

August 29

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss. James 4:3

LET us learn to pray aright, as well as to labor and to hope aright; and in order to do so

CONTEXT

Jas 4:3-4 KJV Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. (4) Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

R5311 "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."—James 4:3.

The word *lusts* here signifies *desires*. We are not to ask to gratify fleshly desires."

R2865 "Many ask and receive not because they ask amiss, for things to be consumed upon their earthly desires—wealth or fame or temporal good things. (Jas. 4:3) ...Our Heavenly Father is pleased to give the *holy spirit* to those who ask him. (Luke 11:13.) If the Lord's consecrated people could all be brought to the point where the chief aim in life, the burden of all their prayers, would be that they might have a larger measure of the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of holiness... what a blessing it would mean! If, then, they should wrestle with the Lord until the breaking of the day their hold upon him would be sure to bring the desired blessing... He withholds it until they learn to appreciate and earnestly desire it."

Jam 4:4 Continued: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?"

R4766 "James 4:4...The love of the world, the friendship of the world to which the Apostle refers, is the love of fellowship, which implies the partaking of its spirit—its aims, ambitions and hopes, and its methods of pursuing them. If any man love the world in this sense, surely the love of the Father is not in him.

As children of God we have been called to a position of great favor and advantage. Our Heavenly Father has revealed to us his plans and purposes and has condescended to take us into his fellowship and active co-operation; and so grand and glorious and extensive is the outlook of the future that we are able to view the things of the present life in a vastly different light from that in which the world views them.

R5708 "As the Christian grows in grace and in knowledge he should come to realize more and more that he is a *New Creature*, and that the New Creature is to pray for itself and not for the old creature."

R3665 "It would be rather unsafe, we think, for any of the "new creation" to make request for temporal blessings. "After all those things do the Gentiles seek." (Matt. 6:32.) They seek those things because they know not of and appreciate not the higher and better, the spiritual things. Spiritual Israelites are exhorted by the Lord to appreciate the spiritual clothing, the spiritual food, the heavenly riches, which moth and rust cannot corrupt, and to seek for these."

let us be swift to hear, slow to speak, swift to hearken to the Word of the Lord and to the lesson which He has already given us, and to His method of instructing us and guiding us and blessing us. Let us be slow to tell Him

R2007 "The privilege of prayer, or any other favor of God, is not granted for selfish purposes. A thing which might be properly desired and asked for in one case might be improper if asked for from some other motive. To desire and ask for something good in itself, in order that we might be glorified before our fellows, is a wrong request, because of a wrong motive.

The desire for a good thing, simply for ease and convenience, is an improper, selfish motive. The Apostle refers to such cases, saying, "Ye asked, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your desires," -- *i.e.*, for vain-glorious purposes or other selfish reasons. (Jas. 4:3.) To ask for some good thing simply to make a test of it, thereby to establish our faith, is seemingly an improper request, for none but the *faithful* are promised anything.

Besides, God's plan is that we should walk by faith and not by sight. Hence, we not only should not ask anything unauthorized, but as we grow in spirituality our petitions will be chiefly for spiritual favors; and even in asking for these we should be particular not to specify *how* they are to come. And we should look for the answers to our prayers in natural rather than supernatural channels, since God's usual method is to use supernatural means only where the natural means are inadequate.

The graces of the holy Spirit are specially stated to be open to our requests and corresponding efforts: Your Heavenly Father is more willing to give the holy Spirit to them that ask it, than earthly parents are to give good (earthly) gifts to their children.-- Luke 11:13.

**"YE HAVE NOT, BECAUSE
YE ASK NOT."**

--James 4:2--

The trouble with many is that they do not avail themselves of the great stock of divine grace set apart for the benefit of those who, abiding in Christ, and his word abiding in them, do ask, do seek and do find. Let no one suppose that all prayer must be selfish. Quite to the contrary, we have a wide field of prayer-liberty in full accord with the Lord's Word and will.

Every trial of faith and patience is an occasion for prayer for the promised succor. Every failure to gain victory is an occasion for a prayer for forgiveness, and as well for divine blessing, that the lesson of our own weakness may be deeply impressed, so that in the next similar trial we may promptly apply for and lay hold upon the "grace to help" promised. Every victory over self is an occasion for prayer that we be not high minded and puffed up, but kept humble and watchful for the next attack from the great Adversary. Every service for the truth becomes an occasion for a prayer of thanks for the privilege of serving the Great King and mayhap to have suffered something for his cause; and a cause for supplication for further opportunities of service and grace to use them wisely.

If you have trials and temptations which you are able to overcome, and which are working out in your character patience, experience, brotherly-kindness, sympathy

what our preferences are; indeed let us seek to attain that development of Christian character which will permit us always not to seek our own wills, but the will and the way of our Father in heaven. Z.'03-204 R3217:6

and love, rejoice and offer the prayer of thanksgiving and acknowledgment of divine mercy and help. If your trials seem heavier than you can bear, and likely to crush you, take the matter to the great Burden-bearer, and ask his help in bearing whatever would do you good, and release from all that would not do you good, but which would injure you. If your heart is full of a desire to obey the Lord's injunction and "forget not the assembling," and you are *unreasonably* hindered in a way that you have tried to overcome but cannot, take the matter to the Lord in prayer, and watch and wait and strive according to your prayer, and you will soon see a manifestation of divine power on your behalf. If you see a true brother, a true "soldier" faltering and in danger, let your heart be so full of love for all of the Lord's "brethren" that you will not only run to his relief, but also supplicate the throne of the heavenly grace unceasingly, until you have regained him, or until in his wilfulness he has renounced the "narrow way" entirely. And should the fault be your own, your prayers and efforts will surely be blessed and overruled to your own profit. If you have no burning zeal to preach the good tidings of great joy, pray earnestly and faithfully and persistently for it, and strive for it, and you will soon have it. If you have a zeal and love for the gospel, and lack ability to present it, pray for the ability while you make full use of what you have. If you have the zeal and the ability and lack an opportunity, take it to the Lord in prayer as soon as you can, telling him that you are faithfully using all the opportunities you have. Then watch for more opportunities without slacking your hand to use the very humblest and smallest within your reach.

Have you a quarrelsome disposition, or other bad habits, which you realize are a burden to your home and family, and to your brethren in the Lord's household? Take it to the Lord in prayer, asking grace and help to overcome, and meantime using your best diligence and effort in harmony with your prayer.

Do you lack wisdom, so that your efforts to serve the Lord and the truth are usually failures? Take it to the Lord in prayer, remembering the promise, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not."-- James 1:5.

Have you business complications brought about by your lack of judgment, or the dishonesty of others, or your generosity to the poor, etc.? And do these perplex you and hinder your progress in spiritual matters, and thus threaten your welfare as a "new creature?" This surely is a proper matter to lay before the Lord at the throne of the heavenly grace. And although it would not be right for you to attempt to dictate how your relief shall come, and you should not expect the Lord to work a miracle to prosper your imprudent venture, yet you can ask his wisdom to guide and overrule in the results, better than your wisdom could do it.

Here is a wide range of subjects (and it might be widely expanded) upon which we may go to the throne boldly in the name of

Jesus and ask and receive, seek and find, God's grace sufficient. But the range of subjects upon which we may not approach God in prayer is also large. We may not ask anything to minister to pride or selfishness or ambition, nor anything which would injure another; nor anything which would conflict with the Lord's plan as revealed in his Word. Oh! how many "ask and receive not, because they ask amiss," that they may consume the desired favor upon their earthly desires.

THE PRAYERS OF CHRIST UNSELFISH

Our Lord's prayers, like all his acts and teachings, are models of unselfishness. Therefore, before we ask anything of the Father, one question should be carefully considered; *viz.*—Why do I want this?... It should not be for his own glory, nor for his own comfort, nor in any manner for himself; for such requests are selfish and out of harmony with his covenant of sacrifice—"even unto death." Remember the course of our Lord and the apostles. Our Lord used divine power in feeding the multitude because of *their* necessity, and to glorify the Father; but when he himself was forty days without food he would not use the same power to feed himself, by commanding the stones to become bread, because this would have been contrary to his mission; for he came not to serve himself but others: not to preserve his own life, but to sacrifice it, to lay it down in the service of others... He healed the lame and the palsied miraculously when it would glorify God, but when he himself was weary, he "sat on the well" to rest, or used other natural means. Though he prayed often to the Father, and knew that he was heard always, and although sometimes heavy and sorrowful, as in Gethsemane, yet his prayers were requests for grace and strength to do the Father's will, and to finish the work he had come to do...

A special reason why the saints cannot properly ask for physical health and earthly luxuries, we have already intimated is, that they, like their Lord, have consecrated themselves, and pledged to God the exchange of all earthly favors and privileges for the heavenly favors and glories to come;—a foretaste of which they now enjoy through the exceeding great and heavenly promises which cheer and refresh and comfort and bless more than earthly blessings could. Who, that understands the matter, would renounce his heirship in the future heavenly glories, together with present hopes and spiritual joys or reexchange them, if he could, for future earthly restitution, and present occasional foretastes of it?"

F677-679 "PRESENT JOYS OF THE NEW CREATION *"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."* John 15:11...

All who from a standpoint outside the "house of sons"—those who have not consecrated themselves...are apt to consider that in this sacrifice every joy is lost. But every member of the New Creation knows the contrary, and can testify that this is a great mistake -- that though some earthly

joys, once held very dear, are sacrificed one by one, in their places come heavenly joys that far more than compensate for the loss. As our Lord again said, "Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." (John 16:20) The New Creation must all taste of the bitter cup which the Lord drained to the dregs; they must all be touched with sympathy for the infirmities of the flesh; they must all realize distinctly the exceeding sinfulness and bitterness of sin; they must all be tested concerning their loyalty to the heavenly Father, and their willingness to sacrifice every earthly thing as the interest of his cause and faithfulness to the right may demand. But blessings come through all such tears and sorrows and disappointments -- the blessings of a realization of divine approval, a joy superior to that of the natural man, the joys of the Lord, fellowship and communion with the Father.

There could be no such joys were it not for our blessed hopes. If our joys were dependent upon circumstances of this life merely, we should be without joy; and, as the Apostle has declared, be "of all men most miserable." (1 Cor. 15:19) It is when hope has laid firm hold upon the exceeding great and precious promises of God's Word, that joys spring up as flowers in a desert, vivified by our tears -- such flowers of joy and blessing as the poor world in its wilderness condition could not produce or imagine. And as our joys depend upon our hopes they depend also upon our activities. It is not sufficient that a promise has been left us, and that our hope has grasped the promise. By divine arrangement the joy which springs into being through the implanted hopes and prospects must be nourished by prayer, and by activity in the Lord's service. Our Lord indicates the close relationship between prayer and the perpetuation of our joys, saying:

"ASK AND YE SHALL RECEIVE,
THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL"

--John 16:24--

"In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures forevermore," declares the prophet. (Psa. 16:11) It is because prayer brings the soul into the presence of the Lord that it prepares the way for divine blessing and superlative joys."

R5803 "PRECIOUSNESS OF INTIMATE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

It is when continued trust in the Lord and His many responsive providences in our lives have ripened into precious personal acquaintance and intimacy that we learn to delight in Him. Yes, it is when heart answers to heart, when pleading prayer brings recognized answers of peace, when the Divine love and care have been clearly seen in the guidance of our way, that we can recognize the abiding presence with us of the Father and the Son. Then, however dark may be our way, however severe may be the storm that rages about us, the thought of Divine protection is ever with us, so that as the children of the Lord we are never in despair; though cast down, we are not destroyed; though persecuted, we are never forsaken. We know our Father's hand is ever

at the helm, that His love and care are sure and unfailing."

R3351 "PRAY WITHOUT CEASING..."

To such an one every day and every hour is a time of fellowship with the Lord. Whenever business cares, household worries, etc., interfere with such communion it is an evidence that we are being overcharged with the cares of this life, and the difficulty should be corrected: either we should rectify matters by diminishing our business responsibilities, etc., or, if this be impossible, we should counterbalance the cares of life with the more earnest and more repeated turning of our hearts to the Lord for guidance in even the trivial affairs of life, much more in the great ones."

R5310 "PRAYER THE VITAL BREATH OF THE NEW CREATURE *"And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."*--Luke 18:1...

THE NEW CREATURE'S GREATEST NEED

Our text means that New Creatures should be persistent in their petitions to God. These may know what is proper to pray for, by studying the words of Jesus and the Apostles and the Prophets of old. The spirit-begotten ones may thus understand what are the rights and privileges of sons of God. To these the Heavenly Father is more willing to give the Holy Spirit than earthly parents are willing to give good gifts to their children.--Matthew 7:11.

The *Holy Spirit* is the one thing which the New Creature needs. The New Creature is on trial for the new nature--for glory, honor, immortality. And he can receive these only as he is worthy. The terms on which he is received into spiritual relationship with the Father are that he shall mortify, deaden, the earthly impulses and seek to have the spiritual impulses quickened. What, therefore, he especially needs to strengthen him and bear him up as a New Creature is the Holy Spirit of God. Consequently God is particularly willing to give us this, and especially pleased that we ask for it...

BLIGHT FOLLOWS NEGLECT OF PRAYER

There is a great blessing that comes from prayer! We see that if prayer be neglected, a certain amount of blight comes in; whereas if the New Creature persists in coming to the Lord in prayer, he thus uses the higher organs of the mind. He brings out the highest qualities, which will make for Righteousness and Truth, and for the growth of the New Creature. And the New Creature, making use of the higher organs of the brain, makes progress in character-structure and in the Lord's service.

Prayer is the vital breath of the New Creature. We cannot control, nor get the best out of our old bodies except we conform to our Lord's instruction to pray. If prayer was appropriate for our Lord, who was perfect, if He needed to go often to the Father in prayer, even so it is necessary for us to go to the Lord in prayer that we may be more and more transformed by the renewing of our minds."

R3216 (From Harvest Truth Database V8.0 2013)
UNFAVORABLE ANSWERS TO PRAYER

1 SAM. 8:1-10.--JULY 5.--

Golden Text:--"Prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only." 1 Sam. 7:3.

THE International Lesson course now turns again to the Old Testament. Six months ago we considered the child Samuel, his parentage, training, acceptance with God, etc. The present lesson takes up the thread of history in Samuel's old age. There is not a suggestion anywhere of disloyalty to the Lord or to the people of Israel on the part of this great prophet Samuel; the Lord's love and favor continued with him to the very close of his life and made it useful to the very end. As he advanced in years, and as the nation of Israel advanced in numbers, it seemed a proper thing that, in addition to the court of justice presided over by the prophet, there should be another court, especially on the southern boundary of Palestine, at Beersheba; and having sons, it was but natural that the prophet should expect of them considerable ability, discretion, wisdom and integrity in serving the Lord and his people according to the example which he had set them. Where could he expect to find more competent assistant judges for service in Beersheba than his own sons?

We perceive that integrity of character, although transmissible to a certain degree, cannot be fully relied upon in the children, however noble and God-fearing the parent. The heart, the will, of each individual, is independent; training may indicate to it the proper course, but full consecration to the Lord is essential to the full, ripe development of character. Samuel's integrity is shown by the fact that when it was proven to him that his sons were guilty of accepting bribes to pervert justice, he promptly removed them from their positions of influence. Doubtless he had in mind the course of his predecessor, Eli, who was too lax in his dealings with his own sons, and thus permitted great calamities to come upon them and upon the people. The nobility and integrity of Samuel's course, which so commends itself to all lovers of righteousness, was no doubt to some extent guided by the lessons of the Lord exemplified in Eli's case. Certain it is that Samuel continued in the divine favor to the end of his course.

As we have already seen, there were elders, or judges, in all the tribes, whose business it was to conduct and adjudicate the smaller matters of the people of their own tribe. It was probable, therefore, that only the larger questions were brought before Samuel and his sons, who constituted, we might say, a kind of superior court--Samuel, as a prophet and judge of divine appointment, representing the Lord. The government of Israel was different from that of every other government in the world. God was their real King, and in his providences, according to the covenant he had made with them, he supervised their affairs-- whether by permitting them to go into temporary captivity to their enemies, because of sins and unfaithfulness to him, or by prospering the nation and delivering them and guiding their efforts favorably when living in obedience to him. Under the judgeship of Samuel they had no king, no emperor, no one except the Lord, to hold an autocratic position, and whose word would be law--the judges raised up for them from time to time being providentially guided by the Lord. The government was not a republic in the present day understanding of that term. The people did not choose their own head, or president, or judge; they merely looked for the leadings of divine providence and accepted such judges as the Lord raised up for them. Their condition was a most happy one in many respects: how much better to have the Lord's providential guidance in all our affairs than to trust in our own wisdom or in the wisdom of some other man or some royal family!

As the Elders of Israel perceived that the sons of Samuel were not to be relied upon to follow in the steps of their father, and to be faithful and impartial judges, seeking to know and to judge amongst the people according to the divine will, they became fearful; they forgot--or perhaps never fully recognized--that God was their real Judge, their King, and that Samuel was only his representative and mouthpiece. They forgot that although Samuel was growing old, the Lord was "the same yesterday, today and forever," unchangeable, and able to raise up for them, in his own due time, a judge of the kind best suited to their necessities. The anxious Elders of Israel consulted together and concluded that they would feel better satisfied if they were permanently tied up to some autocratic ruler--if they became the servants of some one of their number, and permitted his family in a line of succession to be their masters, their kings.

Doubtless, too, they did not realize that, personally and nationally, they were on a higher plane than the nations around them that had kings; they felt, on the contrary, that they were "out of style"; and, as people are very apt to do, they concluded that the majority must be right, and probably felt somewhat ashamed to speak of their tribes as a nation without a king, without a master, without a visible lord, claiming allegiance merely to the invisible Jehovah. Kitto tells us of a somewhat similar sentiment springing up amongst the Dutch when the latter had a republican form of government:

"When the English and Dutch were plotting for power and influence in the East, the English, in order to damage their rivals, industriously circulated the dangerous secret that the Dutch had no king. The oriental mind was puzzled and perplexed by the indication of a condition so utterly beyond the scope of its experience and comprehension. The Dutch, alarmed for the effect of this slur upon their respectability, stoutly repelled the charge as an infamous calumny,--affirming that they had a very great king, and exalted, for the nonce, their Stadtt to the higher rank."

Influenced by this servility to custom, the Elders of Israel brought their petition, or prayer, to Samuel that he, as God's representative, would anoint for them a king--a special ruler over them, and make them as a whole a nation of servants to one of their own nation. It is hard for us to sympathize with such ignoble sentiments, such prayers for their own degradation. Samuel seems to have viewed the matter from this standpoint, and, perhaps, also regarded it as a personal slight to himself. However, he very properly took the matter to the Lord in prayer. It was not for him to decide what and how--he was merely the Lord's mouthpiece and representative to speak to the Israelites in the name of the Lord whatever message he should receive. Ah, how grand it would be if the whole world could be under such a rule,--heavenly wisdom directing, and incorruptible earthly judges communicating and enforcing the divine message and law! And this, the Scriptures inform us, is what will come to pass eventually, the Lord's declaration being, "I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning." (Isa. 1:26.) However, before that grand condition--of which the Jewish law-givers and judges were merely the crudest types--can be realized, it will be necessary for the great King Immanuel to take his great power and reign and subdue all things unto himself. Then, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power"--they will be ready to hearken to the voice of the Lord through those whom he will eventually appoint and recognize as his mouthpieces.

The Lord's answer to Samuel was that the prayer or petition of the people through their elders would be granted; but directed that he should, nevertheless, explain to them what this answer to their prayers, this fulfillment of their desires, would mean--that it would mean the surrender of their liberties and rights; that the rule of a king would be more or less despotic, tyrannical and selfish; that their sons and daughters would be taken to be servants in various capacities; that a large portion of their substance would be taken as taxes for the support of royalty, and that they would be subject to the whims of these masters whom they were desiring, whose pride and ambition would some time lead to rivalries and warfare, in which the whole people, as their servants, would suffer with them.

The elders heard all this delineation of the unwisdom of their course, but were, nevertheless, well satisfied to make the experiment--they wanted to be like the nations around them. How strong is the influence of imitation in all mankind! how necessary that all should have before their minds true standards, true ideals of greatness of liberty or of righteousness,--of that which is really advantageous! Herein the Lord's people have his wisdom, his spirit--have a standpoint of observation superior to that of others, and possess the spirit of a sound mind proportionate to their education in the school of Christ. He has an education in the school of the Lord which gives him a finer acumen in respect to all the things of this present time, which seem comparatively insignificant to him in comparison with the things of the future--the eternal things. As the Apostle says, "He that is spiritual judgeth [understandeth] all things, yet he himself is judged [understood] of no man." 1 Cor. 2:15.

The Lord pointed out that the people were not rejecting Samuel, but were rejecting him. Indeed, that they had not rejected Samuel

was evident from the fact that they came to him with the request. It was their lack of faith in the Lord that led them to fear what would happen after Samuel should die, or when his usefulness should become impaired through old age. The Lord points out that this had been the attitude of Israel from the first--"all the works that they have done since I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherein they have forsaken me and served other gods,--so do they also unto thee." They, of course, forsook Samuel as their judge; for the king whom he would anoint would be the judge instead. But the discredit to Samuel was nothing in comparison to their discrediting and rejecting the One whom he represented.

The Lord's people of today may draw from these incidents a valuable lesson in connection with the divine supervision of spiritual Israel. The Lord organized the Church very much along the same lines as he organized natural Israel. He is the Head of the Church--the guide and director and instructor of the Church. He guarantees that all things shall work together for good to those who love him and follow his guidance. For a time the Lord's people were content with such leadership as he raised up for them in his own way, content that the Lord should direct through the leaders of Zion and that no man should be called lord, or master, or king. For a time spiritual Israel looked only for such instructors, lawgivers, judges, teachers and assistants in the spiritual way as the Lord in his providences raised up for them. But, by and by, there came a time when they said, Let us make us a king-- let us have a head in the Christian Church such as there is in all the heathen religions around us. The Lord had already pointed out to his people a great Leader by whom he had made them free; that they all were brethren, and that only one was Lord and Master; that they should recognize no man as lord, and should recognize each other only as servants; and that the one who served most thoroughly--through the Lord's supervision--was to be esteemed as raised up and provided by divine providence for the service, and to be esteemed in proportion to his humility and loyalty to the Lord and his Word.

The spirit of subserviency and the desire to have a head led, first, to a division amongst the Lord's people into two classes called clergy and laity, a division not recognized nor sanctioned in the Word of the Lord; and, secondly, amongst the clergy it led to the exaltation of some, called archbishops, to the position of lordship over districts; and, thirdly, it led to the choice amongst the archbishops of one to be a chief, or pope; and ultimately it led to this chief being considered infallible and a divinely appointed king over spiritual Israel. As there were some better and some worse amongst the kings of natural Israel, so there were some better and some worse amongst the popes who ruled in spiritual Israel for centuries. Finally, as there was a split in the kingdom of Israel between the ten tribes and the two tribes, so there came in time a split in spiritual Israel nominal, and Protestantism arose, no longer recognizing the popes as kings in spiritual Israel. However, the spirit of subserviency being still present, and the spirit of liberty wherewith Christ had made his people free being still lacking, the Reformation movement led to the appointment and recognition of numerous petty kingdoms in spiritual Israel--the Lutheran house and the Episcopal house and the Presbyterian house and the Methodist house, etc., etc., with their various ecclesiastical princes and potentates, doctors of divinity, etc.-- lording it over God's heritage.--1 Pet. 5:3.

It is time for the establishment of the true kingdom --it is just at hand. It is time for the gathering of the elect out of every quarter, every district of this figurative Babylon in which the Lord's people are captives to these devices of Satan; it is time for a reassertion of the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free; it is time that the Lord's people should recognize him as their only King and Director; it is time for them to hear the words, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Isa. 2:22); it is time for the Lord's people to realize that the Lord is entirely competent to conduct his own work in the way most pleasing to himself, and most advantageous to those who are truly his; it is time for them to look to the Lord to see what agents, what channels of truth, what ministries of service in spiritual Israel he has provided or is providing. When we come to realize the situation, we find that all this matter of recognizing popes, cardinals, bishops, doctors of divinity, etc., is contrary to the divine arrangement--in direct antagonism to the same; but that, nevertheless, it has not hindered, and will not be permitted to hinder, the accomplishment of the Lord's

work and the gathering of the true Israelites, the elect, the precious, the Lord's jewels, out of nominal Israel. This work of the Lord is going gradually on, regardless of what the people in general may do.

We have considered this lesson under the head of "Unfavorable Answers to Prayer," because it furnishes an excellent illustration along this line. What might have been the condition of Israel had they not prayed for a king, we cannot know particularly; but we can know, on the strength of the Lord's Word, that it would have been more favorable to them if they had been in a condition of heart which would have led them to thank God for his care, and to rejoice in him as their King, and to have made no such petition for an earthly monarch as is here recorded. The Lord through the Prophet Hosea (13:9-11) intimates that the answer of this prayer for a king was disadvantageous to the nation; saying, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. I will be thy king; where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath." The king whom the Lord intends to give to Israel and to the world is Messiah. In due time the Lord will set his king upon his holy hill Zion; the law shall go forth from Mount Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; in his day the righteous shall flourish and evil doers shall be cut off. The Lord took away the kings of Israel when the people went into captivity to Babylon; there have been no independent kings of their nation since. Today, after centuries of experience without a king of their own, and under various kings of various nations, they are probably in a better condition of heart than ever before to receive the great blessing which God intends to bring to them first amongst the nations of the world. The prophet declares of them respecting Messiah's Kingdom, that they shall be ready to hail it and shall say, "This is our God, we have waited for him and he will save us." They certainly had serious experiences, not only under their own kings, but under all the kings of the earth; they certainly should be glad that the time shall again come when the Lord will be King over them--and over all the earth; when he shall restore to them a system of lawgivers and judges, and bless all the families of the earth through the seed of Abraham,--Messiah and his bride, the overcomers of spiritual Israel.--Gal. 3:16,29.

What we thus see exemplified on a large and national scale we may see exemplified in a small way closer to us. How many of us in our ignorance and blindness have at some time in life prayed for the various systems of bondage, for the various sects of Christendom, and labored, too, for their upbuilding, only to find ourselves injured spiritually by that which we prayed for and labored for. We asked amiss, as did the Elders of Israel, while, instead, our hearts as well as theirs should have inquired continually for the ways of the Lord, for his leadings, not asking to have him favor and bless that which we ignorantly and mistakenly supposed to be for his glory and our own good. ^[1]Let us learn to pray aright, as well as to labor and to hope aright; and in order so to do let us be swift to hear, slow to speak, swift to hearken to the Word of the Lord and to the lesson which he has already given us, and to his method of instructing us and guiding us and blessing us. Let us be slow to tell him what our preferences are; indeed, let us seek to attain that development of Christian character which will permit us always not to seek our own wills, but the will and way of our Father in heaven.

The same principle will apply in the more private affairs of our daily lives. Several parents have told us, with aching hearts, of prayers answered which subsequently they could have wished never answered; they have told us of companions and children on their deathbeds for whose lives they had prayed with importunity and without either the words or the sentiment, Thy will be done, and how the Lord answered those prayers, and what terrible evils had come to them through the answers. All cases may not be alike, but the properly exercised and heart-developed children of God should expect to attain to the place where all of their prayers are answered, and answered in the best possible way, and most satisfactorily, because the Lord's Word dwells in them richly. They would not ask amiss-- would not ask anything contrary to the divine will and providences; but rather, trusting to the divine wisdom, their prayer would be, "Lord, thy will, not mine, be done."

[1] Aug. 29 Manna, Jam. 4:3