

# What's Going On Up There?

by Staff

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You dial the emergency number and transmit your message. But you receive no audible response from the other end of the phone line—not even the annoying, recorded voice of an answering machine. Is there anybody at the other end? Is anyone listening?

After having dispatched hundreds, thousands, maybe even tens of thousands of seemingly unanswered prayers towards heaven, have you ever seriously asked, "What is going on up there?"

You should, you know.

It is neither wrong nor presumptuous to want a satisfactory answer to this question. In fact, it is very important to know. And simply because many do not know what God is doing, they consequently have no idea what is really being worked out here on earth among all humanity and in their own lives. Why do so many not know what is happening at the other end of their prayer line? Do we know?

Could we be so excessively concerned about our own perplexing troubles that we have not really cared what God might be up to, as long as we get what *we* want? In other words, the culprit for our ignorance of God's purpose may be our self-centeredness!

Each of us needs to be encouraged to do whatever is necessary to gain a better understanding of what God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ are doing at the other end of our line of communication to heaven. We need this encouragement so that all our efforts at communicating will not prove to be in vain. And as we improve our prayers, our personal knowledge and worship of a sometimes neglected God—One we do not *truly* know very well—will also improve.

## A Look from a New Angle

Forget yourself, your responsibilities, your needs, your possessions and all your pains and worries for a while. Once you have rid yourself for a moment of all personal thoughts and desires, you can begin to see things from the perspective of the One at the other end of the line. Yes, for a change, forget "I," "me," "my" and "mine" and take an objective look at our great Benefactor and how we have treated Him.

Notice the pain that has been inflicted on God: the disappointment of broken promises, the shame of His children's sins, the hurt of spurned parental kindness, the wounds from scorning prodigal sons and even the adversarial accusations. Think of all the unrequited love He has given. God receives that kind of treatment day after day, year after year.

But also notice the great success stories that could possibly be written. One by one you see the prodigal sons reflecting upon their self-imposed fate in the murky waters of the swines' trough. You see them suddenly remembering their Father's offer and beseeching heaven with outstretched arms. And at last the Father extends a welcome, invisible hand to each one in just the way that the particular rescue operation demands.

The other end of the line is a very busy place! How silly we were! All along we imagined that *our* end was the real business end, but as we grow spiritually and really begin to know God, we gradually see the great amount of initiative and work originating from the other end. That is where the real action is.

The truth is that we merely respond. We finally quit resisting and happily acquiesce, joining in with the mission that is always in progress at God's throne. In fact, we begin to see that our Father's "all-systems-go" effort is gaining momentum as time is moving toward the final countdown in the launch of the long-awaited Millennium.

To continue the analogy, He has already selected and trained the pilots and navigators, but He is preparing additional officers and crew members. It will be a good crew, the best ever assembled, more than able to accomplish their mission. They will function harmoniously like a well-oiled machine. God closely monitors their progress as they make their individual preparatory voyages and listens to their words as they communicate with Him daily. And in this the Father is very pleased.

### **A Behind-the-Scenes God?**

Although we talk to God so often, we do not really know Him very well yet. As a result, prayer becomes a chore at times, a repetitive, hopeful, wishful, doubtful plea. We may even begin to think of it as just a useless, spiritual exercise. Sometimes we actually need to be encouraged to pray at all! We must not let ourselves sink so low.

Some still talk to Him mostly because they have been told that praying is part of the formula to being saved. But salvation requires a Savior. When a drowning man wants to be rescued, someone must be at the other end of the rope to reel in the life preserver. The One fishing us out of the water, doing most of the work, is Christ our Savior.

But with all due respect to our highly esteemed Elder Brother and Judge, Jesus Christ is only an agent in our salvation. Certainly, He is a whole-hearted and indispensable One, filled with pity and love and affection for each of us as He pulls us out of our messes. Yet, even He looks to another for guidance and authority (John 5:19).

Ultimately we *must* turn our attention to the One whom we consider "behind the scenes," the very One who commissioned our Savior. We cannot avoid the One to whom Christ instructed us to direct our requests, "our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). Never, never leave Him out of the picture—not for a minute!

We all know how easy it is to neglect the Father and His commandments—how our carnal minds rebel against doing those things that are pleasing in His sight (Romans 8:7). We have all practiced living by "the old man" in our past (Ephesians 4:22).

In this human-centered society, we grew up emulating carnal men and their ungodly, inconsistent examples. We grew up conscious of *my* family, *my* home, *my* job, *my* health, *my* looks, *my* things, *my* happiness.

Even after our calling, our focus is often self-centered. For quite a few years, in many cases, we focus on what we call "Christian living": *our* repentance, *our* growth, *our* conversion, *our* justification, *our* sanctification, *our* future glorification, *our* faith, *our* love, *our* fears, *our* hopes, *our* dreams and even *our* church. This kind of "Christian living" is very egocentric!

Survival, self-preservation, is one of our natural drives. When God offers us salvation, we do not instantly stop valuing our survival. But until we really change our hearts, we look at most of the effort involved in our salvation as a necessary *evil* that we have to perform, like it or not. We see it as an unpleasant duty, as the price *we* must pay for salvation. Human nature desperately tries to avoid conversion, so it can continue to indulge in the attractions of the world. It wants to do what it thinks is best for itself at any given time. Our nature would have us survive on our own terms.

We also have a natural tendency to concentrate on what we are being saved *from*. Romans 6:23 says if we continue along the path of sin, we can expect death, and we naturally want to avoid death! So, carnally, our first reaction is to oblige grudgingly and try to do the minimum required to get us saved, while continuing life on *our* terms.

Herbert W. Armstrong, however, explained many times that we must repent of what we *are*—our egocentric outlook on life—not just of the wrongs we have *done* in the past. God wants us to live life on *His* terms, and He gives us a way of life that will prepare us for His purpose for us. To understand what we are being saved *for*, we need to focus on the One who offers salvation to us. We need to find out

- why He is saving us.
- why He does not want us to continue our lives on our terms.
- what His plans for us are.
- what He wants us to do to ensure our future with Him.

## **Benefits of Knowing God**

We cannot stop looking until we are sure of these things! As Psalm 34:8-10 teaches:

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.

"Taste and see" that His plans for us are very, very desirable! We will realize the reasons why we must do things a certain way and why our priorities have to be just so. The right kind of Christian living will make sense from that moment on. We will finally comprehend why Jesus said, "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30).

Understanding the Father's plans will dispel the Protestant or Catholic bias of an austere Christianity and a cruel and vengeful God. We will perceive that passages in Scripture we may have once thought hard-hearted and mean—like the Flood or Sodom and Gomorrah—really illustrate God's mercy. We will discern that God must act in certain ways to work out His purpose for all of mankind.

Before coming to this understanding, we find overcoming unattractive because we do not grasp the Father's goals, plans, purposes for us. We are still chasing our self-determined goals. We make a half-hearted effort at Christian living just to "get" saved from sure death.

But once we understand that living the way Christ set as an example for us (II Peter 2:21) *is* and *shall be* the way of the future, once we know our place in God's plan, we will find ourselves making an *enthusiastic* effort to imitate the life of Jesus of Nazareth. We will know that the way He lived as a human being reflects the way He and His Father live now.

We must remember that this leap in comprehension begins when we really come to know the One at the other end of our prayers. What is He like? What is He doing? Where is He headed? What does He want with us? How can we please Him?

Prayer is two-way communication. Are we gladly *receiving* His message in return? He responds, not only in direct answers to our requests, but also in the pages of the Bible—in laws, prophecy, instruction, doctrine, encouragement, rebuke and many other ways.

In the past, in our self-centeredness, many of us have focused on only the part of the message that promises to save us from pain and death. As we grow, we cannot neglect the more important part of God's message: what He has set out to accomplish and why He is doing it. In reality, that is the *true* message—the *true* gospel—of salvation!

### **Becoming Fully Operational**

Satan the Devil has done everything in his power to hide that part of the message from us. He neither believes in it nor wants it to succeed. Once the Father calls us, our adversary does all he can to occupy our time with self-serving distractions to keep us from discovering the message! He hides the fact that we are privileged to become holy. He obscures the reasons why the Father has so much concern for humanity in general and for the church in particular. The Devil will even encourage a fascination with the Messenger to feed our selfish survival drive. He will do *anything* to deflect us from the true gospel message.

We must strive to "listen" to our Father, to "see" Him with our understanding, as Jesus did. We can begin by reading every word that Jesus says about His Father, recorded primarily in the book of John. Then we should pray and meditate long and deeply about the meaning of those words, for they were intended to reveal His Father to us (John 1:18).

Our end of the prayer line cannot be fully operational if we are not in harmony with our Father. His Son, Jesus Christ, set us an example of how to become fully operational. Ever aware of His Father's wishes, Jesus never faltered because He never lost His focus. He understood and truly believed in the message His Father had given Him to announce to us.

Thus, He had an excellent understanding of what goes on at the Father's throne. He unconditionally believed and trusted His Father, which is why He could say, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30), that is, of one heart and mind. To paraphrase, He says, "His desires and beliefs are My desires and beliefs. We are in perfect agreement." He was in such accord with His Father that He says, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Jesus, setting the example, believed that Someone more important is listening "at the other end." His Father was so important to Him that He would do nothing without His Father's approval: "I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me" (John 5:30). Furthermore, He did not *want* to do anything of consequence without a deep conviction that His action harmonized with His Father's will!

Jesus was ever vigilant to keep His will in total agreement with what His Father had revealed to Him. He prayed often (Matthew 14:23; 26:36; Luke 3:21; 6:12). Jesus made sure that His own will was always submitted to His Father's will (Matthew 6:10; 26:39, 42; John 6:38). By the conduct of His life, He preached that two cannot walk together unless they agree (Amos 3:3), and one must be the leader (John 14:28).

Can we say, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father"? Or, "I and my Father are one"? That is what God wants of us, and that is why we are to imitate His Son—another way of saying that He is to live or abide in us (John 15:1-10). If He is in us, we will be in harmony with our Father also and will be making a great witness to the world (John 17:20-23).

As Winston S. Churchill, Prime Minister of England during World War II, said before a joint session of the United States' Congress:

I will say that he must indeed have a blind soul who cannot see that some great purpose and design is being worked out here below, of which we have the honor to be the faithful servants.

Do you know what is going on at the other end of the line?