***Combat with Apostasy - Jude 21-23

JD16-02***

We have paused at Jude 20, and we have been concentrating on the expression "praying in the Holy Spirit". Jude is stressing the role in this immediate context of Bible doctrine study and of prayer for personal defense against apostasy. None of us is immune to the threat of being influenced by the deception that Satan is constantly pouring into the thought streams of our society. A believer is just as subject as anybody else to being confused and disoriented. I cannot warn you enough that when the Word of God says, "Let him think that he stands, take heed, lest he fall," it is talking to you and me because we have old sin natures. Those natures are prone to be deceived through the emotions by Satan. We are studying the only defense that we have against this kind of apostasy.

I'm not talking about that gross kind of apostasy that I told you about in the last session. That is, when I was in Los Angeles at the hotel and saw these beautifully dressed women walking up and down the corridors, and I suddenly realized that those weren't women--those were men. There was a big convention for gays. We have been seeing them all over the place. I'm not talking about that kind of grotesque outward apostasy.

I'm talking about the sincerity that is inherent in the charismatic movement which no longer has the ignorant stamp upon it that it did a few years ago. Now you watch it on television and it's the turnaround collar professionals; the smooth talkers; and, the very cultured and refined. This is the dawning of the intensified stage of the age of apostasy. That is what we have been studying in the book of Jude. Now you can go just as negative as the devil himself toward that, and you will suffer the consequences as we always do when we are negative toward what are the facts of the doctrines of the Word of God. On the basis of the Word of God, the apostasy of the age is in variant forms: grotesque and ugly; or, refined and cultured, but it is apostasy.

That's what Jude is trying to tell us here. He's saying, "I want to explain to you how you people who are really on the line for the Lord are to defend yourself against this poison which is going to get worse as we get close to the Lord's return." So we have found that Jude has stressed two things. He has stressed in Jude 20, "Building up yourselves on your most holy faith," and "praying in the Holy Spirit." Jude 20 and 21 go together. The main verb of that sentence is in verse 21: "Keep yourselves in the love of God." This means to maintain your personal fellowship with the Father for protection against apostasy.

Jude 20 gives you two essentials for keeping yourselves in fellowship with the Father. One is building up, and the second one is praying. "Building up is "epoikodemeo." "Epoikodemeo" means "to build up," and it is present active participle. This word is joined to another one in Jude 20, and that is praying, or "proseuchomai." "Proseuchomai" is also present active participle.

Now here are the two things that we are to do to maintain our fellowship. Because they are present participle, and they tie back to the main verb "keeping" or "tereo" which is in Jude 21 ("keeping yourselves in the love of God"), the Greek language tells us something specific here. This tells us that these two things: "Building up yourself in the faith" (that is, learning by adapting and being positive to it), and "praying as those who are filled with the Spirit" takes place at the same time as you are keeping yourself in fellowship with God. These two things are a condition for the third thing. You will not keep yourself in fellowship with the Lord and you will not maintain a condition of spiritual stability if on the one hand you are not building yourself up in the faith (through the learning of the Word of God and positive response to it), and through praying (a life of regular prayer in the Holy Spirit).

Now people hurt themselves in all facets of their lives, perhaps, on these two accounts more than anything else. First, you do not study the Word of God, and when you hear somebody who explains the Word to you on an authoritative basis as sound doctrine, you go negative to it. Secondly, we are negligent in a life of prayer. So the Christian is not doing the two things that Jude says will protect you and will defend you against being caught up in the deceptions of an age of apostasy, whether they be gross deceptions or cultured deceptions.

**The Elements of Prayer**

Prayer in the Holy Spirit, we found, includes certain elements:

1. It includes confession which is a private task.
2. It includes thanksgiving for answered prayer.
3. It includes intercession for the needs of others.
4. It includes petitions for one's own needs.

**The Mechanics of Prayer**

We pointed out the mechanics of prayer:

1. Prayer is directed to the Father, in the name of the Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. We found that there was a relationship between what we asked God and what God gives us:
	1. Sometimes God gives us what we ask but the desire that we wanted fulfilled was not satisfied.
	2. Sometimes he doesn't grant what we really ask, but the desire for which we were seeking fulfillment He does grant.
	3. Sometimes when we are in the right condition of prayer, what we ask is granted and the desire (the reason we asked it) is also fulfilled.
	4. Then there are times when neither what we ask nor the desire is fulfilled.

**Why Prayers are not Answered**

We pointed out several reasons why prayers are not granted:

1. One is the lack of faith--not believing and not trusting. This is when we approach this as a questionable practice--not one that really works.
2. We also can ask in selfishness--not to the Lord's glory.
3. Also, we can pray under carnality--we have unconfessed sin. You'll never have a prayer answered in that status.
4. We can pray with lack of compassion--lacking a grace orientation attitude so that you do not have a compassion for those who may have some need.
5. We can ask outside of what is God's will so that you may indulge it upon your pride.
6. If we can pray in pride, the Lord will not hear us.
7. If we pray in disobedience to the Word of God, He will not hear.
8. Praying as one who is not filled with the Spirit of God.
9. Praying under the condition where you lack domestic tranquility--where there is conflict within the home. God says that will restrict the response in prayer.

**Negative Attitudes toward Prayer**

We did want to remind you also that there are negative attitudes toward prayer which are self-destructive to us:

1. We have the idea sometimes that prayer is a special kind of gift.
2. That prayer is only for private use.
3. That prayer is optional. You do it when you feel like it or when you happen to be in trouble.
4. That you don't have time to pray. There's so much for you to do.
5. That when you pray, you don't know what to say.
6. That you can't stand listening to some other people who pray.
7. That you never see the results of your prayer.
8. That your mind wanders during prayer.

All of these we dealt with in some detail last time.

**False Ideas about Prayer**

We also pointed out some false ideas about prayer:

1. That there are certain words you must use.
2. That there are certain emotions you must express.
3. That there is a certain posture that you must assume physically.
4. That there is a certain schedule or a certain ritual under which you must pray for prayer to be genuine.

None of these are true.

We have in the Word of God a divine command to believers that they should pray. Every believer priest has the right to represent himself before God in prayer. The Word of God lays upon us the responsibility for doing so. In Mark 11:24, the Holy Spirit says, "Therefore I say unto you, whatever things you desire, when you pray, believe that you have received them, and you shall have them." You have the right to approach God and to ask him for the things that you want and that you need. In Matthew 18:19, we read, "Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven."

Furthermore, we not only have the right as Christians to approach God, but we have the command to have regular periods of prayer. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, "Pray without ceasing." In Hebrews 4:16 we have that very great encouragement in approaching God's throne of grace: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The simple fact is that God does not give if we do not ask. James 4:2: "You lust, and have not. You kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain. You fight and war, yet you have not, because you ask not." If you do not have, it is because you are not asking.

Yet the Word of God gives us assurances that prayer is a working relationship with a loving God. In 1 Peter 3:12, Peter says, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and His ears are open unto their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." In Psalm 143:1, the psalmist declares to us that God answers prayer: "Hear my prayer, O Lord. Give ear to my supplications. In Your faithfulness, answer me, and in Your righteousness." Then we are also told that God does respond to what we ask. John 14:13 says, "And whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the father may be glorified in the Son." Prayer is heard and it is answered. God does respond as we meet the qualifications for effective prayer.

There is no reason that anyone should not be able to be a prayer warrior. All prayer is a matter of grace. When you declare, "My Father," your words are instantly heard in Heaven. So Hebrews 4:16 tells us that you can approach the throne of grace. Prayer is actually a vehicle. It's a vehicle for your confession of sins (1 John 1:9). Psalm 32:5 says, "I acknowledge my sin unto You. My iniquity have I not hidden. I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and You forgave the iniquity of my sin." Confession brings forgiveness. Prayer is a vehicle for confessing.

Prayer is also a way for you to cast your cares upon the Lord. It's a way of using the faith rest technique. 1 Peter 5:7: "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." Prayer is also a vehicle for thanksgiving. 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." That's a prayer that often is not easy for us to utter. "In everything give thanks."

Prayer is also our means of asking God for the assistance that others may need. 1 Timothy 2:1-3 says, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all supplications, prayers, intersessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." And this is our justification for praying for the president; for members of Congress; for the governor; and, for people in positions of civil authority. Their leadership may be such that we may live in a condition of peace so we may have freedom for the propagating of the Word of God.

I realize that after all has been said and done concerning what the Bible says about prayer--our obligation and our encouragement, that there is this edge of doubt. There are these questions that come up. For example, if God knows all things, why do I have to ask him for anything? That's a human viewpoint thought and it comes out of your human viewpoint reasonings. If you have this thought, ("If God knows everything, why do I have to ask Him for anything?"), I can tell you that this is being stimulated by the old sin nature within you. However, the Christian way of life is not based upon man's logical reasonings. Christianity relies upon divine ways which are revealed to us in the Word of God.

For this reason, the real question is, "What does God say about the way He has chosen to meet our needs?" The question is not, "Why do we have to ask Him if he knows everything?" The question is, "What does God say (what does doctrine say?) concerning how God says, 'I will meet your needs.'" Here are the conditions. This is the way the game is played. God is the one who decides this. The Lord tells us that we are to be active in asking Him, as we saw in John 14:13-14. Prayer is our way of direct communication with God. "Our Father" is an expression immediately heard in Heaven. The Lord does not say that He will look into our minds to see what we need and what we want.

What He does say in Matthew 7:7 is, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." Here are spiritual principles relative to prayer laid out. Ask--your normal practice of prayer. Seek--pursuing guidance that you need; and, knock--the intensity of an appeal--looking to God and saying, "All is lost if You do not provide." Prayer as a practice really demonstrates our dependence on God even though He knows our needs. Matthew 6:7: "But when you pray, use not vain repetitions as the pagans do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him. Here is a clear declaration that God does know what we want (obviously, since He is omniscient), but He does also expect us to ask Him.

All we have to do is ask Him. We don't have to use vain repetitions. We don't have to use key phrases. We don't have to interject "Lord" and "hallelujah" or any other holy language that you think might somehow appeal to God. But we do have to ask Him for what He very well knows we need. Now that's the system. God hears our purpose because of His righteousness and because of His faithfulness, as Psalm 143:1 points out. The importance and the reality of prayer is evidenced for us by the fact that the Holy Spirit has been assigned the job of helping us to pray. In Romans 8:26-27, we read, "Likewise, the Spirit also helps with our infirmity, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought. But the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

Now that's the marvelous thing--that God the Holy Spirit has been assigned the duty of guiding us in our prayer life. When we pray according to the will of God, everything that we ask for is granted. Everything we seek falls in line. The Christian who is sensitive to the Word of God; responsive to the Word of God; and, sensitive to his personal sins (and keeps them confessed) will be in a condition where his mouth will be uttering the very words that Jesus Christ Himself would be saying. He is indeed praying in the Lord's name. He is asking just as if the Lord himself were praying. The Lord's prayers were always answered.

However, you and I must admit to ourselves that we are regularly negligent of prayer. Even in a group of believers who are sincerely interested in having the Lord's blessing in their lives, it would be very difficult to find someone who would be quite satisfied with the practice of prayer in his own life. I can assure you that much of the grief that we bring into our life is because we lack the practice of prayer. If you want smoothness in your relationships; within your home; within your business; and, within your social relationships, it begins, first of all, with the knowledge of doctrine, and, secondly, with a life of prayer. Those two things will carry you through to spiritual stability. You will not be an explosive person who is spewing out all over the people all around you if you have spiritual stability. The Christians who are spiritual basket cases are that because they are negligent of the Word (or they don't even have an opportunity to learn it), and they are negligent of prayer.

For those of us who sit in that category, there is no doubt that we are negligent of prayer. For others of us, perhaps, whose lives are not quite so torn up, we might pretend to think that we're pretty great warriors, and we might even call ourselves prayer warriors. But being neglect of prayer is a thing that plagues every one of us. Usually we neglect prayer until a situation is hopeless or until we come into some crises. Then we become intense pleaders with God. We turn with zeal that comes from our desperation to God to ask Him to deliver us.

What do you think God does when you do that? Well, you might say, from human viewpoint, that God says, "You didn't speak to Me when you didn't need me? Now that you're in trouble, good for you! That's just what you deserve." All of the legalists think that that's what God is going to do. Sure, now I've got troubles. Now I'm running to God and saying, "Oh, Lord, please straighten this out." I'm happy to tell you that the age of grace is upon us, and the psalmist recognized that our God has always acted with his negligent children in grace. So Psalm 50:15 says, "And call upon Me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you. You shall glorify Me." God is not going to hold our negative resistance to prayer against us. He is going to deliver us. But the trouble with us is that after our problems are over and God has delivered us, we are prone to move back into indifference toward prayer.

Remember the statement of 1 Samuel 12:23: *It is a sin not to pray.* "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." Sin is always against the Lord. You and I recognize that we are negligent of prayer. You may recognize that you sit down to a meal and, like a bunch of animals, you dig in without thanking God for the food. You may realize that you have decisions to make and choices to make, and you never sit down for a moment silently and say, "Father what should I do here? Which choice should I make? Where does the decision lay that is compatible with Your plans for me." You may realize that there is not a time when you personally engage in behalf of the burdens of believers and of the problems that people have within the circle of your friends and your neighbors, and that things come to your mind and you don't even stop for just a moment and say, "Lord, so-and-so is facing this problem. Can you help them? I uphold them to you."

If you recognize that you are often guilty of that kind of negligence of prayer (that kind of prayerlessness), then that's the first thing you need to confess, because that's a sin. It is a sin not to pray for people who are in trouble, if you know about it. It is a sin not to pray for the conflicts that you have in your life, and when you don't take them to the Lord and say, "Father, I would be a four-way fool to think that I can solve these problems in my life. Obviously, I can't, or they wouldn't be there in the first place if I were all that smart. Now I'm taking this matter and I'm committing it to You, and I'm asking for great and fantastic changes to improve the problems that face me: to resolve my financial pinch; to resolve my social difficulties; or, to resolve my business needs." Whatever it is, you take it to the Lord, and you lay it before Him. If you don't, the first thing you have to do is go back to the Lord and say, "I must confess. I ignored You when it came to making this decision. I ignored You when I was confronted with this problem.

**Acts 12:1-19**

We have in Scriptures a very dramatic example of where prayerlessness will lead. In Acts 12, we have the dramatic story of Peter's escape from prison. King Herod Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great, who sought to kill the Lord Jesus. Herod Agrippa was persecuting the church. This is several years after the crucifixion. His goal was to discourage Christians, and to win favor with the Jews who opposed the Christian movement.

So in Acts 12:1, we read, "Now about that time, Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church." This man was a government leader, the basest of men, who was being motivated by his master who controls all human government--Satan. Under Satan's direction, this man in authority was seeking to destroy those who were God's voice--those whose voice was causing people to create opposition to the early Christian movement. Verse 2 says, "And he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword." James was the brother of the apostle John. This was the James who was in the inner circle with the Lord Jesus--Peter, James, and John. It was that James--the one who was that close to the Lord Jesus. This James was the first apostle to die a martyr's death.

I want to point out that there is no Scripture that tells us what the Christians were doing when James was taken under official arrest; when his life was forfeited; and, when he was condemned to death. We can't decide from this silence that the Christians were doing nothing. But I think it is noteworthy, at least in passing, to observe that we have no indication that the Christians were praying (as we are going to in a moment relative to another apostle who was also condemned to death).

In the case of James, we simply have the facts given to us that Herod Agrippa took him for favor with the Jews; he condemned him to death; and, he executed him. The Scriptures are silent as to what the believers were doing relative to prayer. We can't press that they were not praying because they probably were. But in any case, we almost have the suggestion here, in the Holy Spirit leaving that out, that prayer was not a big factor with the Christians in meeting this problem. Here was one of their leaders, a man that God had given to them for spiritual leadership, and his life was on the line, and we have no indication that the believers were meeting it with the strongest weapon they had which is prayer (which is the strongest weapon you and I have to meet our problems).

Acts 12:3 says, "And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. Then were the days of unleavened bread. And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him, intending after Passover to bring him forth to the people." When Herod Agrippa saw how popular it made him to execute James, he thought he would really make a bash by taking the leader of the apostolic group. So he took Peter into custody; imprisoned him; sentenced him to death; and, was holding him for execution until the Passover season. Herod again, we're told, was doing this to gain favor with the Jews. Peter, to this end, was placed under maximum security guard. He was being guarded by four squads of soldiers with four soldiers in each squad. These 16 men guarded Peter 24 hours a day. He was chained physically to two of them, and the other two stood outside his cell door. They rotated around the clock--24-hour total maximum surveillance security.

This is the condition in which Peter finds himself. Meanwhile, the believers in the local church proceeded to gather in prayer. Peter, therefore, was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing by the church onto God for him. This was a continual (and the word "without ceasing" in the Greek means "fervent") practice. This was a fervent engagement in prayer in behalf of Peter. These people were praying in this great prayer meeting, "God, please get Peter out of prison." Peter is under four squads of soldiers: chained to two; and, watched by two. In the inner prison there are two other guard posts beyond his cell before you get out to this iron gate (which is locked) before you get off to the streets. Now he was down deep under security. And the people were praying, "God, get peter out of prison. Save his life." Perhaps because of what happened to James, there was this zeal and fervent intensity of prayer constantly because they realized now that just because they were Christians and just because they were God's men didn't mean that they were to escape the ravages of Satan's world; of Satan's control; and, of Satan's people.

So the Christians, in any case, the Holy Spirit points out, in this situation were now engaged in prayer. What they were claiming was Mark 11:24 which tells us, "Therefore I say unto you, whatever things you desire when you pray, believe that you have received them, and you shall have them." So they engaged in believing prayer. They simply wanted Peter freed, and believing that he would be was not enough to move God. They had to ask God. So they held this continuous prayer meeting of spirit-filled believers. In Psalm 66:18, we have stressed to us the condition which characterizes this prayer meeting: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

So there was a group of believers who gathered in prayer. Every believer in the group made full confession of sin to the Lord. They were functioning on the faith principle which is stated in 1 John 5:14-15:"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us, and if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him. They knew that this was in the Lord's will. They were satisfied that it was a prayer which was compatible to the Lord's plan.

What was Peter doing? Verse 6 says, "And when Herod would have brought him forth the same night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and the keepers before the door kept the prison." Now if there's anything that we may certainly see here about Peter, it's that he had a grace oriented attitude. He had a relaxed mental attitude that here the night before his execution, he's sleeping. Now if you put yourself in his place, most of us would say, "I'm not sure that if I knew that come dawn the next morning, they were going to sever my head from my body, that I would be sleeping soundly. But that's exactly what Peter was doing.

Now that is grace orientation. My life and my time are in the Lord's hands. As long as He has a plan for me, I am immortal. When His plans and use for me are through, nothing can stop the hand of the oppressor. Now this is what Peter understood. So if God had plans for him, he would be preserved; if not, he would be in the Lord's presence. He remembered, perhaps, that night that we have recorded a statement which was made about him in John 21:18-19 where Jesus said, speaking to Peter, "'Verily, verily, I say unto you. When you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk where you would, but when you shall be old, you shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.' This He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God, and when He had spoken this He said unto him, 'Follow me.'" Perhaps Peter realized, for one thing, he was not an old man; nobody was dressing him; and, nobody was having to lead him around. So Peter may have thought, "I remember what the Lord said to me. I'm not an old man. My time is not up." In any case, his mental attitude was one that permitted him to sleep.

Now here is the tremendous power of prayer. Acts 12:7: "And behold an angel of the Lord came upon him, and the light shone in the prison, and he smote Peter on the side (gently nudged him) and raised him up saying, 'Arise quickly." And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said to him. 'Gird yourself and put on your sandals,' and so he did." And you can just see the angel saying, "Put your clothes on, Peter," and Peter jumping up putting his clothes on and putting his sash on, and the angel indicating that they are going to go out the door. The angels says, "Put your shoes on," and you can just see Peter saying, "Well, do I have time?" And the angel, very relaxed about it, says, "Yes. No hurry. Just get your sandals on," taking his time getting all this put together.

And then Peter starts out into the night, and the angel says, "Put your cloak on too. It's a little cold out there tonight, Peter." And Peter says, "Oh, yeah, the cloak." And he grabs it and puts his outer garment on. Then the angel says, "Are you ready?" Peter says, "Yes," and the angel says, "Let's go." He walks toward the door and the door slams open, and maybe sends the guards sprawling that were outside the door. But it says to us, "He went out and followed him and knew not that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision.

Verse 10 says, "When they were passed the first and second guard, they came into the iron gate and led it into the city which opened of its own accord. And they went out and passed on through one street, and immediately the angel departed from him." The angel led him through one street, away from the prison, and then the angel was gone. At that point verse 11 says, "When Peter was come to himself he said, "Now I know of a surety that the Lord has sent his angel and has delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. Up to this point, he thought, "Maybe I'm dreaming. Maybe I'm having a vision." He wasn't sure that this was real because the handcuffs (the manacles) were gone; the gates were open; and, the guards were stunned. They went through the outer two lines of the guard post and out into the street and away from the prison itself. So when Peter realized what had happened; that indeed he was out there in the streets of Jerusalem a free man here in the middle of the night, he went beating it around the corner, down the street, to the home of John Mark's mother, where this prayer meeting was in progress continually in behalf of Peter's release.

Verse 12 says, "And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying." There were probably other assemblies gathered in other homes in Jerusalem praying for him also. "As Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a maid came to hearken named Rhoda (a slave girl answers the door). And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in and told how Peter stood before the gate."

This is kind of a humorous segment of Scripture because again, you have to picture this. Here's Peter, barreling down the streets as fast as he can up to this house; frantically knocking at the gate wanting to get in; and the girl answers and says, "Why, there's Peter! Praise the Lord!" She turns and runs into the house and says, "What do you know? Our prayers have been answered. Peter is out there." Meanwhile Peter is out there knocking away like crazy saying, "Hey, Rhoda, open the gate." But she's all excited. He's looking up and down the street waiting for the guards to come.

Well, meanwhile, what do you think the people inside are going to do. "They said unto her, 'You're crazy.' But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then they said, 'It is his angel.'" This meant his guardian angel. The Jews believed that a person's guardian angel would take on the form and appearance of the person he's guarding; and, that on certain occasions, that angel can appear to others looking like the person he's guarding. And they said, "It's his angel," suggesting, probably, that Peter is dead. "The guardian angel has come to tell us." They still couldn't accept the fact that, "God has answered our prayers. Prayer does work. James was killed, perhaps because we were negligent of prayer. Peter lives and stands before us here because we were faithful in prayer."

"But Peter continued knocking, and when they had opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. But he beckoning unto them, with a hand, to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go show these things unto James and to the brethren, and he departed and went into another place." This James was the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ who was the pastor-teacher of the main assembly in Jerusalem. So he gave the word, "Go tell the others what has happened," before he went into hiding. The thing that we see is that our God is all powerful. Jeremiah 32:27 says, "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for me?" Should we indeed be incredulous when God answers our prayers? No. This should be the norm of what we expect.

The fury of Herod was expressed in verses 18 and 19: "Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers concerning what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him and found him not, he examined the keepers and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down to Judea to Caesarea, and abode there." This was a pure "mission impossible" operation in the eyes of Herod Agrippa. And when there was no explanation for the disappearance of Peter, he executed the guards who were responsible and who were on duty that night.

Well, I'm happy to say that prayer still works the same way today. In Jeremiah 33:3, we read, "Call unto Me, and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you do not know." James died, perhaps, because of the lack of prayer and the believers not calling upon the Lord. Peter lived because they did call upon the Lord. God is ready to answer if we are ready to ask. Isaiah 65:24 says. "And it shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer. And while they are yet speaking, I will hear. Many times in this work it has been our experience, in one way or another, often financial ways, to be presenting before the Lord some very desperate need, and find that by the next morning's mail, that need has been met.

Not so long ago a lady received a letter in which we stated that a $1,000 was urgently needed in the ministry to bring us current on things that could no longer wait. She called me immediately on the call when she got the letter, and she said, "I just want to tell you that you have asked this in this letter to pray for this $1,000. You don't have to pray for it any longer because your letter came this morning, and yesterday my husband and I had written out a check for $1,000 that we are going to put it in next Sunday, which was the next day, as a matter of fact. Her check was already written before the letter ever went out to ask God's people. God knew. He was preparing the answer. Many of those who received that letter, as soon as they read the letter, they put it down and they asked God for that $1,000. The check was already written, and it was already destined to be on its way by that next Sunday.

That is one incident over scores that I could multiply to you within the circle of our own experience. We have yet to exploit the riches and the power of prayer. Psalm 116:1 says, "I love the Lord because He has heard my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live."

These two things--steeping myself in the knowledge of the Word of God and its doctrinal principles, and praying in the Holy Spirit) will be the major defense that you can apply to your life in this age of apostasy. They will be the source of untold blessing. Make no decisions without asking God about it. Don't just make decisions on the basis of the world's standards and estimates. Always make decisions in terms of your service for the Lord. Remember that God takes care of His own who put His service first. The only reason you are going to take the next breath is to use your spiritual gift. That's all you're here for. Whatever else you do in life, that is the thing that should preoccupy you primarily. All the rest of the facets of your life are only channeled to that one thing--the exercise of your spiritual gifts in service. Doctrine gives you the guidance, and prayer gives you the power.

**Why Should We Pray?**

1. We should pray because God commands it (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
2. We should pray because God is glorified when we praise and thank Him in response to His answers (John 14:13).
3. We should pray because we are helpless without the Lord. Life is more than the smart moves that we can make.
4. We should pray because prayer makes us partners in God's work. We are his agents.
5. We should pray because God wants us to pray for others (1 Timothy 2:1-3).
6. Finally, we should pray because, as God's children, it is our right to ask our Father for every need (Galatians 3:26, Philippians 4:19).

I commend to you the defense against apostasy--the grotesque, and the cultured kind--in this age in which we live, by learning how to pray in the Spirit on the basis of the doctrine of the Word of God to which you have responded and which you have received into your soul. God will respond if you will respond.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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