*. There is a saying that "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." And, so, as we see results *by using* the faith that God makes possible for us, it then reinforces and tends to make us stronger as well. It also grows in an atmosphere of exhortation. And that is what this is about, in these three verses—verses 12, 13 and 14. Because he says,

Hebrews 3:12-13 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but [Here comes the preventative.] exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Did you ever think that exhortation was a preventative of falling away? Did you ever think of exhortation as being something that would strengthen your faith? Yes, it is—very much so. And one of the greater trials that those of us who are part of the Church of the Great God is facing is that we are so scattered and fellowship is not as easily accessible as it used to be. So it is something that I feel God has brought about to try us.

I think one of the first things that He wants to establish is that our continued existence as a son of His depends upon the relationship, first of all, that we have with Him—the *fellowship* we have with Him—and then secondarily, the fellowship that we have with one another. And we can do that much more easily today than these people could in the book of Hebrews. Because we have telephones, we can at least communicate back and forth that way. We can communicate through letters. And all of us have at least a little bit of fellowship with one another—some of us more than others.

But I want you to appreciate the fellowship you do have. And I want you to take advantage of the fellowship that you do have. And Paul says here (Here is a letter from God.), he tells us that when we are fellowshiping, that **we**

better EXHORT one another because that strengthens one another's faith. It enables us to go on. So we better take advantage of what we do have.

So, exhortation is a preventative of falling away. This is one of the major reasons why fellowship is needful. Without it, we may be able to hold our own and not slip too noticeably, but I am pretty sure that most people who get cut off will rarely grow because they do not take the opportunity to strengthen their fellowship with God.

There is a very definite link between the quality of faith and the quality of fellowship. Fellowship and exhortation of each other is not an absolute cure but it is a preventative. But the fellowship must be of the *right kind*. And that is why God warns us in I Corinthians 15:33 that "evil communication corrupts good manners," or as the King James says, "evil company corrupts good manners."

Does it not follow that if we keep company with the very best Company there is in all the universe that that is going to be a plus? You better believe it. And that company is the company of the Father and the Son. That company comes in prayer. (I will change the word to "fellowship.") That fellowship—communication with God—comes in prayer; and it comes in the study of His Word. When we fellowship with Him, we talk to Him, and He talks to us.

That is Somebody that we need to strive to have fellowship with. And remember, you are fellowshiping with *a Personality*. We are not talking about words in a book. We are talking about *very real* Personages. We need to begin to look at Them in that way if our fellowship with Them is going to be enhanced. And our prayers are going to have a quality added to them that I think that we all need.

In Hebrews 3 and 4, Paul actually establishes a general order of falling away. It goes something like this: First there is sin. And that is something that everybody does from time to time. But if the sin is allowed to continue, the second step begins to shift in. And that is a deceived mind—in which we have justified the sin as acceptable for a variety of reasons. Our justification may be that, "Well, I'm just weak." Or the justification may be, "Well, God is merciful and He is just going to have to accept me this way." You see the

mind is moving into the second stage where the sin is now acceptable and we are getting more and more willing to live with it.

Third, we subtly and gradually become hardened to it. And apathy—shall I say Laodiceanism?—and unbelief about God's holiness and purpose grow. The third one then is that we gradually become hardened to the sin, and apathy toward it and unbelief regarding God's holiness and purpose grow. And then fourth, finally, apostasy takes place. That means departing from, separating from; precipitating a complete falling away.

What Paul is saying here is that with the proper type of fellowship—that includes a great deal of exhortation—it can break that cycle. Exhortation from loving brothers can encourage someone to break the cycle. It works best in small groups of people where every member knows each other well enough, and trusts each other enough to share their burdens and temptations.

It almost seems axiomatic that as a group grows in numbers the fellowship becomes more casual, off-handedly polite, and external. I think that almost everybody will agree with me. If they have been in a congregation that has been small, they would agree the congregation was generally very warm, loving, friendly, kind. People helped one another. They knew what one another's burdens and problems were. They shared them by praying about them. They talked about one another's hopes and dreams. However, as that congregation begins to get larger and larger, that gradually becomes lost, until we are nothing more than a face in a crowd

I saw the results of a study that was done of children in a high school. What this team of psychologists, or sociologists, or whatever they were, did was evaluate children who were attending a small town high school as compared to children attending a large city high school. In the small town high school, there were only about a hundred or a hundred and fifty students in the whole school, maybe two or three hundred. The children in the other school, there was well over two thousand.

One of the tests that they gave these kids was to name all the people they knew. Do you know that the kids that went to the small school could name almost every kid in the school? The kids that went to the large school had trouble naming one or two score children. What was the conclusion? The

conclusion was that in a small school everybody made an effort to try to get to know everybody. In the large school, the children were so intimidated by the very size of it that they sought out a small group of people—a company that they felt comfortable with—and stuck with them and did not learn anything about anyone else. This is very interesting.

I think the same thing works in a church. When a group is small, there is more effort made to help one another, to fellowship in the right way. And as it grows, we begin to become intimidated. And we slowly but surely separate ourselves—unintentionally—simply because we then stick with the people we feel comfortable with and our knowledge of others in the congregation actually diminishes.

This kind of fellowship that I am talking about has to be worked at. It not only has to be worked at by seeking people out, but it also has to be worked at by a willingness to talk openly and freely. I do not mean about every detail of every sin or anything. I am not talking about that. But being willing to talk openly and freely of your hopes and dreams and problems and troubles, in a general sense, so that they can be shared, and so you can be **exhorted**. Once in awhile, you will run into a person who has been through the same thing and they can give a lot of good advice.

Hope, faith, and love *increase* in an atmosphere of encouragement, of thoughtfulness, and where there is enough trust of each other that we are willing to open ourselves up somewhat. I want you to notice again here in Hebrews 10 in verses 23 through 25. Paul says,

Hebrews 10:23-25 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

This "stir up love" means "to arouse"—"to arouse to love." We have an obligation to do this because of both love and faith. We have seen it in two

different contexts now. In Hebrews 3, the subject is faith—belief. In Hebrews 10, the subject is love. In both cases, exhortation within our fellowship can stir to increase either one of them or both of them.

He says that we have to confess our hope. Do you know what confess means? It means, "to make it known, to reveal"—make known our hope. Undoubtedly He means here **the great hope** that we have—the resurrection of the dead. But I do not believe that it is at all limited only to that hope. It is also extended to other hopes that we have of getting rid of burdens that we are carrying around.

It is the accomplishment of these hopes that we are to exhort people about. "Hang in there!" "Hold fast!" "Maybe you need to do this." "Have you tried praying about that?" "Have you sought the advice or counsel of this person?" "Do you think it would help for you to do this kind of thing or that kind of thing?" "I had a problem like that one time." You see, you begin to pool your resources and experiences. And there is wisdom, God says, in a multitude of counselors. It cannot help but build people. And the fellowship becomes stronger—as we share one another's hopes and dreams.

So, Paul says,

I Corinthians 13:1 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

The reason I mention this is because so frequently when we come together, somebody has a particular axe that he wants to grind. It may be a doctrine—a doctrine he wants to see changed—a doctrine that Mr. Armstrong was wrong about, they feel. And so that becomes the subject. But I want to remind you all, that is not really where it is at in Christianity. *The focus of Christianity is becoming like the Father.* The focus of Christianity (the apostle Paul just said here for you and me) is very practical. The focus of Christianity, the whole reason for it, *is that we become loving as the Father is loving and loving as the Son is loving.*

I am not saying we should not look into doctrine and be correct on it. Please do not misunderstand. I just do not want us to dive off the deep end and put the whole emphasis on a doctrine. The Pharisees were that way to a great extent. Jesus told them, [paraphrased] "you tithe of mint, anise, and cumin." He said, "This you ought to have done" (Luke 11:42). It is good to be right, He was saying. There was nothing wrong with being right. But they were neglecting the weightier matters of the law: justice, which is another way of saying love; mercy; and faithfulness, or loyalty. Jesus put His finger right on the heart of the Pharisees' problem. They were neglecting what was most important. So they were hypocrites; they were "whited sepulchres." He called them every name in the book—even though they were very knowledgeable about the Scriptures.

We need to be careful about our fellowship and where it is headed; and to understand that it is our responsibility before God to encourage, to exhort—to encourage people to "hang in there," to love, and to serve others. So then, Christianity's purpose is to convert people into being like God and to love like God loves. Love, in this case, is just another way of saying **submit to doing things the way that God would do them**. It builds people's faith to encourage them, to exhort them, to inspire them to submit to God or continue to persevere in submitting to God.

It is said of Augustus Caesar that he found Rome a city of wood and he left it a city of marble. His impact on it was enough to transform it, or at least *begin* to transform it, into a place of beauty.

I want to confess to you that I feel it is my responsibility from God to help all of us to attain to the beauty of holiness. Because we are a people who are largely forgetful of God because He is not in *all* of our thoughts. Speaking generally here, we are a people who are weak in faith because this material world is more real to us than God. And we have been in the past, at least, a people who are essentially **prayerless** because of our lack of faith. And, it is my job to be used to help us to become people who habitually pray to God (*almost as easily as we talk to one another*). It is my job to be used to help us

become people who believe God—because He has become real to us, and because we **see** Him; and to become people who remember Him, to do His will.

Perhaps the relative importance of faith can best be seen in that statement in Ephesians 2:8, where Paul says that "for by grace you are saved through faith." Faith, along with repentance, is one of the two indispensable conditions to salvation. Do you know why? It is because they **both** lead to *love*. It is by grace through faith that we are saved. And it is by faith that we *stay* saved. Because the Scriptures also say "for we walk by faith..."—you see this is what we do along the way—"...and not by sight" and "the just shall live by faith." This is very important in regard to prayer, because prayer *is* our contact with God, and it is a major player in the development of our relationship with Him.

While we are in the book of Hebrews, let us go to chapter 4 and verses 14-16. "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest..." Notice that word "seeing?" Do you *see* God? Do you *see* that you have a great High Priest? What is it that gives you the ability to *see* in that way? It is *faith* that does that. And so faith is what starts a person in the right direction. And that right direction is to turn that person toward the One who can give him the help that he needs. And that help is in heaven—that help is in and through Jesus Christ who is our High Priest.

Hebrews 4:14-16 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

It is faith that clears the way to the mercy seat. It is faith that, first of all, gives the assurance that there even is a mercy seat and a High Priest who waits to hear our petitions and our confession, the confession of our brothers and sisters.

It is interesting that the Revised Standard version translates "Let us therefore come *boldly*" as "Let us then *with confidence draw near*." It is an interesting approach. "Let us then with confidence draw near." This word "confidence" has the overtone of speaking freely. Let us then "speak freely" as we draw near. What are we doing? We are fellowshiping with God. We are in His company. We are communicating with Him. And it is faith that is plowing the way before us—because prayer grows out of faith! We would not even be praying if we did not have faith.

The people I began talking about, at the beginning of the sermon, prayed to an idol. It is a spiritual being, but it is a demon. Faith is motivating them to talk to that demon. In our case, it is faith, which is an operation of God, made possible by revealing Himself to us, that plows the way beforehand. This power, this energy, that He has given us to enable us to believe what His Word says. So it plows the way so that we can communicate with Him, so that we can talk with Him, and that we can do it freely; we can open up to Him, because He is just like we are! He was tempted in all things, yet without sin. So He can relate to our weaknesses, but He can also encourage and exhort and inspire and comfort and make us feel as though we are on the right track—and make us feel as though we need to go on.

So it is faith that is the companion of prayer all along the way. Because as we saw earlier in Matthew 9:29, "according to your faith, so be it unto you." It is faith that makes possible the answer. It is faith that turns a mere request into something received. So, faith makes prayer strong and it gives patience to the one who prays.

Now, let's go back to Hebrews 11:6.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Because faith is indispensable to a good relationship with God, I do not believe that its importance can be overemphasized. But I want us all to be aware of a condition in this verse. It does not say that God is the rewarder of *everyone*. It says that He is a "rewarder of those who *diligently seek* Him." Living faith seems direct; I mean it has *its* foundation on diligently, actively,

consistently, zealously seeking Him in study, prayer, and conforming to His will. And it is those people who are doing that who are given the encouragement that they will be rewarded. And that reward is to find Him. And this, in turn, does what? **It increases our faith.**

I have frequently said that to me, the biblical word "faith" is most synonymous with the English word "trust." To me, the word "faith" can be a mere agreement with a cold, hard fact. That is okay as far as it goes. But it loses much when we consider that this One with whom we are dealing is a warm, dynamic, and powerful, loving Personality. To me, the biblical faith, that is "trust," is *firm* faith. It is faith in full flower *acting consciously* and with agreeable *feeling* as well—"conviction," we might call it.

This faith is not done coldly and calculatedly, simply because a thing is *right*. It is not done with a "perhaps," or a "maybe," but with *joy* and with firm conviction, *conscious* that one is in agreement with this dynamic and loving personality. Just as surely as we are conscious of our sense of touch—which, incidentally, is the strongest sense that we have in terms of evoking emotion; consider a punch in the nose as compared to a kiss—nothing in our human senses evokes emotion like touch does. But faith and trust are sensitive in the same way. It is analogous to the things of God. It *sees* God. And it too not only evokes the hard, cold facts (we might say "a remembrance of truth") but also an emotional response to a wonderful, dynamic, gracious and powerful Personality who is our friend.

Please turn with me to John 11. I want to show you something here in a section of Scripture we used last week that I want to emphasize at this time. John 11 is talking about the resurrection of Lazarus, but there was a by-play that took place between Christ and Martha that is very interesting in regard to what I am talking about here. We are dealing with a Personality. It is not just hard, cold facts we know are true. We are going to have the kind of conviction that causes God to respond, it is going to have to be because there is an awareness *in us*. I mean, a *strong* awareness of the personality of God. Listen to this conversation.

John 11:17-23 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem,

about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. [See, there is confidence in a fact.] But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

This verse shows what Martha was thinking about. She was still thinking about the hard, cold facts—a truth—from the Word of God.

John 11:24-27 Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. ["All of us know that." See, that is a fact of Scripture that is true. It is absolutely true. It will never be untrue.] Jesus said to her, . . .

"I am the Way!" You see, He turned her attention away from the mere acceptance of a truth of God, to the fact that she was dealing with a Personality, and that this Personality WAS GOD. **"I am the resurrection!"** He turned her attention right to Him.

John 11:25 "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

I do not think that she got it yet. But she was on the way because her attention had at least been turned away from a mere recording of words to a Personality—that dynamic and loving Personality who enforces those words and makes them come true.

The kind of trust that we are talking about here grows in an atmosphere in which there can be open conversation—wonderful fellowship that is not

accompanied by the fear of *exposing* oneself, but rather a fellowship in which humility dominates. And one is not hiding behind a façade of pride and vanity. Notice what it says here in verse 3 of the same chapter.

John 11:3-5 Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." . . . Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

There was here a relationship that was different from the relationship that He had with other people. Now why? One of the reasons is, as we find in other places, this was the family He stayed with when He was in the area of Jerusalem.

He had undoubtedly eaten quite a number of meals at their home. They had undoubtedly talked about the plan of God; undoubtedly talked about Mary's and Martha's and Lazarus' hopes and dreams, their problems, their trials, their difficulties. And Jesus counseled them. And there grew in that family atmosphere, as a result of that fellowship, an intimacy of thinking that He did not have with very many other people. Because it just does not say in the Bible all that often that He *loved* somebody the way He loved these.

He undoubtedly also had a relationship that was special with the apostle John. It was different from the relationship that He had with the others. He was the disciple that He loved. So we have here a relationship. That is Jesus turned her attention to Him as a Personality.

Trust in an historical fact can be essentially passive. "Oh yeah, I believe that. That's true." But, so what? It might not be a vital part of life. But you cannot have that kind of conviction that is needed, the kind that we need, unless we recognize that are fellowshiping with a very wonderful, living, dynamic, and gracious Personality. And He wants us to think about that relationship, and to think about Him and His power and His willingness and His purpose and everything that is connected with Him (in this relationship with us) when we pray to Him.

You see, trust in a Personality energizes the quality of the prayer. And in this case, it infuses the trust with a firsthand knowledge of the Being to whom we are appealing. So prayer's most important fruit may very well be the understanding gained of this Personality and what He is and what He is like.

Let us go to the book of Matthew, this time in chapter 17. And, again, we are in the midst of a section in which He is teaching about faith. What happened here is that a man brought his son to the disciples to cast out a demon, and they could not cast it out.

Matthew 17:17 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? [The "faithless and perverse generation" were His disciples.] How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me."

Then Jesus rebuked the demon. And then the disciples came and asked why they could not cast it out.

Matthew 17:20-21 So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

The implication of Jesus' remark is clear: *faith is cultivated by prayer* . Prayer is a major part of our fellowship with Christ. These men were weak spiritually and their trust failed utterly. Why is this so important? It is because God has made us in such a way so we will have emotional reactions, in many cases to everybody. But to make it a little bit less broad, a little more narrow, we at least have emotional reactions to almost anybody who is more than just a passing acquaintance. That reaction will range from an absolutely cold, uninterested feeling in which one does not want to develop the relationship any further, all the way to one that is charged with desire to be around a person, to please that person more than anything else in the world. That emotional reaction creates a need.

Start thinking. What does this have to do with our relationship to Christ? It has very much to do. And we need to begin asking ourselves, "Is there an emotional attachment to Him?" And, if there is, how intense is it? Is it intense enough to motivate us to move closer to Him to want to develop the relationship? Or is it so weak that all we do is kind of stand back and sort of view Him from afar? This first one that I described, where there is such an impelling desire that we want to be around the person, to be near them, to develop a relationship, and in the case of single people to eventually even marry. It is that reaction that quickly begins to take place so that interest arouses and we begin to feel a need to be fulfilled.

Desire is not merely a wish. It is a deep-seated craving, an intense longing to fulfill a need. In the realm of prayer, it is probably one of the more important adjuncts of prayer. It is so important that I might go so far as to say it is an absolute essential of prayer.

What is desire going to do to prayer? It, along with faith, creates the prayer. Now, follow me here. Desire along with faith creates a prayer. I do not think that I am going out on a limb to say that desire plays a part in the creation of all prayer. Not only that, but desire is going to intensify prayer. Think about this: *Desire to have, to do, or to see something done by God, is involved in every prayer.* Is that not correct? It is. Prayer is the oral expression of a desire. The desire itself is unheard. Nobody else may even know you have it. But in the prayer, the desire comes out into the open because ***prayer must be expressed***.

So what is it that we request of God? It is what we desire. It is what we want. It is what we feel we have a need of or what we feel others have a need of. And, so, because we desire that their prayer be answered, that their needs be supplied, that desire motivates us to pray. We want to see something done by God. We want to see His Kingdom come. We want to see Jesus on earth. We want to see a lot of things occur. And so, that desire *impels us*. It impels us to make that request to God.

How intense is your desire? This is directly tied to the fellowship. It is directly tied to our understanding of the Personality to whom it is that we are

praying. And the more understanding we have of that wonderful Personality, I guarantee you, the greater the desire is going to be to pray. Not only that—the more intense the prayers are going to be.

Jesus was so intense that He perspired blood. That is how real the Father was to Him. I do not expect any of us are going to reach that, but the desire to communicate with His Father, the desire to see His Father's will done, was so intense to Him. There was such a knowledge—such a fellowship that existed between the two of them—it caused that kind of a reaction in His body.

Much of the problem of ineffective prayer can be laid on the fact that there is not much feeling in our prayers. And even if there is not much desire, we should *still* pray. But perhaps, brethren, what we need to do is to begin asking God for the desire to pray.

Not having much desire to pray and not having much desire in our prayer, I think, is a very grievous spiritual lack. And one of the major reasons we do not have much desire in our prayers is because we are not aware of how much we are in need. See there is a progression here. The awareness of need creates desire. Desire creates not just the prayer but earnest, fervent prayer.

Hunger makes us aware of a physical need. And what does it do? It creates the desire to eat. The stronger the need—the stronger the desire to eat and the more fervently we look forward to and begin seeking after food. I once observed a man who had not missed very many meals in his life. I do not know whether he ever fasted, even one time, in his entire life. He was a man of a great deal of experience. He had good age on him. And he was in good health. Evelyn and I were guests at his home, and this happened on the Sabbath. He and I came home from Sabbath services later for dinner than they expected, and this man was so desirous of eating that he was actually trembling.

Look with me in Psalm 42:1-3. Pick up on David's feeling.

Psalm 42:1-3 As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night,

Did David have feeling about God? Do you think that he really loved God? Do you think that he loved to fellowship with God? Can you begin to see why God said of this man—even when he was a teenager—"here is somebody after My own heart"? David was in love with God! Is that going too far? Does that sound queer? Let us go back to I Peter 2. The advice to us is,

I Peter 2:1-2 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.

Do babies earnestly let you know when they are hungry? They cry. They yell. They get red in the face. They let you know without doubt that they want you and they want something from you. There is desire created by their hunger. Let us go back in the book of Matthew again, this time to chapter 5.

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Desire, brethren, is an inward longing for something we do not have but feel we need. And hunger and thirst are appetites given to us by God to make us aware of a need. Hunger for God's Word *and* His attributes are the spiritual appetite given by God to make us aware of spiritual needs. I have never heard of any of these pagans praying to their idols and asking them for love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, goodness, meekness, self-control. They ask for other things—material things, material blessings.

The faith that God has given to us, He has given to us to make us aware of spiritual needs. We will be aware of physical needs by nature. We would never be aware of these spiritual needs unless God, by His Spirit, made us

aware. That is a loving gift from Him. He expects us to think about these needs and come to Him asking for them. And the very awareness of the need is a proof that God is working with us.

We have another step here to add to the process of answered prayer. First of all, there has to be an awareness of need. Then desire arises to have what we need. The desire moves us to make known our need by requesting it of God. Then desire does more than that (if it is really earnest and fervent)—it fixes its mind on whatever the object of its longing is and pursues after it to have it. In other words, desire sets the will in action.

What God really wants us to seek after is Him: what He is. It is interesting that it says here in Matthew 5:3.

Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

People who are poor—I am talking here about poor in terms of finances, economically poor—are very well aware of their need. And it is very likely that, if they pray at all, what they pray for is money. What they pray for is prosperity. You do not have to have a revelation from God to see that kind of a need. Do you know what the poor ought to be praying for? They ought to be praying for the desire to work. They ought to be praying for the understanding of the responsibility that they have to their families. They ought to be praying for the kind of right ambition that will set them in motion. They ought to be praying for the love that will make them lay down their lives in order to support and take care of their family. They ought to be praying for the drive that will energize them to get out there, and find a job, and get to work.

Those are the kinds of things that God wants us to ask for. They are qualities that are part of Him. You see, by nature, we like to short-circuit the whole thing and say, "God, give me money. God, give me a job." He would rather we ask for those other things. And He is far more likely to respond to those other things.

I mentioned the poor in spirit. Do you know that those who are poor in spirit—are going to be the best prayers of all? Look at the title, "poor of

spirit." These are people who properly evaluate themselves against God. They see how *rich* God is in terms of love, generosity, kindness, mercy, wisdom, all the good qualities; and they see how poor they are in comparison. And they want to be like God so they ask Him for the qualities that He has. Those are the kinds of prayers that God responds to. So, the proud, they will not be good at praying because they are secure in their own frame.

In Revelation 3:15, we are dealing with the Laodicean church. And God says,

Revelation 3:15-17 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. [There is no fervency there, no desire to be with God. They are just kind of "blah." They are cool, we would say today.] I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth. Because you say [Notice the pride here:], 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked"

They did not even see their need—because, in their pride, they were not poor in spirit. They felt secure in what they were. Were they asking God to fill them with love, goodness, and generosity, and kindness, and His wisdom, and His faith? He says,

Revelation 3:18-20 "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. [They did not see their need.] As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

Brethren, we are the victims of an age which is apathetic in regard to a true relationship with God. Do you know of anybody who would in all honesty tell you that they would not care to eat a meal with and fellowship with Jesus

Christ? Yet, He is reporting that in His own church, there are some who know that He is at the door and will not rouse themselves to go out and fellowship with Him.

Hang a hook on that word "fellowship." That is what they are doing. They are refusing to fellowship with Him. They are so far from Him that they do not even see their need. No awareness of need—no desire. No desire—no prayer. No prayer—no relationship. No awareness of need. It goes in a vicious circle.

God is hoping that He can stir us up enough to repent and break out of the cycle—by rekindling an awareness of need. Awareness of need is in us because we are close enough to Him to enable us to clearly see how holy, gracious, kind, merciful, and good He is; and we will then want to be like He is. In other words, we *so* admire and respect the Personality and His qualities that we want to be *near Him* and that we will *chase* after Him—diligently seeking after Him like one lover seeking after another. We will exalt Him, seek to honor Him, by being like Him. This is what happens when two people are in love. That is why God uses the Bridegroom/Bride and wedding analogy. It is our responsibility to seek Him with all of our might—with everything that is in us.

Let us finally turn here to Psalm 27. You answer this question: "Was David in love with God?" Psalm 27 is that wonderful Psalm with the wonderful song, "The Lord is My Light."

Psalm 27:4 One thing I have desired of the LORD, [Did David have a need?] that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD,

Did David desire to be with Him? Did David pray? Were David's prayers answered? See, he had the kind of relationship with God which *compelled* him toward God.

Another outstanding example of this is Jacob in Genesis 32:21, where Jacob *with all of his might* wrestled with God. He would not let God go *until* God blessed Him. Did he fervently seek a blessing? Yes, He did. Was he fervently seeking a relationship? Yes, he was. He was answered.

It is interesting (just a little added thing here) that when God gave His Spirit there in Acts 2:3 that part of the visible manifestation was flames of fire. We often think of the wind. We do not often think that He portrayed His Spirit as flames of fire. He did this because He wants to show us the fervency of the relationship that He desires with us. He desires one that is on fire, one that is hot, one that is fervent, one that is diligently seeking Him, one that is striving with all of its being to be around Him as much as we possibly can. He wants one that wants to be like Him, imitate Him, honor Him, **exalt Him**.

We are told in II Timothy 1:6-7 to "stir up the Spirit that is within us." And it means to fan it into a flame. God wants a relationship with His children that is warm-hearted because we are absorbed and earnest in seeking Him. It is not in our power to humanly create this fervency. *But* it is in our power to *ask* that He impart it to us. Then it is ours to cherish it, nourish it, and guard it against its decline. Just like Paul said about unbelief—to fight it like an enemy. We want to guard against the decline of fervency, especially when you see that it is something that the Laodicean did not do. So it is never out of place to pray to God to beget within us and keep alive a fervency of Spirit for red-hot prayer.