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From the Editor:

As you may have noticed, with the retirement of Professor John Lau from the editorship of this publication, the assignment has fallen to the undersigned. Not only has Prof. Lau served as editor for the past fourteen years, but he has been much involved in the production of the *Journal* for over thirty years, working during that time with all three of the editors who preceded him (E. Reim, E. Schaller, C. M. Gullerud). We are surely grateful to God for the gifts He has given through such servants, supplying not only the necessary abilities but also the willingness to serve.

Perhaps some might wonder if a new generation will require a different sort of content in the *Journal*. If our objective were principally the upholding of certain traditions in our church body, then there might come a time when some traditions would no longer serve a useful purpose. But it never was the purpose of this modest periodical to uphold mere tradition, however venerable, but to hold before our readers the eternal, life-giving Word, which is never old, yet abides forever. From the early days of the C.L.C. it was recognized "that the Lord's commission to His Church embraces a call to use every God-pleasing means to disseminate the glad tidings of the Evangel of the Lord Jesus Christ" (25/1:2), and this was how the *Journal* was envisioned.

It remains our goal in every issue to spread the gospel, whether it is being applied to situations past, present, or future, whether a particular study focuses on the Old or New Testament, whether the manner of approach be exegetical, historical, isagogical, homiletical, pastoral, or doctrinal in nature, and whether it causes us to approve or disapprove (cf. Titus 2:12) of something which has been observed. Although our church body was born from controversy, our purpose is

not controversy but the spread of the Good News of salvation in Christ. This, too, is no change from the earliest volume in 1961, where it was stated:

By such a purely negative policy [to live on controversy alone] we would be depriving ourselves of the blessed benefits that come only through the positive study of Scripture and its saving doctrines. For it is this that serves so wonderfully for the edification, not only of the individual Bible student, but as we read in Ephesians 4, of the entire body of Christ – in our case, of those souls that are entrusted to our particular care. We shall try to do this to the extent of our time and ability by widening the range of interest, by deepening the measure of understanding, by enriching the store of knowledge, by cultivating the practical skills of all of us who serve in the ministry of the Word, be it by teaching or preaching, – editors as well as readers. (1/1:3)

So we launch our modest little venture, fully conscious of the responsibilities we are thereby assuming. We are aware of the delicate sense of balance that will be required to keep our Journal from on the one hand becoming an ivory tower of lofty discussion into which one takes refuge in order to escape the stark realities of life, or on the other of falling into the habit of controversy for controversy's sake and so descending to the level of querulous complaint, of unbridled criticism, of intemperate invective, of vindictive retaliation. We know of the danger of both of these extremes. We know that it is not even possible to show just where the exact line of demarcation is to be drawn, where moderation ceases and the immoderate begins. But our readers shall know that we will be trying to avoid these ever present pitfalls, saying what must be said in the face of existing conditions, doing what can be done by way of constructive suggestion, praying that our friends will understand and opponents not misunderstand us, knowing all the while that humanly speaking the extent of our influence must be small indeed, but committing ourselves and our cause to the Lord of the Church. (1/1:5)

Having now reviewed such goals, one is inclined to say, as did Moses, “Who am I that I should go...?” The Lord's answer to Moses was: “I will be with you” (Exod. 3). The present editor would solicit the prayers of the members of the Church of the Lutheran Confession that the Lord may be ever present with him also, so that the fitting word is spoken at the proper time and that the pattern of healthy words received from Christ's apostles is followed, both in letter and in spirit, in the pages of this journal.

– Paul W. Schaller

THE EMPHASIS ON PRAYER

Vance A. Fossum

Some say that prayer changes things. But some things in this life will never be changed by prayer: The endless debate over the why, where, when, what and how of prayer, for example. At this very moment it would seem that the emphasis placed on the “*where*” of prayer by certain “Christian Evangelicals” is driving them to disobey the law of the land, while other Christians will not go so far in the name of Christian prayer. Recently, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled out public prayer at school functions. The school district of Batesburg-Leesville, South Carolina, has defied this decision, and continues to begin its high school football games with public prayer. As confessing Christians we believe this is a wrong emphasis and an offense to the Christian faith and witness.

True Christian prayer is an affair of the *heart*, an intimate talking to our God in heaven. That's why Jesus says to His believing disciples: “*When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you openly*” (Matt. 6:6). Our Lord emphasized “closeted” or private, quiet prayer in order to help us avoid the pitfalls of hypocrisy, to which we all are prone. He says we are to pray to our Father “who is in secret.” How do we do that at a football game or at the mall? Certainly not by making a public scene, insisting that everyone must hear us, whether they believe what we do or not. Such a prideful, “in-your-face” approach makes a mockery of Christian prayer, our Christian faith, and our God.

Those who would debate this issue may find fault with us, suggesting that prayer is not important enough to us. Our answer: “Prayer *is* important to us, along with all the teachings of our Savior. How can it be that the Lord is happy with Christians who break the law of the government He has established, and disobey His apostle's divinely inspired directive (Rom. 13)? – How much worse when this is done in His name! Rather, let every Christian who calls upon the name of the Lord in true prayer ‘*on the street corners,*’ or publicly, do so humbly and quietly. Let him pray secretly, before the school bell rings, at the office desk, behind the wheel, at the stadium, or *wherever* he happens to be.” We would say: “Let our prayers ascend to God, Who hears even the thoughts of our hearts! Let us pray ‘*for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*’ (1 Tim. 2:2 ff.)”

Does such a response to a wrong emphasis on the *where* of prayer mean that we do not think prayer is to be emphasized in the Christian life? Hardly. Prayer is and ought to be a major part of our lives as believing children of God. However, the scriptural doctrine concerning prayer was not recorded by the Holy Spirit in isolation from the other teachings of Christ. Neither has Satan left prayer alone. A wrong emphasis in this matter can lead souls away from the truth of God and astray from their Savior. From the other side, a wrong emphasis on prayer may reveal doctrinal error, already held and established by religious groups and individuals.

PART I.

THE CURRENT EMPHASIS ON PRAYER AMONG THE CALVINIST REFORMED AND THE ARMINIAN “EVANGELICALS”

A Subtle War

To begin with, let's be fair to those in the outward Christian camp whom we conveniently paint with a broad brush as “Reformed.” As we know, those we have referred to as “Reformed” are not all Calvinists whose emphasis on the *sovereignty* and glory of our God impacts the other teachings of their church. For the past several decades, the Arminian emphasis on the *free will* and responsibility of man in regard to his salvation has been gaining in popularity among those who are neither Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican, nor Calvinist Reformed. Members of this new breed like to call themselves “*Evangelicals*.”

Surely the “Evangelicals” think of the Evangel as “good news” for sinners. However, their “good news” is not so much about the saving work of Jesus Christ. Rather the focus is on learning how to *be* good so that one may *feel* good and have a good and productive Christian life, *in and by the Lord*, of course! This is wonderful, good news as it helps people *in this life*. The subtle error in much (if not most) of what is written to promote the new (old) prayer theology is that *the gospel is made to serve the law – the most glorious revelation from heaven is made to serve that which was given on earth*. Feeling good about God and becoming successful in this world through prayer and obedience are the major goals of a religious life that follows Jesus as Lord and Savior. Of course, the Assembly of God, and other Pentecostal/Holiness groups seem to have taken the lead in publishing the ways and means of attaining the best results through prayer, especially prayer “in the Spirit.”

It has become apparent after reading books by various authors on this subject, that the old theological battle between the ideas of John Calvin and Jacob Arminius has been waging for many years also in the prayer arena. The Arminians, with their strong desire to *sense God's power and presence* in the living of their lives, may be winning the war with help from a humanistic and intensely pragmatic culture that also wants to live this life with as much power and success as possible. “Show me a god who can do that for me when I ask, and I'll believe in him!”

Interestingly, perhaps necessarily, most of the popular authors on the subject of prayer acknowledge that *God's will* plays some part in the whole matter. But the tension continues between those who stress the “power of prayer to change things,” and those who stress that only “God's unchanging will” determines human destiny. Way back in the late 1910s, Arthur Pink wrote against an article entitled “Prayer, or Fate?” He objected to the following statements therein:

God in His sovereignty has ordained that human destinies may be changed and molded by the will of man. This is at the heart of the truth that prayer changes things, meaning that God changes things when men pray. . . . Let us give ourselves to prayer, and open the way for God to change things. Let us beware lest we become virtual fatalists by failing to exercise our God-given wills in praying.¹

Apparently, Pink did not like the way the article spoke of prayer *changing things*, even when the explanation was added “*that God changes things when men pray*.” As Lutherans we might argue for balance and say: “Experience teaches that God indeed changes *things* every day in response to the prayers of Christians, without changing Himself or His eternal purposes in any way.” The last sentence quoted above could also be correctly understood. But Pink, zealous to defend the sovereignty of God, writes:

In the great majority of the books written and in the sermons preached upon prayer, the human element fills the scene almost entirely: it is the conditions which *we* must meet, the promises *we* must “claim,” the things *we* must do, in order to get our requests granted; and *God's* claims, *God's* rights, *God's* glory are disregarded. . . . To say that “human destinies *may be changed* and molded by the will of man” is rank infidelity – that is the only proper term for it. . . . To say that “human destiny” may be *changed* by the will of man, is to make the creature's will *supreme*, and that is, virtually, to *dethrone God*.²

A favorite Scripture passage of those who emphasize the unchangeableness of God is 1 John 5:14: “*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us*.” On the other side, a different passage has the greater emphasis: “*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*” (Jas. 5:16b). So we find that some stress “DEPENDENCY upon God” as an essential element in prayer, while others would emphasize another element of prayer they believe is essential: its “POWER.”

In general the popular prayer-pundits are in agreement that, while the prayers of His people do not actually *change* God's immutable will, they "are among the means through which God exercises His decrees."³ Similarly, "Prayer," according to Dutch Sheets, "is essentially a partnership of the redeemed child of God working hand in hand with God toward the realization of His redemptive purposes on earth."⁴

The final outcome of history, that God's name be hallowed and his kingdom come and will be done are *fait accompli*, fixed and sure, right now. But how God may choose to go about achieving his goals for us and others is open to change. . . . In prayer, God invites us to enter into partnership with him in the working out of his immutable will in our lives and the lives of others, giving us what Pascal called the "dignity of causality."⁵

And then, on the charismatic end of the spectrum, there is the common reference to the ability of prayer "to release God's power" in our lives,⁶ or even to "actually release the power of the Holy Spirit from us to accomplish things."⁷

It should also be mentioned at this point that while the emphasis among us is on the *privilege* of prayer, the Calvinist and Arminian treatments of prayer in the book stores, speak of the *duty* of prayer, and the *sin* of not praying. For this reason, when these authors insist that prayer is a *must*, we may be suspicious. Perhaps they are thinking of the Lord's invitation and command to "*ask, seek, knock*," as another expression of law, rather than an evangelical imperative – another prescription to *obey* according to one's duty under God. We would rather think of the *necessity* of prayer in the sense of which Luther speaks:

Next to the preaching of the Gospel (whereby God speaks with us and offers to give us all His grace and blessings) the highest and foremost work is indeed that we, in turn speak with him through prayer and receive from Him. Moreover, prayer is in truth highly necessary for us; for we must, after all, achieve everything through prayer: to be able to keep what we have and to defend it against our enemies, the devil and the world. And whatever we are to obtain, we must seek here in prayer. Therefore prayer is comfort, strength, and salvation for us, our protection, against all enemies, and our victory over them.⁸

Prayer works!

Isn't that what James 5:16b says? Since this passage is so often quoted as a proof passage for the "power" of prayer, we want to examine it more closely at this point. The Greek (Πολυ ισχυει δεησις δικαιου ενεργουμενη) is variously translated:

NKJV – "*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*"

NIV – "*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*"

NASB – "*The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*"

BECK – "*A good man can do much by vigorously praying.*"

LUTHER – "*Des Gerechten Gebet vermag viel, wenn es ernstlich ist.*"

(*v.f.* – *A petition of a righteous man is able to do much in its working.*)

I take ενεργουμενη ("working" or effective) as a present middle participle modifying δεησις ("petition"). Robertson points out that Paul seems to use the middle present in his epistles (2 Cor. 4:12; Gal. 5:6; Eph. 3:20; Col. 1:29; 2 Thess. 2:7), while "the passive is the usual idiom elsewhere."⁹ Spiros Zodhiates and others of the Reformed persuasion view ενεργουμενη as a passive participle ("when energized"). Perhaps they are fearful of seeming to depose God by allowing that prayer "has strength in *it's* working."

The translations of Luther ("wenn es ernstlich ist") and many others, including the KJV, NKJV, BECK ("vigorously praying"), seem to make the fervency or sincerity of the prayer the test of its effectiveness. I believe the context of this passage and other passages on the subject make it clear that it is the prayer *of the righteous one who believes in Christ* (there are no other righteous ones) that is effective, that has "much strength in its working"; it is *not* the fervency, sincerity, or energetic praying of the individual that makes prayer effective. If someone asks what it is that makes for a *working* or *effective* prayer, we may give a simple answer that agrees with the rest of scripture:

- 1) The gospel promise, including all God's promises connected to the gospel; and
- 2) A Spirit-worked, child-like faith that implores God's help on the basis of those promises.

Prayer works! – Sure it does! And because prayer works, it sells. The people of our decaying nation, want to be energized and empowered. They feel *powerless* or not *powerful* enough. They want more of *something*, maybe everything, but they aren't sure how to get anything of lasting value. People are unhappy because they are looking for happiness in the things that perish; but they don't know it! They hope to get somewhere other than where they are, whether a higher rung on the socio-economic ladder, or another step closer to God – but how?

In spite of the threat of divine punishment for sin, in spite of the influences of humanism and evolution which have nurtured the notion that "*there dare not be a God*," many people still cling to that hidden hope of the human heart that there *is* a God and that there must be a way to get His help, to latch on to His power, or He wouldn't have let Himself be known

at all in conscience or creation (cf. Acts 17:26-29). Surely, man will always and naturally pray to his gods because of God, for “He is not far from each one of us.”

People want *power*. Christians want power. The word “power” has become empowering all by itself. We know, and we are “not ashamed of the *gospel* of Christ, because *it is the power* (*δύναμις*) of God unto salvation . . .” (Rom. 1:16). Yet, the titles in the Christian book stores scream something else to anyone with ears to hear: “*Prayer is power!*” they holler. We offer just a few examples:

Prayer that Shapes the Future (subtitled: “*How to Pray with Power and Authority*”)

Informed Intercession (subtitled: “*Transforming Your Community Through Spiritual Mapping and Strategic Prayer*”)

Dear Abba (subtitled: “*Finding the Father’s Heart Through Prayer*”)

Beyond the Veil (subtitled: “*Entering Into Intimacy With God Through Prayer*”)

The Incredible Power of Prayer (subtitled: “*Amazing Stories of How People Changed America Through Prayer*”)

Prayer works; sure it does! And whatever *works* sells to a public that is high on god-power, whoever he is and whatever it is. Corrie Ten Boom, author of *The Hiding Place*, one of the ten best-selling books of the past 50 years, is still read by millions. In another of her popular works entitled, “*A Life of Prayer: Cultivating the Inner Life of the Christian Leader*,” Ms. Ten Boom testifies: “Prayer is powerful. The devil smiles when we make plans. He laughs when we get too busy. But he trembles when we pray – especially when we pray together” (p. 32). Well said! We certainly agree that prayer is powerful, and that it *works*. But we need to be careful when we speak of what prayer works.

What Does Prayer Work?

A rather challenging and fascinating treatment of the subject of prayer and its power, is found in Dutch Sheets’ book, *Intercessory Prayer*. Sheets is a charismatic who believes that the most powerful prayers are done “in the Spirit.” However, he allows that praying “in the Spirit” can mean something different to those who don’t accept the Pentecostal view. This book, with a forward by “Church Growth” advocate, C. Peter Wagner, and the imprimatur of Bill Bright, founder and president of Campus Crusade for Christ International, is being widely promoted and has great influence in the outward Christian Church. – a good reason to have it on our own book shelves. The author makes fine use of Holy Scripture and expresses the pure gospel beautifully in many places (even referring to the original Hebrew and Greek words with the help of Spiros Zodhiates), which tends to make his errors more difficult to see and easier to excuse by the general reader.

Using Paul’s words in Colossians 1:24 (“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and *fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ*, for the sake of His body, which is the church”), Sheets writes: “That which is lacking is really the point of this entire book.” Christ has finished the work of man’s salvation, but “there is a sharing and a filling up” that Christians are to perform, he says. Our job is not a “*re-doing*,” But a “*re-presenting*” of what Christ did – a mediating, distributing, and enforcing is our part in “filling up” what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.¹⁰

Thus, the Christian *re-presents* Christ to others through *intercessory prayers* which “release the fruit” of what Christ “did through His act of intercession.” Sheets emphasizes that intercessory prayer creates a “*meeting* between God and humans, releasing the fruit of Christ’s work,” going so far as to equate “the ministry of reconciliation” of 2 Corinthians 5:18 with “our praying intercession.”¹¹ Is this a subtle shift of emphasis from the power of the gospel revealed in Holy Scripture to some sort of *immediate* conversion? I believe we are provided with the answer later on when Sheets refers to how our Lord “groaned in the spirit and was troubled” and “wept” as He approached Lazarus’ tomb. He adds his uncalled-for opinion to this Scripture passage in order to make his case that the Holy Spirit can and does work without means:

Although it cannot be conclusively proven, I believe Christ was in strong travail, releasing the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit before He ever gave the command, “Lazarus, come forth.” As I stated earlier I do not believe it is *necessary* to weep and groan, etc., in order to release the birthing power of the Holy Spirit (travail). It *can* and *will* happen at times, however, when we move into deep intercession as it did in this circumstance with Jesus.

This is what took place when I interceded for my aunt. I was involved in a form of travail. Although not groaning, I was weeping heavily. It was obviously not the emotion that caused her salvation, but my response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to move through me. This released Him to go hover around my aunt, enveloping her with His power and life, convicting her of sin and possibly breaking some strongholds.¹²

An important concept related to the main theme of *intercessory prayer*, is the “*birthing prayer*” of the Christian (It is intimated that those who pray “in the Spirit” have the best results.). We might summarize the thrust of the author’s words from chapters 7-10 in this way: The birthing prayer “*releases* the Holy Spirit” so that he can use the “*biblical revelation*” to work a change in the heart. Thus:

Spiritual power is only released through revelation knowledge. The written word (*graphie*) must become the living word (*logos*). This is why even we believers must not just read, but abide or meditate in the Word, praying as the psalmist: “Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law” (Ps. 119:18). . . .

Knowledge or information alone, which is what humans have glorified and where they have begun their quest for meaning ever since the Fall, does not produce salvation. It does not necessarily lead to a true knowledge of God. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me” (John 5:39). . . .

The Pharisees knew the Scriptures (*graphie*) probably better than you or I, but they did not know God. . . . Many theologians today know the Scriptures thoroughly, but don’t know God well. Some, perhaps do not know Him at all. . . . They have much information, but little or no revelation. *Revelation makes the Scriptures “spirit and life” (John 6:63). It makes them live.*¹³

The last sentence, italicized for emphasis (v.f.), may raise some eyebrows. Didn’t Jesus actually say, “It is the Spirit who gives life; . . . The WORDS that I speak to you *are spirit, and (they) are life*”? His Words *are living and powerful* because *the Spirit Who gives life* works through these same words. Would Sheets and other Charismatics say that unless the Holy Spirit actually converts the unbeliever, the “words” of Christ (i.e., the gospel) are *without spirit and life*?

Equally troubling and offensive to the truly humble Christian is the idea that our prayers, especially those prayed “in the Spirit,” somehow “*release* the Holy Spirit”. Conveniently – since there is no clear Word of God to support his emphasis – Sheets speaks of the *direct revelation* he received about the need to *release* the Holy Spirit by his intercessory prayer:

. . . I was counseling with four or five people who were in very difficult situations. Three of them were extremely suicidal. I was spending hours each day with these people trying to help them through their situations. . . . It was a stressful season, to say the least. It was at that time the Lord revealed to me this concept of our prayers releasing the Holy Spirit to hover around individuals, birthing life in them. He clearly spoke these words to my heart: *If you spent a fraction of the time releasing My Holy Spirit to go and hover around them bringing life, as you do talking to them, you would see many times the results.* . . . I began to spend a couple of hours every day praying for them. Most of my prayer was in the Spirit. I would simply say, “Father, I bring so and so before You now, asking that, as I pray the Holy Spirit would be released to go hover around so and so, bringing forth Christ.” Then I would usually just begin to pray in the Spirit. I saw immediate results. Maturity came quickly. Almost overnight bondages began to fall off. Victories occurred in their lives. It was remarkable.

What was taking place? The Holy Spirit was being released through my prayers to go hover – *rachaph, episkiazo* – around these individuals, releasing His power and life.

In another section, Sheets speaks of the Christian’s *re-presenting* of Christ as an “*enforcing*” of His victory: “He [Jesus] conquered Satan and his kingdom; we enforce the victory. They are *legally* through the Cross. They will be *literally* as we do ‘our part.’” “Our part” in enforcing Christ’s victory is then explained in terms of Psalm 110:2-3: “Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power; . . .” The “power” which our Lord is exercising in this New Testament era through His “volunteers” is the *gospel message of forgiveness through Jesus, the Christ of God*. Yet, once again, it is apparent that Sheets sees only the “prayer mission” or “burden” of intercessory prayer in Psalm 110. Intercessory prayer is the way we are to “enforce the victory” of Christ in our day.¹⁴

Some will go even further in attributing saving power to intercessory prayer. During a national television broadcast on October 2, 1999, Chuck Smith (founder of Calvary Chapel – Mesa, California) said: “Like the incense by which Aaron made atonement for the people when he stood between the dead and the living, so our prayers *make atonement* for those for whom we pray.” We do not argue against the proposition that intercessory prayer and all forms of prayer by the believing children of God in some way “enforce” the victory of Christ and “tread” upon the powers of Satan. We deny an emphasis that seems to place power in the act of prayer more than in the gospel itself.

In his chapter entitled, “Protective Boundaries,” Sheets sets forth the principle that “*All* promises from God are attached to conditions – governing principles. Most, if not all, of these conditions involve responsibility on our part. Protection is no exception.”¹⁵ Prayer builds “protective boundaries” around Christians, and

We have a part to play in the securing of protection and other heavenly provisions. . . . Let’s accept the fact that the Scriptures are filled with principles that put responsibility on us, which must be met to receive God’s promises. Let’s realize this doesn’t cancel grace and promote salvation by works. Grace does not imply, ‘no responsibility’ on our part. Let’s realize the love of God is unconditional, *but His favor and blessing are not.* (Italics added)

By overstatement at the very least, the italicized clause above separates God’s love toward us from His favor and blessings. Scripture speaks differently: God’s love, favor, and blessings, are *all bestowed without condition* upon His believing children. *Conditions* are unknown to the gospel of Christ. When James, for example, writes “You do not have, because you do not ask” (Jas. 4:2), he does not thereby make their prayer a condition that must be fulfilled before God will bless them. Instead, he blames their lack of material things on their failure to ask God in humble prayer with thanksgiving.

James chastises his readers like a father chastises his child for complaining to the neighbors that he can’t have a bicycle, when he never asked for one in the first place. If such a father were to say up front: “My boy, I will buy you a

bicycle, *if* you ask for it,” he would be establishing a condition that *requires* something from the boy. Did our heavenly Father say in Psalm 51:15, “*If* you call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you,” – making prayer a *condition* to be fulfilled before we can receive His protection? Or does He rather say, “*Call* upon Me . . .” as the strongest, clearest *invitation* to pray? Without question, there is much about the “prayer emphasis” among the Reformed and the Evangelicals that frustrates simple faith in the unconditional gospel-promises of God.

If Dutch Sheets’ book, *Intercessory Prayer*, is so popular because of its extensive use of Scripture, and intellectual appeal, then *Let Prayer Change Your Life*, is a best seller (at least in our area) because of the emotional appeal of the author’s personal testimony – “*The power of prayer has changed my life; and it will change yours too!*” Becky Tirabassi’s book abounds with the bubbly testimony of the Charismatic whose life was miserable until she prayed “*The Believer’s Prayer*,” and discovered “the Awesome Power, Empowering Discipline, and Ultimate Design for Prayer.” In 1990, when the book was written, her pastor was Robert Schuller. She quotes Andrew Murray (c. 1912, *The Prayer Life*, and other books on prayer) often, as well as others who have written on the subject.

Like so many others of this prayer-power persuasion, Tirabassi attributes to prayer what ought to be attributed to the power of the gospel of Christ. We have heard the story before. It goes something like this: “When I first prayed for Jesus to come into my heart; when I gave my life to Him as Lord and Savior, *I felt a change come over me*. But as time went by I found myself slipping back into the same life of sin, . . .” What often happens next is that the person talks about how *prayer changed things* (especially prayer “in the Spirit,” if one is a Pentecostal or Charismatic). Tirabassi claims that while she was *learning* to pray, she was “*changed by praying*.” She quotes Andrew Murray:

Prayer is the secret of power and life. Not only for ourselves, but for others, for the church, for the world, it is to prayer that God has given the right to take hold of Him and His strength. It is on prayer that the promises wait for their fulfillment.¹⁷

Scripture indeed speaks highly of what prayer does *because of Spirit-worked faith in the promises of God*. But the emphasis in the many *prayer-power* books is on the activity of prayer. The importance of the gospel of Christ is to provide for prayer-power, and the relationship with God-power that prayer-power brings! Consider the expressions that are heaped up in praise of prayer-power:

Prayer RELEASES God’s power to live and walk in the supernatural realm of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ . . . Prayer FUELS faith to dream and hope and risk.¹⁹

Relating to the idea that prayer *fuels faith* to “dream and hope and risk,” is Tirabassi’s consistent practice of searching Scripture for answers and twisting or misunderstanding passages to suit the answer for which she hopes. We will consider a few of these passages later. In the following statement the author speaks of how prayer assisted her faith, while stopping short of the more blatant claim that we so often hear:²⁰

Faith cannot be mustered up, engineered, or manipulated; it is a response from within us, orchestrated by God. It is a supernatural confidence inspired by a supernatural God. . . . How did he convince me to be born again when my boyfriend, lifestyle, and future looked so worldly? . . . And why by his suggestion and without struggle or reservation on my part would I ask Jesus Christ into my heart? . . . I believe the first step of faith took place when I *believed* what the janitor said about his Jesus: (1) He did and would always love me, and (2) He was going to make my life new. . . . The second step occurred when I repeated the “sinner’s prayer,” begged Jesus to come into my heart and forgive me of my many sins and make me new. I walked away from that time in prayer convinced I was a brand new person!²¹

Prayer is important, according to Tirabassi, because of what it can do to develop a great and emotional love *toward Him*. When we listen carefully, we find that many of those poor souls who have struggled with guilty consciences because of past sin(s), are desperate to experience *the feeling or sense* that sin does not separate them from God. Those who possess a weak faith in God’s reconciling of the world to Himself through Christ, may also seek a *sensible sign* of God’s closeness. The worst cases focus on their *own love* for God, feeling the need to increase it by some means. We remember that Luther had the same problem: He could not feel love toward a Christ Whose chief work was to be the Judge of sinners. Prayer vigils lasting several hours did nothing to develop an emotional love toward his Savior. Only when the great Reformer was led to discover from Holy Scripture that the Holy God loves sinners unconditionally in Christ, our Savior, did Luther learn to love Him in return.

The author of “*Let Prayer Change Your Life*” wants her readers to know that “Prayer LEADS to great love for God.”²² And “Prayer UNLEASHES love for God – emotional, REAL, and all consuming.”²³ “Not that I hadn’t felt God’s love *toward me*, but an emotional love *toward Him* was developing as a result of my time in prayer.”²⁴ Tirabassi gives credit to the Word of God as a necessary co-worker with prayer. Referring to the teachings of Theophan, known as “the Recluse,” she asserts that, if they are practiced simultaneously, the Word and prayer produce a certain *feeling within the believer toward the Lord*:

When you pray, do not end your prayer without having aroused in your heart some feeling towards God, whether it be reverence, or devotion, or thanksgiving, or glorification, or humility and contrition, or hope and trust.²⁵

Think for a moment about all this emphasis on the importance of praying to receive a *sensible* certainty of being close to God. How terribly dangerous this emphasis is when it is put into practice! How many people have we counseled to cling to the *objective word of God -- to faith, not feelings*? If our salvation and our personal certainty of it is in any way based on our feelings of being close to God, then we are the easiest of targets for Satan. We need to encourage ourselves and others to be thankful that our God does not leave us with only a “sense of belonging to Him”! Job had none! – His sense of belonging to God did not come from his praying night and day, but from *faith’s confidence in the Good News that His Redeemer would take him through death’s dark night and stand with him on the last day*.

As we have already affirmed and will affirm, *prayer works in its working because our faithful God answers the cries of His believing children. In His goodness He desires to encourage our prayers to Him by giving us what we ask according to His will*. However, it is also true that Satan, who walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, *mimics* God. The *beast* of Revelation 13 resembled a “lamb,” yet “spoke like a dragon.” This beast, representing all anti-Christian propaganda in this world, “performs great signs” in the vision John received. By these great signs he “deceives those who dwell on the earth,” John reports. The devil is certainly able to perform signs through his various agents – signs which may appear to be answers from God to prayer.

Then too, prayer may *seem* to work because people are *looking diligently for evidence of God’s presence and fellowship with them in His answer to their prayers*. But where does Holy Scripture assign this purpose to prayer – that the child of God may be more sure of God’s love for him and fellowship with him? The evidence of God’s ever present love and power operating for the believer is what gives rise to the Christian’s prayer; it’s *not* the other way around! For the “Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that *we are* the children of God,” who indeed cry out “ABBA, Father” (Rom. 8:15,16).

Not far from the desire for *sensible* evidence of God’s presence and approval of us through our prayers is the fleshly manipulation of Scripture so that God appears to be answering and even agreeing with the desires we express in our petitions. Much of this is found in Tirabassi’s popular work. In a chapter entitled, “Mounds of Miracles,” she relates how she had prayed to God that he would help them sell their house in Ohio so that they might make the move to California:

I believed God had been giving me Scriptures and an inner confidence – or faith – to believe that He certainly *could* sell our house in a day if He so desired. . . .

Alone in my family room, I looked up at God, then down at my Bible, and sincerely asked, “Did I hear You wrong, or did You tell me that You would sell my house in a day?” Opening to Isaiah, I read, verse after verse, hoping for a glimpse or sign of His word to me. Then Isaiah 51:5 stood out on the page as if it were one-fourth inch higher than all the other verses; “My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way.”²⁶

Later Tirabassi became anxious about finding temporary housing in California soon enough to accommodate them on their arrival. She writes:

Wanting desperately for God to speak to me regarding this situation, not knowing exactly where that verse was found, I sat down at the kitchen table to read my Bible. I began in John, chapter 14, only to read these words: “Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. *I am going there to prepare a place for you*” (vv. 1-2, emphasis added). I closed my Bible and thought, *He is going there to prepare a place for me*. That very morning the women’s Bible study group at the Crystal Cathedral discussed the fact that the youth pastor and his family were in need of temporary housing for the summer – were there any availabilities?²⁷

Of course, one of the members of the church came up with a place, free of rent! By her own account, Tirabassi “exclaimed, ‘He did it.’ Jesus had gone before us that day to prepare a place for us.”²⁸ More than once, as in this case, this popular authority on the power of prayer misinterprets clear gospel-passages so that they seem to validate her prayers and their *power*. If it is possible to *want to see* something so much that we actually think we see it even though it is not really there, then it is also possible to *want to find a certain message in the Bible so much* that a person may actually think he has found it, although it’s not really there.

Prayer *works*! But there is nothing scriptural or Christian about an emphasis on prayer that attributes such power to prayer that it circumvents or diminishes the power of the gospel. There is nothing scriptural or Christian about encouraging people to “*let prayer change*” their lives, or to get to “*know God better by spending more time with Him in prayer*.” Nowhere does the Word of God teach as a matter of doctrinal principle that by means of prayer a person may receive *direct* revelation from God apart from what is written in Holy Scripture. Rather, passages like Romans 10:17 and 2 Timothy 3:16,17 clearly teach that the Word and the sacraments are the only means of divine revelation to faith. Although we are directed by Scripture to pray for the Holy Spirit, greater faith, and all spiritual and material needs, *prayer is not the means by which God provides them to us*. Finally, Christians should always be suspicious of any approach to prayer that

emphasizes the bare activity, fervency, or methodology of prayer, rather than simple faith in the promises and invitation of our Savior: “*Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you*” (John 16:23).

PART II. CHRISTIAN PRAYER *Prayer is work!*

With all the “How to” books on the market, and popular expressions like “praying the promises,” “prayer walking,” “intercessory team prayer,” “praying the scriptures,” “feeling a burden,” etc., one could get the idea that prayer is *work!* Prayer *is* work!

It’s an act of the will, an act of obedience, a holy occupation. What does this work require? Boldness, childlikeness, communication, concentration, discipline, faith, honesty, intimacy, obedience, patience, power, purpose, silence, simplicity, wonder, and worship.²⁹

Again, it is wholly incorrect and false to picture the Christian as being always fervent in prayer and as if praying were his most cherished occupation. It is not so; it takes much struggling on the part of the Christian to make him fit for prayer, fervent in it, and confident that he will really obtain from God what he is praying for. That is the reason why the Lord’s Prayer, which is recited so often, has been called the greatest martyr on earth. Christians are no exceptions to the rule. True, if a person, as a rule, merely babbles the Lord’s Prayer, without knowing what he is saying, he is certainly not a Christian. A Christian who becomes aware of his lack of attention during prayer feels deeply humiliated and promptly starts the Lord’s Prayer over again. Though there are times when the Christians’ flesh and blood are forced into the background and they feel as if they were dissolving in happiness, as if they were in heaven and conversing with God, they nevertheless retain their natural flesh and blood.³⁰

Luther speaks similarly and in many places about the difficulty of prayer. We quote but a few examples:

Where are the people who want to know and to do good work? Let them only undertake prayer and practice it in true faith, and they will find that what the holy fathers have said is true: There is no greater work than praying. Mumbling with the mouth is easy, or is at least considered easy. But to follow the words with earnestness of heart in deep devotion . . . is a great deed in the eyes of God.³¹

To pray aright is a very difficult task and the art supreme (*Kunst über alle Künste*). It is not so because of the words of the mouth. But for the heart to be able by itself to conclude with certainty and assurance that it may step before God with complete confidence and say: “Our Father” – that is a task.³²

Prayer is a difficult matter and hard work. It is far more difficult than preaching the Word or performing other official duties in the church. When we are preaching the Word, we are more passive than active; God is speaking through us, and our teaching is His work. But praying is very difficult work. This is the reason why it is also very rare.³³

Perhaps we would dare to challenge our great and learned brother regarding the last statement quoted above, and say: “That all depends.” But let’s not miss the point he makes: It’s easier for us to prepare sermons with words God Himself gives, than it is to overcome our mortal flesh and speak to Him in heartfelt prayer, using and following our own words. Indeed, we can’t pray the words of our Savior in His perfect prayer without becoming distracted or falling asleep! Luther’s statements regarding the *work* of prayer do *not* stress the work of our own activity or methodology; they stress the *difficulty* of focusing our poor hearts and minds on this great and necessary work of faith. When it comes to the wording of prayers, or – if we may say it – the methodology, activity, and time of prayer so often emphasized in the popular prayer manuals, Luther writes differently. He says (all italics added):

The Christian’s prayer is *easy, and it does not cause hard work*. For it proceeds in faith on the basis of the promise of God, and it presents its need from the heart. *Faith quickly gets through telling what it wants; indeed, it does so with a sigh that the heart utters and that words can neither attain nor express*. As Paul says (Rom. 8:26), “the Spirit prays.” And because *He knows that God is listening to Him, He has no need of such everlasting twaddle*. That is how the saints prayed in the Scriptures, like Elijah, Elisha, David, and others – *with brief but strong and powerful words*. This is evident in the Psalter, where there is hardly a single psalm that has a prayer more than five or six verses long. Therefore the ancient fathers have said correctly that many long prayers are not the way. *They recommend short, fervent prayers, where one sighs toward heaven with a word or two, as is often quite possible in the midst of reading, writing, or doing some other task*.³⁴

Note carefully the important truth that “*prayer does not cause hard work*.” To say that prayer *is* hard work (as Luther points out in his first three statements quoted above), is not opposed to the assertion that “prayer does *not cause* hard work.” True Christian prayer *is work*, because it’s work to *persist* in prayer; it’s work to *remember* to give thanks in prayer; it’s work to *lift up a burdened heart* in prayer and *keep it focused* on God’s promises in Christ when both heart and mind are distracted, agitated, and wearied by this world. Christian prayer *is a most difficult work* because the devil and our flesh

oppose it. Satan knows that by our prayers we are able to fight against him in the war of faith, because our God has ordained that by means of our prayer *His* strength and *His* might are summoned to our side, as the winged messenger brings reinforcements to the battleground (Eph. 6:10-20). But Christian prayer does not cause hard work in the sense of many words, complex sentence structure or methods.

Prayer is necessary and natural to the Christian, like breathing .

In an atmosphere polluted with the noxious gas of the high-pressure prayer prophets, we must emphasize another truth about prayer: *Prayer is as natural as breathing* for the true child of God. This is a key difference between true Christian prayer and all other praying. In the first 41 pages of her book, Becky Tirabassi indicates that before her “*decision*” and “*self-discipline*” to make prayer an “*attitude*” and a “*priority*” in her life *as a Christian*, prayer had been “a drudgery.”³⁵

How many people are there who attempt to pray, thinking they are Christians, but they are not? For these prayer is drudgery, since it can be nothing but a law-work – another burden for a sin-burdened soul that labors, perhaps intensely yet always vainly, to gain acceptance and salvation with God. Prayer is *not* drudgery or duty for the Christian; but a glad necessity. Prayer is not only to be compared with the natural function of breathing normally, but with the accompanying *sighs of the contented, as well as the labored breathing of the soul that is deeply troubled by its sins and sorrows.*

Because of God’s command to pray, no true Christian will regard prayer as optional. Luther, perhaps the greatest human authority on prayer since the apostles, has much to say about this fact. However, we believe that prayer is necessary for the Christian, not *chiefly* because it is commanded by God, but because it is a natural function of a living faith in a true Christian. What the pulse is to the physical life, prayer is to the spiritual life; to cease to pray means to cease being a Christian, as Luther says in his exposition of John 14:13-14:

Wherever a Christian is, there the Holy Spirit is, who does nothing else but pray constantly. For though a Christian is not constantly moving his lips and speaking words, his heart nevertheless moves and beats (just like the pulse in his body) and always throbs with such sighs as these: Dear Father, may Thy name be hallowed; may Thy kingdom come; may Thy will be done by us and everyone. And the harder the blows of life or temptation and trouble press and beat upon him, the stronger such signs and prayers become, even vocally. Therefore you cannot find a Christian without prayer, just as you cannot find a living man without a pulse. . . .³⁶

Since brother Martin brought the matter up: What about the Lord’s Prayer? When the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, teach us to pray,” did they mean to suggest that Christian prayer had never arisen from their hearts before? Certainly not. But they had observed Jesus “praying in a certain place.” What they saw in the *way* and the *what*, the *manner* and the *make-up* of their Lord’s prayer moved one of them to ask, “Lord, teach *us* to pray, as John taught his disciples” (Matt. 6:1). Jesus’ long answer (in both Matthew and Luke), shows that He understood the question to be: “Teach us the *way* and the *what* of prayer.” It surely cannot be said that His perfect prayer or His cautions and encouragements regarding true prayer *cause* hard work. Instead, our Lord encourages the sighs as well as the deep and regular breathing of the beloved souls He has come to save.

***Christian Prayer is encouraged by the Lord
and the example of the early Church.***

Jesus certainly emphasizes the importance of prayer in our Christian lives by His encouragement to pray as children ask their father: “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke. 11:13). Our Lord has graciously invited us to “*ask anything according to His will,*” and promised that we shall receive “*whatever* we ask of Him” that agrees with His good and all-wise will (John 5:14-15).

Our Savior encourages prayer by stressing just *two simple principles* in the familiar accounts of “*the Cursing of the Fig Tree,*” and “*the Persistent Widow*”:

- 1) “The Cursing of the Fig Tree” encourages **unwavering faith in the merciful willingness and power of God to answer our prayers:** “*And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.*”³⁷
- 2) The parable of “The Persistent Widow” emphasizes the importance of **beggarly persistence** (Luke 18:1-8).

The true children of God in both Testaments have always understood these simple principles of prayer. Because our spirits are “indeed willing,” but our flesh “is weak,” just as the Gethsemane sleepers, we have only needed the constant encouragement which our Lord gives in His gospel-word. Let us be encouraged by the record of how *necessary and natural* prayer was for the early Church. We read in Acts 2 that the very young Jerusalem Church “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, in the breaking of bread *and in prayers.*” After the apostles had been thrown into prison, threatened and let go, they told their fellow believers about the whole ordeal. Immediately, “when they heard that,” those Christians “raised their voice to God” in corporate prayer for boldness (Acts 4).

In Acts chapter 6 we see an outstanding example of the great importance of prayer to the work of the entire ministry of Christ’s gospel. For when the Apostles felt that “waiting on tables” was preempting *prayer and the ministry of the Word,*

they gave this command to the congregation: “Seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; *but we will give ourselves continually*³⁸ *to PRAYER and to the ministry of the Word.*” Note the word order! In Acts 9:11, Jesus announces an unmistakable and early sign of Saul’s new spiritual life – the sign that was to calm Ananias, who was afraid that Saul might be playing the hypocrite: “Behold *he is praying,*” Jesus said to Ananias in a vision.

Yes, we DO need encouragement to pray, because of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. We DO need to spend more time with the Scriptures where we learn the *what, when, how, and why* of prayer. But the grace and strength to pray fervently comes from the gospel itself, which, if it were truly and faithfully preached in all the Christian churches in the world – without conditions – would mightily spread the power of prayer *in its working* by faith.

I have not seen a better statement of the proper emphasis on prayer than that which appears at the beginning of this essay from Dr. Martin Luther. The Christian’s speaking with God through prayer is placed *under* the gospel by which He gives to us *ALL His grace and blessings*. Having “put on the whole armor of God,” Christians must pray “always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” – *all* this is being “strong *in the Lord* and in the power of *His* might” (Eph. 6:10-18).

***PRAY, CHRISTIAN, expecting great things from your LORD;
DO NOT PRAY, expecting great things from your prayer.***

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Notes

- ¹ Arthur Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 165-166.
- ² Pink, 166.
- ³ Pink, 172.
- ⁴ Dutch Sheets, *Intercessory Prayer* (subtitled: “How God Can Use Your Prayers to Move Heaven and Earth”), 33 [Note: on this same page, Sheets expresses his agreement with this statement by C. Peter Wagner: “We must understand that our sovereign God has for His own reasons so designed this world that much of what is truly His will He makes contingent on the attitudes and actions of human beings. He allows humans to make decisions that can influence history . . . Human inaction does not *nullify* the atonement, but human inaction can make the atonement *ineffective* for lost people.”]
- ⁵ Ben Patterson, *Deepening your Conversation with God*, subtitled: “The Life-Changing Power of Prayer”, 110-111.
- ⁶ Becky Tirabassi, *Let Prayer Change Your Life*, 123.
- ⁷ Sheets, 200.
- ⁸ E. Plass, *What Luther Says*, 1093:3496.
- ⁹ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. VI, 66.
- ¹⁰ Sheets, 66-67.
- ¹¹ Sheets, 50-52.
- ¹² Sheets, 128-129.
- ¹³ Sheets, 163-164.
- ¹⁴ Sheets, 72.
- ¹⁵ Sheets, 78-79.
- ¹⁶ Sheets, 80.
- ¹⁷ Tirabassi, 46. [Note that Murray seems to be saying, with the author’s approval, that the (unbelieving) world may also access the strength of God through prayer!]
- ¹⁸ Tirabassi, 134.
- ¹⁹ Tirabassi, 134.

²⁰ Such as this statement by the well-known *Adrian Rogers*: “Your new life in Christ begins with your decision to accept Him. So pray this Prayer: O Lord, I am a sinner. I ask you to come into my heart and take hold of my life.” (*Radio broadcast October 1, 1999*)

²¹ Tirabassi, 138-139.

²² Tirabassi, 134.

²³ Tirabassi, 134.

²⁴ Tirabassi, 56.

²⁵ Tirabassi, 142.

²⁶ Tirabassi, 121-122.

²⁷ Tirabassi, 123-124.

²⁸ Tirabassi, 123-124.

²⁹ Oswald Chambers, *Prayer – A Holy Occupation*, quoted from the book jacket.

³⁰ C.F.W. Walter, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, 314.

³¹ Plass, 1088:3476.

³² Plass, 1088:3477.

³³ Plass, 1088:3478.

³⁴ Plass, 1085:3464.

³⁵ Tirabassi, 41.

³⁶ Plass, 1091:3487.

³⁷ Tirabassi changes the emphasis of this *evangelical* encouragement to pray by adding parenthetical words to the passage as follows: “If you believe [in what he has shown you is the way to pray . . . His will], you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer” 153.

³⁸ Greek = προσκορτερεω: *To diligently give one’s attention to something [with dative]; the same verb is used in Acts 2:42, 46.*

Sermons for a Building Project from the Book of Nehemiah

David Lau

In the fall of 1989 Messiah Lutheran Church of Eau Claire, Wisconsin was involved in a major building project: the addition of a fellowship room. During part of the time of this building project twelve sermons from the book of Nehemiah were presented to the congregation to provide the Lord's guidance in connection with this building project. One of the Scripture readings for the Sunday services during this period of time was also from the book of Nehemiah to provide a more complete picture of the history of Nehemiah.

Throughout our church body, and among our confessional brothers and sisters in foreign lands, there are also many times when various building projects are contemplated or undertaken in the on-going work of bringing the Good News of forgiveness in Christ to all the world.

*It is, of course, also true that every Christian congregation is always involved in a building project, a spiritual building project. We are Christ's body and we are being built up by His Word. This spiritual edification takes place as we **"hold fast to the Head (Christ), from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God"** (Colossians 2:19).*

May the Lord bless these messages from Nehemiah so that our thinking and doing in both physical and spiritual building projects may be God-pleasing in every way. To God alone be the glory!

Sermon #1 on Nehemiah 1: 2-4, 10-11

Hanani, one of my brethren, came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ...

"Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer

of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

For I was the king's cupbearer.

This morning and in the coming weeks we are going to become better acquainted with a leader whom God sent to help His people at a time when their situation was very bad. This leader's name was Nehemiah, and we find his book in the Old Testament right next to the book of Ezra, who was Nehemiah's partner and co-leader.

The children of Israel had received many wonderful promises from God through their prophets. The chief promise was that the Messiah or Savior would come into the world from the people of Israel. He would be the Son of David, and He would be an everlasting King, the Prince of peace. But because of the continued rebellion of the people against God and His will, the Lord had brought the power of the royal house of David to an end, and had in fact permitted the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and even the Lord's temple in Jerusalem and carry off the surviving Jews into captivity in Babylonia.

Yet in His mercy God had promised through His prophet Jeremiah that this captivity would last only seventy years. God's promise came true, of course. After seventy years Cyrus, king of Persia, instructed the Jews in his kingdom to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. A relatively small number of Jews returned and began the rebuilding project in great weakness. The majority of the Jews remained where they were, scattered throughout the Persian Empire.

Nehemiah was a Jew who had risen to great prominence in the Persian Empire. Nehemiah's title was "Cupbearer to the King." This was a very important office given only to someone who was absolutely trustworthy, for the king's cupbearer had to make sure that the king would drink no poison. Nehemiah, as cupbearer to the king, also served as a trusted advisor and counselor.

But one day Nehemiah received bad news from Jerusalem. As he says in our text: **"Hanani, one of my brethren, came with men from Judah."** Nehemiah was eager to hear how things were going in Jerusalem with the Jews who had returned there to rebuild the city. So he says: **"I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem."**

This was their report. **"They said to me, 'The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.'"** Nehemiah was hoping for better news than this. After all, the Jews who returned to Jerusalem had been there for almost one hundred years. Surely they should have had opportunity in all that time to rebuild the city. But, no, the walls were not even up, the gates were destroyed, and the people were in danger from their enemies. In fact they were the object of ridicule, because in all these years they had not yet even finished putting up the walls of the city.

Today we want to consider how the believer Nehemiah reacted to the bad news he heard from Jerusalem. For we, too, are living in a time when there are sad conditions in the church. The physical walls of churches may not be down, but the spiritual foundation on which the faith of believers rests is being disturbed by false teachers. As Paul says, the foundation is the prophets and apostles, with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. But today there are many, many persons in high places in the churches who pay very little attention to the word of God spoken by His prophets or apostles. The news we hear from the churches is almost uniformly bad news. Greed, corruption, false teaching, immorality, cowardice -- all these things are prevalent in the churches of our nation, also in those churches that go by the name Lutheran.

So from this first chapter of Nehemiah let us consider THE BELIEVER'S REACTION TO SAD CONDITIONS IN THE CHURCH. How did the believer Nehemiah react when he heard the bad news from Jerusalem? He says: **"So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven."**

1) THE BELIEVER MOURNS BECAUSE HE CARES ABOUT GOD'S PEOPLE AND GOD'S PROMISES. Nehemiah had a high position in the Persian Empire. He was a trusted advisor to the great king Artaxerxes. No doubt he had everything he needed in the way of food and clothing and the luxuries of life. When he heard the bad news from Jerusalem, he could have said: "That's too bad about those people over there. But this has nothing to do with me. As long as I'm prospering personally, I guess that's all that counts."

But Nehemiah did not feel that way. He was a Jew. He was a believer in God's promises to His people. He cared about God's people and what God was permitting His people to suffer. Not that he blamed God for the people's problems. He acknowledged his own sin and the sins of his people and the sins of his fathers, and he knew that God had a perfect right to let evil come on this rebellious nation. They deserved every bit of trouble that came their way.

But still Nehemiah knew that God was a merciful God, and that God had made promises to His people. For example, God had said: **"If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations. But if you return to Me, I will gather you and bring you to the place which I have chosen."** Nehemiah wanted his fellow-Jews to return to the Lord. He wanted God's promises to be fulfilled. He wanted God's people to prosper in every way in accordance with God's will. He cared so much that the bad news led him to weep and mourn and fast. How can a believer do anything else when he hears such bad news?

What about us? How much do we care when we hear the bad news of how things are going in the churches of our day? How do we feel when we learn that there is not a single teacher in any of the seminaries of the new large Lutheran church body that believes and teaches that the Bible is the word of God in all its parts and words? Should we not weep and mourn when we hear such things? How should we feel when the immorality and greed and corruption of supposedly Christian institutions and organizations is exposed? Should we not mourn and weep? Should we not lament when we hear that certain words of God formerly respected and followed by conservative Lutherans are now being dishonored, words on such matters as church fellowship, close communion, and woman's position in the church?

The late Christian leader, Dr. Francis Schaeffer, who was not a Lutheran and who should not be considered orthodox in all his teachings, nevertheless spoke the truth when he said: "The whole culture has shifted from Christian to post-Christian. Do not take this lightly! It is a horrible thing for a man like myself to look back and see my country and my culture go down the drain in my own lifetime." Morally, spiritually, religiously, things are not good in our country or among the churches. Outward prosperity means little or nothing. Nehemiah's position did not keep him from weeping. Our own relative prosperity should not keep us from mourning when we hear bad news from the churches. The prophet Amos once told his prosperous countrymen: **"Woe to you who lie on beds of ivory, who eat lambs from the flock, who chant to the sound of stringed instruments, who drink wine from bowls, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph."**

May we grieve and lament and confess our sins and our fathers' sins and the sins of our fellow-Christians and fellow-conservatives and fellow-Lutherans, in the same way that Nehemiah did.

But Nehemiah did more than mourn. He prayed to the God of heaven. He said at the close of his prayer: **"Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."**

You see THE BELIEVER NEHEMIAH'S REACTION TO SAD CONDITIONS IN THE CHURCH. 2) THE BELIEVER COMMITS THE SITUATION TO THE LORD IN PRAYER, HUMBLY TRUSTING IN GOD'S MERCY.

Nehemiah confessed his own sins and the sins of his people. Nehemiah reminded God of His mercy and covenant and how He had redeemed His people from their slavery in Egypt. They were God's people, and therefore God should take action in their behalf. Specifically, Nehemiah prayed that God would grant him a way by which he could help his suffering people. Nehemiah, as the king's cupbearer, might be able to persuade the king to let Nehemiah do something for his people. It was something worth praying for. **"Grant me mercy in the sight of this man,"** that is, the king.

Nehemiah did more than mourn and weep. The whole book of Nehemiah shows what he did, or, rather, what God enabled him to do to help his people in answer to his prayer. It all started with prayer, humble prayer, confident prayer, to the merciful God of heaven.

This is something all of us can do when we hear bad news from the churches. We can pray to God. We know who God is. He is that merciful God who promised and sent His Son Jesus to be our Savior. For Jesus' sake, that is, because of Jesus' suffering and death in our place, God forgives our sins. In Jesus' name therefore we are enabled to talk to God and bring our petitions to His throne.

What can we say to Him? We can confess our own sins to Him, and humbly ask Him, for His mercy's sake, to turn things around in our time, to convict us and others of our wrongdoing and our arrogance and our pride, to make us realize the stupendous love of our dying Savior, to make us recognize the glory of our risen Lord, and to give us the Holy Spirit to enable us to be faithful witnesses of our Lord and Savior. Prosper us, O Lord, not so much with physical prosperity, but with spiritual prosperity, with true gospel zeal, with integrity in all our ways, with love for Your holy name and Your saving word. Amen!

Sermon #2 on Nehemiah 2: 2-6

Therefore the king said to me, **"Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart."**

So I became dreadfully afraid, and said to the king, **"May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?"**

Then the king said to me, **"What do you request?"**

So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, **"If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."**

Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), **"How long will your journey be? And when will you return?"** So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

When Nehemiah, the cupbearer to the great king of Persia, heard the bad news of conditions in Jerusalem, he was very sad. For Nehemiah was an Israelite, and he shared the hopes of the Israelites, that God would revive the nation of Israel in the land of promise and bring forth from them the promised Messiah, as the prophets had spoken. But the news was bad. The walls of Jerusalem were broken down. The gates of the city were burned. The non-Israelite neighbors ridiculed the weak Israelites, who did not even have a walled city to protect them.

Nehemiah cared about his people very much, and he knew that he was in a position to help his people. For as the cupbearer to the great king Artaxerxes of Persia, Nehemiah was very likely the most influential and powerful Israelite in the whole world at that time. But now the question that faced Nehemiah was how he would be able to help his people. How could he use his prominent position in the kingdom to benefit his people? It was a question he pondered very deeply. And he took it to the Lord in prayer, not just once, but day and night for several months. His specific prayer to the Lord was this: **"Let me prosper this day; grant me mercy in the sight of the king."** Nehemiah knew that if the great king Artaxerxes turned against him, he would immediately lose all his power and influence and he would be unable to help God's people. But if King Artaxerxes could be persuaded to favor Nehemiah and Nehemiah's plan to help his people, then the project would have a good chance of success.

The opportunity to help God's people came suddenly one day, unexpectedly, out of the blue. Our text shows us that **NEHEMIAH SEIZED THIS OPPORTUNITY TO HELP GOD'S PEOPLE**, and we want to learn from this text how we also can and ought to seize the opportunities God gives us to be of service to others.

Notice, first of all, that Nehemiah's opportunity was given to him by God in answer to his prayers. Nehemiah first heard the bad news from Jerusalem in the month of Chislev, which roughly corresponds to our December. But now it was the month of Nisan, corresponding to our April, in other words, four months later. During this entire time Nehemiah was in a state of mourning. He was fasting and praying, hoping for an opportunity to help his people. He prayed continually: **"Grant me mercy in the sight of the king."**

Nehemiah did not dare to go before the great king and ask for a favor. That would have been too dangerous. The kings of Persia had almost unlimited power, and they used this power recklessly. If Nehemiah had asked the king for a favor and had somehow displeased him by his request, the king might very well have ordered Nehemiah put to death, and this would be the end of his plan to rebuild Jerusalem.

But suddenly there was the opportunity to talk to King Artaxerxes about his problem. The king noticed one day that his cupbearer was sad. As Nehemiah says in our text: **"Therefore the king said to me, 'Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart.' Then I became dreadfully afraid."**

This was the moment for which Nehemiah had been praying, but when it came so suddenly, Nehemiah was terrified. His plan to help his people would now either go forward or come to nothing. It all depended on what Nehemiah would now say to the king and how the king would answer him. The tension was almost too much for him to bear. But the king's question demanded an answer, and he may as well tell the truth about his sadness and see how the king would react.

In his dreadful fear Nehemiah spoke up and told the king why he was so sad. He said to the king: **"May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?"** There it was. He blurted out the truth. He finally spoke what had been in his heart over three months. He let the king know what was troubling him. He seized the opportunity God had given him in answer to his prayers.

By opening his mouth in this way Nehemiah was risking his life, and he knew it. That is why he was so afraid. The great king could have turned on him and said: "What do you care about the Israelites in Jerusalem? You're working for me now, the king of Persia. I want you to have Shushan, the Persian citadel, on your mind, rather than the despised city of Jerusalem. Forget the place of your fathers and your fathers' tombs. You have a job to do right here. You better shape up, or else ... !"

Nehemiah knew that his situation was dangerous. He anxiously awaited the king's response to his tale of woe. The king did not turn on Nehemiah or accuse him of disloyalty. He simply said: **"What do you request?"** That is: What can I do for you?

This was the moment Nehemiah was waiting for. He already had a plan in his mind as to how he could help God's people. But it all depended on the favor of King Artaxerxes. The fate of God's people was at stake. It was a terribly important moment. Nehemiah had to say the right words now, or he might blow everything. The responsibility was weighty.

What did Nehemiah do? What we should all do in similar circumstances. He says: **"I prayed to the God of heaven."** A silent prayer went up to God at once. "O Lord God, prosper my plan. Give me favor in the sight of the king. Bless my words, Bless my request. Give me the right words to say. Let me say them in just the right way."

"I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king: 'If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.'"

Now his plan was out in the open. He, Nehemiah, the king's cupbearer, wanted to be sent to Jerusalem by the king for the specific purpose of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. This was a huge task, and he could do it only if the king favored his request.

Again Nehemiah waited anxiously for the king's response. Yes, the queen was sitting there beside him. What would his answer be? The king said: **"How long will your journey be? And when will you return?"** Give me some more details of your plan.

So Nehemiah concludes: **"So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time."** What excitement! Nehemiah had felt he was in danger of losing his life, and now here the great king was approving his whole plan. It was almost too good to be true. Nehemiah became even bolder. He asked for more than mere permission to go. He asked for letters to be sent to governors along the way, so that Nehemiah would not be hindered in his mission. He asked for a letter to the keeper of the king's forests so that he would be granted timber for the rebuilding project. Whatever Nehemiah requested, the king granted. The reason for this was plain to Nehemiah: **"The good hand of my God was upon me."** It was the Lord who had answered Nehemiah's prayers, for his prayers had been in keeping with God's own will for His people. It was the Lord who had moved the great king Artaxerxes to approve of Nehemiah's planned project in its entirety.

And now what does all of this have to do with us today? What is the sad news in the church world today? The saddest news is that God's word is being despised by many, many people who should be leaders in Christ's Church. This is the way the walls of Jerusalem are falling down in our time. People do not regard the Bible as God's word, or even if they do regard it as such, they do not really follow it. As a result the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, the only gospel by which we can be saved, is becoming more and more distorted and neglected and even forgotten. The standard view of many religious people in our day is that one religion is as good or as bad as another, and that we'll all get to heaven in the end anyway, because whatever god there is out there is so gentle and loving. In their view Shushan is as good as Jerusalem. There's nothing special about Jesus Christ or the Bible or the gospel of God's grace.

If we care about the sad condition of the churches in our time, and how can we not care, what should we do about it? The very first thing is prayer, prayer to the God of heaven who has all power in His hand, who has the power to revive and restore His people, the God who shows mercy to the world, but only in Jesus Christ, and only in the true Jesus Christ foretold and described in the Bible.

So we pray to this merciful Savior-God of ours and then we await His answer. We know what this world needs: the gospel in its truth and purity, Christian education for persons of all ages, mission work here and everywhere. This is the way to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in our time. Do we expect God to answer our prayers? Are we expecting opportunities to be set before us in answer to our prayers? We should indeed be looking for God to hear and answer our prayers.

And then when God answers us and suddenly presents us with an opportunity for Christian education or mission work or gospel teaching, are we ready to seize the opportunity God has given? Are we ready to walk and even run through the doors God has opened? Are we filled with excitement as we see God blessing our plans and projects?

Of all the people in the whole earth, we as members of this congregation and this church body at this time ought to realize what an opportunity God has set before us and still sets before us in the field of Christian education, from kindergarten through seminary. We are not worthy of these blessings, but God gives them to us. Of course there are risks involved, as there always are, in seizing the opportunities provided. Now is the time for us to seize these opportunities, to open our mouths for Jesus, to tell others about what God has given us, to train our young people for the days ahead. May God keep us busy with praying and planning, and may He enable us to seize the opportunities He gives us daily to be of service to His people through testimony and through Christian education, all for the glory of His saving name. Amen!

Sermon #3 on Nehemiah 2: 17-18

Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach." And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me.

So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to this good work.

In the short history of our congregation we have already been involved in four church-building projects as well as the building of a parsonage, a teacherage, and various building projects out at Immanuel College. All of these building projects were necessary because of God's abundant blessings to us: blessings of the pure gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ; blessings of Christian education; blessings of growth in numbers and opportunities. It is truly remarkable that there have been all of these building projects in such a short period of time. To God alone be all the glory!

Now I suppose all of these building projects began with a certain amount of praying, planning, and persuading. But then in every case there came a day when a decision had to be made. Are we going to go ahead with this project, or not? The Lord's guidance is sought, we try to determine what our Lord wants us to do, and then the decision is made. In our system the final decision is made on a congregational level by the voting members of our congregation, and on a synodical level by the official delegates at a church convention. The decision is made, as it was made in the days of Nehemiah: **"Let**

us rise up and build!" Our leaders encourage us in the same way that Nehemiah encouraged the Israelites in Jerusalem: **"The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build."**

This morning we want to consider for our own edification THE DECISION TO REBUILD JERUSALEM, as this is described for us in our text by Nehemiah, who was the appointed leader in carrying out this project.

The project began when Nehemiah's brother, Hanani, visited him in Shushan or Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire where Nehemiah was employed as the cupbearer of the powerful king Artaxerxes. Hanani reported that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, and its gates burned with fire, and the residents of the city defenseless against their enemies.

This report troubled Nehemiah, and he took it to the Lord in prayer. He asked God to prosper him so that he might be able to help his people. Soon the opportunity came. One day King Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah why he was so sad, and Nehemiah told him the whole story and what he hoped the king would permit him to do: namely, to go to Jerusalem with the proper protection and authorization to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah's prayers were answered. The king sent him on his way. Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem under the good hand of God and by a directive from the Persian king.

Nehemiah had already done much praying and planning before he got to Jerusalem. But now that he arrived, he knew that the first thing he had to do was to persuade the people and their leaders that the walls needed to be rebuilt and that they should get busy and do this work. Nehemiah could not do it all by himself. He had to have the support and cooperation of the people, particularly because there were already enemies on the scene eager to bring any building project to a halt.

So what did Nehemiah do? After he had been in Jerusalem for only three days, he and a few others with him went on an inspection tour by night to look at the walls of Jerusalem and get an idea of how much work it would take to rebuild them. Since he was going to try to persuade others to support this project, he wanted to know first-hand the extent of the damage and the layout of the land. So by night he went out through the Valleygate past the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool **"and viewed the wall."** Nobody else knew where he had gone and what he was up to. So far he had kept his plans to himself, probably in order to keep the enemies of the project from getting advance information.

But now the time had come for Nehemiah to tell the people and their leaders what he had in mind. Certainly he wanted their cooperation and support. He needed all the help he could get. This therefore is what he said to them after his inspection tour: **"You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come, and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach."**

Moreover, Nehemiah **"told them of the hand of God which had been good upon him, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to him."** In this way Nehemiah was doing everything he could to persuade them to rebuild Jerusalem. Four good reasons. One: The walls are down, and the gates are burned. We are in a bad way. Two: We are a reproach. God's enemies make fun of Him and of us because of the condition of the city. Three: My God answered my prayers and blessed my planning up to this time. His hand has been good on me. Four: King Artaxerxes has given us permission to go ahead. In fact he is even helping to supply the materials we need. Therefore this is my proposal to you all: **"Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem."**

And what did the officials, the nobles, the priests, and the Jews in general say in response to Nehemiah's proposal? **"They said, 'Let us rise up and build!'"** They were convinced that the project was needed, that it was something they could do, and, most importantly, that it was the Lord's will. There is no record of any opposition among the Israelite leaders. **"They said, 'Let us rise up and build.' Then they set their hands to do this good work."** What excitement and enthusiasm there must have been at that point! Finally, after almost one hundred years since the Israelites had returned to Jerusalem, they were going to get those walls rebuilt.

Of course, the decision to rebuild Jerusalem was ridiculed by Israel's enemies, such as Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. The Bible says: **"They laughed us to scorn and despised us."** But Nehemiah did not let their opposition or ridicule get him down. He simply said: **"The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build."**

The third chapter of Nehemiah shows the orderly way in which the work was done. Each group or family was given responsibility for a certain portion of the wall. Even the high priest and the priests got into the act and repaired a certain section. The Bible says that one man **"and his daughters made repairs."** So the women must have been active also. Everyone did his share, and the work proceeded swiftly. Almost all of God's people were willing to cooperate.

Yes, I said "almost," for there was one group that held back. It is stated that **"the nobles"** among the Tekoites **"did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord."** Did they think the project was a bad idea? Did they have a problem with Nehemiah's leadership? Or were they just plain lazy? The Bible does not say. But **"they did not put their shoulders to the work of the Lord."** They did not do their share of the work, although it seems that everyone else did.

Now what can we learn from all of this for our building projects today? I think we should realize, first of all, the importance of prayer and planning and persuading in carrying out projects of this kind. God gave the Israelites a leader, Nehemiah, who was first and foremost a man of prayer. He was also a careful planner and an effective persuader. Nehemiah was God's gift to the Israelites for the particular plight in which they found themselves at that time.

So also God has given us gifts of leadership for our work today. These gifts are certainly not centered in one person, as was the case with Nehemiah. God has given us many persons with the necessary gifts to get the job done. We all should be supporting the project in our prayers, and I suppose there must be those who have been doing some praying among us, for God's hand has been good upon us. God has also given us planners and persuaders. He has given us personnel to carry out portions of the task, one to do one thing, and another to do another thing. The Lord's gifts are here in great plenty.

But any building project takes more than just leaders. Nehemiah needed the cooperation and support of all the people, and so do we today. The decision to build in our case was reached unanimously, I believe. The needs were evident; the plans were in place, the cost was counted, and everything indicated that our God would prosper this project. After all, it was the Lord who put into our hands a gift of over \$100,000 from the widow of one of the carpenters who was involved in the very first building project of our congregation. Surely the good hand of our God has been upon us.

Are there any weak points in our building project? I suppose there are. The nobles of the Tekoites **"did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord."** No doubt there are some among us, perhaps even many, who have done almost nothing in connection with our current building project. Perhaps they have not been praying for it, perhaps they have not contributed towards it, perhaps they have not volunteered their talents and skills and energies when volunteers have been called for. Please do not think that I have any such list of people who have not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord, but of course the Lord knows if there are such among us and who they are.

Our sinful flesh is responsible for such weakness among us. Even in Nehemiah's building project, which was so wholeheartedly supported by the people, there were some who held back. It is not strange that the same thing happens today. We need to recognize our weaknesses, our sins, our lack of zeal for the Lord's work, and ask God once more to forgive us for the sake of Jesus, our Savior, who died for our sins, and then out of love for Him and a desire to do His will, set our hands to do this good work. The God who has blessed us in the past will Himself prosper us once again. **"Let us rise up and build!"** Amen!

Sermon #4 on Nehemiah 5: 7-9

After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury from his brother." So I called a great assembly against them. And I said to them, "According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?"

Then they were silenced and found nothing to say. Then I said, "What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?"

When Governor Nehemiah began the huge project of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, he was opposed by three enemies in particular: Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab. At first these enemies tried to discourage Nehemiah by making fun of his project. When that method did not work, they became more serious in their opposition and threatened to bring the project to a halt by force. But Nehemiah supplied weapons to his builders and took other security precautions, so that the work was able to continue. In fact Nehemiah instituted an alarm system, that is, a trumpeter to sound the alarm when danger threatened so that all the scattered builders on the wall would be informed at once when anyone was attacked. Nehemiah and his men were so devoted to their project that they did not even remove their clothing, except for washing, so that they would be prepared by night or by day.

But now, right in the middle of the building project, another enemy loomed suddenly on the horizon, a much more dangerous enemy than Sanballat, Tobiah, or Geshem. We can call this enemy "the enemy within." In other words, Nehemiah faced internal dissension in his own camp, and there is nothing more dangerous or harmful than this to any cause or project. For example, our nation's greatest conflict to this date has been the Civil War, which set brother against brother. No doubt our nation's greatest problem today is also the threat of internal dissension, internal conflict, internal corruption, and internal decay. It has often been said that America will probably be defeated, not by enemies from the outside but by corruption and dissension on the inside.

The same thing is true of the Church of Christ. We Christians are often the strongest in times of adversity and persecution. We are able to deal with that threat because by God's grace we recognize the problem and God gives us the strength to resist and overcome. But Satan's attacks are often much more subtle, and the damage is often done before we realize that we even have a problem. Things like false teaching and ungodly practice, greed and worldliness, lovelessness and pride, have a way of sneaking in and gaining a foothold and gradually taking over, and all of a sudden we wake up to what has been going on around us, and it's almost too late to do anything about it.

Our text for this day from Nehemiah points out the importance of WALKING IN THE FEAR OF GOD in our lives from day to day. In other words, this text speaks of the Christian life and how important this is in our on-going struggle

against Satan and all the forces of evil. First, we shall see what the problem was in Nehemiah's time, and how it was dealt with. Secondly, we need to note similar problems among ourselves and encourage each other to take action as God directs.

First of all, then, what was the problem in Nehemiah's time in the middle of this building project? The problem was, as we have said, internal dissension caused by a lack of kindness or consideration on the part of some of the prominent members of Nehemiah's following. No doubt Nehemiah was shocked when he first heard of this dissension. After all, the people had a common foe, a joint project to work on, and it seemed they were all fully cooperating in the building project under God's blessing. It seemed that things were going well.

But finally the sad truth of what had been going on came to Nehemiah's attention. The Bible says: "**There was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren.**" What was the problem? The rich were taking advantage of the poor. Some of the poor were having difficulty finding enough to eat. The rich would sell their food, but in payment they acquired control of the poor people's land and its fruits. Some of the poor were being charged interest on loans by their wealthy brethren, even though this was against the Jewish law. Finally, as the worst thing of all, some of the poor were being forced to sell their own children into slavery in order to come up with enough money to repay their loans and pay their taxes. The rich were getting richer, and the poor were getting poorer. Yet they were all supposed to be children of God by faith in the promised Messiah. They were all brethren. They were all supposed to be co-workers in the building project. But there was such resentment on the part of some at the way they were being treated that the whole project was in danger of being scuttled.

How did Nehemiah settle the matter? It did not take him very long to determine that in this case the chief fault lay with the rich and prosperous. The Bible says Nehemiah "**became very angry**" when he "**heard their outcry and these words.**" The account continues: "**After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, 'Each of you is exacting usury from his brother.'**" That is, you are charging interest on loans, and this is forbidden by God's law. The Jews were permitted to charge interest on loans to non-Jews, but not on loans to their own brethren. But even if it had not been specifically against God's law, it would have been against the law of love for the rich to take advantage of the plight of the poor and make money from their miseries.

Nehemiah did more than rebuke the nobles and rulers. Our text says: "**I called a great assembly against them.**" That is, I called a meeting of the whole people to discuss this problem. "**And I said to them, 'According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations.'**" That is, we have been spending our money to set Jewish slaves free. "**Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?'**" "**Then they were silenced and found nothing to say.**" They were unable to justify their loveless practices.

Nehemiah then went on to say: "**What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?'**" This is the critical thing, is it not? We need to walk in the fear of God here in this world. What does this mean? Since we are sinners, we know from the start that we cannot earn God's favor by what we do. We are sinners. But God has loved us, has promised and has sent His Son to be our Savior. This is our hope, even as it was the hope of the Israelites in Nehemiah's time. But trusting in God's mercy for forgiveness and life does not mean we can or should live as we please and pay no attention to what God says. No, the Christian life is a walk in the fear of God, and this includes reverence towards God and His word, a love of God created in our hearts by His love for us in Jesus Christ, and a trust in God and His mercy. Martin Luther combined all of these thoughts in his short explanation of the First Commandment. "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." This is the beginning of the Christian life: that in our love for our loving God we shall want to do what He says and put Him first. Joseph walked in the fear of God when he refused to commit adultery with his master's wife. He said: "**How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?'**" This is what Nehemiah wanted his fellow-Jews to consider: how could they keep on exploiting the poor contrary to the law of love and God's own express commandments? Were they children of God, or not?

He also used one additional argument. What about the nations, our enemies? What will they think when they see us treating each other with so much heartlessness? Will they not rejoice at our internal dissension and despise our God all the more?

Nehemiah's rebuke was effective. The problem was corrected, at least for the time being. The poor got back their land, and there was no more selling of children into slavery. They all promised to change their ways. There was great rejoicing and praise of the Lord.

Now what about us? We are often told that the rich in our land are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. This may be so, but the rich unbelievers in the world who are taking advantage of the poor are not our immediate concern. We need to be concerned chiefly about lovelessness or unkindness that reveals itself in our own congregation. We can start with the children in school. Does it not happen from time to time that one or two are singled out and picked on by the rest for no good reason? It becomes the "in" thing to despise or make fun of one or two or three individuals who also are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. And even if somehow they are not children of God, yet there is no reason for anyone to treat them in an unkind way.

Children and young people can be cruel to one another by what they say and do, or sometimes simply by their unwillingness to associate with persons who are not in the "in" group, so to speak. And, of course, we adults have the same sinful flesh that our children have, and so we also have a tendency to show love and kindness to some people but exclude others. And yet we are all brethren, children of God by faith in Christ. And if by chance there is someone among us who is not really a believer in Christ, do we help him or her become a believer by being unkind or unloving?

In the days of the early church the heathen unbelievers were impressed by the way Christians proved their love to each other in word and deed. "Behold, how they love one another," they said. May we never give any non-Christian the right to say of us: "Behold, how they hate each other!" But rather let us walk in the fear of our God at all times. The daily Christian life is a part, a very important part, of our witness to the world. May God forgive us our sins of unkindness and lovelessness for Jesus' sake (He died for these sins too), and may God give us His Holy Spirit to produce in us the fruit of Christian love. Amen!

(to be continued)

A Word Study on ὑποτάσσω
with Special Reference to Ephesians 5:22-24

Bruce J. Naumann

"Mary, will you have John, here present, to be your wedded husband, to live together according to God's will in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love him, comfort him, honor him, obey him, and cherish him in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him so long as you both shall live? If so, declare it before God and these witnesses by saying, 'I DO.'"

Up until that point in the wedding service, the mood of the congregation and the wedding party had been joyful, with a fitting touch of solemnity. But when the pastor asked Mary to repeat the words "obey him" as part of her wedding promise to John, there were snickers heard from the pews and even from the bridesmaids and groomsmen. "Did you hear that old-fashioned idea?" their eyes seemed to say. "Why would Mary stoop to say that, when nobody thinks of marriage that way anymore?" Any confessional pastor who has performed even a few weddings is familiar with this scene.

Few Bible-believing Christians would argue that a Christian marriage ought to be, above all, founded on faith in Christ, with the husband and wife pledging themselves to mutual love, honor, and faithfulness. But there are, among various churches and denominations, plenty who dispute the fact that Scripture mandates a loving leadership role for the husband. According to God's design, the husband has a greater responsibility as well as an authority to which the wife willingly subordinates herself. That this is so can be readily demonstrated by studying the meaning and application of the word ὑποτάσσω in its Scriptural context. The central passage for this doctrine is found in Ephesians, chapter five, where wives are urged to "submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord," and husbands are urged to "love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."

ὑποτάσσω is a compound of two common Greek words, the preposition ὑπο (under), and the verb τασσω (to place or arrange). It is from this root meaning of "arrange under" that the New Testament uses of the term are derived. In the active voice, the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich *Lexicon* translates it as: *subject, subordinate*. In the passive voice, the meaning is *to become subject, be subjected or subordinated*, and in the middle voice (which uses the same grammatical form as the passive) the meaning is *to subject oneself, obey*. Vine's *Expository Dictionary* says "primarily a military term, 'to rank under,' . . . denotes (a) 'to put in subjection, to subject,' . . . (b) in the middle or passive voice, to subject oneself, to obey, be subject to." Perhaps the most easily understood English equivalent is given in Louw and Nida's *Lexicon* (based on semantic domains) where the meaning given is to "bring under control." Thus the passive would be to "be brought under control," and the middle, to "put oneself under [another's] control."

Let us consider a few examples of the New Testament uses of this word (a complete list is printed in the appendix).

(Hebrews 2:8) "You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.

In this quotation from Psalm 8, the writer describes the omnipotence of God the Father in placing all power and authority in the Son's control. Ὑπετάξα, the aorist active indicative form of ὑποτάσσω, is used. It indicates that all things will be in the Son's control, whether willingly or not. This thought is echoed in Phillipians chapter two, "every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

(Luke 10:17) Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

Here is an example of the present passive indicative form of ὑποτασσω, ὑποτασσεται. With authority delegated to them from Christ Himself, the disciples exercised power over evil spirits. When the disciples commanded these spirits to come out of those possessed, the demons had no choice but to obey.

(Titus 3:1) Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work.

Here, the form of ὑποτασσω is middle/passive. Although the NKJV and NIV translate it as a passive, it could just as easily be translated as a middle – "Remind them to submit themselves to rulers and authorities. . . ." The sense of the command is the same as that given to wives in Ephesians, chapter five, namely, that they are willingly to put themselves under the authority of another.

Note that in passages where the active form of the verb is used, the context indicates that someone is subduing something else, whether that something else wishes it or not. However, in the passages that speak of a wife's relationship to her husband, this active form is never used. In other words, the Bible never says that the husband is supposed to put or keep his wife in subjection. Rather, the wife is willingly to put herself under her husband's authority – and with a noble motivation, namely, reverence for Christ.

Several points should be noted here before proceeding. Since this is a word study on ὑποτασσω, and the Lord nowhere calls on husbands to ὑποτασσησθε, to submit themselves to their wives, this article does not give "equal time" to the husband's role in the marriage. However, the rest of Ephesians, chapter five, certainly does give equal time. A cursory reading of the chapter shows that the husband's role has more to do with responsibility than it does with authority. If he were able to fulfill his own God-given role properly, by loving his wife as Christ loved the church (v. 25), then more than half the battle would be won when it comes to a successful marriage relationship. Furthermore, practical experience shows that when marriages have problems, oftentimes the main reason is not that the wife purposefully usurps the authority of her husband, but that the husband fails to exercise Christian leadership as he should, thus abdicating headship to the wife. Now for the passage under particular study:

(Ephesians 5:21-24) ...submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Verse twenty-one serves both as a conclusion and an introduction. It is the last of a string of participles which have their antecedent in the imperative of verse eighteen, "be filled with the Spirit." The participles then show various ways that this should be done – "speaking in psalms and hymns. . .singing. . . giving thanks. . . submitting to one another in the fear of God."

How exactly this "submitting to one another" is to be done depends on a person's particular circumstances, so Paul addresses a number of these differing roles – wives, husbands, children, parents, servants, and masters.

Perhaps the best way to examine the issues that are in theological dispute in our day concerning this passage would be to examine some of the arguments put forward for a "feminist" interpretation of this passage. I found just such an interpretation on the internet, by a certain Mary Stelzer, who presents feminist arguments for a reciprocal and equivalent submission between husbands and wives. In other words, it is acknowledged that wives are urged to submit to their husbands, but it is argued that husbands are obliged to submit themselves to their wives in the same way. Here is the line of reasoning:

1. Since verse twenty-one calls on all Christians to submit to one another, this command is no less binding on the husband toward the wife than it is on the wife toward the husband.
2. There is no verb in verse twenty-two [but see textual note, below - BN], therefore "in whatever way believers are to 'submit' to each other in verse 21, would be the exact same way wives are to submit to their husbands in verse 22. . . "The mutual call to submission in Ephesians 5:21 serves to erase any notion of authority and subservience in the section that follows (vv. 22-23)."
3. "The misuse of 'submit' has to do with domestic violence. Could there be a greater defamation on these scriptures than 'I had to beat her because she would not submit'? It is reported that over 2 million women are beaten and abused by their husbands every year."
4. When Paul writes, Ephesians 5:23, "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body," the original intent of the word "head" had nothing to do with leadership or authority. Rather, κεφαλη has the meaning of originator or source of blessing, as in the "head" (source) of a river. "The man is not, as Christ is, the Authority, the Judge, the Creator, the Forgiver, or the Mediator etc. The husband is not just what Christ is to the church. The husband is the 'head' (enabler or completer) of the wife as Christ is the enabler or completer of the church. . . So God is authority of both the man and the woman, who in turn are to submit to each other . . . Who makes the decisions in marriage? The two have become one!"

5. Any authoritative role that is claimed by a husband comes as result of the curse of sin. After all, it was part of the curse pronounced on Adam and Eve in the garden when God said to Eve, "Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you," Genesis 3:16.

These arguments are decisively answered by remaining true to the actual meaning of the Greek words involved, and by comparing Scripture with Scripture, without endeavoring to force one's own bias on the meaning of the text.

1. There are at least two possible interpretations of the meaning of verse 21 over toward the following verses. One is that a general rule is stated in verse 21, and specific instances, tailored to a particular relationship, then follow. In other words, the specific is taken up in light of the general. This would not at all imply that there is no difference in authority between husbands and wives. If that were true, then it would have to follow that parents must submit to their children, and masters to their servants (Eph. 6:1-9). The context of the chapter clearly indicates that there is authority under which Christians should willingly subjugate their own will, out of love for the Lord Jesus. But an entirely different interpretation of Ephesians 5:21 is also possible. This interpretation keys on the meaning of ἀλλήλου, "submit to one another," and whether the meaning must be that "everyone is to submit to everyone else." In fact, there are many places where ἀλλήλου does not have this meaning.² Thus, the Spirit-intended meaning of the "submit to one another" could be "all of you submit to those to whom God has given authority over you." The argument for this interpretation is, in fact, compelling, since there are no other instances of ὑποτάσσω where the submission is intended to be reciprocal. "None of these relationships is ever reversed; that is, husbands are never told to be subject to wives, the government to citizens, masters to servants, or the disciples to demons, etc. . . The word is never 'mutual' in its force; it is always one-directional in its reference to submission to an authority. . . So we may ask, why should we assign ὑποτάσσω a meaning in Ephesians 5:21 that it is nowhere else shown to have?"³ No one will dispute the fact that in many places the scriptures call for mutual love between Christians – it certainly does. However, it does not then follow that Christians are supposed to put themselves under the authority of people over whom they are also supposed to exercise loving authority! Finally, it makes little difference whether one subscribes to this interpretation, or to that of a general call to mutual submission, followed by specific instructions. The salient point is that the wife is called to be subject to her husband as to the Lord, and not vice-versa.

2. The lack of a verb in verse twenty-two depends on a textual question. Vaticanus and Papyrus 46 omit the verb, while Siniticus, Alexandrinus, and the Majority text include it. The weight of evidence favors including the verb, but even if it were absent, the verb would be inferred from verse twenty-one, and the meaning of the passage would be unchanged.

3. The horrors of domestic violence are not to be ignored. It is also true that this sinful brutality has, at times, been perpetrated with the excuse that the Bible mandates submission of the wife. The argument here, however, is a *non sequitor*. Using the same logic, one could say that it is wrong for parents to discipline their children, because some of them abuse their children while citing Proverbs 22:15, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him." A husband's Christian leadership in the family is a good and blessed thing when exercised as God intends, in self-sacrificing love for the wife.

4. All the lexical references to a non-literal use of κεφαλή indicate a position of leadership and authority, similar to our understanding in English when we speak of the "head" of a department or company. The New Testament refers to Christ as the "head" of the church, as well as of the universe (Eph. 1:22; 4:15). These passages clearly point to Jesus' "headship" as an indicator of His authority. In the passage from Ephesians 5, "It is evident that Christ is the head of the church as the authority over it because the following verse speaks of the church as submitting to Christ. The two concepts mutually explain one another: the church submits to Christ's authority because He is the head or authority over it."⁴

5. This old argument is quickly refuted by Ephesians 5:23, "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church." The husband's leadership role is not attributed to the fall into sin. It is, in fact, modeled after Christ's headship for the benefit of His church. Another significant passage that speaks to this question is 1 Timothy 2:11-13, "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve." Here Paul refers to the order of creation, not the fall into sin, when giving the reason for differences in authority between men and women. Paul shows that this order was built in at creation. Therefore, a husband's leadership role in the family does not find its origin in the curse of the Fall. It is important to remember that a difference in authority, while it does indicate a difference in relationship one to another, does not imply superiority in intelligence, character, or ability. This is shown strikingly by 1 Corinthians 15:28 –

Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

This says that Christ, following His second coming and complete subjugation of all earthly forces, will Himself be subject to the Father. Since we know that Christ is, with the Father and the Spirit, the eternal and all-powerful God, it follows that "being subject" does not at all imply "being inferior." Likewise, a wife's self-subjection to the authority of her husband does not imply inferiority of any kind. It is simply the way that the Lord organized the institution of the family for the mutual

good of all. Christian wives have complete equality with their husbands in the area that is most important; she is equally a child of God, equally redeemed from her sins by the grace of the Lord Jesus:

(Galatians 3:27-28) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The modern re-writing of Scripture in the interest of making it conform to a politically correct model of marriage in our society does a disservice to Christian men and women. The Lord's design for marriage is the one under which both husband and wife will find the greatest fulfillment and happiness, that is, with the wife showing a self-submitting love to her husband, as to the Lord, and the husband showing a self-sacrificing love to his wife, as Christ did for the church. "Just as the church should willingly submit to Christ in all things and, if it does so, will not find that stifling, demeaning, or stultifying of growth and freedom, so also wives should willingly submit to their husbands in all things and, if they do so, will not find that stifling, demeaning, or stultifying."⁵ As pastors, we will do well to instruct those in our care thoroughly on these matters, so that Christian women will be satisfied and even pleased to make a marriage vow to "obey" their husbands, with the understanding that this self-submissive love is directed first and foremost to the Lord Himself.

Notes

¹ "Ephesians 5 (Submission and Headship)," by Mary Stelzer, <http://www.geocities.com/~biblepage/eph5.html>.

² For example – (Rev. 6:4) ". . . that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword." Obviously, everyone could not kill everyone else (1 Cor. 11:33). "Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another." Everybody didn't wait for everybody – some waited for others. In Galatians 6:2, "bear one another's burdens" does not mean "everyone should exchange burdens with everyone else," but rather "some who are more able should help bear the burdens of others who are less able."

³ "Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood - A Response to Evangelical Feminism," by various authors, edited by Wayne Grudem and John Piper. You may order the book, or read it in its entirety at: <http://www.cbmw.org>

⁴ Same.

⁵ Same.

Appendix: Occurances of ὑποτάσσω in the New Testament, Classified by Agents Involved

Jesus to His parents:

Luke 2:51 Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart.

Demons to the disciples:

Luke 10:17 Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

Luke 10:20 "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

Citizens to government authorities:

Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Romans 13:5 Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

Titus 3:1 Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work,

1 Peter 2:13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme,

The universe to Christ:

1 Corinthians 15:27 For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.

Ephesians 1:22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,

Philippians 3:21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (Christ, not angels)

Hebrews 2:5 For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels.

Hebrews 2:8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.

1 Peter 3:22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

Christ to God the Father:

1 Corinthians 15:28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

Church members to church leaders:

1 Corinthians 16:16 that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.

Younger people to older people:

1 Peter 5:5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

Wives to husbands:

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (also vs. 24, below)

Colossians 3:18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Titus 2:5 to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

1 Peter 3:1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,

1 Peter 3:5 For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands:

Women to male leadership in the church:

1 Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.

The Church to Christ:

Ephesians 5:24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Servants to Masters:

Titus 2:9 Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things,

1 Peter 2:18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

Christians to God:

Hebrews 12:9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

James 4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Unbelievers' lack of submission:

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Romans 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

Miscellaneous:

Romans 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;

1 Corinthians 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

Ephesians 5:20-21 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.

BOOK REVIEW

Charles W. Nienkirchen: *A. B. Simpson and the Pentecostal Movement*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1992, second printing January 1994, paperback, 162 pages.

A. B. Simpson (1843-1919) was the founder of the organization known today as the Christian and Missionary Alliance, an evangelistic association with 311,612 members in the United States, 87,197 members in Canada, and many other members in other countries of the world. Many of the churches in the Midwest that work among the Hmong people are affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The 1965 statement of faith of the Christian and Missionary Alliance stresses the Trinity, the deity of Christ, Christ's substitutionary atonement, the inerrancy of the Bible, and other basic Bible doctrines.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance got its start in 1881 and was not at first intended to be a separate denomination. A. B. Simpson himself stressed what he called the fourfold gospel, portraying Christ as Savior, Sanctifier,

Healer, and Coming King. Together with the holiness churches, Simpson taught that the conversion experience was followed by a second experience known as the second blessing or baptism with the Holy Spirit. Simpson believed that he had experienced this second blessing and he encouraged other Christians to seek this same blessing.

The modern Pentecostal movement is generally accepted as having begun on Jan. 1, 1901, when a woman named Agnes Ozman had a tongue-speaking experience in Topeka, Kansas. This phenomenon, known as *glossolalia*, spread rapidly in the next ten years, especially through the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, California. In his presidential address to the Alliance in 1907-1908 A. B. Simpson reported: "We believe there can be no doubt that in many cases remarkable outpourings of the Holy Spirit have been accompanied with genuine instances of the gift of tongues and many extraordinary manifestations" (151).

The Alliance, however, was split by the Pentecostal phenomenon, with some Alliance leaders leaving the Alliance and joining Pentecostal associations while others found fault with the extravagant claims of the Pentecostals. As a practical missionary, Simpson was opposed to the view of some that the gift of *glossolalia* made it unnecessary for missionaries to learn the native languages of the people. "Some inexperienced persons had been commissioned to foreign countries under the naïve assumption that they would receive the gift of tongues as a substitute for language study, only to be disappointed and abandoned" (92). In particular Simpson could not agree with the generally accepted Pentecostal claim that tongue-speaking was the evidence and proof of a baptism with the Holy Spirit. He believed that he himself had been baptized with the Holy Spirit, and yet he never spoke in tongues. Later leaders of the Alliance, such as A. W. Tozer (1897-1963), have been much more critical of Pentecostalism than Simpson was, and the result has been that many have considered Simpson to be an opponent of Pentecostalism.

The main purpose of Nienkirchen's book, it seems, is to show that Simpson was not opposed to *glossolalia*, and that the advice concerning tongue-speaking often attributed to Simpson, "Seek not, forbid not," cannot be found anywhere in Simpson's writings. In fact, Simpson's diary from the years 1907-1916 shows that he himself earnestly desired the gift of *glossolalia* for himself. He had had what he called special experiences of the Holy Spirit in his life, but he wanted more. Specifically he wanted the gift of *glossolalia*, but after five years of praying for this gift Simpson wrote in his diary: "No extraordinary manifestation of the Spirit in tongues or similar gifts has come. Many of my friends have received such manifestations" (146-147).

Since the Pentecostal movement (beginning in 1901) and the charismatic movement in mainline churches (beginning in 1960) are still very strong in this country and especially in Central and South America and also in Africa and India, it is good for us to know something about the history of Pentecostalism and some of its main tenets. In general it must be said that Simpson and the holiness churches as well as the Pentecostal and charismatic churches of today stress outward manifestations of the Holy Spirit that can be seen rather than the Christ-for-us gospel that needs to be believed without being seen. "You are complete in Christ" (Col. 2:10), says the apostle Paul, and therefore we walk a path dangerous to faith when we, like Simpson and the Pentecostals of his time and our time, always desire "more."

– David Lau

