

What the LORD Requires

*“Wherewith shall I
come before the
LORD, and bow
myself before the
high God? shall I
come before him
with burnt offerings,
with calves of a
year old? Will the
LORD be pleased
with thousands of
rams, or with ten
thousands of rivers
of oil? . . . He hath
shewed thee, O
man, what is good;
and what doth the
LORD require of
thee, but to do
justly, and to love
mercy, and to walk
humbly with thy
God?”*
—Micah 6:6-8

THE DETAILS OF THE divine will may vary in their application to us as individuals, yet the basic principles of what God requires of his people are the same for all. These basic principles have operated in the past—they function now, and they will continue to do so in the future. Our text summarizes the Heavenly Father’s requirements very simply: Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. It was these principles that Jesus perfectly exemplified during his earthly ministry, and which we as his disciples must also follow as we endeavor to fully develop the “mind of Christ.”

We are to appreciate that circumstances vary according to the will of God for a particular time. As an example, for anyone to humble himself before God during the present Gospel Age means walking the narrow way of sacrifice and suffering even unto death. This has been God's will since the death and resurrection of Jesus. To humble oneself before God during the coming Messianic kingdom, however, will not mean suffering unto death. It will mean walking the highway of life, back to mental, moral, and character perfection as human beings on a restored and "glorious" earth. (Isa. 60:13) Nevertheless, all, whether in this age or the next, will have to humble themselves before God. No blessings will accrue to those who do not.

The tendency of the fallen flesh is to lose sight of these fundamental principles of the Lord's unchanging requirements. The inclination is to seek ways of pleasing God that are less exacting—more satisfying to the flesh. This was true in the days of the prophet when our text was written, and it is still true today. To find an easier way of serving God usually means seizing upon some detail of his will and magnifying its importance to the exclusion of other divine requirements. We should always be on guard against such tempting practices.

Some of the results of this fallen tendency of the flesh are alluded to in our text. The prophet asks, "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" Under the arrangements of the Law given to Israel, God was pleased for his people, in certain instances, to offer rams in sacrifice to him, and to have them use oil

in connection with their religious services. These things were commanded by God in the Law. The Israelites could not have neglected them and at the same time have been wholly pleasing to him.

However, rams and oil were not the only things that entered into God's will for his typical people. Even though a thousand rams were brought, and ten thousand rivers of oil were used, these would not give anyone license to ignore or omit the other requirements of God. As God said to his people through another of his prophets, "Bring ye all the tithes [not some, or most, but all] into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing."—Mal. 3:10

NEW TESTAMENT CONFIRMATION

The Apostle Peter's outline of the divine will for Christians is very comprehensive. After exhorting to add what are sometimes termed, the "graces" of the Spirit, the apostle tells us that if we do these things we shall not be "barren [idle] nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," and we "shall never fall." (II Pet. 1:4-10) No half-measures are acceptable. The apostle's outline of the divine will includes not only the growth of grace in our hearts, but the outward expression of it in understanding and activity.

In these verses, the Apostle Peter says we are to add to our faith virtue—that is, mental and moral excellence. Virtue is very essential in the Christian life. Without it, we shall be of those who are simply tossed about by every wind of doctrine. To have

virtue implies strength of character. This is derived from a living faith in God and his Word. We should endeavor to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. This we do by prayer, by study of the Scriptures, and by fellowship with the brethren. Let us not make the mistake of thinking, however, that we can stand in our own strength. If we do, we shall surely be thrown off our guard, and fall. As the scripture says, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."—I Cor. 10:12

Not only have we the need to increase in faith and fortitude, Peter says, but we are also to grow in knowledge. Paul states the matter this way, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Col. 1:10) If we are to increase in knowledge, then we must apply the knowledge as we acquire it. Rightly dividing the truth and fidelity to all its principles are primary requisites to our growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord.—II Tim. 2:15; II Pet. 3:18

Viewed from this standpoint, we can see that knowledge is fundamentally important to us as Christians. The Scriptures testify, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (I John 3:14; 5:19; Rom. 8:28) To "know" these things is essential to our walk in the narrow way.

While the attainment of an accurate knowledge of the Truth is of primary importance to the footstep

followers of Jesus now, our ultimate goal is to share in Christ's resurrection to the divine nature. (Phil. 3:10,11) It is through the knowledge of the Truth that we are able to keep the requirements of the Heavenly Father—to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before him, and thus be found worthy of such a great reward.

Our text says, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee." The test which God applies as to whether we love him or not, is in the knowing and doing of his commandments. Jesus said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." (John 14:21) We need, therefore, both to know and to do the will of God. Indeed, if we do not know the will of God for us, we will be unable to do it.

KNOWING AND DOING

God shows us what is good, and what he requires of us, through a knowledge of his Word. It is also true that we cannot know what he requires of us unless we have a knowledge of his will. Therefore, knowing God's Word, and his will as revealed in it, is of utmost importance to his people. Hence, the Scriptures say that we are to study for the purpose of showing ourselves approved unto God—not approved unto this brother or that sister, but approved unto God.

From this standpoint alone can we glory in the knowledge of God's great plan of the ages—not merely because we know it, but because, through it, God has revealed his will to us. As we read in Jeremiah 9:24, "Let him that glorieth glory in this,

that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.”

PETER CONTINUES

In addition to faith, virtue and knowledge, Peter says that we need to grow in temperance, or self-control. (II Pet. 1:6) We are reminded here of the proverb which says, “Better . . . [is] he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” (Prov. 16:32) “Self” rebels against the divine leadings and direction. It must be brought and kept under control. This task is made even more difficult by the fact that each day we observe a general absence of self-control in the lives of those not begotten to a living hope. Thus, in addition to our personal fight to attain self-control, we must resist the temptation to join in the world’s lack of this same quality. Only by increasing control of self—and self-will—can we hope to bring ourselves more and more into harmony with God’s will, and do what he requires of us.

Peter says we are to increase in patience. So many and varied are the obstacles in the way of the Lord’s people that we need to increase in patience if, as Jesus said, we are to “endure unto the end” of the way. (Matt. 24:13) If we do not increase in patience, we will become “weary in well doing” and “faint” by the wayside. (Gal. 6:9) At times, we may deal justly with others, perhaps only to receive injustice in return. We may manifest love and mercy toward our neighbor, and not have it appreciated, but scorned. We

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(Continued from page 31) may consistently walk in God's way instead of our own way, while at the same time being opposed by those who have the spirit of the world, the flesh, and the Adversary. We will need much patience—cheerful endurance and constant perseverance—if we are to meet the three requirements of our text.

Building on what has gone before, Peter says we are to grow in godliness. The word godliness is translated from a Greek word which means: "piety," "holiness," "reverence." We should certainly be of those who worship God in the spirit of holiness and reverence. How truly pious, holy and reverent was Jesus. He could say, "I do always those things that please him [my Father]." (John 8:29) Without reverence for God and for his Word, we could never be sure what God requires of us. When answering the tempter, Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4) Wherever we are—in meetings with the brethren, in our home, where we work—let us ever maintain our reverence for God and his son Christ Jesus.

Another "grace" Peter says we must add to our character is brotherly kindness. (II Pet. 1:7) That is to say, we should always have a deep and abiding interest in the welfare of our brethren. After exhorting the Christian to become fully equipped with the God-given armor, Paul then says, "Praying always . . . for all saints." (Eph. 6:18) Brotherly kindness implies our interest in one another is to be that of a spiritual family. This family includes not merely the brethren of the ecclesia to which we belong, but all the brethren throughout the world.

There is a danger at times of becoming constricted in our spiritual outlook. The Apostle Paul said, “Be ye also enlarged.” (II Cor. 6:13) While keeping the local viewpoint and its related privileges of service in mind, let us not lose sight of that broader perspective which takes in the interest of the Lord’s people and his work generally. We want to increase in brotherly kindness toward all. We do not want that narrow, confined, limited, and selfish spirit which says, as it were, “Bless me and my wife; my son and his wife; us four and no more.”

Finally, Peter tells us to increase in love, that ultimate divine principle of unselfishness. This unselfish love enables us to bestow blessings upon all those with whom we come in contact—brethren, families, neighbors, job associates, even our enemies. If we fail to increase in love, we cannot possibly meet the requirements of our text to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

After providing this list of graces to add to our character, Peter said, “If ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” (II Pet. 1:10) We wish to emphasize that he did not mean if you do one or two of them you will never fall. To use the illustration of our text—it is futile to come to the Lord merely with “rams” and “oil,” even though these might be great in quality and quantity. All the Lord’s requirements are important, and should be faithfully met to the best of our abilities.

PRAYER

One of the outstanding privileges and necessities in the life of a Christian is prayer. However, even prayer loses its true value when other features

of God's will and purpose for us are neglected and ignored. It is in prayer that we express our thanksgiving to God. We seek his forgiveness for our transgressions. We ask for strength and guidance in our daily efforts to meet his requirements. When the Scriptures exhort us to "pray without ceasing" and to be "instant in prayer," it means that we should consistently maintain the spirit of prayer in all our enterprises. (I Thess. 5:17; Rom. 12:12) Prayer is not a ceremonial rite, but rather one of the divine provisions of grace.

Prayer is a means to an end, but not the end itself. It is very precious to the followers of the Master. Often it has been said that prayer is the vital breath of the New Creature. Yet, we should not engage in prayer to the exclusion or neglect of anything else. It is certainly a privilege and a necessity to come before the Heavenly Father with a liberal supply of the oil of prayer, but if we lose sight of the ultimate objective of our calling, even "ten thousands of rivers" of such oil will not enable us to fulfill that which God requires of us.

FOR THE BRETHREN

We are admonished to lay down our lives for the brethren. (I John 3:16) This sacrificial service is prompted by love. To do so means that God's requirement of mercy and loving kindness is being worked out in our lives. Let us be on guard, however, against having too restricted a view of who constitutes our brethren. We must not restrict our outlook merely to those with whom we are personally acquainted. Do not let us think that we have fulfilled our obligations when we have done what

we can for the spiritual and material welfare of these, but have ignored the same needs of others of our brethren.

Sometimes brethren with whom we are not personally acquainted need our help. This was true in the Early Church. Paul visited both the Jewish and the Gentile brethren, building them all up in the most holy faith. Our interest should be for all the brethren. As opportunities arise, let us be prepared to disregard our own personal and local preferences, if by so doing the general interests of the Lord's people and his work are best served.

The Lord richly blesses those who make self-sacrificing efforts to help the brethren. Truly, this also is a part of that which God requires of us. It, too, is only a part and must not be so magnified and emphasized as to smother other requirements of the Heavenly Father. We need to exercise the spirit of a sound mind in all these things.

PREACH THE WORD

Another important element of God's will is given by Paul when he instructed Timothy to "preach the word." (II Tim. 4:2) Faithfulness in all the requirements of the Lord means that we will be doing what we can, both as individuals and ecclesias, in the work of spreading the Truth as a witness to our God, as well as for the enlightenment of those who will accept it and make it their own.

One of the evidences of life is activity. For the Lord's consecrated people, activity in his service should be the natural result of being filled with the Truth and its spirit. At the same time, however, we do not engage in any service of the Truth with the

thought that by such faithfulness we can earn our way into the kingdom. It is by grace that we are saved, and it is also by grace that we will have a place in the kingdom. (Eph. 2:4,5,8) Jesus said, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) This will not be accomplished by works alone, but God wants us to appreciate his grace. He wants us to value it so highly as to be willing to spend and be spent in the telling of the Gospel message to others. As the poet has expressed it in the words of the hymn, "Yet low in the dust I'd lay me That the world my Savior might see."

In the economy of God, it has been so graciously arranged that the overflow of appreciation from the hearts of his consecrated people can be utilized by him for the blessing of others. Thus we can lay down our lives for the brethren. We can bear witness to the Truth. These things we can do with the assurance that our labor will not be vain. We can rejoice because we know that it is God's will for us, and in so doing, we are walking humbly with him.

CONTENDING

Another detail of the Lord's requirements for his people is found in Jude 3, where we are told to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." The exercise of this privilege has a very direct bearing upon our success in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God. If we appreciate the wonderful light of truth as we should, we will gladly and earnestly contend for it. We will guard it as a very precious treasure in our own hearts, and do all in

our power to help others of our brethren do the same. If we are inclined to take the view that it really does not matter what we believe, then such an attitude should be regarded as a danger signal.

Failure to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints may be caused by specializing along only certain lines of what the Lord requires, to the neglect of other important elements. For example, perhaps the conclusion has been reached that prayer and brotherly kindness are the only essentials of Christian development—that it does not really matter what we believe or what others believe. Human reasoning might conclude that such an attitude is a noble exercise of tolerance, but it sometimes arises because faith has been lost in one or more doctrines of truth which we come to regard as no longer important or applicable. The Scriptures clearly teach that we are sanctified by the Truth. (John 17:17) Thus we should earnestly contend for the Truth by which we are sanctified, keeping it clean, pure, and bright.

JUSTICE, MERCY, HUMILITY

To do justly means to obey the Golden Rule, as stated by Jesus with these words, “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” (Matt. 7:12) This is a high standard, and should be always kept in mind in our dealings with others. We are also to love mercy—that great principle of unselfishness which is the basis of all God’s works and ways. The Psalmist David says, “The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear [reverence]

him.” (Ps. 103:17) Blessed, indeed, are “the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matt. 5:7) Very little, if any, progress can be made without the quality of godlike mercy.

Even though we do justly and love mercy, we will come short of what God requires of us unless we also walk humbly with him. This means we are to sacrifice our little all upon the altar of God’s will. He wants us to bring to his altar our “rams” and our “oil.” Most importantly, however, he wants us to bring anything and everything he may ask for—indeed, life itself. We have been shown in the Scriptures what is good, and what God requires of us. It is for us to live prayerfully and zealously day by day, keeping these requirements in mind, and endeavoring to live up to them.

Let us continue to rejoice in the knowledge of the Truth, and do all in our power to show our appreciation to God for the fact that he has taken us into his confidence and under his wings. The Heavenly Father has revealed to us his gracious plan of salvation. We can know nothing about his plan except as he reveals it to us through his Word. As we are able to view all matters from the divine standpoint, our lives will be blessed even in the midst of earth’s lamentations.

It is true that we long to see the end of suffering, dying, and death. Let us realize, however, that our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus are even more interested in the human family than we are. God’s wisdom knows best just how fast his plan of the ages should progress. Like the skilled surgeon who cuts deeply in order to heal, so the Lord in his great abounding love, and vastly superior wisdom, knows

exactly what is best for all individuals in order that their everlasting blessing may be assured.

GOD WILL HELP

Let us be assured that God will help us day by day. He helped his people in ages past, and we can witness that his love is still the same. He will assist us through the blessed assurance of his Word, and through fellowship with those who are truly his. He will help us in his providential overruling of all our affairs, and in permitting those experiences which, if rightly received and endured, will make us vessels fit for the Master's use, now and in the future.

From the human viewpoint, the entire world scene is dark, confused, and full of anxiety. How blessed it is in this time of the world's perplexity to have a theme of life that lifts us above the trouble, and keeps us rejoicing in the blessings that are ahead. Our whole course in life should be governed by the knowledge that the present evil order of things is soon to give place to the new order of things—the restitution of all things as spoken in the Scriptures.—Acts 3:19-21

As followers of Christ, we must continue to be guided at all times by the Heavenly Father's Word, and more earnestly than ever before, "seek . . . first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." (Matt. 6:33) Let us resolve that we will zealously do all we can to lay down our lives for the brethren, and to comfort and cheer others by bearing witness to the glorious Messianic kingdom, so near at hand. While doing so, let us ever keep in mind that which the Lord requires of us—"To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." ■