**They Continued Steadfastly In Prayer**

*by Harry Osborne*

The New Testament church engaged in prayer to worship God. Jesus taught the disciples that prayer was an act of worship and reverence to God (Matt. 6:5-13). Our Lord's example in public and private prayer is instructive to us as well (Matt. 11:25f; Lk. 3:21; Jn. 11:41f; 17:1f; Lk. 5:16; 9:18; 22:41f). In Colossians 4:2-4, the church is commanded to pray. The Bible says the early church prayed together in worship (Acts 2:42; 4:24-31). Churches following the approved example as a pattern in their worship will give attention to do as they did. But what do we know about 1st century churches and prayer?

1) **They "continued" in prayer (Acts 2:42).** This suggests that prayer was not an occasional act with them, but a continual practice. Jesus taught His disciples that "they ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Lk. 18:1). By inspiration, Paul instructed the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). If Christian men must be "lifting up holy hands in every place," they must do so in the assembly of the saints (1 Tim. 2:8). The remainder of Acts as well as the epistles show clearly that Christians assembling to worship God in places other than Jerusalem and long after the first Pentecost following the resurrection also engaged in the practice of prayer as they gathered.

**2) They were steadfast in prayer (Col. 4:2; Rom. 12:12).** Steadfastness not only implies continuation of a practice, but also an unwavering effort that abides regardless of the situation, surroundings or opposition faced. This characterized all work commanded of Christians (1 Cor. 15:58). It was done "at all seasons" and with "all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Eph. 6:18). Even when civil powers were persecuting saints, the inspired writer said it was "good and acceptable" to keep on praying for them and all men (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

**3) Their prayers addressed the deep needs of the time (Eph. 6:18-19).** They prayed for the furtherance of the gospel and for the boldness of those who preached it (Col. 4:3). In sending men to preach that gospel, they prayed (Acts 13:3). By prayer, they were "helping together" with those who preached the word (2 Cor. 1:11). They gathered expressly to pray for Peter when he was imprisoned for preaching the truth (Acts 12:5,12). In appointing both elders and deacons, they prayed (Acts 14:23; 6:6). Elders prayed and wept when the beloved apostle left them saying he would see them no more (Acts 20:36-38). In all needs and blessings, they prayed (Phil 4:6).

**4) They prayed for the forgiveness of sins on behalf of their brethren (Jas. 5:16).** Notice the instruction to "confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another" is followed by a promise: "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." Prayer by the church on behalf of brethren guilty of sin was both authorized and effective in N.T. times.

**5) They prayed in faith (Jas. 1:5-8).** Since faith comes from the word of God (Rom. 10:17), their prayers were in harmony with truth. Faith also dispels doubt which makes any act of worship, prayer included, unacceptable to God.

When first century saints prayed acceptably to God, their prayers went up as sweet incense to His throne (Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4). We have the same opportunity today if we pray acceptably as they did. Let us never look lightly upon approaching God in prayer as we assemble together. We come before the Almighty when we do so. Let us address Him in reverence and praise, casting our needs and petitions before the heavenly Father knowing that He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7).

**Forgiving from the Heart**
*by Jerry Fite*

Jesus concluded his parable highlighting forgiveness by saying, *“So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not everyone his brother from your hearts”* (Matthew 18:35). Forgiving from the heart denotes a sincere and genuine forgiveness. But here our heart is made aware of a sobering thought. What will my heavenly Father do unto me, if I do not forgive from the heart?

We are to forgive from a heart knowing God will not forgive us if we do not genuinely forgive others. This is the point of the parable (Matthew 18:23-35). A servant owes the king 10,000 talents and cannot immediately pay the debt. Pleading for patience, the servant receives compassion from the king who forgives him of the debt. When released of his debt, he finds a fellow servant who owes him 100 shillings. He rigorously demands payment. He does not forgive with compassion, even though he was forgiven by the king far more than what his fellow servant owed him. His king, when learning of his servant’s unwillingness to forgive, demands what was owed him. This is where Jesus’ summary statement is made. We must forgive others knowing God will not forgive us when we need forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15).

Forgiving from the heart is a heart that is not calculating the wrongs done, but is a heart always ready to forgive. Peter asked, *“How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him…”* No doubt thinking magnanimously, Peter immediately adds, *“until seven times?”*Jesus follows the line of thinking, but takes it to a different meaning. Jesus says not seven but the complete number 7 multiplied by 10 times 7. Jesus is not saying that one must forgive 490 times, but the limit is reached at this point and one does not have to forgive the 491st time. He is saying the heart is ready always to forgive.

What is the limit of your forgiveness? If one wrongs you once and you forgive; and then wrongs you a second time, and you forgive; you are probably at your limit. Does it not make you look foolish to keep on being wronged and you respond with forgiveness? After all, does not the world think in terms, *“fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me”*. But forgiving from the heart involves being always ready to forgive, not having a certain limit to forgiveness.

Forgiving from the heart, is a heart knowledgeable of how God forgives. While always ready to forgive, God does not forgive until we repent (Acts 8:22). As God has forgiven us, we are to forgive others with a *“tender”*and *“kind”* heart (Ephesians 4:32). While we should always be ready to forgive, *“if he repent, forgive him”* is the godlike way we should forgive from the heart (Luke 17:3).

We must forgive as God forgives, being ready to forgive the penitent with compassion. We will forgive with a heart never to apply the wrong again. When your heart says “I just cannot forgive anymore,” tell yourself, “Do I want God to quit forgiving me?” He will, if we quit forgiving from the heart those who sin against us!