

The Steps God Takes in Saving a Sinner

The Bible teaches clearly that we are born sinners unable to understand spiritual things and unwilling to seek salvation. It therefore needs God Himself to intervene graciously in our lives and to bring us to the only saviour Jesus Christ. In this article we will look at the steps God takes to bring a lost sinner to Himself.

1. The first thing God does when He saves a person is to shine light into his darkened understanding. "For God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). In all cases the Holy Spirit uses the word of God to bring this about (Ps. 119:130). At the same time the Holy Spirit removes the veil from the heart (2 Cor. 3:15,16) and opens the heart to receive God's word with faith (Acts 16:14). The result is that the person becomes aware of his own terrible condition because of his sins. Before this conviction of sin the person may have been baptised, a church member or even a preacher. But now he discovers that he is unclean, that his heart is desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9) and that he is unfit for the presence of the thrice holy God. A person in such a state of conviction realises that all his best works are only as filthy rags (Is. 64:6) and that he justly deserves everlasting burning in hell. He is brought to a state where he no longer has any confidence in himself because he has been brought to the end of himself.

By means of this enlightening, the renewed soul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, realises that he is a sinner in great need of Christ. The Holy Spirit then leads him to apply to Christ for pardon, cleansing, peace, righteousness and strength. Other acts besides turning to Christ, such as repentance, flow from this new birth.

Have you at a certain time or period of time felt something of what I have described above? If not, it may be that you are not saved. Ask God to show you your sins now.

2. The second thing God does when He saves a person is that he takes full control of the heart. By nature men are lovers of their own selves and lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God (2 Tim. 3:2,4). The renewed person has his affections taken off his idols and fixed on God. The affections are thus refined and directed to love God above all others. The love of God therefore becomes the governing principle of his heart. The saved person also finds his heart drawn out to all members of God's family irrespective of their nationality, social position or church affiliation. This becomes the real evidence that such a person has passed from darkness into life because he loves the brethren (1 Jn. 3:14). Do you have such a consuming love for God and for all true Christians everywhere? Test yourself by the choices you make: your career, your dwelling place, school for your children or the friends you have.

3. The third thing God does when He saves a person is to set the will free. By nature the will of the fallen man is enslaved by sin and in bondage to his evil nature. At the new birth the will is set free from all this and begins to conform to the will of God. God graciously gives the saved person a new heart and a new spirit thus causing him to walk in obedience to His commands. This is the blessing of the new covenant God promised to His people (Eze. 36:26-27). As a result, the will of such a person is so liberated from the power of indwelling sin that he finds it a delight to obey God's commands. He freely and gladly chooses to walk in subjection to Christ and to obey Him in all things whatever it may cost him.

Do you find it a delight to obey God in all things at all times? For example, do you keep the Lord's Day dedicated to the worship of God from morning to evening or do you use part of the day for your own amusements as if the day is your own?

4. Lastly when God saves a person He changes the whole conduct of the person and makes him a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). As a tree is known by its fruits, saving faith is known by good actions. The principle of holiness the person receives at the new birth translates itself into a godly life in the believer. It is written, "If you know that God is righteous you know that everyone who does right has been born of Him" (1 Jn. 2:29). Surely the deepest longing of every child of God is to please his heavenly Father in all things even though this longing is never fully realised in this life. Nevertheless, he continues to strive toward what is ahead and to press on toward the goal of winning the prize that God has for him in heaven in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12,14).

Do you realise that I have been describing a true Christian for you? Are you such a person? If you are praise God for it, if not ask God to make you such a Christian right now.

God planned marriage for His own glory

in the lives of His people.

I have taken this opportunity to write about marriage because looking at our country and the world, people do not understand what marriage is and why God established this wonderful institution on earth. It is sad that many people do not respect marriage, because then they do not respect God Himself.

In this article we will look at who instituted marriage and why. This is the first in a series of articles on the subject of marriage and living the married life. In future editions of the magazine we will look at what the Bible says about marriage.

Who instituted Marriage and Why?

"The Lord said it is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him; Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man (Genesis 2:18).

1. The Lord saw that man was in need of a companion: "The Lord said it is not good for man to be alone."

The Lord God the creator of the heavens and earth sees all things and understands all things and all situations. In Genesis chapter two we read that God created all things and then He allowed Adam to name all the things He had created. But among these creatures, there was no suitable companion of Adam. The Lord saw this and so we read that He created Eve and brought her to Adam.

This teaches us that we as the Lord's people must always have trust in the Lord that He will provide for us when the need arises. We must trust the Lord in our decisions concerning marriage. We must wait upon Him for direction and wisdom because He alone knows the

best companion for us. Let us never think that the Lord does not understand us and that He does not want us to get married or to marry. God is the best match maker and you will never find any one like Him anywhere. He knows that you want a companion and at the right time He will bring the right one.

Do not lean on your own understanding of beauty, class, shape, tribe and colour, lean on God. Do not rush in relationships. Seek the Lord's guidance and seek His help. Do not awaken love before the time is right. Do you want to escape many troubles and tears? Wait upon the Lord. Do not cease asking Him and in due time He will answer you.

This shows us clearly how God cares so much about the welfare of His people.

2. The Lord brought a woman as the suitable companion for Adam: "The Lord made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man."

Among all the creatures that the Lord God had created, there was no suitable companion for Adam. So the Lord created a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man. Adam was given a companion without any struggles or payments or the so called appreciation fees.

A Suitable companion from the Lord is suitable indeed. Adam was not lonely any more. The Lord God had taken care of his loneliness. The Bible says that every good gift comes from God. At this point, God had instituted the first marriage ever in the history of the world and it was a perfect marriage because it happened before the fall of man.

The purpose of the marriage was companionship. What a shame when I see and hear men who do not appreciate the purpose for which God created marriage. They beat, abuse and mistreat their wives. Many married people in our country today and in the world do not understand this, that marriage is a godly institution. They marry, today they divorce tomorrow. They talk about and slander the institution of marriage as if it was instituted by man. In today's marriage companionship is no more. People are marrying for the wrong reasons like lust, family pressure, prestige, finances, need of children and many more. That's why today's marriages are like a battle field. There is no peace, no joy and no companionships. It is contrary to what God planned, it is not of the Lord.

The Bible gives us a picture of an ideal marriage and that is of Christ and the church which is the bride of Christ. Christ is the role model companion who we should imitate in our marriages. He died to save the church, He lives to intercede for the church and He is coming come back to take His bride home the Church. Look to Him as our great example.

3. God planned marriage to be between one man and one woman only: "Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out the man, and He brought her to the man."

One woman was brought to Adam and not two and the woman was given to one man and not two. Polygamy (where a man has more than one wife) and polyandry (where a woman has more than one husband) are both offences to God. Do not look at David or Solomon and the others in the Old Testament, look at God's plan in Adam and Eve's wonderful marriage. Polygamy and polyandry are excuses by lustful men and women who lack the fruit of the Spirit which includes self-control (Galatians 5:22-25).

Marriage also is not between two people of the same sex: “Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out the man, and He brought her to the man.” God brought a woman to Adam, not a man. It is one of the greatest evils of this age that people have decided to go against the plan and the will of God and to follow their own lusts. The Bible condemns this great evil and those practicing it are going to hell unless they repent and turn from the evil. God is going to judge them and all His wrath will be poured out to them if they continue to refuse to repent.

How are we to live according to these teachings?

1. We must seek salvation through Christ.

The person who is unsaved cannot fully please God in his marriage. If we ever want to please God, we must believe in the one He has sent, that is Christ Jesus. God is well pleased in His son Jesus Christ. No one anywhere can please God without coming to Him through His Son Jesus Christ. He is the one upon whom God the Father has placed the seal of approval (John 6:27).

Come to Christ today for without Him, you will never please God by your own efforts, in your marriage or in anything else.

2. We must seek to bring glory to God through Christ Jesus.

In all things and at all costs we must seek to glorify God in Christ. We can not have better marriage if its not for the glory of God. Do not seek to please the world for they will never be pleased with you, do not seek to please your family, for marriage is between two parties. Seek to please God. “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:11).

Seven Signs of a True Believer

1. He that believes in Christ has peace and hope in his heart.

The Bible says, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” and, “We who have believed enter that rest” (Rom. 5:1; Heb. 4:3). The believer is a person whose sins are forgiven and all his iniquities are removed. His conscience is no longer burdened with the guilt of his sins. He is reconciled to God, and is one of His friends. He can look forward to death, judgment, and eternity without fear. The fear of death is taken away. On the Day of Judgement when the books are opened, there will be nothing laid to his charge. He will be in heaven in eternity. He has a sure hope of entering heaven, he is going to a city which cannot be moved. He may not fully understand all these privileges yet. He may often have doubts and fears and he may wonder at times if he will really enter heaven. He is like a child who is the heir to a great fortune, though at the moment he may not be aware of it. But, despite all his doubts and fears, he has a real, solid, true hope of heaven (Rom. 5:5).

2. He that believes in Christ has a new heart.

It is written, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!; To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God; Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (2 Cor. 5:17; John 1:12, 1 John v.1.) A believer has no longer the same nature with which he was born. He is changed, renewed, and transformed after the image of his Lord and Saviour. The person who cares only about the things of the flesh has no saving faith. The person who is a true believer is born again; he is a converted person; he is no longer the person he used to be. An unchanged person is not a believer.

3. He that believes in Christ is a holy person in heart and life.

It is written that God "purifies the heart by faith," and that Christians are "sanctified by faith." The Bible also says, "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (Acts 15:9; 26:18; 1 John 3:3.). A believer loves what God loves, and hates what God hates. His heart's desire is to walk in the way of God's commandments, and to keep himself from all manner of evil. His wish is to follow after the things which are just, and pure, and honest, and lovely, and of good report, and to cleanse himself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. He falls far short of his aim in many things. He finds his daily life a constant fight with indwelling corruption. But he fights on, and resolutely refuses to serve sin. Where there is no holiness, we may be sure there is no saving faith. An unholy man is not a believer!

4. He that believes in Christ works godly works.

It is written, that faith expresses itself through love (Gal. v. 6). The person who is a true believer will never be an idle man, he will not be a man who sits still, happy in his Christianity. True faith will move him to walk in the steps of his Master, who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). In one way or another, his faith will make him work. The works that he does may attract no notice from the world. They may seem insignificant to many persons. But they are not forgotten by the Lord Jesus. He notices a cup of cold water given for His sake. Where there is no working love, there is no faith. A lazy, selfish Christian, has no right to regard himself as a believer!

5. He that believes in Christ overcomes the world.

It is written, that "Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John v.4). A true believer is not ruled by the world's standard of right or wrong. He is independent of the world's opinion. He cares little for the world's praise. He is not discouraged when the world turns against him. He does not seek for the world's pleasures. He is not ambitious of the world's rewards. He looks for eternal things. He sees in Christ the eternal Saviour; he sees the Day of Judgement coming, and he waits for the crown of glory that does not fade away. The sight of these is far more important to him than the things of this world. If a person is ruled by the world and the desires of the flesh then he is not a true believer. The man who seeks after the things of this world only and desires the things of this world only is not a true believer.

6. He that believes in Christ has a testimony in his heart that he is a child of God.

It is written, that "Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart" (1 John 5:10). This sign requires very careful handling. The witness of the Spirit is unquestionably a very difficult subject. But I cannot shrink from declaring my own firm

persuasion, that a true believer always has inward feelings about himself, feelings which are connected with his faith, and flow from his faith, feelings of which unbelievers know nothing at all. He has the Spirit of adoption, by which he is reconciled to God and knows God as his Father, and looks up to Him without fear. He has the testimony of his conscience, sprinkled with Christ's blood, that, although he is weak, he rests on Christ. He has hopes, joys, fears, sorrows, consolations, expectations, of which he knew nothing before he believed. It is true that feelings can be very deceitful. But where there are no inward religious feelings there is no faith. A man who knows nothing of an inward, spiritual Christianity is not yet a believer!

7. He that believes in Christ will regard Christ as very precious.

It is written, "To you who believe, Christ is precious" (1 Peter 2:7). This text deserves special notice. It does not say "Christianity" is precious, or the "Gospel" is precious, or "salvation" is precious. It says Christ Himself is precious. A believer's religion does not consist in outward things and outward beliefs. It consists in union, communion, and fellowship with an actual living Person: Jesus the Son of God. It is a life of faith in Jesus, confidence in Jesus, leaning on Jesus, drawing out of the fullness of Jesus, speaking to Jesus, working for Jesus, loving Jesus, and looking for Jesus to come again. The person who is a true believer knows Christ as His personal Friend. He that knows nothing of Christ as his own Priest, Physician, and Redeemer is not a believer and cannot call himself a Christian.

Reader, I place these seven signs of a believer before you, and I ask you to consider them well. These are the signs that a person should look for in himself when he examines himself.

Where the seven signs, of which I have just been speaking, are missing completely, then the person is not a believer. He may be called a Christian. He may have been baptized with Christian baptism, and be a member of a Christian church. But if he knows nothing of peace with God, conversion of heart, newness of life, victory over the world, then he is not a believer. He is still dead in trespasses and sins. Unless he is born again, he will spend eternity in hell.

But the person who has these seven signs in him is a true believer. He may be poor and needy in this world, but he is rich in the sight of God. He may be despised and rejected by man, but he is honourable in the sight of the King of kings. He is travelling towards heaven. He has a mansion ready for him in the Father's house. He is cared for by Christ, while on earth. He will be owned by Christ before assembled worlds, in the life which is to come.

"According to the New Testament, holiness is essential to our salvation. God planned to save his people through faith and holiness. The two cannot be separated; the latter being the proof of the former. "But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). Peter tells us that we were chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ..." (1 Peter 1:2). Having God's very nature within us we cannot but "escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 1:4). God is preparing us, as members of his true church, to be presented to his Son as a bride is presented to her husband – radiant and without stain or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:26,27).

Frank Alred, The Eclipse of the Gospel.

Losing Sight of the Kingdom of God –

A Study in Haggai 1:1-11

This article is an exposition of Haggai 1:1-11. Please make sure you read this passage first before reading this article.

In this passage, we find the first of four messages that God gave to the people of Israel through the prophet Haggai. The people of Israel had returned to their own land after spending 70 years in exile in Babylon. When they returned to Jerusalem, the temple was in ruins, having been destroyed by the Babylonians. The people started the work of re-building the temple, but then got discouraged after they faced much opposition from the enemies of God. For about 16 years, the temple lay unfinished while the people lived in nice houses. In this sermon, God speaks to the leader of the Jewish people, Zerubbabel, through the prophet Haggai.

It is quite clear that the people of God had got their priorities wrong. Instead of working for the glory of God and for the Kingdom of God, they had begun to chase after the world and the things of this world. The pleasures of the world tempted them and they lost direction in their lives.

1. The People's excuses (v. 2).

For about 16 years no work had been done, and the temple was half finished. Everytime the people of Israel were challenged about this, they would say, "The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built." It seems the people were saying, "We know it is our duty to build the temple of the Lord, and one day we will definitely do it; but this is not the right time." Perhaps they had reasons for making this excuse: "We do not have the money yet; the enemies of God are still there, wait till they have gone; we don't have the skilled labour we need," and so on.

It is a tragic thing when the people of God make excuses for not being zealous for the work of the kingdom. There are many saved people in our country today whose heart is not fully for the kingdom of God but for other things. There are people who say, "I haven't had proper training yet, I can't serve the Lord just yet. Once I have received proper training, then I will begin to serve the Lord properly." There are others who say, "I have a really busy job that takes many hours in the day and tires me out completely. I can't work for the kingdom yet. When I have made enough money, then I will give myself to the work of the kingdom." These excuses are vain. Jesus said, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well" (Matt. 6:33). The time to serve God and His kingdom wholeheartedly is not some time in the future, it is now.

2. God's Complaint (vs. 3-4).

God says to the people of Israel, "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses while this house remains a ruin?" Here we see the real reason why the temple of the Lord had been neglected. It is not because of the enemies of God or because the time was not yet right. It was simply because the people of Israel cared more for their own comfort and

their own possessions than they did for the kingdom of God. They wanted wealth and comfort and possessions for themselves and so they set about acquiring these and in the process they forgot about the house of God.

This, of course, is something that we are all in danger of doing. The world with its pleasures and possessions and comforts is a constant draw for God's people. The devil displays the things of this world, education and possessions and comfort, in front of us. He reminds us that it is not a sin to seek education or to possess the things of this world. He knows that there is a great danger that our hearts will be drawn away from seeking after the kingdom of God and we will begin to pursue these things instead.

3. God's Judgement (vs. 5-6; 9-11).

Because the people's hearts were not fully devoted to God, God brought judgement upon them. The judgement was in two forms.

(i) There were times when there was drought in the land (vs. 9-11). It is God who gives rain (Matt. 5:44-45), and it is God who withholds the rain (Deut. 28:24). And so there were some years in Israel when there was no rain: "Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops" (v. 10).

(ii) The people got no satisfaction from their possessions (vs. 5-6). Even in the years when there was not a drought and the people were able to harvest, they did not get satisfaction from the possessions: "You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it" (v. 6). This is a great reminder that the pleasures and possessions of this world will never bring us deep satisfaction and joy. The only time we will be able to enjoy the world and its possessions is when we have peace with God. As long as there is no peace in our hearts, all our possessions will never bring us any joy. "Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred" (Prov. 15:17).

4. God's Command (vs. 7-8).

God places a very simple and direct command to the people: "Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured." The commands of God are not so complicated that we cannot understand them, they are simple: we are to use our gifts to work in His kingdom and to build His kingdom. We are to preach the gospel to the whole world and make disciples of all nations. This is the work God has given us to do, this is the work we are to do whole-heartedly. This means we must know the message of the gospel clearly.

The book of Haggai in this passage tells us that the people of God sometimes forget about the kingdom of God and instead get taken up with the pleasures and possessions of the world. This is a great danger that we all face. Let us be alert and prayerful so that we are not deceived by the world. Let us make sure that the kingdom of God is always our priority.

The Prayer of David

This article is an exposition of 2 Samuel 7:18-29. Please make sure you read this passage first before reading this article.

In this passage we read of the prayer that David offered to God after God gave to David some very great and precious promises (2 Sam. 7:11-16). In response to these promises of God, David offers up this prayer. It is a prayer that contains many vital lessons for us as God's people today. We have been commanded by God to pray. But how should we pray? What should be our attitude when we come before Him in prayer? These are things we learn in this passage.

1. David prayed with humility.

Remember that David was a very great king in Israel. Under him the nation of Israel had great military and economic success. David was respected and honoured by all the nations that surrounded Israel and he was held in great regard by his own people. He was a mighty ruler in his land.

And yet when David comes before the Lord in prayer he does not behave as a great king but as a humble servant who is totally dependent upon God. He says, "Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?" (v. 18). David does not begin his prayer by telling God that he is a great and a successful king and a highly spiritual man. Rather he acknowledges that he and his family are as nothing before the great and almighty God who rules the heavens and the earth.

This is a lesson we need to learn from David. The Bible says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). The Lord Jesus told a parable in which a proud Pharisee prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers...I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." Jesus said that this man was not accepted in the sight of God. Instead, it was the man who prayed, "God have mercy on me, a sinner" who was accepted (Luke 18:9-14). If we want to be accepted by God then we must be humble. If we want our prayers to be acceptable in the sight of God then like David we must pray with humility.

2. David prayed with adoration and praise.

David said in his prayer, "How great you are, O Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears" (v. 22). Notice carefully why David offers adoration and praise to God: it is because of who God is. David here is thinking of the character of God and is filled with praise and thanksgiving because of who God is.

Notice carefully what David says about God. He recognises that God is great: "How great you are." Furthermore, David recognises the sovereignty of God: "How great you are, O Sovereign Lord!" He knows that the God whom we worship is over all things and rules all things: He is great and He is sovereign. This is why David goes on to say, "There is no one like you, and there is no God but you." He knows that there is only one true living God, the creator of heaven and earth, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why he comes to prayer with a humble heart: he recognises the greatness and the sovereignty of God.

The character of God needs to be foremost in our minds when we pray, because we need to remember to whom we are praying. It is the character of God that shapes the style and content of our prayers. If we keep in mind that the God to whom we are praying is great and

sovereign and the one who controls and rules all things then we will come before Him in humility and bring praise and adoration to Him, just as David did. Do you?

3. David prayed in agreement with God's will.

When we read this chapter, 2 Samuel chapter 7, we find that it had been David's intention to build a house for the Lord in the city of Jerusalem. He said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent" (1 Sam. 7:2). It is quite clear that his intention was to build a glorious temple to the glory of God in the city of Jerusalem. But that night God appeared to Nathan and sent him to David to say, "When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my name" (1 Sam. 7:12-13).

It was David's desire to build a house for the Lord, but it was God's will that that honour should go to Solomon his son. In his prayer, we find that David does not argue with God and does not try to push his will. He has received revelation from God through the prophet Nathan and he prays in accordance with this revelation. He says, "And now, Lord God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised, so that your name will be great forever" (vs. 25-26).

David understands and accepts the will of God and prays in accordance with God's will. His prayer is directed not by what he wants but what God has planned. It is God's will that shapes his requests, not his own desires. It is a prayer of humble submission.

Application for God's people today

David's prayer in this passage is an important prayer for us to study and meditate upon. We are commanded by God to pray and we need to learn from His word how we are to pray.

1. In the first place, let us keep in mind whenever we come to the Lord in prayer that He is the great and Sovereign God who rules the whole of creation. Let us therefore come before Him with a humble and submissive heart, ready to accept His will. Let us make sure that we do not come before God with our own desires, and with the attitude that we are going to get God to agree to our desires.

2. In the second place, let us make sure that when we come before God in prayer, we do not come with a grumbling and unsubmitive heart. There are many times when what we desire is not in the will of God. David wanted to build a temple for the glory of God. That was the desire of his heart. But it was not God's will that he should build that temple, God's plan was that the honour of building the temple should go to Solomon. Now when we read David's prayer we do not read anywhere that he complained or grumbled or refused to submit to the will of God. Rather, David accepts the will of God with a glad and a joyful and a submissive heart. Let us make sure we follow his example in this.

3. In the third place, let us make sure that God's revealed will shapes and directs our prayer life. David listened carefully to what Nathan had to say from the Lord and then he prayed in accordance to the will of God. The will of God and the promises of God as revealed to him by Nathan shaped his prayer. Let us make sure that we read and study the Bible diligently so that we are always conscious of the will of God and the promises of God so that they will

shape and direct our prayer lives. Let us not pray as the pagans do who have no knowledge of God and His will. Let us remember that in the Bible God has revealed clearly His will for us. Let us make sure it is the Scripture that directs us in our prayer life.

The Pastor must make sure that

he himself is a saved man

“Therefore look after yourselves, and all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

If you are a pastor make sure that you look after your own spiritual condition. Make sure that you are truly saved yourself. Take care that while you are preaching Christ to others you yourself are not without Christ. A glorious reward is promised to faithful preachers of the gospel, but you will never enjoy that reward unless you receive the gospel yourself. There are many preachers in hell today who preached about hell to their congregations when they were on earth. Do not think that simply because you are a pastor God will allow you into heaven. God has never promised to allow a man into heaven simply because that man was a preacher, no matter how gifted he was. If you want to enter heaven you yourself must be converted.

To be an unsaved person is a terrible thing, but to be an unsaved preacher is much worse. Every time you open the Bible and read it, you are reading about your own eternal judgement. Every time you preach the gospel you are increasing your own guilt because you are rejecting the very Saviour whom you are preaching.

And yet usually an unsaved preacher is unaware of his true condition. Every day he reads the Bible where precious truths are found. He lives an outwardly holy life in the eyes of the world. He preaches against sin and encourages others to be holy. And yet all the time he himself is unsaved and going to hell. He is like a man who is starving to death and yet he has bread in his hands and is giving it to others.

If this is true of you, then take my advice: preach to yourself before you preach to others. Do not be like those who will say on the Day of Judgement, “Lord, Lord, did we not preach in your name?” If you are not saved, you will hear the words, “I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers!” (Matt. 7:21-23). I advise you to confess your sin to your congregation and ask them to pray for their pastor’s conversion!

It is not a strange thing to find a pastor who is not saved. Your preaching will be cold and lifeless if Christ is not in your heart. I wish that everyone who is studying theology would understand this. What is the point of study if it does not lead to a knowledge of God and his saving grace? If God saves those who are studying theology then they will have knowledge that they never dreamed of before. You cannot know anything correctly until you know God. You cannot know anything in the whole of creation until you see things through the perspective of God Himself.

When God made man he was perfect and lived in a perfect world. Everything revealed the glory of God. If man had not sinned, he would have increased in the knowledge of God and

of himself. But, when he sought knowledge for himself, he lost the true knowledge of God and his creation. Instead, the knowledge he gained was vain and empty

Christ's work is to restore us, by faith, to the purity, obedience and love in which man was first created. Therefore, the most holy men are the best students of creation. The study of science is worthless if we do not seek God in it. To see and adore, to love and delight in God as revealed in his creation is the only true wisdom. It is therefore a danger in education to place other subjects before the study of God. Theology should come first and guide us in all our studies. Nature should be read as one of God's books which he made to reveal himself. The books of Job and Psalms teach us that science and theology are related to each other.

I therefore urge all Christian teachers to tell their pupils about God and his salvation alongside the sciences. Do not think they are too young to understand the Word of God. You do not know what lasting impressions your words may make. You are privileged because young people are willing to listen to you. Do not treat Christianity as just any other subject. Teach them the Bible so that they will be godly students.

Christ has set God's people free

from the power of sin.

“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

These are the words of Christ the Son of God to those Jews who had believed in Him. He spoke the words to them because they thought since they were Abraham's descendants, that this gave them the right to be called children of God (John 8:33). Jesus in His reply to them points out to them that although they are Abraham's descendants, they are big sinners. “I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word” (John 8:37).

We learn three things from John 8:36.

1. Those whom the Son has set free were at one time slaves.

Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). This is a truth which the Bible states clearly: “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures” (Titus 3:3). Every one of us has been born a sinner and a slave of sin and the devil. Because we were sinners, we were cut off from God, without hope and without God.

We were not just sinners, but slaves, enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures which are found in the world. Every born again Christian was in this state before he became a Christian. He or she was a slave of sin and the devil. There is nothing in us that God saw that moved Him to save us. We were His enemies and our destiny was hell fire.

But thanks be to God because He has freed us from the power of sin and the devil through Christ Jesus. Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mathew 9:13). Jesus makes it clear from these words that He came to free sinners from slavery to sin. Jesus Christ died on the cross at Calvary to free sinners and He rose again to seal their freedom to worship the living God.

Those who are not saved, are still under the slavery of sin and the devil. They cannot do anything to please God; they are without hope and without God in the world; and when they die they will be thrown into hell for eternity.

You who are not saved, you will never find peace and freedom until Christ Jesus frees you from the slavery of sin. Come to Him today for He is ready to free you and guarantee you a place in heaven.

2. It is only the Son who has the power to set sinners free from the slavery of Sin

Jesus said, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36), and He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Paul says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). This is the message of the Bible and the foundation of all truth that man has been given by God. Jesus Christ came from heaven with one purpose: to save sinners. The power to save is in Christ Jesus alone and in no-one else.

All the faithful men and women of God were saved through Christ alone. At the baptism of Christ, a voice was heard from heaven saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased" (Mathew 3:17). The same voice heard saying, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him" (Mark 9:7). What God the Father was saying is that, no-one else can save man from the power of sin except Christ Jesus alone.

Many have trusted in other people and many have looked for salvation in other things and have used other means, thinking that these can save them. All of them can confess that in vain have they tried. Many have died trying and they have ended up in hell. There is one way to receive forgiveness of our sins and to be redeemed from slavery to sin and that is through Christ Jesus alone. Do not waste time trying other ways, come to Jesus Christ, for He has the power to save you and it is with Him alone and no-one else.

For us all who have trusted in Christ alone for our salvation, let us rejoice and continue rejoicing for what God has done for us in Christ. Let us give ourselves whole heartedly to the service of God at all times and in all circumstances. Rejoice brethren!

3. Because the Son has set us free, no one can enslave us again: forever we are free in the Son

Jesus said, "You will be free indeed" (John 8:36). Because the Son of God has died and rose again the chains of slavery have been broken: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you" (Isaiah 60:1). Jesus has now brought all those who are saved into the kingdom of God and no one can snatch them from Him, they are safe in His hands.

All the sons and daughters of God are free in Christ and they can serve Him with confidence because they have been set free eternally from slavery to sin. There are many who refuse to accept that once saved by Christ, forever saved in Christ. They hold a view that a man or woman saved by Christ can one day lose His salvation and end up in hell. This is not true because if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. The Bible does not say you will be free for part of your life only. Our salvation has been secured by the Son of God and there is no day we will ever lose it. Jesus Christ said, "I shall lose none of all that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day" (John 6:39).

What a joy for the saved people of God and great sadness for those who are not saved. If you are not saved, you are still under the judgment of God, you have no hope, no God and no life in Christ. Your life is in danger because you are not in Christ. You are not free, you are still a slave bound in chains and about to be thrown in hell. You have only one hope left for you, and that is Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Come to Christ now for He is ready to receive you and save you too.

What is Godliness?

What is godliness? What does it mean to be godly? The answer is this: godliness is a work that God does in the heart of a man so that the man is no longer a sinful and a worldly man but he is now a spiritual person. It is the work of God in which he makes a person alive and spiritual, so that that person no longer cares for the things of this world, but begins to care very deeply for the things of God and the things of heaven. There are seven important things about godliness we need to know.

1. Godliness is founded upon the truth of God. True godliness is not some feelings in the heart that come and then go. True godliness is the way of truth (Ps. 119:30). It is something that comes from God and is not feelings generated in the heart of man.
2. Godliness is something that is deep in the heart of man (Rom. 2:29). There are people who on the outside appear very godly, but actually their hearts are hearts of sin. They are not truly godly, they are just making a show. But the person who is truly godly has the life of God deep in his heart. He does not live a godly life just as a show for other people, he lives a godly life because he has true godliness in his heart.
3. Godliness is the work of God, not the work of man. When we are born into this world, we are born sinners. The Bible says that sinful passions are at work in our bodies right from the time we are born, leading us into sin (Rom. 7:5). But godliness is something that comes from God (James 3:17), it is not something that is found in the heart of the natural man. Natural man has no godliness or godly desires in him. Godliness is a lamp in the heart of man that God lights, it is a something that God plants in our hearts when we are saved; it is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Without this work of God in his heart, a man can never be truly godly, no matter how hard he tries.
4. Godliness is something that is found in every part of man. Paul wrote, "Now may the God of peace sanctify you completely" (1 Thess. 5:23). The godly man understands the things of God with his mind; he loves the things of God with his heart; he desires to follow the ways of God with his will; and he lives a life that is pleasing to God. He is a new man (Col. 3:10). It is not the case that just some parts of him are new; it is the case that every part of him is new: he has been renewed thoroughly (2 Cor. 5:17).
5. Godliness is an active thing in the heart. It is the work of God in the heart which is seen in the life of the person. He does not just talk about holiness, he lives a holy life.
6. Godliness is a beautiful thing. It is like a precious stone: it is attractive. The person who has true godliness in his heart is like an angel here on earth: he reflects the glory of God.

7. Godliness is an eternal thing. It is planted in the heart of a man and it changes that man's character completely so that he becomes more and more godly. Once a person is saved, he will never lose his salvation: the tree of godliness has been planted in him and it cannot be removed.

Exposition of Philippians 1:3-11

There are three things in this passage: Paul's teaching on Christian fellowship, Paul's teaching on Christian assurance and Paul's prayer for the Church in Philippi.

In verses 3 and 4 Paul says he thanks the Lord for the fellowship he has been having with the Church in Philippi. He is saying the church has been in partnership with him in the gospel. We will see here what kind of fellowship Paul had with the Church in Philippi and see what it involved.

1. This fellowship was about love for one another.

Paul says "I have you in my heart" (verse 7). In verse 8 Paul adds, "God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus." These verses show us the kind of love that existed between Paul and this Church. We see here that Paul had these Christians in his heart and he remembered them always. He remembered them not only when he heard reports about how the church was doing, but everyday. They were part of him and they were in his heart. Paul's love shows us what real love for Christians means. If there is no love among Christians then there is no fellowship. To love a person is to do what is good for him and to share what is best with him. To love a person is to do for that person whatever benefits him first before seeking your own interests. It is a sacrificial love, meaning you first think about your brother even before thinking about yourself. In the gospel of John, Jesus has shown us the great example of this kind of love. He says, "Greater love has no-one than this that he lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). This is the kind of love that every church should exercise. Each Church member should seek to serve others first.

2. This fellowship was about praying for one another.

Paul says he remembers the Christians in Philippi and prays for them. Praying for other Christians is an expression of Christian fellowship. If we say we are in fellowship with one another, then we should pray for the needs of one another. Also a local church should pray for other local churches with whom they are in fellowship.

3. This fellowship was about brethren supporting one another.

Paul says he prays with joy for the partnership that he has with the Church of Philippi in the gospel. On top of praying for one another, the Church in Philippi sent gifts to Paul. This shows us that when we share our resources with our brethren, we encourage them in the Lord.

In verse 6 Paul talks about assurance of our salvation. He says, "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." What we learn from here is that the person who is saved, his eternal destiny is secure. Paul is saying to the Philippians he is sure they will not give up their faith in Jesus even when troubles come. This is because it is God himself who has begun this work of salvation in them. He says, "He who has begun a good work in you will carry it on to completion." Again

this is another reminder that salvation is the work of God. A person is not saved by making a decision to receive Christ. Salvation does not depend on man's actions. It is God who works in the heart of a sinner and convicts him of his sins and brings him to salvation. Ephesians 1:4 says, God "Chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." This means that God purposed whom to save before the foundation of the world, and Paul tells the Philippians that they can be sure they will be with the Lord in heaven after life in this world. We should know that God cannot be frustrated by anything and all that He has purposed will come to pass.

Again Paul tells the Philippians that God will complete the work he has started in them. Salvation is a great work, it involves God giving life to a person who is dead in sin, convicting him about his sin, granting him repentance and faith in Jesus and justifying him and then starting a process of making him more and more holy. This process of making a person to be like Christ is a life time work. The Lord God will continue to do this work in the hearts of all who are saved until the time they leave this world either when they die or when Jesus comes. God will continue this until a Christian is fit to enter heaven.

Paul's prayer for the Philippians (verses 9-11).

There are two things that Paul prays for this Church in his letter.

(i) Love. Paul says, "This is my prayer that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight." The Philippian church was a church whose members loved one another, so Paul is instructing them to love one another more and more. Paul prays that their love for one another should be in the knowledge of the word of God so that members may discern what is the best thing to do for each other and in each situation.

(ii) Holy lives. In verses 10 and 11 Paul says "So that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God." The mark of a true Christian is holiness. The Bible says that God chose us before the foundation of the world so that we may be holy and blameless" (Ephesians 1:4). Jesus himself said, "Blessed are pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8). And in the book of Hebrews we read, "without holiness no one shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). If anybody says that he is saved and yet lives a sinful life, then his profession of faith is not real. He is not a Christian because the greatest mark of a Christian is not evident in him.