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## The work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of sinners and the conviction of saints

Gerárd Roy

(We appreciate this history of the pathway of our brother as the Lord led him to an assembly of believers. We solicit similar accounts of others of how the Lord also led them and we desire to receive such so that they might encourage others in like manner.)

**A unique Period** We live in a very special time of Biblical history. The work necessary to satisfy God and save the lost being completed, the risen Saviour ascended in mighty triumph to the Father. Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Lord Jesus fulfilled His promise to the apostles by sending the Holy Spirit (John 14:16,17, Acts 1:8, 2:1-4). This blessed Person of the Godhead has been here in the world ever since and is doing a great and glorious work. The book of Acts is mainly about the actions of the Holy Spirit as He works with men through the early disciples.

### A unique Privilege

Broadly speaking His ministry is twofold. First of all, His arrival was for the formation of the church the Lord Jesus spoke about when He said; *"I will build my church"* (Matthew 16:18). This spiritual building that began in Acts chapter two is in progress until this day. It is composed of all those who are born again by the Word of God and the Spirit of God (John 3:5, 1 Peter 1:23). Convicting men and women of their sinfulness and pointing them to the only Saviour is a divine work, and all those who respond to His dealing in genuine repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus

become living stones built up into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). The building of this spiritual edifice could be completed at any moment and the Lord will rapture to Himself His church also called His body and His bride. Old Testament believers and those who will be saved after the rapture will be in heaven but they are not part of the church, since this is a unique privilege to this period.

### A unique Place

Secondly, the work of the Holy Spirit is to draw those who are saved to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ to be gathered around Himself. The Word of God is their only guide and as they humbly seek to obey its teaching, they declare that the One who saved them is their living Lord. Such a gathered company is also called a church. The Lord Jesus was the first one to use the word "church" in that sense in Matthew 18:17. And in verse 20 He said, *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"*. The words, *"are gathered together"*, literally *"are, having been gathered together"* indicate that someone else did the gathering. It is not merely believers who decided to gather together. This is a divine work and, as the book of Acts clearly shows, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. We read with great joy how in many cities and villages those who believed the Gospel were separated from the religious systems of their day and were gathered together, owning no other name but the lofty Name our Lord Jesus Christ and bowing to the supreme authority of His Word. This is why we refer to them as local churches and these must be distinguished from the church which is the Body of Christ. We must emphasize the uniqueness of a local church, totally distinct from denominations, missions and religious organizations. All these may be formed by men, but it takes the Spirit of God to form a church of God.

### A unique Personal Testimony

All those who are in what the Lord Jesus called

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"my church" in Matthew chapter 16 can tell how, where and when they were saved by God's mighty grace. Likewise, believers who are in a local church should be able to clearly explain how they discovered and eventually joined a local Assembly called in the New Testament "Church of the living God" (1 Timothy 3;15). We have an example in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 when a person is exposed to the teaching of the Scriptures he discovers and confesses with a worshipping heart, "God is in you of a truth".

In my experience, I was first exposed to the Gospel when a young man gave me a Gospel tract and told me that he was sure of heaven. I had just turned 17 years old. Although I was raised by good parents in a God-fearing home and I had been an altar boy, I had never heard my parents nor the priest say that they were sure of heaven. Shortly before that encounter a school friend had an accident and was taken into eternity. This was used of God to stir an interest in my soul. I found a small New Testament that had been given to me at school a few years earlier and began reading. It wasn't long before I discovered that it was possible to be sure of going to heaven through the Lord Jesus. What a discovery!

But how could, I be sure? For the first time in my life, I was faced with the problem of my sin. I managed to reform my life some and, being fully convinced of what the Bible says, I tried to live like a Christian and spoke to others about the Gospel. But the more I read, the conviction of my sins deepened until I knew that simply quitting some bad habits would not do, what about the sins of the past? The awful possibility of going to a real hell shook me and I became desperate to have God's forgiveness. A few weeks later, after talking to a friend about wanting to be saved, I broke down before God. In my despair I told Him for the first time that I was lost and did not know how to be saved. Oh! What a blessed moment when in the darkness of my soul the glorious truth of the Gospel shone in, "The Lord Jesus died for the lost" That means He died for me! It was so simple but so gloriously real. My sins were gone, eternally saved because He died for me. Little did I know then that I had become

a living stone in the great spiritual edifice, the church of Christ. I shall for ever thank God for that night of February 1978.

During the same period (1977-1978), God worked in the life of several others in the village of Green River, including my younger brother Gilles who was saved a month after I. We met in a house and spent much time praying and reading the Bible together. The changed lives became the talk of the village and, while some mocked and persecuted, none could take away what we had found in our Saviour and Lord. We rejoiced in Him and spoke to many about Him. At first, we didn't know any other believers. But later that year we heard about a Baptist pastor who came once a month for a house meeting and we attended for a while. We did not know much about the Bible but all of us were convinced that we should take no other name than "Christians". We wrote letters to the Roman catholic church asking to remove our name from their register. But when the pastor wanted us to become "Baptist" we strongly refused. During the same time a certain Pentecostal preacher from the USA came to the nearby town of Edmundston. We went to hear him and enjoyed some of his messages but were turned off completely by fake healings and a collection taken three times each evening.

During the summer of 1978 a brother from Sarnia Ontario, Ivan Poirier, had come to visit his family in Kedgwick NB, his native village. On his way back to Ontario he was rather discouraged, none in his family wanted to listen to him. As he drove by Green River, he saw a car with Bible verses on the rear bumper. In his excitement he managed to stop the car and learned that it was the wife of one of the believers. She told him about the little group of Christians meeting regularly to read the Bible. Much to Ivan's joy she told him how they would like to have some help. Ivan stopped at the next phone booth to call Murray McCandless. Soon after, Murray came and was later joined by Larry Buote. Together they preach the Gospel for two months in the basement of the house where I was when God saved me. Many attended the meetings including my parents. A few others professed salvation during that fall including my younger sister Regina.

I had gone to Quebec City to look for work when all this happened and was living with my oldest sister and her husband. They were very kind to me and, while enjoying the opportunities to speak to them of my Saviour and giving a lot of Gospel tracts when looking for a job, I terribly missed the fellowship of other believers. I eventually found a small Baptist group and attended their meetings. There is no doubt that the pastor was a saved man, the Gospel was clear and the teaching was of some help to me. It was during that time I was baptized as a believer. My thirst for the truth was such that I read the Bible a lot each day and started to discover how the first believers met and behaved as a church. I had a lot of questions because what I saw in the Scriptures did not correspond with some of the practices in the Baptist group where I went. On a few occasions I approached the pastor but his answers to my questions were far from satisfying, because he did not answer from the Bible. One weekend I came to Green River to visit my parents and see the believers. A brother made me read 1 Corinthians 11:1-6 and pointed to my long hair. Back in Quebec City a few days later, I had my hair cut. When my sister and her husband discovered that I had been baptized, they nicely told me that I would have to find another place to stay. Soon after, I was laid off from work and decided to move back to Green River.

I was so glad to be with the believers again and Mr. James Smith was having ministry meetings. As he explained night after night how local churches functioned in the New Testament, the teaching confirmed what I understood while reading my Bible in Quebec City. As I listened, not only my questions were all answered but I began to see clearly what it means to be gathered in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Although limited in my understanding, I became deeply convinced of the uniqueness of the New Testament church and the presence of the Lord Jesus in the midst (Matthew 18;20).

The Holy Spirit was doing the same work in the heart of the other believers, molding our thinking by the Scriptures and drawing our hearts to our Lord Jesus Christ outside the camp. On the 25th of February 1979 we met for the first time as an Assembly. The gather-

ing was small, only eleven local believers plus a few visitors. The arrangement was simple, in a basement once used for a pool room, a circle of wooden chairs around a small table with one loaf of bread and one cup of wine. But the occasion was most sacred and solemn for as our hearts rose up to God in worship for His precious Son, we were conscious of the presence of the Lord Jesus in our midst. For most of us, we had never witnessed the Lord's Supper until that morning, but we had seen it in the Holy Scriptures. How precious!

The little Assembly met in the same place until a hall was build in 1986 and by the grace of God the testimony that He established continues until this day in humble dependence upon Him. Since the formation of the first French speaking Assemblies in New Brunswick three other Assemblies have been established in Tracadie, Shédiac and Pigeon Hill.

## Abraham's Life and Lessons

Robert Surgenor

"Abraham, who is the father of us all." What does this unique statement mean? The quotation is from Romans 4:16 and is also mentioned in verse 11, "*The father of all them that believe.*" Verse 12 further states that the characteristic of such is that they "*Walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham*". In a spiritual sense, Abraham is the father of all believers, those who have placed their faith in the promises of God apart from the law of Moses. Abraham is the father of the faithful inasmuch as he manifested the power of faith to control his life. His whole life was affected and governed by his belief in God's promise. He confessed himself to be a pilgrim here while looking for a heavenly inheritance. He lived in a tent but looked forward to a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God. Believers are spiritually linked to him, for they too confess themselves to be pilgrims and strangers here, journeying on to God's city above. Just as sons act like their fathers, we too acted and continue to act like Abraham, thus spiritually we are his sons and he is our father. We, through union with Christ, are in the same family. The fatherhood of Abraham was even known in his day,

it is nothing new. "*And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, 'As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee'*" (Genesis 17:4-5). This does not merely mean a physical father of many nations, but a spiritual father, as we see in Genesis 12:3, "*In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*" This embraces both Jew and Gentile.

I know of no other person in the scriptures mentioned as "*The father of all them that believe.*" Nor do I find any other person spoken of by God three times as "my friend" (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 23). Not only this; Sarah, Abraham's wife, is the only woman in scripture whose age is mentioned at her death (Genesis 23:1-2). Abraham, the most illustrious personage in ancient history, affords us diamonds of spiritual truth. Abraham was an exceedingly important man and an example for all believers to follow. All his movements of faith and his lack of faith, provide extremely valuable lessons for all believers of this age, as we shall see in this booklet.

It is interesting that the Jewish people consider Abraham and Moses the greatest men in their history. Abraham is mentioned almost 300 times in the scriptures, but Moses is mentioned over 800 times. Yet the history of Abraham is far more comprehensive for practical teaching than the history of Moses. With the exception of the Lord Jesus, Abraham is probably the most important person in the Bible. God devotes 11 chapters in Genesis to give us the world's history encompassing about 2,000 years and at least 19 generations, but the history of Abraham and his immediate descendants occupies chapters 12 to 36. Moses is known as the great lawgiver. Joshua, who followed was a great military leader. David was a shining king. Daniel was an outstanding statesman, and Elijah was a powerful prophet, but Abraham was the father of all that believe – the exemplar of faith. The fact that he was called "friend" brings him down to our level. We have the power to exercise the same faith that he manifested on most occasions.

Moses provides lessons for us, but we

could never attain to the position he occupied as the great lawgiver. It would be most unlikely that we would rise to the elevated position of commander in chief of an army as Joshua, nor rise to the power of Elijah, parting waters, raising the dead, and performing other wonders. Ah, but listen, we can be like Abraham, for he was God's friend and so are we. There was nothing worthy in Abraham when he was living in pagan idolatry. His calling was pure grace on God's part. Neither was there any worthiness in ourselves to merit God's consideration of us, but like Abraham, we have found grace in the Lord merely because He designed it so. As a common man, chosen by and living a life of faith, he is not beyond the reach of us imitating him.

Why was I made to hear Thy voice,  
and enter while there's room,  
when thousands make a wretched choice,  
and rather starve than come?"

'Twas the same love that spread the feast  
that sweetly drew me in;  
else I had still refused to taste,  
and perished in my sin.

The lessons for the believer are manifold, and I trust that the reading of this article will enlighten you more fully as to the Christian's proper pathway in a world that is antagonistic to the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth.

### **Abraham's Life in Ur**

The history of Abraham begins when he was dwelling in Ur of the Chaldees and ends when he was 175, buried in the cave of Machpelah in Hebron in the land of Canaan. Thus 105 years of pilgrimage, trials, and faith are recorded for our learning.

I have noticed that the place of one's upbringing often determines their habits and personality. For instance, a person raised in New York City is certainly different in outlook and personality than one born and raised in Cody, Wyoming. West Virginia folks are far different than those living in Detroit, Michigan. Considering that fact, it would be wise on our part to examine Ur where Abraham was raised to fully appreciate what it meant to him to leave

his culture all behind and enter a culture the very opposite to which he had been raised.

Ur was located in the present day Iraq, situated about 140 miles southeast of the site of Babylon and about 10 miles west of the present bed of the Euphrates River. Foreign trade was conducted and prosperity prevailed. The houses of private citizens in the Larsa period and under Hammurabi of Babylon (c. 18th century BC), in which period Abraham is supposed to have lived at Ur, were comfortable and well-built two-story houses with ample accommodation for the family, for servants, and for guests, of a type that ensured privacy and was suited to the climate. In many houses a room was dedicated in which the family god was worshiped and under the pavement of which members of the family were buried. Many large state temples existed and small wayside shrines dedicated by private persons to minor deities.

In its time, Ur was a city of enormous size, scope, and opulence which drew its vast wealth from its position on the Persian Gulf and the trade this allowed with countries as far away as India. The present site of the ruins of Ur are much further inland than they were at the time when the city flourished, owing to silting of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Ur was a seaport city in Abraham's day.

From the beginning, Ur was an important trade center owing to its location at a pivotal point where the Tigris and Euphrates run into the Persian Gulf. Archaeological excavations have substantiated that early on, Ur possessed great wealth and the citizens enjoyed a level of comfort unknown in other Mesopotamian cities. It was a center of commerce and trade, protected by the gods and flourishing amid fertile fields.

What Abraham's occupation and goals were in Ur we are not told, but more than likely he led an affluent life with many pleasurable activities with like-minded friends. All was to drastically change, the call was about to be heard.

### **Abraham's Call of God**

*"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee"* (Genesis 12:1). How

Abraham heard God's voice we are not told, but it was a clear and demanding message and Abraham obeyed.

(1) *"Get thee out of thy country."* That meant severing all his political ties. He would no longer be a resident of Ur but a pilgrim and a stranger in a foreign land. It is the same with God's people today. Peter describes us as pilgrims and strangers and Paul, by the Spirit, informs us that our citizenship is in heaven. Like Abraham, we too look for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Consequently we are not involved in the politics and investments of this world. We are in this world, but certainly not of it.

(2) *"Get thee out from thy kindred."* That involved breaking all social associations. What are my social associations? Do I party with the ungodly? Do I fraternize their clubs and worldly projects? May the Lord help us to faithfully witness to them and live Christ before them, yet be spiritually separated from them as was said of our Lord, *"...holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"* (Hebrews 7:26).

(3) *"Get thee out from thy father's house."* This meant abandoning all religious connections. I detest that old religious song that goes like this: "Give me that old-time religion. It was good enough for father, and it's good enough for me." What folly! What ignorance! Prior to their salvation, my father's and mother's religion was taking them down to hell and it certainly wasn't good enough for me.

The demand was great but so was Abraham's faith, for he unhesitatingly obeyed the first command but sadly failed the second and third command. His father tagged along with his various idols that were his gods. This proved to be a hindrance to Abraham.

However, Stephen gives us a further report in Acts 7:2-4. *"The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran (Haran), And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran (Haran): and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land."*

This is the first recorded appearance of

God after the banishment of Adam and Eve from Eden. Only here and in Psalm 29, which is a Millennial Psalm, do we read of God as "The God of glory. *"And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran"* (Genesis 11:31-32). Looking at Joshua 24:2 gives us an insight to Abraham's family. *"Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods."* Isaiah 51:2 reveals, *"called him when he was alone."* However, as we have noticed, he didn't go out alone. □

### **Abraham's First Failure**

Notice Abraham's first failure. The ties of nature hindered Abraham's full response to the call of God. He took his idolatrous father with him, causing him to tarry at Haran for a few years until nature's tie was broken by death. Not 'till then did he, with unimpeded step, make his way to the place to which "the God of glory" had called him. In this we see that the influences of nature are always hostile to the full realization of God's calling. If we lack faith we will come short of God's divine call, whatever it may be. To rise to the height of God's thoughts takes great faith. It is to be noticed that in Abraham's delay in Haran there was no communication from God. Heaven was silent. So it is in our day; Christians that cater to the flesh need not to expect divine guidance and communion from God. There are many staggering saints today, simply because they are not living a life that is dead to the flesh and to the world. They are carnal. Here is their sad song:

"I lived for myself, for myself alone.  
For myself and none beside.  
Just as if Jesus had never lived,  
And as if He had never died."

God's calling to Abraham was to Canaan and to his inheritance there. However, his soul was not fully under the power of that truth or he could not have remained in Haran. If Chris-

tians today are led by the Spirit into the understanding of the truth that they are called with a heavenly calling and that their home and inheritance are all above, they could never be satisfied to make a name for themselves here or lay up an inheritance on the earth. The two things are incompatible; this is the true way to look at the matter. Our calling is a divine reality, not merely a worthless dogma or some wild speculation. No, no! Our calling finds its foundation on the word of God. He was called to Canaan and God could not possibly sanction his stopping short of it. Thus it was with Abraham and thus it is with us. If we desire to enjoy God's divine presence, we must seek to reach in practice and moral character full fellowship with his own Son in His rejection here. It was not until Abraham's father died that progress was made. It was in our baptism that we publicly confessed that we had died with Christ. It is not until in our lives we live out the truth we proclaimed in our baptism that we will progress in divine things for our God.

God never sanctioned Abraham's stopping short of Canaan. Do you want God's power and presence with you? Then don't come short of His design for you. Many saints have been turned aside by unsaved loved ones. Beware, and learn your lesson from Abraham's failure.

The next thing to notice is the promise connected with the divine call. God's commands are rarely accompanied with reasons but are usually accompanied with promises. So was the case here.

*"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed"* (Genesis 12:2-3).

Tremendous words indeed! Matthew 1:1 identifies the Lord Jesus as the Son of Abraham, so thus through Him all blessings flow even to the Gentiles of this age (all nations) and on to His Millennial reign. God's promise to Abraham has been largely fulfilled, yet there is more to come.

(continued)

## The Ancient Landmarks; Seat of the Unlearned

Larry Steers

This series has been emphasizing the ancient landmarks as they appear relative to Assembly testimony with Proverbs 22:28 before us *"Remove not the ancient landmarks which thy fathers have set."* With the fathers before the Hebrew writer he exhorts *"Remember them ... who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation"* (Hebrews 13:7). When we consider the godly character of servants of Christ whose faith and labours have been tried and proven, it does seem presumptuous for brethren in 2021 to revise what has been taught in the past by these well known men of God. Today, how thankful believers should be for esteemed and gifted brethren who clearly taught Divine principles.

Today there is a drift toward denominational writers, to purchase and read their books and when possible to listen to their ministry. Many of these men have no understanding or appreciation of Divine truth relative to the Assembly of God. It is not a quantitative step to reason, if we read and listen to these men why not receive them to partake of the Lord's Supper. Let it be clear at the commencement of this article that reception is to the fellowship and all of its privileges and never to the Lord's Supper. Therefore these early brethren taught what is often referred to as the "back seat". While this is not a scriptural identification it will only be referred to as such once more in this article.

In 1 Corinthians 5 a serious and solemn case demanding Assembly discipline has arisen at Corinth. The references to "them that are within" (1 Corinthians 5:12) identifies those who are part of the fellowship of the Corinthian assembly and "without" those who are not part of that fellowship. Many of those men and women "without" are guilty of the most detestable sins identified in Romans 1:24 to 32. Those sins cannot be countenanced among believers. Yet as in Corinth, so today the danger is that such defiling sins may insidiously creep in.

Again, we want to be absolutely clear here. There are God fearing believers who are not part of an assembly: and as indicated already, all believers in an assembly are not spiritual. Listen to the voice of a mighty man of God writing to the Corinthian assembly *"For ye are yet carnal"* (1 Corinthians 3:3).

The problem in Corinth involves a brother "within", that is a member of the fellowship. While the sin involved is acceptable in the world; the assembly, a holy place, had been defiled. That a brother should be guilty of an immoral relationship with his father's wife did not trouble the Corinthians. They were "puffed up" and did not grieve the defilement. Discipline is essential. The Apostle demanded that the guilty brother be delivered unto Satan (1 Corinthians 5:5), to be put "without". The assembly is now to gather for a case of discipline. The teaching is clearly that there is a "within" and a "without" of the assembly. Without is the realm of Satan, *"the prince of the power of the air"* (Ephesians 2:2). In that realm the excommunicated brother would learn the great value of being within the protective, preservative care of the assembly.

Those "within", are those who have been born again, and their convictions are identified in Acts 2:41-42. The word of God and its entirety has been gladly received as their guide in life and assembly principles. All are baptized as a precious public profession of identification with their Lord. They look back with rejoicing hearts to a moment when they were added to the fellowship. The Apostles doctrine is accepted as the guide in all matters relating to the assembly of which they now are a member.

To be "within" is not a temporary experience, but embraces a total commitment. To be "within", to be part of a local assembly fellowship with all of its privileges shared with like minded believers, is a blessing beyond measure. Again this fellowship requires a total life devotion. The brother referred to in 1 Corinthians 5 did not commit his sin while the assembly was gathered together. The details of life lived in this world bear influence upon the assembly.

Those "without" have not grasped the value of these assembly truths which are most precious to those "within". They may be searching but have not embraced nor committed to

these tremendous truths of gathering alone to the person and name of Lord Jesus Christ.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 14:16 and "the room of the unlearned". Unlearned implies unknowing or not accepting. Those "without" have not comprehended or accepted the value of these truths identifying the gathering center. They may be searching for truth but have not committed to the Word of God which gives clear teaching relative to the gathering together of believers.

*"The room of the unlearned"* is a physical location where a believer, not part of the assembly, but searching, can learn the significance of what it means to be "within". The word "room", is the Greek word TOPOS and is found 92 times in the New Testament. Notice a few of those references. Matthew 27:33 "place called Golgotha", a physical place where our Lord was crucified, and 28:6 "come see the place", the literal tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke 2:7 "no room in the inn" a physical location in the inn denied to Joseph and Mary. Judas went to his own place (Acts 1:25), a literal hell. On the day of Pentecost "the place was shaken", the room where the disciples had gathered. In 1 Corinthians 1:2 "that in every place", the location where assemblies had been planted. The word TOPOS is consistently used by the Holy Spirit to identify a physical location.

The word "unlearned" does not imply immature but does identify a believer who lacks understanding. They may be a godly believer. They may have tried a number of denominational places with their Bible in hand to test what they observe, only to discover practices not according to scripture. On a Lord's Day morning they walk into a Gospel Hall. Here we must show love, kindness and Christian courtesy. One brother known to the writer greets visitors with a smile and a warm welcome. He graciously explains there is a special seat for them this morning but at any other time they can occupy any seat in the hall. He gives them a booklet explaining what they will see. It would be impossible to be offended with this elder brother's way of greeting.

The seat of the unlearned applies only to the Lord's Supper because the supper is a beautiful expression of the fellowship of which the unlearned is not part of.

We can become accustomed to the practices generally observed at the Breaking of Bread; but an observer watching may be impressed with a number of things he sees. The believers come into the hall and display a quiet attitude of reverence. There is no minister conducting a service. The hymns are not previously chosen and are sung with some of the company in tears. Various men in the gathering rise to give out a hymn or to lead the gathering in expressions of worship. When the moment arrives a brother gives thanks for the bread and it is passed around the circle. Each in the gathering brakes from the bread and after thanks has been given they partake from the cup.

All of this is so familiar and taken as customary to most reading these words. But, just for moment try to stand in the shoes of a believer who has never seen anything like this in their experience. One brother having visited the denominational places in his area and found they did not conform to what he found in his Bible and as a last resort came to a little assembly. At the conclusion of the meeting he declared, "This is the place".

What could be the greatest testimony to a local assembly? It is certainly not the modern character of the building or the size of the gathering. After silently watching the Breaking of Bread, listen to the breathings of the observer's heart, "And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest, and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth" (1 Corinthians 14:25).

If a similar response does not flood the soul of those of us who gather to remember the Lord as He appointed, we certainly need to respond to the invitation of the Divine counselor to the Laodicean assembly. "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire" (Revelation 3:18).

As a further observation, the word unlearn does not refer to a believer who is a member of the fellowship but does not understand the tongue, the language, being spoken. Note the following in 1 Corinthians 14. No one in the gathered company understands the speaker so "ye shall speak into the air" (v.9). Paul adds relative to himself "if I know not the meaning of the voice" (v.11). For the whole gathered company the apostle demands an

interpreter (v.13). Paul concludes that one may pray but not understand his own words (v.14). To "excel to the edifying of the church" (v.12), all who are part of the fellowship as well as those occupying the place of the unlearned must understand what the speaker is saying.

There may come in an unbeliever. They too are graciously shown a special seat and encouraged to watch and to listen. There is a grand truth expressed by the hymn writer:

No gospel like this feast  
Spread for us, Lord, by Thee;  
No prophets or evangelists  
Preach the glad news more free.

Every truth of the gospel is evident, observable, and profoundly expressed at the Breaking of Bread.

Many a lost soul, observing and listening as the believers remember their Lord has discovered:

All our redemption cost,  
All our redemption won;  
All it has won for us the lost  
All it cost Thee, the Son.

## Prayers from the Cross

It is commonly recognized that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke seven times from the cross. These are usually described as cries, utterances or statements. Each is precious and full of meaning. All of the events, circumstances and details surrounding the cross are among the most appreciated by God and His saints.

However, it is also important to differentiate among these seven statements. It is essential for us to realize that the first, fourth and seventh of the cries are, in fact, supplications, prayers, and intercessions from the lips of the blessed Savior. Prayer is communication with a divine person; at Calvary divine persons are in communication! When we realize this the statements become even more valuable to us in our meditations.

Prophetically this is seen in Psalm 22:24 when it is stated, "When he cried unto Him, He heard." It is also seen more directly in Psalm

69:13 when the Lord Jesus states prophetically, *"But as for me my prayer is unto Thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of Thy mercy hear me, in the truth of Thy salvation."*

The first prayer of the Lord Jesus at Calvary, *"Father, forgive them; for they know what they do"* (Luke 23:34) was uttered at the beginning of the six hours on the cross during daylight. Norman Crawford has pointed out that the imperfect tense of "said" is used, meaning the Savior kept on saying these words. (Luke – *What the Bible Teaches*) The prayer is addressed to His heavenly Father with whom He was always in intimate communion. It expresses the complete absence of bitterness, vindictiveness or anger despite the heinous treatment He was receiving. It also fulfills the scripture, *"And made intercession for the transgressors."* (Isaiah 53:12)

While this prayer was directed toward the Roman soldiers who had physically crucified the Lord, its intent is far broader. The repentant thief is taken in; the 3000 souls saved at Pentecost and the host of the redeemed since have all known the forgiving love the Lord expresses in this prayer. Each can say like Paul, *"In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."* (Colossians 1:14)

The prayer also illustrates the Lord's own teaching on forgiveness. He said, *"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you"* (Matthew 5:44) This he was expressing toward the religious and political leaders and toward His own people Israel. At the very outset of Calvary, Christ sets a sterling example of forgiveness! His example for us is powerful and condemns our own reluctance to let go of animosity toward those who have done us wrong.

The fourth cry from the cross, *"My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me?"* (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34) was uttered in a loud voice near the end of the three dark hours at Calvary. It is a deep seated supplication of the sin bearer to His holy God. The cry again is a fulfillment of prophecy and mirrors precisely the opening words of Psalm 22. A.W. Pink states, "These are words of appalling woe, unequalled pathos, deepest mystery and profoundest solemnity."

The reason for the abandonment and cry is found in Psalm 22:3, *"Thou art holy."* God, in His

utmost holiness, must act in keeping with His pure character. *"He is of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on iniquity."* (Habakuk 1:13) Because sin was being judged, a righteous God had to turn His face from the Savior of sinners.

When Adam sinned he was driven from the presence of God. Sin resulted in loss of fellowship and separation. Israel was told, *"Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear."* (Isaiah 59:2) Because of the horrific nature of sin in God's reckoning, He must bring the Sin Bearer into isolation during the period when His wrath was being poured out upon the sinless substitute.

The darkness that engulfed Calvary was miraculous and unique. It demonstrates that the light of God's presence was withdrawn because since sin was at issue. *"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all."* (I John 1:5) The darkness of the cross portends the outer darkness and the blackness of darkness forever and ever that Christ rejecting sinners will experience in their separation from God through a lost eternity in the lake of fire.

Each saved person today can sing with grateful thanks:

The Holy One did hide His face;  
O Christ twas' his from Thee!  
Dumb darkness wrapped Thy soul a space,  
The darkness due to me.  
But now that face of radiant grace  
Shines forth in light on me.

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The seventh cry of the Lord Jesus from Calvary, *"Father into Thy hands I commend my spirit."* (Luke 23:46) is also His third prayer. It is the second in which He addresses His Father. These are the last words of the Savior on the cross and, therefore, rich in feeling and meaning. Following this utterance he dismissed His spirit.

The first words of the Savior were about His Father. *"Wist ye not that I might be about My Father's business?"* (Luke 2:49) His last words, as noted above, were also about His Father so he alone, of all those who ever have lived on earth, could say truthfully, *"I do always those things that please Him."* (John 8:29)

This prayer also represents a fulfillment of words the Savior previously spoke. In John 10:17 & 18 He had stated, *"I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and have power to take it up again."* As the very source and giver of life He uniquely was able to voluntarily choose and control the moment in which His spirit was yielded up to God.

The place into which the Lord yielded His spirit was a place of utmost safety and security, His Father's hands. He had told His own sheep, *"My Father which gave them Me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hands."* The place of His security is our security – blessed truth!

The prayers of the Lord Jesus are a most interesting and instructive study. We find that he began His service praying (Luke 3:21) and, as noted, He ended His service at the cross praying to His Father. In between, he spent a whole night praying as He chose His disciples. He prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail and He prayed as He performed miracles. Perhaps the best known of His prayers are the high priestly prayer of Jn 17 and the 3 prayers in the garden of Gethsemane as he anticipated suffering for sin.

Surely the three prayers from the cross would touch our hearts in a manner similar to the others. We would understand that even in the severest agony His spirit and activity in prayer remained undiminished. While physically restrained to the cross He continued in prayerful supplication. What an encouragement for the sick and infirm, as well as those going through severe trials, to do the same!

As in all other matters the Lord Jesus is our supreme example. He surely fulfilled the New Testament corollary, *"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."* (Ephesians 6:18) As we contemplate the prayers of the cross it should give us a compelling desire to pray more and always be in a spirit of prayer!

## When all thy mercies, O my God

When all thy mercies, O my God,  
my rising soul surveys,  
transported with the view, I'm lost  
in wonder, love and praise.

Thy Providence my life sustained,  
and all my wants redressed,  
while in the silent womb I lay,  
and hung upon the breast.

To all my weak complaints and cries  
thy mercy lent an ear,  
ere yet my feeble thoughts had learned  
to form themselves in prayer.

Unnumbered comforts to my soul  
thy tender care bestowed,  
before my infant heart conceived  
from whom those comforts flowed.

When in the slippery paths of youth  
with heedless steps I ran,  
thine arm unseen conveyed me safe,  
and led me up to man.

Through hidden dangers, toils, and deaths,  
it gently cleared my way;  
and through the pleasing snares of vice,  
more to be feared than they.

O how shall words with equal warmth  
the gratitude declare,  
that glows within my ravished heart?  
but thou canst read it there.

Thy bounteous hand with worldly bliss  
hath made my cup run o'er;  
and, in a kind and faithful Friend,  
hath doubled all my store.

Ten thousand thousand precious gifts  
my daily thanks employ;  
nor is the last a cheerful heart  
that tastes those gifts with joy.

When worn with sickness, oft hast thou  
with health renewed my face;  
and, when in sins and sorrows sunk,  
revived my soul with grace.

Through every period of my life  
thy goodness I'll pursue  
and after death, in distant worlds,  
the glorious theme renew.

When nature fails, and day and night  
divide thy works no more,  
my ever grateful heart, O Lord,  
thy mercy shall adore.

Through all eternity to thee  
a joyful song I'll raise;  
for, oh, eternity's too short  
to utter all thy praise!