



*the  
Golden  
Candlestick*

**THE CROSS OF OUR LORD  
JESUS CHRIST**

**Part 3**

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## A LIFE OF FAITH

As we were seeing in our previous meditation, the letter to the Galatians brings the cross into view in relation to spiritual life and liberty in the Holy Spirit. We first of all saw that it makes it clear that believers come into their place as the children of God on the basis of life only, and that the essence of life is revelation by the Holy Spirit into the heart, revelation of Jesus Christ. Then we went on to see that the letter shows clearly that Satan always attacks life by legalism, trying to change living revelation into a system of truth to be legally imposed, a whole system of thou shalt and thou shalt not, instead of the glorious liberty and life of the Spirit where it is unnecessary to say to anybody, 'Thou shalt', or 'Thou shalt not.'

Now there is one final fragment of this which we are going to look at for a little while, and it is as the third resultant issue of this letter. Never at any time or at any point in our Christian lives, however advanced we may become, do we escape or move away from the basis of faith. That is what this letter makes perfectly clear. It is a thing, of course, which, in a certain sense, is obvious, and which we know, and yet somehow or other most of our troubles, most of our difficulties, most of our inward spiritual sufferings are upon that very fact. We do so persistently hold on to the hope, expectation or belief that there ought to come a time when we have got away from the basis of faith and are living in actual present living experience of it all, and there is no more need for faith. Now, I hope it will not in any way disconcert, disconsole, disturb or upset you when we say with real emphasis that if we were to live here to the age of the oldest man in the Bible and were to walk with God right to the end, we should find that, rather than that we were getting away from the basis of faith, we were coming more and more to the position where it is a walk of faith in very truth. I think, in the early experiences and stages of the Christian life, we are further away from the faith than we are in later stages. We get gloriously saved, and come to know the Lord and for a little while there is not very much faith about it. It is almost seeing, it is all in the realm of present, conscious, blessed enjoyment, and then that passes and we think everything has gone wrong. That is the normal Christian life and the further we go the more it will be a matter of faith.

Let us get perfectly clear upon this truth, open our hearts to it. What the apostle is saying in this letter is this very thing. In Galatians 2:20, one of the most familiar passages of Scripture, he says it: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me."

In Galatians 3:11 he quotes from the prophet Habakkuk: "The righteous shall live by faith."

Now I want you to recognize this, which perhaps is almost too simple to point out. In both passages, in Galatians 2:20 and 3:11, the apostle is not only referring to our coming into life initially, that is justification by faith. He is saying, That is true, but I live *all my life* by faith. When I am justified or am righteous through faith, then I still have to live on by faith, for not only justification, but also sanctification, growth and conformity to the image of God's Son. All these are a matter of faith, and faith is faith.

And to prove it, you have only to look again at this letter. They came into the experience of justification, the joy of salvation, through faith. They came to know the Lord Jesus through faith. They entered into their blessed life, which the apostle indicates was a very real thing with them, through faith. Then these Judaisers came along who were bent upon destroying the work of the apostle Paul wherever he went, and they brought in again the arguments about the law. These Galatians were turned aside, led back from this position of faith and this threw the apostle into terrible travail and he cried, "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be fully formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). Do you see the implication of that? It is just this, not only the first initial part of the Christian life, but the full formation is a matter of faith. If after having come to the Lord and to enjoyment of the Lord through faith, you stop going on on the basis of faith, the full formation of Christ within is arrested, you come to a spiritual standstill, or Christ comes to a spiritual standstill in you. Christ can only grow, be fully formed, as you go on in faith, so that full formation is just as much a matter of faith as is justification, the initial blessing of the Christian life. Paul says, I live in the flesh by faith, and, as I said, faith is faith. Faith is not works; faith is faith.

No one can come to the letter to the Galatians without having Martin Luther somewhere on his horizon, for it was his letter, and, although it is so hackneyed, I am going to use again the old illustration from his life for our purpose here. You remember he was an honest, true-hearted, sincere man, who was really groping for God and groping in the deep shades of the Roman system of salvation by works, and then one day he went to Rome and in quest of some high special unction, he undertook a severe penance and started to climb a long high flight of stone steps on hands and knees, and at each step made some ejaculation, believing that when he reached the top of those steps, he would have attained the spiritual attainment that he was after, the blessedness of peace of heart, the blessedness of inward rest, satisfaction and assurance, but as he got to a certain point in his climb, it was as though he heard a voice and the voice said, 'The just shall live by faith!' Well, that did it. Three hundred years hung upon that text, three hundred years of blessed emancipation for multitudes through the Reformation. That was an end of penance, an end of works, but I take that as an illustration.

It seems to me that even many Christians are on the stone steps and those stone steps are doctrines, blessed truths in the word of God, the great blessings for the people of God, and many Christians are striving with all their might to attain unto some spiritual position by climbing up a presented system of doctrine, climbing up on hands and knees on this and that and the other truth, and oh, they

are working at it so hard! If only I can master this truth, if only I can master this principle of the spiritual life, if only I can get really on top of this particular thing, then I shall find rest! — when in fact faith will put you at the top of the flight of steps at once. And then, through faith, the Holy Spirit Whose work it is and not ours will begin the other work and carry the other work on. Do remember that the Holy Spirit will not touch a situation until you have exercised final faith, faith that reaches the top and He will not touch you; He will leave you alone. You can wrestle on the steps, you can strive with your Christian truth and teaching, but He will not touch you. How many children of God are simply tearing themselves to pieces to get the experience? The Lord does not come in at all to give the experience, the Lord is requiring first of all an exercise of appropriating faith, the faith which believes, which lays hold of God's fact as to what we are in Christ, and then the Holy Spirit will begin to make that good, but never until we have recognized that the whole thing is finally accomplished and settled and perfected in the Lord Jesus, and, so far as we are concerned, it is all ours as a fully accomplished gift and by faith we stand on that ground. The Holy Spirit will do the rest and you can trust Him to do it, but do be careful, when He begins to do it, to make it good inwardly, that you do not allow the devil to come along and say, This trial you are having, this suffering, adversity, is all because God is against you! Satan wants to bring you under condemnation but the Holy Spirit is only bringing you to the position that your faith has apprehended. Your faith has got to hold on and say,

‘Work on then, Lord, till on my soul Eternal light shall break.

And in Thy likeness perfected I satisfied shall wake’

(from ‘My Saviour, Thou hast Offered Rest’ by Evan H. Hopkins, ed.).

Whatever the Lord does in us never for one moment suggests that He is against us, although His work in us is difficult for us to bear and trying and causing suffering. Always remember always that Satan will encamp upon that and try to give to the very work of God a complication which is satanic and not divine.

You remember the illustration, the three men on the wall, ‘Fact’, ‘Faith’, and ‘Experience’, walking along behind each other on this high wall and while Faith kept his eyes on Fact they got on splendidly and while Experience kept his eyes on Faith, they went on fine, but at a certain point, Faith thought he would have a look behind to see how Experience was going on and he lost his balance, went over and pulled Experience with him. That is what we are doing all the time. There is God's fact. The eyes of faith have got to be kept on God's fact and to go on. Experience comes after faith has fastened upon God's fact. If you and I become taken up with our experience and not with God's fact — how we are feeling today, how it seems today, looks today, just what the complexion of things is inwardly today, we will go down over the wall and experience goes down with us. No, God's fact, that is the way of life, it is the only way of life, and it is the only way of liberty, and this is not something being said to you out of a book only, it is being said out of experience. It was said out of Paul's experience, and he was seeking to make it perfectly clear to those Galatians that it is no use going to the outward things of the law to try and find perfection; having commenced

the spiritual life in faith, they must go on in faith, and that is the only way of life and liberty. They are going to be brought into terrible bondage if they do not do this, and we could say from our experience, many of us, that this has been our battleground, the real centre of our greatest conflicts. If we have at any time been occupied with how we were feeling spiritually, how things were going on in us spiritually, what the situation was spiritually, ah, well, faith has gone down. We have lost our assurance, our confidence, our position. And it is just as bad for us to take account of our good times and begin to make a lot of them. Things are feeling all right today, it is sunshine, clear sky, everything is beautiful, our fellowship with the Lord is good today! — and we begin to bank on that. Oh, have we not learnt that it is not, long before Satan is on the scene, and he is going to smash that for us by tripping us up somehow because we are hanging on to an experience and making experience everything and if he can smash experience he has got us. It is not holding on to experience, it is holding on to Christ.

In this little letter to the Galatians, Christ is mentioned some forty-two or three times and the extraordinary thing is that, unlike the other letters, thirty-nine of the forty-two or forty-three times mentions of Christ are the personal name of Christ, not ‘the Christ’. Elsewhere it is so often ‘the Christ’ which is Christ corporate, but here it is only two or three times ‘the Christ’, but thirty-nine times ‘Christ’. You see what that means. It is the overwhelming weight of this argument. Look here, you Christians, Galatians, Christ is God’s fact, not your feelings, nor what you do. Christ is the fact to be held on to, on Whom to keep your eyes fixed; if you do, the experience will follow alright! In any case, you will go on, you will not fall off the wall! Let us be careful that neither on the one side nor the other are we occupied with experience, whether it is good or bad, but with Christ.

And what is a real mark of spiritual strength, spiritual growth? It is this, when you come to someone and say, Well, how are you feeling? And they reply, I am having an awfully bad time, but it is alright, the Lord is the same; it does not matter very much how I am feeling, that is not the thing that counts, it is the Lord! The Lord is alright! If you find a person, a believer, who is anchored like that so that, no matter how bad a time it may be, in spirit, soul or body or all three combined, they say, it is alright, the Lord ... , you have someone who has got the secret, you have someone who is growing, and you have someone who is going to be a help. When I look back over my life and I see the people who have helped me most, they have been those who have had everything to give them a bad time within and without but they have taken this certain position: It is alright, the Lord does not change; He is faithful, it is the Lord! That is strength and that is helpfulness. You know how to the contrary it is true. A person who today is swayed by the bad time, tomorrow by the good time, and you never know whether you are going to find them in a good or bad time, is no good to you, and no help to anybody.

Oh yes, the secret — The righteous shall live, keep on living, by faith. “That life which I now live in the flesh”. What sort of life did Paul live in the flesh? You turn back to 2 Corinthians 11 and see. We are pursued, persecuted, cast down! —

a whole catalogue of his sufferings and afflictions, shipwrecks, privation, treacheries, everything. That is the sort of life he lived in the flesh — false brethren, oh, everything that a man could know. But “this life which I live in the flesh, I live by faith”, not faith in myself, not faith in my experience, not faith in anything, but faith “which is in the Son of God”, Jesus Christ the anchor ground of faith.

I am inclined to stop there now. There is no virtue in heaping words on. The thing is to come to the point. The Lord has got to have triumphant children, triumphant believers. He has got to have those upon whom He can count. His people must be in life, in liberty, they must be all the time going on, not constantly coming to a standstill. “The righteous shall hold on his way” (Job 17:9). Why? Because the righteous shall live by faith. We will never hold on our way if we do not live by faith. Anything that comes up will stop us going on if we are not living by faith, so we just have to come to the real point. Are you on the steps? What kind of steps are you on by which you are trying to climb up to something, to a certain position where you will be satisfied? You can go on climbing as long as you like, and you will never reach the top, the goal of satisfaction. Faith will put you there and then the Lord will do the other things. Remember that experience follows faith, but faith must never make experience its ground. Faith must follow God’s fact and God’s fact is the Lord Jesus Christ. I am quite sure you are not going to forget the three men on the wall. Please bear them in mind. It may be very nice today and tomorrow, but the next time you are having a bad time, and Satan is lurking about insinuating, and he makes out a very clever case, you cannot answer his case in arguments, you have got to answer Satan’s argument always with a Person — Jesus Christ. ‘On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand: all other ground is sinking sand’ (Edward Mote, ed.).

Well now, this is very brief, but I believe it is to the point, and I do trust it will be used by the Lord to clear up some difficulties and get us on our feet and keep us going. “The just shall live by faith.” “That life which I now live (every moment) ... I live by (or “in”, ASV) faith, faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me.”

## THE CROSS AND THE HEAVENLY POSITION OF THE CHURCH

*Reading: Eph. 1:19-2:6, 14-16.*

We now come to the fifth of the unveilings of the cross in the New Testament letters, which is in the letter to the Ephesians. Here the special connection of the cross is with the heavenly position of the church. We will not stay to read the several passages which contain that term, 'the heavenlies'. You know quite well that, in this letter, it is the governing term or phrase and occurs twice in chapter 1, in chapter 2 and chapter 3 and chapter 6, so, by what we have just read, we see that the cross is the instrument by which the church, the members of Christ's Body together, are brought to a heavenly position now. I always find it very difficult to convey a really helpful practical explanation of this term, this phrase — 'In the heavenlies', and I have been very much asking the Lord for enablement to do that to some profit, convinced as I am of the tremendous importance of this matter, and I believe that we shall see afresh, perhaps more than ever, how important this heavenly position is for the Lord's people now, and it is a very happy thing that we are in a position to set this forth practically and spiritually.

### **A practical demonstration**

We are tremendously helped by this very conference to the understanding of the meaning of 'in the heavenlies' both from the practical and the spiritual or doctrinal standpoint. As to the practical, why, here it is! Whoever would have believed that gatherings like this would have gone on for days at a time like this? When we contemplated having a conference this year, it gave us some very real heart-searching, and those of you who received the announcement will have seen with what trepidation we sent it out and how we felt the necessity of putting great responsibility upon everyone who came in a day like this, a day in the full tide of a great war which is steadily spreading itself over all the world, a day when destruction and wreckage and death are all around us and ever coming very near to us, a day when we might well have thought that such a time as this, four whole days full of meetings, would be utterly impossible. And here we are, in the closing meeting, and what does that say and what does that mean? Surely it does declare in a very pointed and powerful way that if God wants something done, He can suspend anything and everything to get it done, and if He has a people who are in fellowship with Him concerning heavenly things, then let the nations go to war, He can give a space which is not as on the earth at all, not in the world, not involved in all that, but outside, apart, in perfect quietness, to get on with things as though there were no war at all. If that is not being in the heavenlies, what is? If that is not the rule of the heavens, what is? And it says to us that it is possible,

and not only possible, but it can be and should be the blessed experience of the church, of the people of God, to see and to know that earthly things, whatever they may be, however they may be, are not the criterion argument, need not of necessity govern our procedure. We can be above them, we can be outside of them, we can in a very real sense be masters of them.

That is not just for conferences and meetings. That is something for us as having a position in the heavenlies in Christ, that we may know in our lives from day to day that circumstances being very bad, everything arguing that certain things are quite impossible, are nevertheless not necessarily to govern, to dictate our course, that we can know the impossible, from all human natural standpoints, as an accomplishment. That is being in the heavens, and it seems to me that the Lord is saying to us very much through this very time, this very means, Look here, don't allow earthly conditions to dictate. You keep in fellowship with Me and you will see we can go on whatever earthly conditions may be! I can suspend earthly conditions; I can govern circumstances! If I have things to do, you are not to surrender to the state of things that you find around you. Now, that is a very practical exposition of this term — 'in the heavenlies'! You can be right down here on the earth in the midst of a terrible war and all the means of destruction pressing on you, and yet not involved but taken up with heavenly things and going on with the things of God as though these things were not. It is a great lesson to us, I feel, and I am very happy to be in that position to expound the Word of God with a very practical setting. After what we have known round here, we might well have been wiped out long ago and many times; we might have been having it going on today or each night, meetings being impossible. Is it presumption to say that Almighty God has stepped into the world situation in order that Honor Oak might have a conference? The worldling would laugh at that, but is this not something of the meaning of being in the heavenlies in Christ, that is, that the heavenly things govern, and, when the Lord wants something done, though it may seem utterly foolish and impossible on this earth, we are not to accept that. We are rather to stand in the place which says, Well, so-and-so is the case, all these things really do exist and humanly it seems foolish, dangerous or impossible, but if the Lord wants it — all right, we go on not surrendering, but recognizing that we have One above and our union is with Him and He rules. That is heavenly union, heavenly position; that is throne life. Blessed be God for an example of it in this very day! That is the practical exposition of the Word.

### **A doctrinal exposition**

But then we also have in this very conference the spiritual exposition or, shall I say, the doctrinal. I was wondering how this term was going to be got over. I knew the Lord wanted it as a message, but there is my difficulty, just to really explain what it means to be in the heavenlies. It just came almost as though the Lord said, What have you been talking about? Put together all you have said, and you have got it! Well, what have we been saying?



First of all we were in the letter to the Romans, and we saw there that the great foundation of the cross is not anything that we have done, not anything that we are. Even before our faith is put into operation, God has done everything. “If God be for us ...”. And in that letter is the great revelation that, before ever we were for God, God was for us, and demonstrated to this poor sinful world that God is for it by giving His Son and in His Son perfecting the work of redemption and presenting something absolutely complete and final as an object for faith. That is all. It is not necessary to climb up to it, God has brought it down to us. And when faith has got focussed, settled, upon that, that God is for us, in spite of all that Satan, sin, self and the world say, in spite of every argument within and without, we have taken a big step towards a heavenly position on that very thing. Satan will fight to bring you down to earth again all the time. That is the first big step on this ladder to the heavenlies.

Then we went to 1 Corinthians. There we saw Christians, believers, very largely influenced by their own natural lives, temperaments, mentalities, bringing in their natural reasonings as to spiritual things, bringing in their own standpoints as to what power is, bringing in natural interests even to the realm of spiritual gifts, to use spiritual gifts for their own glory, the natural life working in believers. And the cross is revealed in 1 Corinthians as the instrument to set aside the natural life in believers, so that it is not ‘I’, it is Christ. It is not my natural life influencing or touching anything, but it is just the Lord Jesus Himself, and when you have got through the cross onto that ground, you have taken another big and higher step to the heavenlies.

And we went into 2 Corinthians, and there we saw God revealed in Christ within the heart in the power of the Holy Spirit resolving in spiritual fruitfulness, testimony and ministry. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ shining into the heart in the power of the Holy Spirit so that there is an outflow, an outshining of the Lord, the Lord very preciousy filling the heart by revelation of the Holy Spirit so that it is the Lord now, the Lord of whom we are speaking, the Lord in whom we are rejoicing, the Lord a great reality in our hearts, Christ in us. When you get there you are still nearer the heavenlies. It is climbing all the time. That is what it means to be in the heavenlies. You will not know anything about a heavenly life if these things are not there. If the Lord is not a growing reality in your heart, there is not much heavenliness about you. If your natural life is all the time dictating terms and causing you to act according to its standards, you have not much heavenliness. If you are not settled upon the great foundation of God for you, settled upon this — “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... Nay, ... I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Until you are there, there is not much heavenliness about you.

Then we went from 2 Corinthians into Galatians and there in Galatians we

were shown that a life in the Spirit is a life of liberty and we noted a life in the Spirit as differing from under law where everything in our religious or Christian life is a matter of obligations laid upon us. We must do this; if we do not do it, well, we get into trouble. We must not do that; if we do, there is a punishment for us. We must go to meetings. If we do not someone will talk about us and say things — all that kind of legalistic Christianity. That is one thing — not much heavenliness there. What a miserable time you have when you are there! You do have a miserable time when you say, I ought to go to the meeting, but I don't want to! What a wretched kind of life that is. In thousands of ways it is like that where our Christian life becomes a whole set of rules and regulations we have to live up to. It is an awful business. Well, Galatians — a life in the Spirit, where the Spirit is Lord, lifts us clean out of that. We are free from all that, and things are spontaneous and in life. That is heavenliness; that is being in the heavenlies.

And so you come to Ephesians next, and, as I said at the commencement, how grateful we are for the blessedness that Romans begins the course. Yes, you see Romans was not the first letter written by a long way. The first letter written by Paul comes almost at the end in the arrangement of the New Testament letters, and one written fairly well on is put at the beginning. Thank God for that. It would be a terrible thing to have to approach this matter of Romans through Ephesians. No, you get to Ephesians through Romans. Well, we thank God that Romans comes first, because God is for us, and then everything is possible after that. Corinthians is possible, Galatians is possible, even Ephesians is possible. It is significant that the letters have been divinely arranged in this order. Romans, "If God be for us ..." and the very next step, and it is not chronological at all, is 1 Corinthians, and until you have 1 Corinthians, the natural man dealt with by the cross, you cannot have 2 Corinthians, the Lord shining out because the Lord fills the heart. If the natural man fills us, the Lord cannot shine out very well. Get rid of him and then there is the outshining of Christ in testimony — the right order. Then Galatians; just again a step on. It is all progressive spiritually, and you find a life in the Spirit repudiating all that is merely traditional and legalistic, a walk in the liberty of the Spirit. That is the next thing.

And when you have got to the end of Galatians spiritually, you are in Ephesians, in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, and then you find that the one big thing with which Ephesians finishes up is the principalities and powers trying to pull you out of the heavenlies, trying to force you down to earth. The whole argument of Ephesians is, Recognize what your position is, the position to which you have been brought by the cross of the Lord Jesus and stay there; keep your position. Now, all this can resolve itself into a sort of Bible Reading, an analysis or summary of content of the Scripture, but let us at once stop and put that back. This is not a Bible Reading, this is not a summary or an analysis of Bible truth. This is a challenge — the tremendous importance and necessity that we really should be in the heavenlies because it is only there that God can realize His full purpose in us.

Well, then, if that is so necessary, we have got to get this Romans question settled. Are you quite sure that that is settled? Have you come to rest on God's

fact? “When we were without hope, Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). Have you come to rest on it? “God for us” — is that settled as far as anything can be settled? It will always be disputed, but are our feet on that rock?

Now, what about the next step? Have we really had definite dealings with the Lord over this natural life, in the realm of our reason, soul, likes and dislikes, (not only as to people — with them it was, I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas) but as to anything. Our likes, our dislikes, our preferences, our sympathies, our antipathies, are they governing at all? Is what springs from this well of our own natural life in any way dictating our course, governing or colouring our outlook? Well, God cannot get on with His full purpose which is a heavenly purpose until that has been dealt with. Have we had real dealings with the Lord about this, that there shall be an application of the cross right to the very centre of our natures? We may think it not too bad, fairly good, but it is nature. Have we really had dealings with the Lord as to the inwardness of His Son, for that is 2 Corinthians. You know the contrast is made there between Moses and Christ in the Holy Spirit. Moses read the law with a light on his face; it was outward, but now it is written in our heart by the Holy Spirit and the light is inward, the inwardness of Christ, and that may mean something more than you are awake to. Not once nor twice in our history have people who have been Christians for a long time suddenly one day wakened up to the fact that Christ was in them. I remember a young man who had been a Christian for a long time and I had known him very intimately, and we had had much fellowship and prayer together. After I had not seen him for some time, we met one day, and all aglow, he said, I have made a discovery and my discovery is summed up in these words, “Christ in you the hope of glory”. Christ, God’s Christ, in you! Why that is something wonderful to contemplate as a proposition, a doctrine and a truth, but do you remember Brother Nee when he was here telling us of the day when he came into the deliverance of Romans 6? He had been a Christian quite a long time, and those of us who know him know he was a very thoroughgoing Christian. He had served the Lord in a very thoroughgoing way, but one day the inner truth of Romans 6 broke on him and he ran downstairs to one of his colleagues in ministry, and said, Brother, I have made a discovery! I am dead! The brother looked at him — You are crazy! What do you mean, brother, you are dead? Brother, I am dead! Well, of course, he had to explain it. But he had just discovered that he was dead. That was the revelation of the deep secret which for him changed the course of his life, put him in a new position. He had had Romans 6 for a long time, a New Testament ever since he was born again, but now it was all different. Now, the cross is meant to work out like that. Have we had dealings on this matter of Christ inwardly the glory of God, the testimony for a fruitful life?

Well, we have got to face the practical question bound up with Galatians. What is Christianity and the Christian life to us? If the Lord should send an archangel to you straight from heaven to say to you by name, My dear So-and-so, from today you will be excused from being a Christian and from all that belongs to being a Christian; the Lord gives you your liberty and you need not worry

about it anymore? — would you be grateful, would you be relieved, would you say, That is fine! If you did, that means that you are in legal bondage. We have to get past that to where it is really delight in the Lord Himself, where the Lord in us is such as to make us feel we never want exemption, never want to be free, because it is not a matter of obligations, but a matter of life. Well, we have got to have practical dealings with the Lord on this.

Do any of these things touch you — Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians? When you have dealt with the Lord on these matters and seen that the cross of the Lord Jesus really does mean, in the purpose of God, a clearing up of all that, and does lead to deliverance in all these ways, then you come into Ephesians, you are in Ephesians. I do not believe there is an empty gap between Galatians and Ephesians. Some people think that you are down here at the foot of a terrific precipice when you are in Galatians, and up here at the top is Ephesians, and somehow you have got to get up to Ephesians. No, I believe if you take the steps, Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, you are in Ephesians, in the heavenlies. "... hath seated us in Christ Jesus in the heavenlies".

### **A heavenly position essential to spiritual fulness and a worthy earthly walk**

Well, now, I just want to say one or two things about this position. First of all, it is shown here that this heavenly position is essential to spiritual fulness. The first statement about being in the heavenlies: "hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies (heavenly places, ASV) in Christ" (1:3).

Every spiritual blessing — that is spiritual fulness, but it is in the heavenlies in Christ. We know nothing about spiritual fulness or every spiritual blessing while Romans, Corinthians or Galatians are not settled. Get that settled, and we come into the place of spiritual fulness. It is a position essential to spiritual fulness. We have not this wealth until these other things of which we have spoken are really settled matters and then we know spiritual fulness.

The old illustration is Israel in the wilderness, which was not spiritual fulness, but over Jordan in the land it was spiritual fulness. Jordan is Romans, Jordan is 1 Corinthians, Jordan is 2 Corinthians, Jordan is Galatians — what they mean, then is spiritual fulness. Oh, we have got to get there before we know the real spiritual wealth, and, beloved, it is true. We do not want to speak of our own experience too much, but we can speak of our experience, for this very truth of the cross is the great divide in our history, the divide between a Christian life in struggle, largely in barrenness, unfruitfulness, straitness, and wondering all the time where the means would come from to carry on our work, our ministry — that was one side. And then that real living experience of the cross in a Christian's life, after which, fulness, yes fulness, wonderful wealth, no straitness since then. It is a fact, a reality. The position is necessary, but we are called to that position.

A heavenly position is necessary for right earthly conduct and relationships. That is the second thing in this letter. "Walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called" (Eph. 4:1). That is the earthly walk. And then the earthly rela-

tionships come in. Husbands, wives; wives, husbands; children, parents; parents, children; servants, masters; masters, servants. But oh, what a time we may have in all these matters of earthly relationships, of our earthly behaviour and conduct, if we do not have a heavenly position. What a difference it makes if we really have a heavenly position, a heart rest from Romans, if we have deliverance from self, the natural life, if we have a life of liberty in the Spirit. In all these things of daily life here on the earth, if God has shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, what a difference it makes. What a difference it makes if it is life now motivated by the power of the Spirit and not under the compulsion of Christian obligations. A heavenly position makes all the difference to the time here on earth and our affairs here on earth.

### **A heavenly position imperative to spiritual warfare**

And then a heavenly position is imperative to spiritual warfare. That is the last word. It is of little use going out against the enemy, a vain thing to contemplate warfare with the powers of evil, if Romans is not settled, quite impossible; and equally true if 1 Corinthians is not settled. See what havoc the enemy can make of any life that has personal self-interests, natural interests. You will be defeated on that ground, but let the cross deal with the life of nature and you are on the way to holding your ground against the enemy. And how impossible it is to contemplate anything like victory over the enemy if the great realities of 2 Corinthians and Galatians are not actualities in our experience. So a heavenly position is necessary to spiritual warfare. Blessed be God, there is a heavenly provision for that which we are bidden to take up, and, as we pointed out earlier in the conference, you have in Ephesians 6 a gathering up of everything that is mentioned from Romans onwards. The helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the sword of the Spirit, feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace and the shield of faith. These are all spiritual means which are set before us in those other letters. It is a heavenly provision for a heavenly warfare that we, by that provision, may have a heavenly position and a heavenly triumph.

I am always afraid of words. I do ask you to ask the Lord that the meaning of this may be brought home to us, that we may seek to really get the meaning of this, for it does matter whether we are knocked all over the place by the enemy. It does matter whether the enemy is having his way. It does matter whether he is stopping the work of God, it does matter whether he is able to suspend blessed times like this because we do not have a heavenly position. It does matter in every connection whether we are in the heavenlies now in Christ Jesus by faith. Let us ask the Lord to show us in what way it is necessary for us to move towards that position if we are not enjoying it and knowing it.

*Concluded.*

# THE FAMILY ALTAR

Raymond Golsworthy

*“The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish.” (Prov. 14:11)*

## Introduction

We begin by asking you a question. Have you ever had the privilege of regular participation in Christian ‘family prayers’? Have you, with others, sat by quietly while a godly father, for instance, takes from the shelf a well-worn Bible and reads to all, the daily portion? And then, when the precious Bible is reverently closed, have you knelt down with the others while the loving parent briefly commits the little family to the Lord for His mercy and protection through the day? If you happen to be one who has enjoyed this priceless privilege, you will know exactly what we have in mind as we send forth this appeal. And you will join us in our prayerful longing that countless multitudes in every place might come to know this selfsame blessedness.

This message certainly comes from a burdened heart, for it touches a matter of great importance, and bears down upon a vital secret which can be of untold value to the church of God in the days in which we live. It certainly concerns those who seek the welfare of their children, and their children’s children, and many such may be responsible to take some very practical steps in this connection.

What we are pleading for, of course, is just this simple practice of daily ‘family prayers’. It has been our own great privilege to drink deep into the blessedness of this practice, both in our own home and in many other homes where it has been our joy to sojourn as itinerant servants of the Lord in many parts of the world. Memories crowd in of happy homes amidst the snows of Scotland, the towns and cities of Europe, the burning plains of India, the sheep lands and fruit orchards of Australia, and the favoured islands of the Philippines. In all these places, and more, we have met the Lord as we have taken our place with the members of some Christian family for their few brief minutes of ‘family devotions’. What is written, therefore, is rooted in considerable experience; we have seen this simple practice bringing untold blessing to Christian families in many lands.

On the other hand we have had to witness the many breakdowns and tragedies which increasingly show themselves among the younger generation of so-called Christians; breakdowns, and tragedies which, very probably, could have been avoided and averted if Christian parents had known and grasped, in time, this blessed secret of the ‘family altar’, and if they had been willing to pay the price for its simple application in their own homes. But now those young and impres-

sionable and formative years have all slipped by; the course of life is set, and only mighty miracles of grace can get us back to where we might have been. In fact we have to say that certain priceless values and advantages have been for ever lost.

In a recent survey of members of a group of evangelical churches in Ohio, U.S.A., it was learned that ninety per cent of those members never have family worship. The same is probably true in other places, and this, we believe, goes right to the heart of the need that we have mentioned. Those tragedies exist, to a large extent, because something vital was missing in the testimony of the home.

Of course we know that there is no mere technique or formula, which, by itself, provides the answer to such a situation. We do believe, however, that, when the hearts of the parents are truly for the Lord, and when there is, in consequence, the longing to see the much-loved children deeply established in the Lord, and visibly rejoicing under His gracious smile, there most certainly are Scriptural ways and means that can be employed as being divinely conducive to the end in view. This treatise deals with one of those appointed ways and means, and if our simple suggestion is adopted, in real dependence on the Holy Spirit, blessing will come to many families, and our homes will begin to approximate more closely to what God wants them to be. More important, perhaps, the church and the churches will thus become revitalised, and material will be gathered which may be greatly used of God for coming generations.

## **What the Bible teaches**

For convenience and simplicity we shall group our thoughts under three main headings.

First we shall think of the Biblical authority and background for this practice. Of the very much that might be said in this connection, we shall here present only a few brief tokens, but even these will be more than adequate to show that this simple practice of 'family prayers' is most certainly supported by the Word of God.

Beginning in the New Testament, we notice that Christian parents are expressly enjoined to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). This, of course, embraces many matters, but including, we would say, this matter of a daily occasion for family prayer together. The root idea in the verse is that the Christian home is intended to function as the child's first happy school in the realm of spiritual things. If this is so, what better occasion could possibly present itself than this daily meeting with the Lord at the 'family altar'? Here, most certainly, we can do much to bring up our children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord", and we can count on the Lord's wonderful presence with us at those times.

We are told, for instance, that, "from a child", Paul's beloved Timothy had "known the holy scriptures" which were able to make him "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). We learn that he was blessed, too, by having a mother called Eunice who had unfeigned faith, and his grandmother Lois was just the same (2 Tim. 1:5). No one will question, then, that it

was in that homely domestic setting that the boy himself had come to know those Holy Scriptures, and had been made wise unto salvation through faith in Christ. The faith had come by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10: 17). We are not expressly informed of the details, but we can well imagine how, in that home at Lystra, the children were regularly assembled, and the Word of God was opened to them by parents and grandparents who had already proved for themselves the power of its saving message. Little did they imagine, at that time, how the captivated boy before them was destined to become the chosen associate and companion of the great apostle Paul! Day by day, and little by little, the Word of God was finding entrance into the heart of the attentive child, and creating, as it always does, a beautiful faith unfeigned. No doubt Lois and Eunice had their difficulties in arranging these occasions, for evidently there were particular complications in the home (Acts 16:1), but, by their unfeigned faith, they pressed through these difficulties, and blessing followed. In answer to their prayers, the occasions were made possible, and in the end they had this great reward.

Reverting now to the Old Testament, it is very noticeable that, again and again, the Israelites were expressly commanded to be specially diligent in teaching the Word of God to their children (Deut. 4:9,10). A few chapters further on, the instructions are repeated, and further details added: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest in the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:6-7). Surely, in these verses, we have strong warrant and support for our present practice of Christian family prayers! "These words shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children ... when thou liest down and when thou risest up."

As if this were not enough, the great divine demand echoes out again, just a few pages further on, and in terms, this time, which will surely move our hearts to action. Almost word for word, the Spirit repeats the call to lay up God's words in our hearts and in our souls, and to teach them to our children, when we are seated in our homes, when we lie down, and when we rise up. Then are added the wonderful words: "That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth" (Deut. 11:21).

What could be more inviting and alluring? Days of heaven upon the earth; days in the land which He swore unto our fathers to give us! This is what we may know if we will lay up God's Word in our hearts, and if we will teach it to our children. And let us remember that, in this dispensation, we do not have to think of an earthly and material land, which the Lord has given us! We, thank God, are privileged to live in the days of the vastly greater spiritual antitype! To us the land is that great rich fulness of Christ in which the grace of God has set us (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:3). If then, we will lay up God's Word in our hearts, and teach it to our children, our days shall be multiplied in that land, and so shall the days of our children! We shall find ourselves eating and drinking continually into



that great all-sufficiency of our living and exalted Lord, for, what He is in glory, He is for us, and we shall find ourselves declaring exultingly with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

Oh, that Christian parents, in our day, might really dwell in this great land of Christ! And oh, that our children, too, might come into that same land, and live long in it! We may be sure that, if they were truly enjoying the greatness and all-sufficiency of Christ, the subtle appeals of Egypt and the wilderness would cease to captivate them. Rather would they say with their parents and with the ancient prophet, "What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard Him, and observed Him" (Hos. 14:8).

But we must not digress. We are simply noting that all these blessings, physical and spiritual, are the fruits of laying up God's Word in our hearts and souls, and teaching it to our children. How wonderful if God could say of parents nowadays what He said of Abraham; "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord ... that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19).

What a commendation that was of the ancient patriarch! God was confident that he, at least, would teach his children after him. Oh, that He might be able to have the selfsame confidence in those who are the heads of Christian families today! And to such, the daily 'family altar' would be the suitable and prized occasion.

Before we close this section we would like, perhaps, to go a little deeper, and mention a matter, which is of tremendous significance in this connection.

We refer to the place given to the Christian home in the Epistle to the Ephesians. As we scan that Epistle as a whole, we see that all those precious doctrines of the church, presented in the first three chapters, are made to focus down immediately, and very strongly, on the Christian home. Twenty-one verses are given to this subject, and, in effect, the apostle is pleading earnestly for the establishing of families and households, which will, in their very constitution and behaviour, worthily express the exalted truths which he has earlier set forth. This is most impressive. There is no mention, just here, of local churches, nor of elders or deacons, nor of the problems of the local work! Even the passage in chapter four regarding the various gifts distributed by the ascended Lord upon His members, envisages, for the time, the universal church, and the universal work ... "until we all come to a perfect Man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ!"

Why this silence, then, for the time, regarding local churches, and why this emphasis instead upon the Christian home? The answer, surely, is very obvious. The Holy Spirit is carefully showing that the Christian home is intended by God to be the first collective outworking of redemption. Here, in the homely family circle, God plans to have His initial glorious expression of the church. Here, first of all, shall the mystery be seen. That is what God always works for, and that, incidentally, is why He said to the Philippian jailor, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house."

Needless to say, the local church becomes, in turn, the fuller sphere of testimony, for it is the happy aggregate of all such homes, but, on that matter, even Ephesians, for the time, is silent. It all starts in the home! The rest will surely follow!

In practical terms, it means that, in regular family affairs, first of all, Christ is to have the pre-eminence; there, in the family circle, He is to be known as Lord; there, in everything, His will is to be consulted and His directions followed. There, beneath that roof, His Name is to be worshipped and His glory praised. There, in everyday affairs, the great ascended Lord of glory is to be our all in all. In such a situation will be found the first clear focus of the eternal mystery.

It may appear that we have deviated somewhat from the simpler matter of our subject, the daily practice of Christian ‘family prayers’, but to those who have eyes to see, the connection will be very obvious. God wants His testimony established in our homes, and, while this has its bearing on numerous far-reaching issues, we ask, “What could be more conducive to this great end and purpose than this daily gathering of the family to the Word of God and to the ministry of prayer?” This, surely, would be altogether foundational to the testimony in view.

### **Blessings and benefits**

Now we come to our second word on this matter and we shall discuss the blessings and benefits of this practice. Again we have to say that those blessings and benefits are numberless. But we shall mention just a few. It hardly needs to be said that whenever Christ is set in His rightful place as Lord, blessings and benefits abound. Wherever we have His government, we shall have what Isaiah calls the “increase” of that government (Isa. 9:7). Some typical examples of that increase are later described by the prophet when he says: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing” (Isa. 35:5,6).

The hymn writer, Isaac Watts, puts the same truth in other words when he declares:

“Blessings abound where’er He reigns:  
The pris’ner leaps to lose his chains,  
The weary find eternal rest,  
And all the sons of want are blest.”

Now if this is true in a general sense, and it is, it will also be true in a particular sense, including this matter of instituting the ‘family altar’ in the home. Such a move is a very practical honouring of the Lord as Lord, and a granting to Him of the first and foremost place in the daily schedule of the family. It is, in actual essence, a veritable enthroning, on that territory, of this glorious King of kings. We can reasonably expect, therefore, that ‘millennial blessings’, in their deep and spiritual form, will begin to appear within that home! Throughout the family, Isaiah’s wonderful prophecy, for instance, will begin to have its blest fulfilment. New vision will be granted; new hearing experienced; a new walking

and leaping will be made possible, (how great the need for this!), and a new song will be heard! Surely that should be enough to provoke some action in this matter! The very enthroning of the Lord in this particular respect is sure to bring its train of blessing. What a heartening prospect for the Christian parent! And, of course, that well-worn Bible, handled by the parent every morning in the presence of the children, is sure to bring its own deep blessing to the home. God told Joshua that if he would meditate on the Scripture “day and night” he would make his way prosperous and he would have “good success” (Josh. 1:8). Many are the families who have proved the truth of that sure promise, and have done so through the daily reading of the Word together. In the course of that homely exercise, the Word of God itself has “Converted the soul; made wise the simple, rejoiced the heart, and enlightened the eyes” (See Psalm 19:7,8). In other matters, too, there has been practical success; all faithfully granted by the Lord in keeping with His promise.

Let us mention, now, some of the particular and personal blessings, which usually attend this practice, and starting, perhaps, with the one who is privileged to be the head of such a house, and who has the honour and responsibility of presiding at these prayers. That such a one will receive a special blessing there can be no doubt. It is a responsibility, of course, and means an extra load, but God is no man’s debtor, and He sees to it that the regular home ministry brings its own reward.

There is, of course, the priceless joy of seeing the family developing and rejoicing under the gracious smile of God, and that, itself, is wonderful. But there are, as well, particular ‘side blessings’ which such an one will surely know.

Perhaps, for instance, this father of the family has been very recently converted, and he could hardly find the courage to utter an exhortation, or even a simple prayer, in the larger company of the local church. Much as he would like to do so, the words will not come! But here, in his own familiar home, it is very different! Surrounded by the trusting love of little children, and by the humble helpfulness of an understanding wife, he can begin immediately to exercise a precious ministry, which, incidentally, will be all the better for its spontaneity and brevity. During those few minutes together in the morning he can become accustomed to presiding at the gathering and to hearing his own voice as he reads from the Scriptures in the presence of other listeners. Sometimes he will feel the urge to add a little comment, some simple thought that has been quickened of the Spirit to his own heart as he has read the allotted portion. These may be small beginnings, but who knows where such a ministry may end? Very quickly it can spread to the larger gatherings of the local church, and possibly far beyond! This, surely, is a benefit, and quite a considerable one, which very frequently attends this exercise. All unconsciously, it has been the ideal training ground for wider ministry!

Another important matter suggests itself just here, and it may be well to mention it. If there are servants in the house, these also can usually be gathered from their several tasks, and all in the home can be encouraged to ‘bow the

knee' together before the great Lord Christ. This very act of kneeling down with those who serve us, often helps to maintain a happy working atmosphere and to offset proud and haughty attitudes which frequently spoil our more affluent and favoured families, particularly among the children. To be sure, our appointed positions in life may be different, but, meeting thus together before our Maker, we are made to realise again, that, in the ultimate things that really matter, we are all on common ground. All are sinners, and only the grace of God can save us (Eph. 2:8). Impressions of that kind will bring, in time, their untold benefits, particularly to the children, and will leave their mark, in years to come, in richer Christian character.

And what a wonderful opportunity, incidentally, for sowing the seeds of the gospel into the hearts of the servants! In earlier life they may have had no Christian background whatsoever, and would never feel free to attend the more public Christian meetings. But here, at 'family prayers', they can listen every day to a few verses from the Word of God, and, when they hear the prayers, they can see and feel the blessedness of a genuine Christian life lived in fellowship with our unseen heavenly Friend! Little by little, the Word will do its saving work, and those who serve us daily can thus be brought to Christ. (See 1 Pet. 1:23; Jas. 1:18).

Often a visitor in the home, taking part in the regular daily prayers, also receives a blessing; something, maybe, which he or she would never get in any larger gathering. And possibly such a one will be encouraged, by what has been seen and tasted, to incorporate the happy practice into his or her own home. And so, praise God, the blessing spreads!

It has been our own frequent experience that an unconverted tradesman or business acquaintance, dropping by at that particular time, has been invited to sit in, for a moment, on the little family gathering, (it is always short; ten minutes at the most) and has been noticeably touched by the Holy Spirit through the verses read, or through the very sight of a Christian family kneeling down in prayer together and blessedly united in this act of worship. All these are blessings, which can be known through the daily operation of the 'family altar'.

Before we close this part of our message there is another solemn matter, which we feel urged to touch upon. It relates again to the relationship that exists between the individual Christian home and the local church, and has to do, particularly, with the principle of eldership in that local church. God's Word tells us that an elder must be: "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity", and then is added the significant parenthesis: "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim. 3:4,5). Another translator renders it: "He must have proper authority in his own household, and be able to control and command the respect of his children" (J.B. Phillips).

This, of course, is a tremendous matter, the far-reaching significance of which can hardly be imagined. Those who covet the welfare of the local churches, and of the testimony of Jesus as a whole, should ponder much this inspired directive regarding elders, and they should lay to heart this clear insistence on a right

domestic background for all who would hold this office. And, of course, the whole matter is very definitely related to what we are now studying. We may say that this simple practice of ‘family prayers’, with all that inevitably accompanies it, provides a most desirable foundation in the developing and qualifying of one who is later destined to become a shepherd of God’s flock! The very responsibility often does very much towards the setting of our homes in order, and towards the fitting of us, in the eyes of God, for further responsibilities which yet may come to us. Those who have ears to hear will hear.

The benefits and blessings of this simple practice are indeed innumerable. We have not even mentioned the benefits, which will accrue in the sacred area of the relationships between the husband and his wife. Being Christians, they will long to grow up together into Him, and to know a deepening oneness with each other in every realm. Here again the ‘family altar’ will serve its gracious purpose. It will provide a daily occasion for the husband and wife to take their place together as the appointed leaders in the home and as the eager helpers of each other in the training of the children.

We may add that, even among Christians, in these unnatural days of rush and drive, the holy harmony of husband and wife comes under constant challenge, for the devil certainly hates this living symbol of the oneness of Christ and His church (Eph. 5: 31,32). In view of this, apart from all else, there is a growing need for this daily exercise and fellowship together. Those few minutes every morning, when parents are found fulfilling their mutual ministry to their family, will aid them much in their own relationships and in their deepening life together in the Lord. Many will testify to this.

### **The battle against family prayer**

We have mentioned the Biblical authority for this practice of ‘family prayers’, and have also listed some of the blessings which will follow. The message, however, would not be complete without some reference to the battle entailed in the actual implementation of the plan.

It is a strange fact that whenever this matter is raised in any land or in any company, difficulties and questions immediately arise! Even those who are sincerely desirous, and perhaps deeply wistful about it all, will reluctantly voice their doubts as to the practical workability of it ... in their case! Mention will be made, for instance, of the wild pace of modern living, and the virtual impossibility of incorporating those few minutes into the already heavy schedule of the harassed family. Sometimes it is objected that all have to be hurried off to work or school together; sometimes, that they have to leave at different times! In both cases, strange to say, it is accepted as a convincing veto against the ‘family altar’ and the rights of God !

Now let us say immediately that we know full well that there are many difficulties, and certainly every case is not the same, but behind it all, is there not here some sinister intelligence putting up a desperate battle? Is this, perhaps, the

“roaring lion” of whom Peter spoke, who “walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8)?

Yes, there are these difficulties, and, for ourselves, we are prepared to face them helpfully and squarely. Some, we know, have had to make very big adjustments and considerable sacrifices, or perhaps content themselves with some alternative arrangement to which the Lord has mercifully led them, in their case. But, when all is said and done, it is our sincere conviction that this wholesale turning back, with all the resultant and immeasurable loss, is by no means justified. That will very much need to be pressed through, we do not question, nor that the Lord may need to be consulted very earnestly regarding some great difficulty which seems to stand quite firm across our way. But to give up, before the battle is even fought, seems to us an untold tragedy. If the alternative gains and losses were really understood, and rightly valued, we believe the battle would be fought, and, by His grace, the victory won, and yet another family would be added to those who daily know the joys of the ‘family altar’, and who now and in eternity will reap the fruits thereof!

This is no place for listing and attempting to answer all the possible and conceivable difficulties. It is better for each individual to bring his own particular situation to the living Lord, doing so with a vigorous and expectant faith and a fully open heart, and with no fixed prejudices or conclusions regarding the issue. Praise God, we worship a living God Who moves the mountains, (Jud. 5:5; Mic. 1:4; Mark 11:23; etc.) and, with such an approach, the sincere enquirer will usually find that, after all, there is a way, if only he will pay the price!

Whatever the difficulties may be, it is probably safe to say that the thousands of Christian families who have got through in this matter have somehow and somewhere faced those selfsame difficulties! This means that someone, somewhere, has faced your difficulties and has fought your battle, and, by God’s grace, has got the victory! The ‘family altar’ has been actually instituted in that home, and now, years afterwards, parents and children are reaping the precious fruits. Best of all, perhaps, the Lord has gained spiritual material and substance for His wider purposes. Lives are now available to Him for what He wants.

The sufficient motive for such an aggressive and productive attitude is usually to be found in what we would call an adequate sense of the urgent need, and in a far-seeing and spiritual appraisal of the very much that stands to be gained or lost by the decision made. And, of course, right at the foundations, the love for the children has been what it ought to be, engendering a due concern and holy jealousy for their highest good.

Oh may God raise up parents of this kind in these dark, and darkening, days when our subtle and plausible enemy is everywhere around! And may God help them to press through on this matter and to set up this ‘altar’ in their homes, securing to themselves, and to their children, the blessings we have mentioned, and, possibly, to their children’s children! May God save our rising generation from the kind of parents who easily give in to our blustering and deceptive foe, and who take the line of least resistance, mildly hoping, that their children will

not be too much the losers! That, we say, is neither Christian character nor true parental love.

But we certainly know the many problems, and have every sympathy with the honest parent who is truly baffled on this score, and who does not see at all how God can do it in their circumstances. We would only urge such parents to hold on strongly to the Lord about this matter. In due time they will see what can be done where true parental care is a functioning reality, and where the inner choice of Christ's own Lordship in the home is deep and genuine. Often, too, we find we have to take a step of faith, and there it is that God shows us His surprises! That this may be your experience is our earnest prayer.

### **Some guiding principles**

For the sake of those who may now be exercised about actual details, we would suggest the following as guiding principles for family prayers.

1) Let it be clearly understood that we are not here referring to a weekly meeting in the home, for instance. That is quite another matter, and is not to be confused with what we are here proposing. We only have in mind the daily, and much simpler, occasion for the reading of the Word of God together, during the course of the morning meal, for instance. This other matter of a weekly family meeting is altogether different, and, we would say, fraught with extra difficulties. The members of the family are probably overloaded with meetings, and the very thought of yet another, creates reactions, and may be more than God is asking of them. 'Family prayers' are different from meetings, and helpful cooperation is more easily secured for the brief occasion, as they start out for the day.

2) Let the time be in the morning if at all possible. Do not settle for an evening alternative unless absolutely necessary. One of the main objects is to enable the family to anticipate the coming day together, under the Lordship of Christ, and to encourage them to face the various responsibilities that await them as 'in the Spirit', and in happy fellowship together. And, apart from all else, Christ deserves the best time of the day, for in all things He must have the pre-eminence. (Col.1:18).

3) Make use of the morning mealtime if you can, having the reading while the family is seated at the table, either before, or after, the meal. This simple plan saves a lot of extra organising and a lot of effort, too, in gathering the family from various directions and occupations. At the mealtime they are already gathered and the opportunity is there!

Of course, many families do not have the morning meal together, and some other arrangement may need to be made. But, we repeat, work for this better and easier way if you can. Many families could eat together if certain sacrifices were made, and if wholesome discipline were obtaining through the family. Some who conceivably could sleep longer may need to rise a little earlier in order to take the family meal together.

The extra time is not lost in any case, and good use can be made of it when the meal is over and 'family prayers' completed. In fact, in many cases, it could

prove a very great advantage to be up a little earlier than has been customary, and children, particularly, will soon come to appreciate the extra time available and make good use of it. Incidentally, the warnings of Proverbs 6:9,10 and Proverbs 24:33,34 could well be taken to heart in many of our Christian families who genuinely mean business in the things of the Lord!

The earlier start, of course, may also necessitate something of a curtailing of unnecessary indulgences the previous night, and strong leadership and wise parenthood in these things is, no doubt, a tremendous factor. We need to settle it, that, if we want blessing, there must be order, and leaders have to pay a price for this.

4) Let the time used for the 'family prayers' be very brief. Seven to ten minutes are usually quite sufficient, and the shorter time gets better support from the family, and better results, too, than something unnecessarily prolonged. This is specially so when children and others are eager to get started with their busy programme for the day. A Christian parent will show loving understanding in these things, always being as co-operative as is possible, consistent with the interests of the Lord.

5) Let the head of the house ask for complete quietness while he reads, say, fifteen or twenty verses from the Word of God, and then makes, perhaps, the very briefest of comments. In this way the family can go right through a suitable book, such as one of the Gospels, or the Psalms, or Proverbs, and, later on, other books, as the Lord shall lead. Even reading without comment is sure to bring a blessing, for the Book held in the hand is itself the dynamic and faith-creating Word of God. (Rom. 10:17).

6) After this brief reading, let all kneel down together, if at all possible, while the head of the house commits the family to the care and keeping of the Lord for the day to come, and brings some word of praise for mercies and blessings hitherto received. Friends and relations can also be remembered, and any special needs of which the family may be aware at any given time. These could include sicknesses or other problems, and we may mention that children are often helped by a brief but sincere remembrance of their school examinations, and such like matters. All is shared together, and all is spread before the Lord in simple, trusting, faith. Let the focus of the prayer be on the living Christ Himself, that all may become freshly mindful of Him, and of His great love and mercy. Such a family rises from its knees, immensely strengthened, and those who meet them, through the day, will quickly recognize it.

7) It is sometimes helpful to make a slight change on the Sunday morning, such as including a song or taking the reading from a different part of the Bible, or even getting one of the children to do the actual reading of the Scriptures in the hearing of the others. A little variety of this kind helps to counterbalance any lurking tendency to monotony and is often helpful in many ways.

8) Do not regard 'family prayers' as a substitute for individual 'quiet time' or 'personal devotions'. The individual time with the Lord must always be encouraged and is a basic principle of progress.



9) In all the matters we have mentioned, let the head of the house seek, for himself, a deepening godliness of character. Children are often quick and accurate in assessing the moral and spiritual qualities of parenthood. If the family exercise is to be appreciated and effective, it is basic that the head of the house be genuinely honoured and respected by all the family. He must be known as one who sincerely seeks the glory of the Lord, and who, in the home and out of it, does always those things that please Him (John 8:29). It cannot be overstressed, that, inconsistencies there can rob the whole occasion of its usefulness; in fact they can build up resentments and cause great harm. Notice that, in these respects, the 'family altar' becomes a constant challenge to the head of the house, and provides an ever-present provocation to still more godliness. This is another bi-product of the exercise!

All the above suggestions, we believe, can be helpful to those who are now personally concerned about this matter, and who desire to see this 'family altar' established in their homes. The best advice, however, is just to make a start in true dependence on the Lord, and being constantly alive, in Him, for counsel and direction. Simplicity and spontaneity are the greatest assets, and we can surely approach this matter knowing that the Lord wants it to be, in every way, a joy, and not a burden. Let the Spirit be Lord, and let there be liberty (2 Cor. 3:17).

'Family prayers' are a wonderful way to honour the Lord as He should be honoured, and, as we have said, infinite gains will follow. By this simple practice, the spiritual is given the place of prominence and priority, which rightly belongs to it. A new atmosphere is progressively apparent in the home, and a sense of the opened heaven. The whole level of living becomes elevated, and Christian character begins to grow apace. Often, it is only years afterwards that the benefits will be fully recognized and assessed, but, that they will be there, all in due time, there can be no doubt. Thus will the heart be gladdened, and the Lord glorified, for 'He is faithful'.

We would urge all who have read these paragraphs, to seek the Lord about this matter, especially those who have responsibility for the spiritual guidance of a Christian home. We are sure that what is written enshrines a vital secret which can be of untold blessing to us, and to our children, and, as we have said, it will leave its mark of blessing, too, on the fuller family gathering of the local church. Best of all, it will surely affect that final family gathering, up in heaven, of the whole household of faith (Gal. 6:10). Around that Throne, please God, may our children be brought up faithfully in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. All this will greatly magnify our Lord, and that, of course, is the single end in view.

"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).