

COMING TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH (THROUGH EVALUATION)

While studying on this subject of coming to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7), I have prepared six sermons on the first three steps of learning: education, meditation, and participation. I also prepared six sermons on the fourth learning step: evaluation. This indicates how important this step is to this process. Not only is the step of evaluation perhaps the most important, but to me it is the hardest.

Why is it so important and so hard? First consider what evaluation does. It is the mechanism by which we judge ourselves as we see ourselves versus how we want to see ourselves. As Christians, we evaluate our service to God by his standards. By evaluating our thoughts, actions, and intents against the Lord's will for man, we can determine if we're doing good or just doing. You could say the fourth step - evaluation - is what proves and improves the third step - participation. But evaluation goes back farther than that. Remember the first step, education? Evaluation was part of the thought process that made us want to begin to improve ourselves through education.

Then why is it so hard? Because the most difficult person we have to see and judge is ourselves. We can see the worth of others with 20/20 vision, but somehow the face in the mirror is usually a symbol of perfection! Talk about rose-colored glasses! To make it worse, people that study human behavior tell us that certain personality traits (mainly narcissism, a very common trait in varying degrees) carries the characteristic that makes it almost impossible for that person to see and judge themselves of anything short of perfection (NOTE: I'm no psychologist, but I do enjoy reading about human behavior). Why is it even necessary to evaluate ourselves? Because unless we see ourselves as part of our problem with sin, we will never see ourselves as part of our solution!

Now let's leave these introductory thoughts and jump right into our study. According to Webster, evaluation means to find the value or the amount of, to fix the value of. But I like the following as a working definition of evaluation: to judge something against a designated standard. This definition seems pretty simple, until we try to decide on the correct designated standard. So what are our choices? Could it be social norms, financial circumstances, the marital environment, the family climate, or God's standards? Of course, you and I are practicing

Christians, so we want to say we always evaluate ourselves against the designated standards in the Bible.

So if the designated standards are so important, who picks them: the family unit, our peer group, our church family? The truth is that this is something that each and every one of us chooses for ourselves. I cannot choose the designated standards for the people I love most in the world, as much as I want to. I just can't. It's not possible. The only thing I can do is lead them to use the designated standards I'm living and evaluating myself by. And that's all you can do, too. So it is extremely important to choose wisely!

Look at it another way. Why is it so important that we each have and claim ownership of our very own designated standards to evaluate against? Because we would go crazy trying to meet someone else's! Have you ever listened to a disgruntled Christian complain? Either you are hearing someone that is trying to evaluate against someone else's designated standards and not their own, or their designated standards are not God's standards. What do you think about an unenthusiastic Christian, or a bored Christian? Rest assured that either the designated standards are wrong, or the evaluation process is broken, or both.

But what really is the big deal about what designated standards we choose to use to evaluate our life's work? Because if we are striving as we should to become a better person, then the goal is not the person we already are, but the person that is defined by our chosen goals - our designated standards. This is what sets our personality, attitude, humor, behavior, appearance, intent, the way we think things "ought to be," etc. In short, the designated standards we choose will determine the kind of person we are, and more importantly the kind of person we will be tomorrow. I will tell you that personally I know few people that I would accept all of their designated standards as my own. But I will also state that I have always tried to copy the best standards of the best people I know. In most instances these designated standards are Bible based, and they come first. But where the Bible is silent, such as in how to drive/maintain a car, then I try to copy others that have proven themselves successful.

What do you do? Do you see people who are more humble, more forgiving, more content, more industrious, more focused, more disciplined, etc. than you and feel envious of them and criticize them? Or do you thank the Lord for their example and try to copy them? If you're not the person you want to be in all

parts of your life, could it be that you're evaluating yourself against the wrong designated standards? Could it be that your designated standard is the one talent man instead of the five talent man (Mat. 25:14-30)?

Let's leave the idea of our designated standards for awhile and consider the usefulness of the evaluation process. A good evaluation can work through the conscience to be very corrective. Consider Romans 6:21. Paul asked them to evaluate their past fruit, the idea that the fruit now caused them shame, and that the fruit would lead to death. Even though this verse does not contain the word evaluate, without the Romans using the evaluation process the verse is useless as far as touching their conscience. And we know that if the conscience is not touched, there can be no repentance, correction, and conversion.

Another way to say this is that without evaluation, Romans 6:21 simply becomes an observation of their history. Now consider a couple of illustrations of the difference between an observation and an evaluation. First, consider a man and a woman looking at another woman. The man looks at the woman and sees obvious things, such as her shape, age, hair, looks, etc. He is only making an observation. But the woman may look at the other woman to see if her purse matches her shoes, if her nails and hair are done, if her jewelry looks gaudy or classy. In other words, is she better than me? She's not making an observation, but an evaluation. On the other hand, if the man and woman are looking at a car, she probably is looking at the obvious things, such as the paint, chrome, interior trim, and seat covers. She is only making an observation. The man is checking the tires for wear, the oil, the air filter, the brake pedal, the mileage, and *Consumer Reports* for reliability. He's making an evaluation of the worth of the car for his purpose and his money.

So why worry about the difference between an observation and an evaluation? Because we will be more effective if we will mainly make observations of others and make evaluations of ourselves. If we get this backwards, I'm afraid we'll be making no progress in our spiritual life. And our time is too short to not constantly be trying to make the most of ourselves. Jesus deserves nothing less! If we will be what God designed us to be, we must constantly evaluate ourselves and our performance against God's standards. Please reread and meditate on these thoughts, because they lay the foundation for fully coming to the knowledge of the truth.

Bill Prince Jr.
Oxford, AL

APOLOGIA

QUESTION: Can you discuss prayer from the standpoint for what we are to pray? I realize how important prayer is and I want to make sure that I pray for the right things.

ANSWER: Prayer is one of the greatest blessings and privileges given to the children of God. We must constantly remind ourselves that God is a God who is portrayed as a loving Father, and those who have obeyed the Gospel are His children. John writes,

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God." (1 John 3:1)

If forgiveness of sin wasn't enough, God has and does continually bless us in so many ways. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Word to guide us, the joy of fellowship, and the promise that all things work together for good to just mention a few. In addition to this we can also add the privilege of prayer.

We want to commend the attitude of the one submitting the question. Since as His children we are given the awesome gift of prayer, we should also be concerned that we do not abuse it nor take it for granted. While the scripture gives many instances of prayer and of specifics for which we can pray, it will be the purpose of our answer to address the subject not so much from the specifics but rather from the foundation from which our prayers are to be offered.

In order to do this we will turn our attention to 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12. Paul writes,

"Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

The above reference is not a prayer as much as it is a prayer report. It opens our eyes to the way that the apostle Paul viewed prayer. Remember that Paul admonishes us to be followers of him as he is of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). As we study this section of scripture we begin to obtain a sense of what he prayed for. This is not a passage that develops for us the theology of prayer but rather it is a glimpse into the heart of a godly man who was earnestly committed to following Christ and

who had the love of others in his heart. As we look at it we get an inclination of praying for the right things.

Unfortunately, most of us pray for the wrong things or our prayers are shallow lacking depth. We pray for comfort, solutions, healings, food, jobs, cars and many other things that pertain to life in this world. While we do not dispute that all of the above can be legitimate prayer requests and that it is certainly not wrong to pray about such matters we need to be reminded of the bigger framework into which such requests are made. Most of the time, the above types of petitions are isolated or are the end in themselves of our prayers. If we are to pray legitimately we need to pray from the perspective of and for matters that pertain to the kingdom of God . This is the key principle that will aid in keeping our prayer life on track and ensure that we pray for the right things.

As we look at the passage mentioned above, we find three specific requests. Paul mentions worthiness, fulfillment, and powerful service. All of these are in alignment with God's desire for His people. God's ultimate goal for each of us is our sanctification. He wants a sanctified people. A people set apart from the world for Himself. Remember sanctification deals with our holiness and is manifested in our life as we become progressively Christ-like. The point to note is that Paul lines his prayer up with God's purpose. This is what we often fail to do. Many times our prayers are asked in isolation, separated from God's desire and purpose. Unfortunately they are more in line with our purpose and our desires. Let's examine each of these.

The first thing Paul mentions is the worthiness of our calling. God makes us worthy so we can walk worthy. This refers to our salvation. We have been saved not because we are worthy of being saved but that God loved us. Our salvation is also a matter of His glory. Through Christ and His redemptive work in our life we glorify God. By glorifying God we do not mean to indicate that we add something to God's nature that He lacks. We are not saying that God needs more glory. His glory is like all of His attributes. It is infinite. What we are saying is that we are to draw attention to His majesty and honor. It is in this sense that we glorify God. This is of course our calling. God's glory should be our primary focus in all that we do. Being worthy of our calling is just another way of saying, "be what you are". We are called to be saints therefore we should live like it! Our calling is our walk. It is our conduct. It is our life that is lived in Christ to God's glory. There should not be a gap

between what we claim to be and how we live. Therefore in our prayers we should pray that God assist us in this endeavor.

The second request Paul makes is that God fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness. This is asking God to accomplish in our lives everything we desire when what we desire is good. Herein lays the principle behind praying for God to bless our personal life. As mentioned earlier in our article, there are some who do not believe that it is proper to ask God to bless our jobs, our health or whatever else we might personally need. This view is not correct. It is scriptural and in fact expected that our prayers include such supplications. However, these supplications should never be separated from that which is good and according to God's good pleasure. God will fulfill every longing for our life as long as we long for that which is according to His will.

The third request is one for power (the ability) to do His work by faith. God not only wants us to be a worthy people, a fulfilled people, but powerful people as well. We have much work to do on this earth and it is only by the power of God that we will be able to accomplish it. Consequently as we live our lives we need to pray daily for the power of God to accomplish His will in this world.

Now that we have seen that we should pray for worthiness, fulfillment, and power we turn our attention to the reason. Note 2 Thessalonians 1:12.

"that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Our purpose in prayer is not for us. The purpose of our prayers is for the Lord. It is His glory with which we should be concerned. We are to lift Him up so He will be honored, exalted and lifted up before the world.

As we noted when we began, this study was designed to give us the framework for our prayers. While specifics may be different for each of us, we all should ask the Lord to use us in a way that glorifies Him!

SAM DICK
Cave City, KY

GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
March 14 - 16	Willow Oaks Congregation Russell Springs, KY	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
March 17 - 21	Owens Road Congregation Prattville, AL, AL	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
March 22 - 24	Napoleon Congregation Woodland, AL	Steve Moore (Woodland, AL) & Lee Messer (Wedowee, AL)
March 23 - 26	Noble Congregation Noble, GA	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
March 28 - 30	Verona Congregation Verona, KY	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
March 31 - April 4	Liberty Congregation Liberty, KY	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What happened to the men who gave false reports concerning the land of Canaan ?
2. Who told Haman that a seventy-five foot gallows should be built, on which to hang Mordecai?
3. Who does Hosea say "took his brother by the heel in the womb?"
4. Jesus told his disciples they were worth more than what?
5. According to Paul what should wives give their husbands in return for husbands loving their wives?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. In Deuteronomy what analogy did Moses use to describe the current population of Israel? LIKE THE STARS OF HEAVEN (Deut. 1:10)
2. What was the last group of Israelites to receive their inheritance in the new land? LEVITES (Josh. 21:3)
3. God compared the power of Job to that of what animal? A BEHEMOTH (Job 40:15-24)
4. According to Galatians how much time passed between the covenant with Abraham and the Law of Moses? 430 YEARS (Gal. 3:17)
5. John said who has seen God? NO ONE (1 John 4:12)