

# AN INTRODUCTION TO INTERCESSORY PRAYER

## by R H Johnston

### Introduction

I recall a book entitled "Car driving in two weeks": such a book could never make you a car driver: you need driving practice to become a driver. Instruction on prayer is similar, there is no substitute for practice under the instruction of the Holy Spirit, relying on the guidance of the Scriptures.

There is no magic about prayer, though some people make it magic by their attempts to manipulate God and situations through prayer. No, "prayer" is not the power: rather it is the living omnipotent God Who acts. He has chosen to work through and in co-operation with His righteous and obedient servants, and he accepts some limitation (James 4:2) on His action by working through them.

Learning to pray is made easier, as it was for Jesus disciples, by being in a group alongside one who has already learned to prevail with God in prayer. Such a person can help you avoid the pitfalls which Satan would place in your path in order to deflect you from praying. As "The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (James 5:16), and such prayer does great damage to his dominion, Satan is probably never more active than when we really begin to seek God effectively in prayer.

### Lord, teach us to pray: the pattern and persistence

What sort of prayer is acceptable to God? "Lord, teach us to pray" was the prayer of the disciples (Luke 11:1ff). Maybe you feel like echoing that request: what is interesting is that it is "teach us to pray", not "teach us **how** to pray". Clearly the disciples perceived that the power and effectiveness of Jesus ministry depended on His relationship with His Father in prayer. The disciples had seen Jesus pray and they felt clueless about doing it. This is not surprising. True prayer depends on the work of the Holy Spirit, Whom they had not then received. Jesus's answer is interesting because He answers their request only in the form of headings, and with (in Luke's account) a parable which emphasises persistence. We need to study Jesus's answer carefully and prayerfully if we are to truly understand it and to use it to learn to pray according to God's will.

Certainly Jesus never wanted His people to repeat the words of the "Lord's prayer" as an empty formula. Jesus in Matthew 6:7 specifically commands that we must not pray "empty phrases" or "meaningless repetitions" like pagans who think they will be heard if they utter many words, instead they are to pray intelligently according to the pattern in Matthew 6:9-13. Constant repetition of the "Lord's prayer" has unfortunately inoculated many people against perceiving

the truth which these words contain. Ecclesiastes 5:2 advises us to keep ourselves to few words before God: the implication there being that we should be careful what we commit ourselves to in His presence.

Jesus's answer starts with "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name". God is the heavenly Father of all His people, but we must remember that there is nevertheless an enormous gap between His position and ours. He is the almighty God who created heaven and earth from nothing, while we are His creation and only exist because of Him. This sense of the Holy prevents us from being presumptuous in God's presence. He is a Holy God, wholly separate from sin, and we are, at best, unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10). The sense of worship and awe needs to be foremost before our minds - all too often we are far too casual in God's presence - and with this God is not pleased (Malachi 1:6ff).

Also to use God's name is to use His authority. His name is not to be taken in vain (Exodus 20:7): it is holy, or "set apart". This means that we should use His name with care, and not presume to act on His authority unless we truly have it. If we do so, He will probably not act upon our request, and moreover will be angry with us for abusing his authority.

"Your kingdom come". This is the primary focus of prayer, and all prayer ought to have this ultimate objective. Matthew 6:33 emphasises that to put God first in this way will result in God meeting our needs. (Recently much of the church has once again wrongly come to believe that the Kingdom of God can be fully realised on the earth in advance of the second coming of Christ<sup>1</sup>. This heresy had already become apparent in various forms even in New Testament times: the teaching that the resurrection is past is one form of it (see 1 Corinthians 15). Rather, we seek to save men and women from being eternally lost: when they receive the Holy Spirit they then have the kingdom (or rule) of God within them. The kingdom which we receive is not of this world (Hebrews 12:26- 29), and the political and spiritual situation on the earth in general is prophesied to get worse as the time of the end approaches (Revelation 12:12). Because of man's sin, the form of this present world will pass away. There will be judgements and the destruction of the heavens and the earth by fire such as has not been seen since the beginning of creation (2 Peter 3; Revelation): they will surpass even the Genesis Flood which completely transformed the whole of the present earth.)

"Your will be done, on earth as in heaven". All prayer needs to be on the basis that it is God's will that shall be done, not mine, yours or Satan's, in heaven and

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<sup>1</sup> Christians' previous attempts to establish the kingdom of God on earth have always led to violence and coercion and eventually totalitarian control (as in the medieval Roman Catholic church, the Anabaptists at Muenster in 1534, and in Calvin's Geneva). The same happens now through Marxism, an idealistic secular religion that is arguably a Christian heresy, as expressed in the socialist communism of, for example, the former Soviet Union, and Mao's China.

earth alike. It is hypocrisy to seek this while ourselves walking in disobedience to God's commands.

Having dealt with the important God-centred matters, we may petition for our needs. "Give us our bread for the morrow" emphasises our total and continuing dependence on God for everything we need: such an attitude will help to encourage the right kind of humility towards God. The prayer does not allow us to receive more than a daily supply.

"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive those who are indebted to us". This emphasises the reality that God's continuing forgiveness of our moral and spiritual debt is conditional on our forgiving others (see Matthew 18:23-34). We are in need of forgiveness ourselves so we have no ground for boasting, or being superior to others who have offended against us. Our relationships with others must be right if our prayer is to be heard.

"And lead us not into trial". God does not test us directly (James 1:13): the force of the Greek is "Do not allow us to be led into trial". We are seeking God's help in avoiding those situations where we might become in danger of falling (see also 1 Corinthians 10:13).

"But deliver us from evil". We need to be kept from every form of evil whether an evil man, Satan or simply bad things.

These are all important components of the prayer which God seeks of us, and they help to reveal what we ought to be praying about, both as regards the purposes of God and the needs of man. Inspection of the prayers recorded in scripture shows that they routinely contain these elements.

### **Persistence in prayer: the place of fasting**

Matthew's gospel continues with the importance of fasting, while in Luke 11 the story of the man who must provide food for a friend who arrives during the night shows the vital importance of persistence in prayer on behalf of the needs of others. These are in fact related, and fasting plays an important but much neglected part in intensifying prayer. Note that Jesus says in Matthew 6 "when you fast" not "if you fast". Fasting has a two fold aspect: firstly it "humbles our soul" (Psalm 69:10), which means that it helps to subdue our flesh (that is our selfish attitudes and desires) before God, and secondly it shows God that we are concerned enough about the issues we are praying about to forego the normal necessities of life for a time. Isaiah 58 is the main teaching which reveals that there is a right and wrong way to fast. The wrong way both to pray and to fast is with self-centred objectives. The right way is firstly God centred, and then seeks to meet the needs of others.

Persistence in prayer is often misunderstood: it is not repetition of the same request over and over again in the same form. The man did not come back night after night with the same request. He only came on one night: his persistence was revealed in the fact that he clearly was not going to go away! The other parable of the woman and the unrighteous judge (Luke 18:1-8) shows much the same thing: the judge gives way quickly because he knows that, given the way she is handling her case she will not go away, but will keep on coming with fresh arguments until she gets what she wants. (She must bring new arguments to succeed in wearing the judge down. If she came with the same argument time and time again, all the judge would need to say is "I have considered your argument, and dismissed it. Good bye.")

### **What is intercession?**

What is intercession? It is not the same as either supplications or prayers or thanksgivings, since it is distinguished from these in 1 Timothy 2:1. However we may regard making intercession as a special sort of praying. 1 Timothy 2:1-6 reveals that making such intercessions is not optional, but something which God commands us to undertake on behalf of all men, for kings and those in authority, in order that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way (1 Timothy 2:2). The reason given for this is so that the gospel can be proclaimed easily and men can be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). (It is important to recognise that because men's salvation is the reason that we have to pray and intercede there will be times when we cannot pray for peace, because God is using war to make people aware that they need to change their behaviour and attitude towards God.)

To intercede is to stand between two parties who are in conflict. The bible presents a number of different images of the intercessor. He acts as a mediator (Job 33:23; 1 Timothy 2:5), like a umpire at a cricket match (Job 9:23), or as an advocate (1 John 2:1) like a lawyer defending a client in a law court, or as a substitute ransom (1 Timothy 2:6).

Israel was called to be a kingdom of priests, a calling which for a time they have failed to fulfil, and we are similarly called. Jesus represents us before God, we represent before God those who do not know Christ and so cannot represent themselves.

### **Prayer and intercession the foundation of the prophetic ministry**

Nowhere in the bible is either prayer or intercession described as a "ministry". At first sight this is surprising, but the reason is that prayer and intercession are the essential characteristics of the ministry of prophecy. The first time the word "prophet" is used in the bible is in Genesis 20:7, when the fact that Abraham is a

prophet is revealed by God to Abimelech. It is not that Abraham is going to tell Abimelech anything from God, which is our idea of a prophet (God had already spoken directly to Abimelech), but rather that Abraham will pray to God to heal him and his nation. This was not the first time Abraham had interceded with God for nations and cities, as he had already argued with God over Sodom (Genesis 18:17- 33).

### **Intercession depends on knowing God's mind, as revealed in scripture**

Further proof that the characteristic of the true prophet is intercession is provided by Jeremiah 27:18: this verse reveals the great need for the word of the LORD to be in the prophet if his intercession is to succeed. Prayer, especially intercession, and prophecy vitally depend on the knowledge of God's mind, which depends on being in his presence (Jeremiah 23:18). This requires us to think deeply and reflectively - that is, to meditate - on the revealed word of God in scripture. Subjective impressions and our good ideas are no substitute for this foundation, as through meditation of the scriptures we come to know the way that God thinks. His thoughts and ways are much higher than ours and can be quite different from what we would have thought (Isaiah 55:8-9). This explains why "He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination" (Proverbs 28:9). Job had to pray for his three friends because they had seriously misrepresented God (Job 42:8-9). The situation in Isaiah's day had become very much like this, even though there was still a lot of religious activity: "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from your, yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen" (Isaiah 1:15). We need to be sure that we are not doing the same today.

### **Intercessors are self-sacrificial: identification**

Moses interceded with God to the extent of requesting his own damnation in preference (Exodus 32:32), though God would not accept this (Exodus 32:33). We must be prepared to risk all in order to see the salvation of others (Paul had same attitude in Romans 9:3 in order that Israel might be saved). Moses intercedes again with God for Israel in Exodus 33:12-14 and Numbers 14:17-19. In Exodus 34:9 Moses acknowledges what a stiff necked people they are, includes himself among them and asks God's pardon. Moses stands between them and the raging fire from the LORD (Numbers 11:2). All these examples show that the intercessor's task is an ongoing one, and that the intercessor must be fully identified with those for whom he intercedes. Daniel shows this identification in his confession of Israel's sin in Daniel 9, by using "we" throughout, even though Daniel himself was a man of exemplary righteousness (Ezekiel 14:14). Daniel prays through the situation as a representative of all Israel.

### **Intercessors argue with God**

When God revealed to Abraham what He intended to do at Sodom (Genesis 18:17- 23), Abraham did not just accept this, but he argued the matter out with God, using arguments which he knew would carry weight with God. This way of dealing with God is quite common in scripture. Moses argued successfully with God that He should not wipe out the people of Israel in the wilderness when God was angry enough to have done this (Exodus 32:10-14), by appealing to the effect this would have on the attitude of the Egyptians. We must plead the case as if our own life depended on it. Daniel in Daniel 9 appeals to the effect of the continued exile on God's reputation (His "name"). The line of argument which all these men use are very instructive, and should be studied in depth. Acts 4:24-31 is a New Testament example of an argument presented before God based on His sovereignty and reliant on Old Testament scripture - the one thing they did **not** pray for was to be saved from further trouble! Arguing with God on behalf of others introduces the idea of the advocate, the lawyer who expertly argues our case before God's court.

### **Jesus Christ the incomparable intercessor between man and God**

The full character of the intercessor is fully revealed in Jesus Christ (Isaiah 53:12). He is the one who stands between men and God (1 Timothy 2:5) and who gave himself as a ransom (1 Timothy 2:6). This sets a very high standard for the intercessor, and clearly no one else can take His place. Nevertheless, given that an important component of the attitude of the intercessor is self-sacrifice, it is perhaps not so surprising that God finds such people hard to find (Isaiah 59:16). But Isaiah 59:16 clearly shows that to find such people is very important to God.

Jesus is our advocate: "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation of our sins (1 John 2:1). He continually argues our case before the father (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). The enemy accuses us before God (Revelation 12:10), but Jesus points to what He has done, and the Father accepts that. But Jesus left another advocate of the same kind (John 14:16 etc.), the Holy Spirit. He prays through us according to the will of God, as God would have prayed - through us (Romans 8:26-27). Thus all true prayer is the work of the Holy Spirit, and the initiative in true intercession lies with God (Genesis 18:17-19).

### **Why our praying fails**

Before we can pray in the Holy Spirit we need to examine our failure in prayer. If we are honest, most of us do not like praying because it is difficult to do, and we have found it doesn't work. For many reasons, there is no doubt that of all activities praying is the hardest. And if it is not a successful activity who wants to

go on doing it? We need to face up to this, and try to determine the reasons for our failure.

A homely illustration may help, as God is our heavenly Father. Much of our praying is like children's prattle. Parents hear their small children talk, and are pleased that they do, but what the children say rarely forms the basis for parental action. It may do if there is a consistency in the things talked about or requested, or if it is easy to do and matters little one way or the other. But many requests go unanswered, because the parents know the request will be forgotten in a few minutes. Children ask for many things which wise parents will not grant. Parents find that their children are much better at talking than they are at listening! But children do eventually learn what kinds of requests will be fulfilled, which lines of petition work, and they then start to manipulate their parents!. Now we cannot manipulate God like this though many people try, and sometimes God gives heed to such a request but at the cost of leanness of soul (Psalm 106:14-15) in order to teach a necessary lesson.

But it is right that we should learn his mind and will (through meditation of scripture, and by observing carefully which prayers God grants), so that we can ask according to his will, and if we do so then we know that we have obtained the requests we have made of him (1 John 5:15). Children learn what kinds of arguments will prevail with their parents, and we must learn to know what prevails with God.

### **Conditions for our prayers being heard**

Are all our prayers answered? Although some people teach that God always answers, giving the answers: "yes", "no", or "wait", this is not what the Bible tells us. In fact God is rather particular about who He will listen to and answer. He only even hears our prayers if we are free from conscious sin ("If I regard wickedness in my heart, the LORD will not hear" Psalm 66:18). See also Isaiah 58, especially v4). To get our prayers answered as we have prayed requires a number of further conditions to be satisfied, which include:

1. we are abiding in Him and His words abiding in us (John 15:7) (this is done by keeping His commandments John 15:10);
2. we are keeping his commandments (particularly those of believing in Jesus and loving other Christians), and so pleasing Him (1 John 3:21-22);
3. we are asking properly on the authority of Jesus Christ (John 15:16), and in obedience to the delegated authorities who are over us (1 Corinthians 11:1-16).; and
4. we are asking "according to His will" (1 John 5:14).

All of these conditions require our obedience and conformity to God's mind.

## **The need for the reality of death to self**

God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32), and he only consistently answers those who have no self-will. So often, our prayers are not answered because they end on self (James 4:3). We want God to answer prayer according to our will: but He will not do this, because the main thing which God wishes to work in us is the reality of death to self (e.g. Galatians 2:20; Luke 9:23). If he answers according to our (carnal) will, then we shall never be changed into His likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18), and never grow up into salvation and receive the things which God wants to give us. God is not mean or ungenerous, as the one talent man thought (Matthew 25:24): "No **good** thing does the LORD withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11). Of course, God's view of what is good is very different from ours, a problem which started when we decided to determine what constituted good and evil at the Fall.

Much of our lack of success is because we are so sure of ourselves, even when we claim to be humble. The problem is more with "self" than it is with "sin". The self (the "flesh") will do anything, "fast twice a week and give tithes on all that I get", if only it can remain alive (compare Colossians 2:23). The key to life in Christ, and everything within it, including effective fervent prayer, is the reality of our death to self. This is not a popular doctrine to our self-pleasing self-regarding age.

All true prayer is on the basis of death and resurrection. That is, death to self, and my ideas, my agenda, my wants. "Give me, give me" (Proverbs 30:15), is the desire of the flesh. But God said that we must take up our cross daily and follow Him (Luke 9:23). This is no special option for the super-spiritual: this is the normal Christian life, without which we are useless to God. We are unprofitable servants at our best (Luke 17:10). God has promised to give us all things, but with persecutions (Mark 10:30). "All those who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived" (2 Timothy 3:12-13). This is a promise to all, not a maybe or a perhaps, and this test may help us to know how far we are living in God's will.

## **True prayer starts in God's heart, and depends on His faith through us**

We have seen that the conditions for effective prayer is that it fully reflects what God wants to do, that we have his mind and are praying in accord with the will of God revealed by the Holy Spirit to us. Our ideas have been taken to the cross and left there.

Faith is "the making real of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1, literal), and we cannot receive that for which we do not have faith. Faith is something which we



have deep inside. True faith to receive from God comes from God: "Have God's faith" (Mark 11:22, literal). We cannot work faith up, though many people try: to do so is a route to deception and ultimately to disillusion. Praying according to the impressions we have in our heads or according to what we think we **ought** to pray will lead to certain failure. Instead we must seek God until we are sure about what we can pray for and receive from God. When we start on this "way of faith", we will probably learn to do this first by believing for little things, and receiving them. As we get more attuned to the voice of God we shall find that we are able to pray for and receive for bigger and bigger issues. Unless we are prepared to start in a small way like this we shall never start. To live like this is truly to "live by faith", which is the way God commanded us to live (Romans 1:17; Hebrews 10:38). Psalm 37:4 says that God gives us our heart's desires, and this is true in two ways: God must first give us the right sort of desiring, and then he fulfils those desires.

### **Can we pray for everyone and every situation?**

We have already seen that Moses stood between the people and God, but he did not always stand to defend people against God's judgement. See for example Numbers 16. And praying for people is not always good for them: Moses interceded with God for Pharaoh when he asked (e.g. Exodus 10:16-18), but this did him no good. Rather it seems to have hardened his heart.

It is not always good for other people for us to pray for them. People may ask us to pray for them, but this may not always be either possible or wise. After Peter commanded Simon the magician to repent (which is what we have to command the ungodly to do), Simon's response was to ask Peter to pray for him (Acts 8:24). There is no evidence that Peter did so, and experience shows that asking others to pray is quite a common way of avoiding repentance by those who will not obey the gospel. God may forbid intercession entirely (Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). In any event, we cannot pray for other people except in the way which God indicates, which may be entirely different from your own desire or the desire of the person who made the request for prayer. It is worthwhile thinking about how the father of the prodigal son was praying throughout his absence. How would we pray for a young man living in destitution?

How often we will find that if we are praying in God's will we have to pray in a way which is against our desires and inclination. God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours, and we must have our minds changed to be like His (Romans 12:2). When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, there can be no doubt that the flesh quailed at what would shortly come upon Him, yet He was confident that the Cross was the will of God and he sought to become fully aligned with that will. This is the true way of prayer. Not My will but Yours (Matthew 26:39) - and

this not out of reluctance but out of an embrace of the Father's good acceptable and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

This is not the same as appending "if it be your will" to the end of every prayer. This is a "cop out" which reveals a lack of faith to receive what we have asked for. If we do not have the faith, then we should not ask like that: instead we should ask to know what to pray for with faith. Once we know, and that may take a long time, we can then pray with the full assurance of faith.

### **Intercession in practice**

We have seen that we must be living in obedience to the will of God and in right relationship with others (1 Peter 3:7) if any prayer of ours is to be heard. The pattern of praying is revealed in the so-called Lord's prayer, and these elements will normally be present in intercession. We must be filled with the knowledge of God and His ways as revealed in the scriptures. This means that we must spend time studying the scriptures and letting them change our attitudes until we can discern the way God thinks and acts. We must be open in our own spirit to obey the voice of the Holy Spirit. To be able to do this our "flesh" must be crucified with Christ.

The practical implication of this is that we are devoid of our own opinion on what God ought to do. (Until we do this we can never be sure that we are not merely following the deceitful desires of our own hearts.) We must be as willing to pray for judgement as blessing, or at the very least, for judgement that will refine and purify those for whom we pray. naturally, we want people to have an easier life, but "When God's judgements are in the earth its inhabitants learn righteousness". Also consider Psalm 119:65-72, especially v67,71. God's principal objective is to see men won for His kingdom and living in obedience to Him. Consider again how to pray for the prodigal son. Some Christians have to have on-going trials because the easy life is too dangerous for them. Difficulties are the only things which keep them close to God.

We must therefore spend time before God, asking Him what He would have us pray for, and how we should pray. This is the process of discovering what we really have faith for in our hearts. Once we have that faith we can ask for it with confidence of receiving. In our discussions with God about the subject we should be seeking to be able to argue a case before Him, using arguments which will carry weight with Him. If there is sin involved in the thing we are praying about then we must become sufficiently identified with those for whom we pray that we can realistically confess the sin on their behalf, and agree with God that the sin does merit His judgement, and plead for mercy. There are limits to the extent to which we can identify with other people, and we must be sensitive to what God will allow.

As we need to know God's mind, during this process it is helpful to meditate the scriptures, not necessarily passages which appear directly relevant, but those which form part of the normal pattern of our study. As we pray, God may direct our thoughts to particular scriptures, and can sometimes apply them in unusual ways. God may sovereignly do that, but we should be careful that we are not hijacking scriptures which have not been given to us, simply because they suit the case which we wish to make before God. That is robbery. We can **never** force God's hand: to do so is to become deceived, and deception leads to disillusion, which can be spiritually fatal.

We must pray through to the end of what **we** want. We must not want glory for ourselves, to be "successful". Much of modern Christianity is self-centred in this way, even in prayer. This is why prayer is often easy when we first get down to pray but the longer we stay in the place of prayer the harder it gets. The reason for this is very simple. The early prayers are what we want to say, from our desires. We then reach a state where our "flesh" or self has had enough. It is at this point that we start to die to our own agenda. We are then tempted to give up (could you not wait with Me one hour?), but if we keep on praying then it is at that point that we often begin to know God's mind. This is the start of true persistence in prayer.

It should be self-evident that it is no good to pray for things that are outside God's revealed will (for example, for peace on the earth now).

It is no good to simply "declare" something, unless it has been revealed as God's will. We can only bind/loose on earth what has already been bound/loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:19, literal; Matthew 18:18, literal). Regrettably a lot of current teaching on "Spiritual warfare" is delusion, since it starts from the false premise that we have authority to do whatever we like without first taking the step of finding out what God wants us to do. It **is** possible to get to a place where we can declare something to be loosed or bound, but we must **know**, rather than presume, the Lord's mind before we do so.

We should, of course, discuss what is on our heart with God, and out of that we then get a clearer idea of what is on His mind, and can begin to pray accordingly - this is part of coming to abide in Him over the issue in question. We will not get far by trying to impose our will or insist on our own way - the heavens will become silent. We have all known the person who is so insistent on having their way that they can listen to no-one, and they can receive nothing as a result even from men. We are often like that with God. We should consider just Who He is - and how small and insignificant we are. Yes He has saved us, (if He has), but that is not because we were anything special - it was just out of his own grace, or favour. Yet if we will not spend time to find His mind, we shall become in danger

of uttering false prophecy (Jeremiah 23:16-22). Yet even these false prophets **could** have known His mind (Jeremiah 23:18,22).

### **Prayer with others**

It is often helpful to pray with others. This should be considered as a business meeting with God in the chair. As each person contributes his prayer, the others can listen not only to what he says but also weigh in their own spirit the extent to which they have agreement in their own hearts. As each prays the conviction about what is on God's heart grows. Once we begin to find that place of agreement deep down in the heart, without doubting (James 1:6-8; 1 Timothy 2:8), then we know we are in the place where we can ask and receive. To make this effective it is necessary to pray short prayers which are only on one subject until the place of that agreement is reached, or God witnesses that we need pray no further on that matter for the present. We may regard this as sticking to the divine agenda: imagine the chaos which would ensue in a business meeting if everyone tried to talk about everything on his mind all at once rather than follow the chairman's agenda. Clearly this way of praying needs a lot of personal discipline, combined with careful, sensitive yet firm leadership to keep things on track. The leader has a particular responsibility to know when agreement has been reached and to sum up the praying, rather as a chairman does at a business meeting, before moving onto the next item. It is also good if "minutes" are kept, as this will help to raise praise when prayers are answered, and this will provide the necessary encouragement to press on with praying.

This is an introduction to a large subject, and many aspects are barely touched upon. But if you think over what I have said, God will fill in the gaps and will give understanding (2 Timothy 2:7). The reader should test everything and hold fast to what is good.

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These notes provide a basic treatment of the topic, to stimulate personal bible study. Every effort has been made to be accurate, but the reader should test everything (Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21). Please report errors and omissions, and queries unresolved after discussion with the LORD to the author (email rhjbibpap@rhj.org.uk) (Feb 1994; 12 April 1994, 2.9.2018)

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