

How You Should Truly Seek the Lord

How do we truly seek the Lord? This question has been marinating in my thoughts for the past few weeks. The answer seems pretty straight forward, but there is more to it than meets the eye.

As I was reading through 1 Samuel recently, the Lord showed me something I had not noticed before. In the story of Samuel, I usually focus on what God and Samuel are doing, without stepping back and seeing the big picture. This time, I saw the bigger picture.

Samuel is the last of Israel's judges. This was a time when "everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg. 21:25). When Samuel comes on the scene as young man, the word of the Lord was rare. But God revealed Himself to Samuel, because Samuel sought the Lord, and word spread throughout Israel.

It was about this time that Israel went out to fight the Philistines, without seeking the Lord. During the first battle, the Philistines defeated Israel and the elders complained, saying, "Why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines?" (1 Sam. 4:3a, NIV). But instead of stopping and seeking God at that point of defeat, they treat God like a talisman, or good luck charm. "Let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh, so that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies," they say (1 Sam. 4:3b). And off they go, carrying the ark of the Lord's covenant into battle.

Things don't go as they had hoped and the Philistines defeated them again, this time capturing the ark as well!

God Wants All Men To Seek Him

While the Israelites mourned the loss of the ark, the Philistines who were in possession of the ark had an unexpected encounter with the Lord. They put the ark in the temple of their god, Dagon. In the morning they found their idol lying face down in front of the ark. They set it back up, but the next morning, it was face down again with its head and hands broken off.

Through the subjugation of the idol, the Lord was revealing Himself to them as the one true God. But the Philistines did not get the message and failed to turn from Dagon worship to seek the Lord. Instead, in an effort to rid themselves of this problem, they decided to move the ark to a different Philistine city.

Wherever they sent the ark, the Philistines began to suffer from tumors, rats and other destruction. They quickly understood that their troubles came from the Lord. But once again, they did not seek Him. Instead, after six months of misery, they put the ark on a cart drawn by two milk cows whose calves were locked up. They waited to see what the cows would do. Without any leading, they miraculously headed to Israel instead of back to their calves! Again, God was proving Himself to the Philistines, inviting them to follow Him—but they clung to their false god.

Presumption Again

When the ark arrived back in Israel at Beth Shemesh, there was great rejoicing! The people immediately made sacrifices to the Lord in the field where the cart carrying the ark stopped. It seemed like things were turning around for Israel. But as the crowd was gathering around, 70 Israelites looked inside the ark, something only the high priest was permitted to do. They had not learned, they did not seek God! Even though they sacrificed to the Lord, they still did what was right in their own eyes—and all 70 died.

Fear of the Lord fell on the people of Beth Shemesh, and rightly so! They recognized the holiness of God, but they did not repent (1 Sam. 6:20). Rather, they asked people from a neighboring town, Kiriath Jearim, to come get the ark and take it away.

They Sought The Lord

The ark remained in Kiriath Jearim for twenty years. At this point 1 Samuel 7:2b says, "Then all the people of Israel turned back to the Lord." Finally!

Then Samuel called all the people together and said, "If you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines" (1 Sam. 7:3).

Let's stop a minute and take note of what is happening. The people of Israel are seeking the Lord, but are also worshipping other gods! They are not fully committed to the Lord. They want His protection, but they also want the immorality, materialism and sinfulness allowed by the false gods. The Lord will not tolerate that!

Isaiah 55:6-7 implores us to "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

That day the people of Israel did put away their idols. Samuel cried out to the Lord on their behalf, and "the Lord thundered with a loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into a panic that they were routed before the Israelites" (1 Sam. 7:10). And Israel finally had peace with their neighbors, at least for a while.

What About Us?

Like Israel in the time of Samuel, many people today are doing what is right in their own eyes. Even many who call themselves Christians are seeking the Lord and the idols of our day. But if we truly want the Lord's intervention in our lives, in our communities, and in our nation, we must rid ourselves of those idols. We must love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30).

Ridding Ourselves of Foreign Gods

My family came to Christ when I was six. Not long after, we learned what the Bible says about fortune telling, sorcery, all forms of witchcraft and idol worship. Like the Ephesians did in Acts 19:19, we gathered up everything in our home that had anything to do with witchcraft and idolatry, and burned them. We wanted to rid our lives of anything that would draw us away from following the Lord whole heartedly. One of the items we had was a valuable piece of furniture that had signs of the horoscope ingrained in the wood. One of our neighbors offered to buy it from my parents, but they did not want any gain from anything related to sorcery—so we burned that too. The atmosphere in our home changed when we got rid of those items.

Of course, those are not the only forms of false gods and idols we must purge from our lives—anything that steals our affect away from God is an idol. If we want to truly seek God, we must be ruthless with idols of any kind in our lives.

God is not our good luck charm to pull out when we are in trouble. While He loves to answer the prayers of the righteous, He cannot be manipulated or fooled into doing our bidding. To truly seek the Lord, we must be willing to submit fully to Him; to turn away from those things in our lives that are rivals for our affection; and He will give us the desire our hearts—which will be more of Him!

Then God will abundantly pardon us and, as 2 Chronicles 7:14

says, He will hear from heaven, forgive our sin and heal our land.

Let us truly seek the Lord!

If you have been crying out to the Lord, but sense there is a distance between you and Him; ask the Lord to reveal to you any idols or ungodly influences in your life. When He shows you, be quick to repent and rid your life of those things. Maybe it is turning away from some all-consuming form of entertainment, or a reliance on an ungodly source of information. Some may need to repent of making a political party or figure their savior, instead of the Lord. Others may have addictions from which they need freedom. There are many who make the pursuit of wealth, prominence or position a god; and many who dabble in occult games, horoscopes, tarot cards, fortune tellers or other sorcery from which they need to repent.

God wants your whole heart! It is worth giving all your allegiance to Him! It is time to truly seek the Lord! {eo}

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