

Praying, Obeying, Staying
I John 3:21-24

July 15, 2007

A. Introduction

1. where do these verses refer to
 - a. Praying? ...
 - b. Obeying? ...
 - c. Staying? ...
2. what are some essentials of a sound relationship between persons?
3. what is the final way the world will recognize Jesus was sent by God (John 13:34-35)?
4. How did Jesus focus on relationships (Matthew 22:34-40)?
5. How is God a Being in relationship?

B. Praying 3:21-22a

1. what relationship need does prayer fulfil?
2. in what direction does prayer take place?
3. what is needed so 'our heart does not condemn us' (I John 1:9)?
4. what does it mean when it says we have 'boldness'?
5. who are some biblical examples of this boldness?

6. what do we learn about God's promised response to prayer in
 - a. Psalm 145:18-19 (also, Romans 8:29)?
 - b. James 4:3?
 - c. I John 5:14?

C. Obeying 3:22b-23

1. what relationship need does prayer fulfil?
2. how has God fulfilled His part (Psalm 8:4, Galatians 4:4-5)?
3. any success in keeping God's commands on our parts is
 - a. Luke 17:10: only ...
 - b. Romans 7:18: not from ...
 - c. but, Philippians 2:13: results from ...
4. what is the prerequisite commandment given here? (cf Acts 17:30)
5. to whom is the promise of answered prayer therefore limited?

D. Staying 3:24

1. what relationship need does this fulfil?
2. How has God fulfilled His part (cf Romans 8:15)?
3. How can we obstruct God's overture in this matter
 - a. I Thessalonians 5:19?
 - b. Ephesians 4:30 (read verses 25-31)?

A. Introduction

1. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. ²³ And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. ²⁴ And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. (NAS)

2. “Praying, Obeying, Staying”

a. this message title, hopefully, is just a catchy way for us to remember that these last four verses of 1 John 3 contain:

- (A) Praying ... ‘whatever we ask’
- (B) Obeying ... ‘because we keep His commandments ...’
- (C) Staying ... ‘abides in Him ... He abides in us’

b. however, what the passage is really about, of which these three items are but different facets, is relationship

c. it is about our relationship to God

d. suppose I ask you what the essentials are in order to have a lasting and fulfilling relationship with another person

- (A) say a close friendship, marriage, or so on
- (B) what qualities and actions would you list? Anyone?
- (C) think about these qualities ... respect, trust, love, time together, communication, and so on
- (D) what do they have in common? Relationships involve a genuine, mutual giving of oneself to the other person

e. those who recognize that relationships are important and needful to each of us are willing to pay any such cost.

- (A) 1992: Kerrin-Lee Gartner of Calgary became the first Canadian in history to win Olympic gold in the women’s downhill. For us here, she was an immediate sensation.
- (B) Shortly after her victory, an announcer interviewed her, asking wasn’t this the most significant day

of her life.

(C) “No,” she replied. “The most significant day was the day of my marriage — but this ranks pretty high.”

(D) Even the greatest of achievements cannot compare with the greatest of relationships. ^{-(2)}}

f. so, let us use this relationship of marriage this morning as a shortcut way to refer to our various human relationships

3. so, the question I want to be on our minds this morning is

a. God does His part in having a relationship with us ...

b. are we doing our part?

c. The Bible, God’s progressive self-revelation to us shows that the Creator considers our relationship to Himself to be the most significant event that can ever happen to us

d. L. T. Jeyachandran is an apologist with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. ^{-(3)}} He says,

(A) ‘I am often engaged in conversations that involve the philosophical, theological, scientific, and historical reasons by which one could reasonably conclude that Jesus is exactly who he said he was -- the eternal God now come in the flesh. But interestingly enough, Jesus tells us in John 13: 34-35 {A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (NAS)} that the final apologetic by which this world will recognize that he was sent by God is the demonstrable love-relationship that will be seen in the lives of his disciples.

(B) ‘Why is it that the unfathomable truth of Word made flesh can only be conclusively understood in a living, verifiable community of believers? Why ... There is one simple but profound answer. God is a Being in relationship and any truth pertaining to Him, in the final analysis, stands attested by exemplary relationships among his creatures.

(C) ‘To the clever lawyer who questioned him about the greatest commandment in all of Scripture, Jesus significantly refrained from giving religious or ritualistic requirements; instead, he had only two simple relational injunctions to offer: “Love your God” and “Love your neighbour” (Matthew 22: 34-40). By placing these two commands at the same level, Jesus brought relationships into focus. Thus, worshipping God is not about mere observance, but relating to Him in love. He is likewise the one who liberates the individual from the self to love others. The first commandment

thus becomes foundational and makes the second obey-able. But by the same token, obedience to the second commandment becomes the evidence that the first has been obeyed. ...'

(D) Our relationship to God and to each other is to be a joyous witness to the world that 'The image God has given us in the Trinity is an image of three co-eternal, co-equal Persons giving themselves to one another in eternal self-effacement.' –{4}.

4. let's consider this relationship that God would have us to have with Himself from these verses in 1 John 3 ...

B. Praying 3:21-22a

1. One of the necessities of a sound relationship that we noted was that of communication
 - a. prayer is the vehicle God has given for this
 - b. but it is more than simply a spiritual telephone
 - c. by prayer we tell our heavenly Father of our needs, our wants, our desires, our concerns, our cares – we tell Him what is upon our heart ... even though He already knows!
 - d. and, by prayer, as the Holy Spirit gives us the words of prayer, as He recalls to our mind the promises of Scripture, the Father communicates to us His desires, His will, His purposes – what is upon the heart of God
 - e. in marriage, the couple need to communicate in order to come to a common thinking on some action or priority
 - f. prayer is to bring our minds into agreement with God's
2. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have boldness before God, ^{22a} and whatsoever we ask, we do receive from Him, ...
 - a. 'our heart does not condemn us' – we closed last week just making a brief reference to this verse and thinking of the heart at liberty – John has spent the first part of his letter giving us a number of tests whereby we might know that we are in fellowship with God, that we might have hearts at liberty – one of the most important being that when we sin, God has given us a way of ongoing cleansing from sin
 - (A) 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' (1 John 1:9 NAS)

- (B) Ezekiel Hopkins commenting on this says, 'Guilt abashes the soul, and makes it both ashamed and afraid to appear in the presence of God ... But, when our consciences are clear, oh, with what delight do we haste to God , and with what content do we stay with Him!' —^{5}.
- b. but what is this we read? ... 'we have boldness before God'
- (A) now that word, 'boldness,' is extraordinary
- (B) it is literally "'the speaking out of all," freespokenness as the characteristic of a frank and fearless mind' —^{6}.
- (C) this is not the obsequious manner in which we might approach some civil authority with a request or our supervisor for some time off; it is the open way in which a child can sit on its father's knee and ask, 'Daddy, can I have ... ?'
- (D) this is how Moses spoke when he argued with God not to destroy the children of Israel in their disobedience: 'God, you cannot destroy this people ... what will all the heathen say about you ... they will say you do not have the power to bring them in the land of promise!'
- (E) this is how Abraham bargained with God that he not destroy the cities of the plain where Lot dwelt: 'God, supposing there are 50 righteous ... what about 45, that's only 5 less? what about 40 ... 30 ... 20 ..10?'
- (F) and God agreed each time with these bold words
3. so, too, we read, 'whatsoever we ask, we do receive from Him'
- a. now we are not going to deal with the whole question of the matter of how God answers prayer this morning
- b. but just a small part of it
- c. nevertheless, it is the testimony of saints down through all ages that God answers prayer; we sang 'Yesterday, today, forever, Jesus is the same' and that is true in the matter of prayer just as in so many other ways
- d. if you are following the schedule to read through the Bible from the Bible League journals, you will have read these verses this week: 'The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them.' (Psalms 145:18-19 NAS) – God is the same
- e. but do pay attention that these words in John are spoken to those who are children of God, to those

whom 'He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son' (Romans 8:29 NAS)

- f. so this prayer is not based on the desires of our old nature which James warns about, 'You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.' (4:3 NAS)
- g. it is communication, like that of a married couple, where we come into a settled agreement with the mind of God
- h. and that is how John alternatively describes this fact, 'And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.' (5:14 NAS)

C. Obeying 3:22b–23

- 1. 'asking according to His will' brings us to the matter of obeying
 - a. we said that mutual respect is one of the important elements in any relationship
 - (A) in the matter of our relationship with God, God has already demonstrated His respect to mankind
 - (1) 'What is man,' asks the Psalmist (8:4), 'that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him?' (NAS)– cf Galatians 4:4-5
 - (2) the story of the incarnation: of God the Son, of Jesus Christ coming into the world to save sinners is a demonstration of God's respect for mankind
 - (B) but what of our respect for God?
 - (1) throughout the Old Testament you will find the phrase, 'the fear of the Lord'
 - (2) this speaks of man's needed reverence for God
 - (3) man's respect for God is marked by his obedience to God and his trust in God
 - (4) John's next words show this is unchanged ...
 - b. ^{22b} because we keep His commandments and we do those things which are pleasing in His eyes, ²³ and this is His commandment that we should believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and that we should love one another even as he gave commandment to us.
- 2. the way this is introduced, by that word 'because' has given many people problems
 - a. at first glance it looks as though God is going to answer our prayers due to our doing good and pleasing things
 - b. maybe it would be better translated, 'seeing that,' giving the evidences in our lives that assure us of

God's answering our prayer; there are two things to consider in this respect:

3. first, keeping the commands of God is not the meritorious cause of receiving anything from Him
 - a. so that although Christ's disciples, when we "do all the things which are commanded {us, must} say, 'we are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'" (Luke 17:10, NAS)
 - b. no, we must confess that any good work that we may do, any act which is pleasing to God, is the fruit of the Spirit
 - c. we must agree with Paul's assessment of our condition:
 - (A) on the one hand, 'For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.' (Rom. 7:18 NAS)
 - (B) yet on the other, 'for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.' (Philippians 2:13 NAS)
 - d. answered prayer is due to God's gracious work in our lives

4. second, consider the specific wording of the commandment to which John makes reference ... and notice it is one command
 - a. 'that we should believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ'
 - b. with its inseparable from its attendant
 - c. that we should love one another even as he gave commandment to us.
 - d. God gives an invitation through Jesus Christ to sinners to find salvation
 - (A) Jesus told a very instructive parable about a king who made a marriage for his son and invited many to the wedding – and those who refused and maltreated the king's servants, or who came without the wedding garment furnished by the king were punished ⁻⁽⁷⁾.
 - (B) one point is this: God's invitations are commands
 - (C) that's what John is saying here
 - (D) God commands 'all men every where to repent' ⁻⁽⁸⁾.
 - (E) realized by faith 'in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ'
 - (1) recognition that He is the Lord, eternal Son of God
 - (2) reception of Him as the Messiah, anointed of God
 - (3) acceptance of Him as Jesus – Saviour – confessing of the sin which He died to save

e. answered prayer is due to our reception of Jesus Christ through saving faith, of being God's children – have you ever come to God in this fashion? ... do not put off until too late the response to God's commanding invitation

D. Staying 3:24

1. with the last verse of this passage we come to another needful item if any relationship is to be solid and sound – staying – just spending time together – or, the Bible's word, 'abiding'

a. to continue the marriage illustration there needs to be

- (A) a companionship in the relationship
- (B) the comfortableness of just being with one another
- (C) spiritually, physically, intellectually, emotionally
- (D) often without any need for speech or a word spoken

b. this just spending time together is needed to enrich any relationship – There is a story of a little boy with a learning disability. ⁻⁽⁹⁾.

- (A) He worked really hard to keep up with the others in his classroom, but because of his unique challenges, he kept falling behind. He was laden with homework every night. There was no letup. He no longer could play outside with his friends after school. By the time he had made a swipe at all his school work, it was time for bed.
- (B) The parents consulted with the elementary school guidance counsellor and decided that their son needed to be placed with a class of slower learners. It quickly became apparent that the right decision had been made. The third grader got his childhood back, complete with after-school play, positive self-esteem, and grades that matched the front end of the alphabet.
- (C) After several weeks of asking his dad if they could play together after dinner, he grew weary of the same response: "I'm sorry, buddy, I have a briefcase full of work I have to do." One day he simply said, "Well, Dad, can't they just put you in a slower class, too?"

c. our Father is infinitely wiser, and He has already done His part so we can spend time together; listen ...

2. ²⁴ And the one keeping His commandments abides in Him and He in him; and hereby we know that He abides in us, from the Spirit which he gave to us.

a. God the Holy Spirit is sent by Father God and Jesus Christ to indwell every believer

- (A) so that we can spend time together with God
- b. how are you relating to this unseen Guest in your life?
 - (A) are you quenching Him by ignoring the prompting that He gives for how you walk with God? – stop and listen to His voice
 - (B) are you grieving Him with unconfessed sin which makes you a dirty temple unsuited to His residence? – take time and confess and cleanse that sin today
 - (C) are you enjoying the fullness of joy with His power? – praise the Lord!
- c. How do we deepen our relationship with God to match God's intentions for us? our closing hymn sums it up with these words: Trust and Obey

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
NAS	New American Standard version © 1975, 1996 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Philips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

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2. From Leadership, Fall 1992, by Gerald Cameron – Kerux illustrations #3139
3. Adapted from ‘The Church as Witness’ by L. T. Jeyachandran, from ‘A Slice of Infinity: Ravi Zacharias International Ministries’ – Kerux illustrations #34111
4. L. T. Jeyachandran, *op cit*.
5. From ‘A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures &c’ compiled by John Peter Lange, DD., *in loc*.
6. Edward Robinson, ‘A Greek and English Lexicon, &c’ (1879)
7. Luke 14:16ff, Matthew 22:2ff
8. Acts 17:30
9. From ‘The Man Who Missed Christmas’ by Rev. Greg Asimakoupoulos – Kerux illustrations #4126