

Principles of Continued Fellowship

By Paris Reidhead*

Now to the Text, II Chronicles 7:12:

“And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice.”

I wish that you would read this last issue of the Alliance Witness. I wish you would read every issue, but particularly the editorial that was there this week when the Editor said that we were to seek God for Himself, not as a means to an end, but simply for Himself; because He is infinitely worthy to be sought, to be loved, to be adored, to be worshipped, to be obeyed, to be served. We need not condition our service by, Lord, if you will, then..., for it is demeaning to this infinitely holy, and righteous, and majestic God to have to add anything to His work or character in order to merit our love, and our worship. He is to be worshipped for Himself. He is to be loved for Himself. And God has been on the seeking hand, from time immemorial, from the very beginning, yes, before the foundation of the world, God as a Father wanted children, God as eternal Son wanted brethren, God as Bridegroom wanted a bride. God who is Love desired someone like Himself to whom He could reveal Himself, and with whom He could share all that He is. And this is the reason why He made man. He made us with a great inner cavern in our spirits, so immense that only He can fill it. He made us in such a way that nothing can satisfy us but Himself. Our work, as interesting as it may be, is inconsequential; and God will often give us work that in the midst of success we discover the emptiness of anything other than Himself.

God has given to some riches; and they have thought that in this they were having the greatest blessing of God. But there came a time when the riches were but a burden from which they sought release, because somehow they felt that in answering the cry for riches they had been robbed of that for which their soul infinitely needed; namely, God Himself.

And it is thus that we have to recognize that position and place, and honor and things, in experience, all that is in the world is utterly incapable of meeting the need of a human spirit. You are made for God.

Now the great tragedy of the universe is not that man sinned and thus became subject to hell. The great tragedy of the universe is that man's love turned away from God, and turned in upon himself, and he robbed God of that which He had sought from eternity past. It wasn't what man sustained by his crime that was tragic; it was what God sustained, the loss that He sustained by man's crime that was the true tragedy, and the only tragedy of the ages, that God should have taken such infinite care and pains to prepare an ideal place for the creature He was making; and then, having perfectly fashioned this man so that he could be all that He intended, and having provided everything that he needed, then to have this one exercise the most Godlike part of him, his imagination, and his will, in a revolt against God, and by so revolting to rob God of all the purpose for which He had had in making man. This I say is probably the true and the only tragedy of the universe. It is not necessarily tragic that a murderer, who is impenitent and absolutely unwilling in any wise to reconcile himself to society by a changed attitude, should be electrocuted in Sing Sing. This is regrettable, but it is not tragic. And were the Judge to release this one without having had some more adequate indication of the justness of the law, it would have been to have shown contempt for those that were righteous and law abiding. You can't say that the prisoner behind the bars is in a tragedy. Now it may be to him, and to his desire to continue in his crime (and there have been unfortunately miscarriages of justice) but the principle is that when man sinned and became subject to hell, this was the just consequences for his enormous crime. The tragedy was that God was robbed of that for which he had made all preparation from eternity past.

And of course then to see the measure of God's love, and the measure of His desire, that He should have even before the foundation of the world have anticipated this crime, and Himself have been willing to become flesh as a man, subject Himself to His Own Law, live in the place where the man that He had been put and placed was expected to live; and then, sinless, to identify Himself with sinners, and to die, the just one for the unjust that He might bring man back to God. This is a measure of love, infinite, the proportions and the dimensions are such that they never can be penned or expressed. That longing that He had before the foundation of the world should in the fullness of time be measured in this avalanche of outpoured grace and mercy is inconceivable to the human mind. I can't conceive how God could have loved us at all. But to have loved us enough to

have become what we were, in order that we could become what He is, this I say staggers our minds. And yet this is the measure of His love, that He was willing to be made what you were, to become in the eyes of the Father what you were so that you could be made the righteousness of God in Him, you could be remade, refitted, recreated, so that it would be possible for God's purpose to be realized in you, whether in anyone else or not; at least in you. For this was a very personal matter.

And so we find that this Book is not the record of man seeking God at all; it is the record of God's great desire for man, His great longing for man, His mercy extended in an infinite compassion, and a tender desire, the beggar's words when God moves on every page of this Book to reach man and draw him to Himself. And man appears as the monstrous rebel, who though he has sinned has no concern for his sin, a criminal with no sense of guilt for his crime, a rebel that is willing to engage in constant rebellion. And then at times, when he does begin to realize that God is, he views God as merely an instrument for his own convenience. The Bible is the fulcrum, and the revelation is the lever, and God is on the other end, and he tries by some means to press down the lever of truth resting on the Word of God, in order that he can move God to some further usefulness in his own life; and the while losing all sense of interest in God, as an end, but viewing Him primarily as a means. This is the crime of religion that is irreligious, Christianity that is non-Christian, devotion that is devotion less. When God is viewed as an end, He is worshipped, He is adored, He is served and He is satisfied. When God is viewed as a means, it is simply another kind of Christianized idolatry.

And thus you have got to recognize that whether it was out of fear of hell that you came to the Christ, and many of us came, aware of our guilt, and saturated with the sense of our sinfulness, and completely convinced that we deserved hell; and the good work of fear pressed us to the Cross, and drove us to Christ, and we are grateful for that lever, and we are grateful for that instrument of fear. But I submit to you that early in our encounter with Him in the Word, and through the Word, we ought to understand that, whereas He had to use fear as an instrument to awaken us from our sleep of death, that this ought not be the primary motive for our seeking God. We ought to recognize and realize, dear friends, that God has something in us, something that He wants from us, and there ought to come into our hearts a great concern that He see of the travail of His soul, and He be satisfied. And there should come to us then a sense in which we are greatly concerned, and our primary concern is not to get God to work for us, not to get God to become useful to us, but that He should find in us what He wants, and receive from us what He desires, and secure that which is rightfully His. And this then becomes Christianity. When you are Christian to the degree of being one with Christ, live for the glory of Christ. And the concern of your heart is the honor of Christ, and the satisfaction of Christ.

Now, if you recognize this, then you will realize that whereas you may have come to Christ in order to escape hell, the real reason now why He wanted you to come was not just to keep you out of hell, but that in your repentance, and in your faith, the Lord Jesus might receive what you have denied Him in the days of your rebellion, and your sin. You see, He was worthy to be worshipped long before you began to worship Him. He was worthy to be adored, and to be served, and to be loved. And you were loving yourself. And so was I. We were worshipping ourselves. We were serving ourselves. We were seeking to please, and to gratify ourselves. And this is the state of sin, when self is the center of our being. And a sinner is just an individual who lives for himself, to please himself, and gratify himself. He is egocentric. He is just centered — everything is centered in him. And he may be religious, he may be engaged in any kind of priestly service, but still this is sin. But when we come to that place that the concern of our hearts is that Jesus Christ should get something out of us, that we repent because He is worthy to be - to have been served, and worthy to have been obeyed, and worthy to have had everything there was of us, and we didn't give Him that which He deserved. And now we see that this is wrong, we see it is a crime, and we have changed our minds about it, and we have renounced this as the end of our being; and now we have committed ourselves to an entirely new purpose, which is to bring to Jesus Christ what is rightfully His.

And now we are moving into the realm of what we would call Biblical Christianity, when this is the motivation of our hearts, when we recognize that we aren't to pray essentially to get from God, that we've got to test everything we would ask of God by this, Will it be to His glory, Will it be to His praise, Will it be to His honor, Is this that which He wants? Our first prayer in almost every instance of praying is not, Lord give me this; but, Lord, open my eyes, the eyes of my understanding to see whether or not this for which I am praying is needed now, and it is needed in the manner in which I am petitioning you, and is going to be to the end that is above the supreme reason for Your doing everything in the universe today, which is to glorify

Your Son with the glory He had before the world was. And thus, the first prayer you have to pray before you pray any other is, Lord, teach me how to pray. Teach me how to pray about this thing.

If you want to get from this lower auditorium here to the balcony, there is one way you can do it. You can stand here and try to jump. But I assure you that there are very few among us that will make it on the first try, at least, and I am confident that most of us aren't going to make it on any number of tries. At least I have no prospect of it. But I know how to get to the balcony without straining myself to jump. For right around there are steps. And so sometimes people pray with enormous jumps of faith for which they are not prepared. But if they would simply approach it from the standpoint of praying this step and that step, and this answer encourages that petition, then they would find that they are certainly soon in the balcony without the great disappointment that comes from a leap for which they were unprepared.

And so it is that we should recognize that the end of our being is the glory of Christ, and the end of our worship is His satisfaction; rather that we worship simply that we can get. Now this, I say, is a basic fundamental principle in this Book. It goes from Genesis in the 1st Chapter and ties to the last of Revelation; and if you would understand the basic theme of this, it is that man was made for God, that he could only be happy in rendering to God what God deserved, that man's happiness would come as a result from this. Now this was beautifully couched in the words of the Westminster Catechism: What is the chief end of man? And the answer that has rung across the centuries, unchanged and unchangeable. The chief end of man is to glorify God, (and then the answer) to enjoy Him forever. But He only becomes enjoyable when He has been glorified. Man only becomes complete when he can enjoy God, for he is made for God.

Now Solomon has presented to God a Temple, and God has accepted it. He has said, "I heard your prayer, and I have accepted the place." And God invariably does this. When you came to Him in repentance and faith, you gave to God a temple, not made of stones and the cedars of Lebanon, and plated with gold, with furniture of brass; no, no. When you came to Him, you gave to God a temple just as definitely and specifically as did Solomon. You see, Solomon's was a temple made of stone, a temple made of timber. Yours is a temple made of bone, and of flesh and of sinew, and of blood. Yours is your body. But the Scripture tells us, that, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of God" (I Cor. 3:16). And when you came to Jesus Christ in repentance and in faith, you signified at that time that you were submitting what you were to Him. You did because you said, He is to be Lord and Savior, and by so doing you recognized He bought you with all that He is. And since it cost Him all that He is to get you, He ought to have gotten all you are in exchange. And so, in a beginning sense, back there at the point of repentance, when you said the purpose is to please God, I am not going to rule, He is, that this issue was settled, in principle. But you notice it wasn't just enough that the fire should come down and the smoke fill the temple, and God seal it as His. It was not long after this that that temple became as vacant and as useless spiritually to God as a pair of old shoes are that have been sitting out in a shed, mildewed and warped, are to man whose feet they once fit. And this was signified by God when He allowed Nebuchadnezzar's army to come in and take the temple down, and just wreck it. He said, It is useless to Me.

Now, dear heart, when you understand that it isn't enough for you to be born of God, and thus constitute a temple of God which He in His invading presence makes His by regeneration; it is that you should therefore understand that the place that God is going to meet you is there.

David said, The secret of the Lord is in the sanctuary. The sanctuary in the Old Testament was the Temple, the Tabernacle in David's time, for God dwelt in a tent until then. But in Solomon's time it was of stone, as we have said.

Now the temple of God is not this building which was erected by thoughtful men that impoverished themselves 80 years in order to provide us today a place of meeting. And we are grateful for it. We recognize however that this is not the church, and this is not the temple, this is not the place of God's dwelling as attractive and as satisfying as it is to my heart, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty" (Zep. 3:17). Believe me this is not the wings of the cherubim, and God's glory does not dwell between the extensions of the sign on the wall. You are the temple of God, you are His temple. And this — you are the place, and when you come together then His temple is present, and when we disperse, His temple is absent. The building is here. The window above and beside, and all that we are associated with, is here. But this is not the place of God's dwelling. You are the place of God's dwelling.

And so, what God would have said regarding the temple of brick and stone, He now applies to us. And so we discover that He is sensitive. His Name is holy, and we obviously recognize that He has got to be that. And He said, "My Name is Holy. I dwell in the high and holy place with him that is of a broken and of a contrite spirit, to revive the spirits of the broken, and to revive the hearts of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15). And, consequently, since we are flesh, and blood, and bone, human beings, and we have wills of our own, and minds of our own, there is going to be in the course of our pilgrimage failure, failure to appropriate the provisions of His love and grace, failure to walk as we ought to walk. This is a terribly filthy world that God has called us to traverse. It is a world that is governed by His arch enemy. The whole philosophy came not from the Book, but from the pit. And we are in this world. We have to walk through it. We are assaulted by what we see on the highways and signs. And you can't pick up the newspaper without having to associate yourself, mentally at least in imagination, with a world that is under the sentence of death. It is an evil world. We sing, "This is My Father's World"¹. Well He made it, but man turned the governorship over to God's arch enemy, and when our Lord was here, He said, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (Joh. 14:30). And that princeship has not yet been extracted from the imposter. It will be, but it has not yet. And so the system is still under the control of Satan.

And this is the kind of a world He is asking you to walk in. And so He knew that you were going to be dirtied, you were going to be soiled, and thus very thoughtfully He put into the Tabernacle the laver, between the altar of burnt offering, and the place of fellowship. Can you imagine what judgment would have come, what would have happened, if a Levite had gone from the court, or a priest had gone from the court where he had been tending the fire with the ashes? Have you ever seen burning flesh, and the stench, and the soot, and the grease that comes with the smoke, and all that is associated with the putting of the carcass of an animal on a huge fire of coal, and having it consumed. And God knew that these could not go in, and so there is something even at the Cross that makes our hearts bend and cringe. People think of the cross as a place of beauty. To me, my friend, the Cross is the place where we ought never come until we come with our heads down. It is not a place of beauty. It is a place where justice and righteousness, and holiness met sacrifice and sin. It is not the place to stay. There was a beautiful place in there, the holiest of all, illumined by the presence of God, the holy place. But out there in the courtyard, there was not much of beauty. And so God put the laver between the altar and the holy place. And now He is speaking to Solomon, and He is saying, My people are going to understand that in this pilgrimage they are going to have recurring need, and they will deal with it the way I have prescribed. Then I can bless them.

And you are the temple of God. And He spoke of His temple in Jerusalem. But what He said of His temple in Jerusalem is applicable to your heart today. And so it is very personal. You can't, say, This is Israel, You can't even say it is the Church. This is too broad. If you understand II Chronicles 7:14, you have to see this is you, you. "If My people" (put your name there. Put your name there as much as you would put it in John 3:17. For you belong there. This is a covenant. This is a covenant that goes right through the Word, from beginning to end. And put your name.) "If My people which are called by My Name..." Do you bear His Name? Do you call yourself Christian? One of Christ is what it means, belonging to Christ. Do you bear His Name? Then remember He is concerned about His Name. He is interested in His Name. He is burdened about His Name. "If My people which are called by My Name shall humble themselves."

Oh, my dear friend, do you not understand that this is what you did when you came to the Cross. You humbled yourself. This is why so few go in, because it is such a strait gate. It is a gate where only the bankrupt, and the hopeless, the helpless, the crushed, those that are without strength, and sinners, and ungodly, and enemies can come. That is all. Have you come there? Did you humble yourself by coming to the Cross, and testifying that you needed a Savior? Well listen. Because you have been forgiven, are you changed? Because you have been justified from all things whatsoever you have done, have you changed? Are you any other than you were? Isn't it true that you were the same kind of stuff you were before? Yes. And so, is it hard for you to say, If I needed a Savior to die for me, I need His continuous intercession, I need His constant advocacy, I need someone at the right hand of the Father who loved me enough to have my name written upon His hands, I need a High Priest that continueth ever, whoever lives to make intercession for me. Can you humble yourself? Humble yourself at the point of failure, at the point of need. This is what He is saying.

¹ "This is My Father's World" By Maltbie D. Babcock, 1901.

How often? Well how often did the priest go to the laver? Daily. How often should you humble yourself? Whenever there is necessity.

Yesterday, or this past week rather, I was talking with Jimmy, my boy. And something had not gone quite right. And I became impatient with him. And I scolded him. And he knew he didn't deserve it. And after I had done it, I knew he hadn't deserved it. And you know, I began to realize something of this that I am speaking to you of, in this connection, when I had to say, Jimmy, I'm awfully sorry. Do forgive me. I shouldn't have been that impatient with you. It wasn't your fault.

Now this is something utterly new for me, that is according to nature. I have had to do it in the past. But you see the Scripture says, "Humble yourself" (Jam. 4:10). I don't know how far to extend it. I don't know where to go. But I would rather err on the wrong side than to stop short. And I believe, dear friends, that we as Christians ought to be the first to become sensitive to our failure and our need, and not wait to be caught in a mesh and exposed, because God loves us too much to let us get by with anything. He says, "Humble yourself. Humble yourselves." "The broken and the contrite spirit He will not despise" (Psa. 51:17). We are afraid people will despise. Well they do any way. Why don't we just go ahead and get on the right side with God. And this means humbling yourself, and keeping it that way. Not just once in a while, but just that way. "Humble yourself." This is the first thing. And don't pray for humility, because if you do, you know, God has such a rough stone on the anvil, He will make you humble; but, O dear, let's not force Him to. Shall we? Let's understand that He said, You do it. He will. He will, but if we force Him to. But let's not do that, shall we? He said, "If My people which are called by My Name will humble themselves."

Then the next thing He said was this. 'If My people which are called by My Name will pray.' Now there are several kinds of prayer. There is the prayer of the sinner that comes to savingly embrace Christ. There is the prayer of the Christian that comes in confession. I believe I told you of a young lady at a Christian College some months ago, and she came at the close of a meeting. And I said, "What is the matter?" And she said, "Well, I work in a certain situation, and do to a series of temptations, in my own weakness I sinned against the Lord." I said, "Yes, well let's pray." So we got down to pray, and you know, she started out, "O Lord, Thou who art sovereign and majestic in the heavens, Thy servant hath failed Thee in particulars that are common to the race." Well after a few moments of this kind of nonsense, I touched her shoulder. I said, "Look, we're just wasting God's time as well as mine." She got up and said, "I thought we were going to pray." I said, "Not like that. That isn't what He meant when He said, Pray." "Well, what did He mean?" "Well" He says, "He wants you to use the same words He used." "What do you mean?" I said, "The only way I'll pray with you is if you will get down on your knees and tell God what He said, that that what you did is." The tears just gushed out. "You mean, I have to tell..." I said, "That's right. I'm through. I'm going." "Oh," she said, "Don't go." So we knelt again at the bench there in the auditorium in the College Chapel, and she got down there and the fountain of her heart broke up. She said, "O God, I have, and she said it." But you see, it was for her. She was trying to fool God and fool herself. But when she said what God said, she was praying. This is what prayer always is. "Humble yourself." And then He says, Pray. But pray means to say what God says.

And then the next thing is, He said, "Seek My Face." "If My people which are called by My Name will humble themselves, and call things by their rightful name, and seek My Face. My Face." Now why do you seek God? Is it that you want something from Him? Well, bless your heart, you need something from Him. We all do, don't we? But you know you need Him more than you need anything from Him. When He said, "If you will seek My Face..." David said, "When Thou saidst unto me, seek ye My Face, my heart said, Thy Face, Lord, will I seek" (Psa. 27:8). Now what are you seeking from God? Are you asking God to bless you so that you will be effective in your service? Good, but not good enough. Are you asking God to give you power so that you will be fruitful in your Sunday school class? That is good, but not good enough. Are you asking God to bless you, so that you will be a faithful Pastor, or street preacher, or a witness in the home, or successful in your business? Now, God does all of these things. But He did not say, Seek them. He said, "Seek My Face." "Ye shall search for Me, and find Me when ye shall seek for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). You see, God died out of love, He loved you with an everlasting love, and He died out of love for you. He loved you so much that He died out of a broken heart for you. Now He wants to be loved for Himself. He wants to be sought for Himself. He doesn't want you to come to Him, just on the basis of seeing how you can use Him. He loves to be longed for, and He wants to be wanted. And if you come to Him with anything less than wanting Him, you are robbing Him and you, because God can't give you what you want. But when you come just seeking Him, and you don't care about anything else, then God can trust you with things, place, and so on. He said, "Seek My Face;" the smile of His Face brings joy to your heart, the light of His eye bring wisdom to your life. Seek My Face brings satisfaction to you, for you are made for God.

And so He said, "If you will humble yourself, and pray, and seek My Face (and then of course the last) and turn from your wicked way." Because if you were not to turn from your wicked way, you would give evidence that you had not humbled yourself, you had not prayed, and you had not sought His Face.

Now this is a crisis, you see. Here is a crisis. Humble yourself; That is a crisis. Pray; that is a crisis. Seek My Face; that is a crisis. Now, what is the evidence of the genuineness of the crisis? The process. "Turn from your wicked way." Do you see? This is exactly what the Spirit of God is telling us, as the principle for continued fellowship, whether it is in the temple of Jerusalem, or the Temple of your own heart. This is an extendable principle that God wants to have operative in every Christian life, as long as we walk in this world. It is a principle that is not restricted to this temple. It is a principle that is as eternal as God is.

Now what are we going to do about it? You are either going to say, Yes, that is true. What he said is so. Or else you are going to say, God spoke to my heart, and He asked me to humble myself, and He asked me to name things by name in praying, and He asked me to seek His Face, and He asked me to turn from my wicked ways. It would be derelict of me to have brought you to this point not to give you an opportunity to have the crisis today. Today. Now. You ought to do it now, you see. That is why we are going to bow in prayer in just one minute, two at the most. I am going to ask you to say to your own heart, Am I where God wants me to be? Am I what God wants me to be? I know I have been forgiven, most of you will say. If you haven't I speak to you and say, We invite you today to make this clear.

But perhaps I speak to someone who says, Yes, I know I have passed from death to life, I know I have been born of God, I know the past sins are under the Blood, but O my there have come in attitudes, and there have come in actions, and there have come things into my life which I deplore and know to be sin. But today I am going to humble myself, testify to my need, I am going to pray, I am going to seek God's face. You know your need. You know your heart, Because we only have a moment, I am going to say, If God has spoken to you, will you not stand right now, right where you are, and by your standing say, Yes, I have heard the voice of God. Quickly just stand, and remain standing. And in a moment I am going to ask you and others to go with me into Wilson Chapel so that we can have a time of quiet prayer together. It would be derelict, I say, not to challenge you to mind God now. No time is propitious and wise as right now. Would you stand? God bless you, yes. Every head bowed, every eye closed. Are there others? Are there others? Right now. Mind God now. Don't wait. "If My people. Do you know His Name? Will humble themselves and pray, and seek My Face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear, then will I heal, then will I forgive." Would you stand? I said it would only be a moment, but Oh that moment is long enough for you to say, Yes Lord. How wise it would be, if things are not right with you and God to take this morning to meet Him. So mind Him now. I am going to ask that one or two of our deaconesses go with the one standing, into Wilson Chapel right now. Will you do that, please? Would you just slip out and go to the back. We will join you in Wilson Chapel.

Now what of you? Things are right, the glory fills the temple, and then just rejoice that you see again how to maintain that life of fellowship and union. But what if it has not been so? Do you not think we ought to pray that God will just deal with you until you come to the place where you do what you ought to have done? I would like to ask you this before we go, How many would say, If I had done what I ought to have done, I would have stood. Pray for me. Would you put your hand up? This is your heart. Yes, I see it. God bless you. Are there others? If I had done what I ought to have done I would have gone.

Let us stand for the Benediction. As we go, our Father, help us to go realizing that Thou hast loved us with an everlasting love, and Thou hast desired us for Thyself, Grant that we shall ask our hearts, Have I given to God in me what He wants from me? Is He satisfied with me? Is He getting out of my life that which is to delight His heart? Deal with us, Father. This word that You gave to Solomon at the dedication of the temple, we apply to our own hearts, and hold as a continuing principle, that the truths in it are unchanging, for You are a covenant-keeping God. For the one whose hand has been raised, saying, If I had done what I ought to have done, I'd have gone, for the one who has gone, who is quietly praying, Oh meet that one, our Father, with victory and blessing. For all of us, let the continuing, abiding presence of the Lord be upon us. May Thy grace, and mercy, and peace, be and abide with us, now and until Jesus comes again. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, September 16, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.