

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (21)
Following Jesus Christ Rightly: #14. Waiting on God”**

Introduction:

Following Jesus Christ rightly may be summarily described as a life of *faith* in the Lord Jesus. Christianity is not chiefly a life ordered according to set laws, as much as it is a life in fellowship and dependence upon the person of Jesus Christ who died, rose, ascended and was enthroned, and now lives in His people through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul said this quite succinctly in confessing the manner that he lived with respect to his own relationship with the Lord. He wrote,

“For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Gal. 2:19 -20)

The footnote in The New Reformation Study Bible states Paul’s meaning quite well:

Union with Christ means that He represented us (*i.e.* Christians) in His death and resurrection. But it means more, for it is a living union. Jesus is present with the believer; by the Spirit the Lord lives in inward fellowship with His own. Paul does not mean that the individuality of the person is suppressed or absorbed; he lives “in the flesh” by “faith.” The union is a spiritual relationship of the utmost intimacy.¹

But the Christian life may also be rightly described, as we have been addressing it, as a life of *following* Jesus Christ. Yes, we have “faith in the Son of God” in that we *look* to Him and *relate* to Him continually even as we *depend* upon Him daily. But our faith in the Lord Jesus is also that of *following* Him. Following Jesus implies a destination to which He is leading us. We are traveling on this path, being led by and assisted by our Savior Jesus Christ. The destination to which we are traveling is a state and place of eternal happiness, a life characterized by full joy, unshakable peace, an existence of perfect righteousness, which may be described as complete conformity to the will of God in the blessed presence of God. This destination is *promised* to us who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. We never arrive to our desired haven in this life, although we are able to enjoy in this life many of the blessings that will be fully ours in that day. Thank God we may presently in these days of faith enjoy fellowship with our Lord and with one another.

I. The Christian life involves much waiting upon God

Even as we are in the pilgrims’ progression to our eternal home, our heavenly Zion, there is a sense in which we are *waiting*; we are waiting on God to fulfil what He has promised us. This waiting upon God is not always easy. Sometimes it is even resisted by us. But God calls upon us to wait on Him until He fulfils His promises to us. God is always the God of promise to His people. We wait for the things He has promised us to be realized by us. As we wait upon Him, we show forth our dependence on Him, our delight in Him, our confidence in Him, our submission to Him, in short, in our waiting on our God to fulfil all He has promised to us in His Son, we show forth a life of faith in Him as He leads us onward and homeward, toward the day when we will receive in full all that God has promised us in Jesus Christ.

The writer to the Hebrew Christians described the life of faith in this manner when he summarized the faith of many believers of the Old Testament period. We read in Hebrews 11:13 this statement:

¹ R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 1850.

These all died in faith, *not having received the promises*, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The Christian life of following Jesus may be understood, therefore, as waiting on the Lord. It is a life of unrealized expectations in this world, even as we wait upon our God to fulfil all that He has promised us in His Son. Much of the Christian life may be described as “waiting on the Lord.”

The Holy Scriptures speak to this matter quite frequently. The psalmist wrote of his waiting on the Lord:

Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD;

²Lord, hear my voice!

Let Your ears be attentive

To the voice of my supplications.

³If You, LORD, should mark iniquities,

O Lord, who could stand?

⁴But there is forgiveness with You,

That You may be feared.

⁵*I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,*

And in His word I do hope.

⁶*My soul waits for the Lord*

More than those who watch for the morning—

Yes, more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷O Israel, hope in the LORD;

For with the LORD there is mercy,

And with Him is abundant redemption.

⁸And He shall redeem Israel

From all his iniquities. (Psa. 130:1-8)

The psalmist is clearly in distress. He declared to God, “Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD.” He was praying that God would hear his prayer and answer his petition. He knew and acknowledged that he was a sinner, who had no claims upon God, but he also knew and was confident that His God had forgiven him his sins. His sins were not a barrier to God answering his prayer.

In verse 5 he depicts himself as waiting rather anxiously for the Lord to fulfill His Word to him. He was looking for God to fulfil His promises to him. He was more attentive to the Lord answering him than even the watchmen who were guarding their city at night, as they waited the dawn of the morning when the danger of the night will have passed. One described the sentiment of the psalmist to be like our own:

When we, like the guards of a city, wait for the morning, we are waiting for more than simply time to pass. We are waiting for the sun to rise and day to break, for the light to replace the darkness, and the cold to be replaced with the warmth of the sun. Waiting involves an expectation of something special. Waiting means anticipation, expectation, confident hope in something that will take place. Ultimately, waiting on the Lord is like waiting for the sun to rise—waiting expectantly for the Lord’s answers to human needs as the sun brings the warmth of the day.²

Other passages of the Old Testament speak to the waiting on the Lord that characterizes the people of God. David wrote, “I *waited* patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry” (Psa. 40:1).

² J. Hampton Keathley III, “Waiting on the Lord”, see <https://bible.org/article/waiting-lord>

The promise of Isaiah was that the Lord would strengthen those who waited on God:

But they that *wait* upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. (Isa. 40:31)

Elsewhere we read of instruction and exhortation for the people to wait upon God.

Wait on the LORD;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the LORD! (Psa. 27:14)

Waiting takes grace. This is perhaps especially so in our world in which everything seems to be so instantaneous. We become impatient if it is slow-going at the drive up window to the fast food restaurant. We are irritated if the link to a webpage we have entered does not immediately bring us to the website. Where we tend to be an impatient people who expect immediate service by all things and everybody, the Lord would have us learn to wait patiently on Him, sometimes for an extended period of time, before we come to experience what He has promised and what we have desired.

A. The Christian life involves waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ

In the New Testament this waiting theme is often presented. Sometimes it is with view to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ:

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, ⁵that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, ⁶even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, ⁷so that you come short in no gift, *eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ*, ⁸who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 1:4-8)

Paul wrote of the well-known testimony of the church at Thessalonica:

For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰*and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.* (1 Thess. 1:9)

And then there is Hebrews 9:28 that states:

He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. ²⁷And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, ²⁸so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. *To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.*

We Christians are children of God, but all of what that means and entails has not yet been fully disclosed to us and certainly not fully displayed in us. But we wait for the day in which that will be manifest. Paul wrote:

²²For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, *eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.* ²⁴For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, *we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.* (Rom. 8:22-25)

B. The Christian life involves waiting on the Lord to answer our prayers

But the Christian life is not only waiting on the Lord for what He has promise to do after this life is over, but we also wait upon the Lord in this life as we desire and anticipate the Lord working in the here and now. The Lord has given us many promises that we may enjoy in this world in this lifetime, even as we wait the consummation of all things. Most of our praying is for the Lord to intervene in our lives and to make changes in what is happening to us. We pray frequently, and hopefully we pray faithfully. And thankfully the Lord many times answers our prayers. But He does not always answer our prayers in the manner and in the time frame in which we hope. This, therefore, involves *waiting*.

In causing us to wait for Him to answer our prayers, He accomplishes several things. First, the Lord shows forth our true desire for the thing for which we pray. The Scriptures describe persevering, importunate prayer as the kind of prayer that God delights in answering. With regard to this let us consider *Jesus and the Syro-phoenician woman*. This is in Matthew 15:21-28, in which we read:

²¹Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²²And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.”

²³But He answered her not a word.

And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, “Send her away, for she cries out after us.”

²⁴But He answered and said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

²⁵Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, help me!”

²⁶But He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw *it* to the little dogs.”

²⁷And she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

²⁸Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great *is* your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

We read that a woman sought Jesus out, and not just any woman, but a “Canaanite woman” came to Him. **Verse 22** reads, “*And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.’*” Here was a woman who had no claims upon Jesus, but was driven to Him due to her great need. But her need was not an affliction of her own, but that of her daughter. Her daughter was “severely oppressed by a demon.”

Let us consider the nature of her faith. (1) She knew that she had no claims on Jesus, no basis on which to appeal to Jesus, unless and except the Lord showed her “mercy.” She came to the Lord and was crying, “Have mercy on me.” She was a woman, and not even a Jewish woman; she was a Canaanite woman, a Gentile, who had no right or claim upon the God of Israel; nevertheless, she came to Jesus. (2) She had a very high view of the person of the Lord Jesus. She addressed Him, “Have mercy on me, **O Lord, Son of David.**” She knew and confessed that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, the promised King of Israel. God had promised Israel that He would send a Savior, a Deliverer to them, who would be a descendant of Israel’s great King David. She had more understanding and faith than the Pharisees, who had come to Him from Jerusalem. (3) She had a great need, her daughter was severely demon possessed, but she knew that Jesus could deliver her daughter from satanic bondage and oppression.

Initially the Lord did not give her encouragement. We read in **verse 23a**, “*But He answered her not a word.*” One of the greatest trials a Christian may face is a perceived unresponsiveness of God to our prayers. Our concern may be for a loved one—a son or a daughter. It is very much as acute a concern as this woman had for her daughter, but we like her, in response to our petition, “*But He answered her not a word.*” **Thomas Manton** (1620–1677) wrote:

He heard well enough what she asked, but not a word of answer gets she from Him. I will show you, that though Christ love our persons, and dislikes not our petitions, but meaneth to grant them, yet for a time He will seem to take no notice of them...

That this is a sore temptation appeareth by the complaints of the saints and servants of God: Lamentations 3:8, “When I cry and shout, He shutteth out my prayer; ‘as if God ad locked up Himself, that their prayers should not come at Him, or find access to Him. So verse 44, “Thou coverest Thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through;’ as if God had wrapped Himself in a thick cloud of displeasure against our sins, that our prayers could find no entrance. So the spouse: Canticles 5:6, ‘I sought Him, but I could not find Him; I called Him, but He gave no answer.’ That God would refuse and reject our prayers is a grievous trial to the faithful, who value communion with God. Nay this delay may be so long till the cause seem hopeless: Psalm 69:3, ‘I am weary of my crying; my throat is dried, mine eyes fail, while I wait for my God.’ So Psalm 22:2, ‘O my God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.’ And all this while God seemeth to forsake them, nor to regard their suit, as if He had no respect to their hard condition. To lose our labour in prayer is one of the saddest disappointments that we can meet with, when our Lord and importunate cries bring no relief to us.”³

Why does the Lord tarry in His answer of our prayers? Why would He have us *wait* for His answer? To the end that He might be glorified and that we might be strengthened. He waits to answer for our ultimate good, that we might exercise our faith, patience, and our love for Him, and our true desire for the thing we request of Him.⁴

Will we in our patient persistence in prayer show forth that we are true to Him and unwavering in our loyalty to Him? Or does our commitment to Him last only as long as we receive things from His hands, and that if we do so rather quickly? Let us be as the prophet, who said,

“Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.” (Habakkuk 3:17f)

Our Lord’s silence would not lead her to be silent. And further, she must have heard Jesus’ disciples regarding her. We read, “*And His disciples came and begged Him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she is crying out after us’*” (15:23b). J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) wrote:

There is only too much of this spirit among many who profess and call themselves believers. They are apt to discourage inquiries after Christ, instead of helping them forward. They are too ready to doubt the reality of a beginner’s grace, because it is small, and to treat him as Saul was treated when he first came to Jerusalem after his conversion: “They believed not that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26). Let us beware of giving way to this spirit: let us seek to have more of the mind that was in Christ. Like Him, let us be gentle, and kind, and encouraging all our treatment of those who are seeking to be saved; above all, let us tell men continually that they must not judge of Christ by Christians. Let us assure them that there is far more in that gracious Master than there is in the best of His servants.⁵

But after hearing His disciples, the woman heard Jesus say further, “*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (15:24). The Father had sent Jesus on a mission. It was to fulfill His promise to the nation of Israel that He would redeem a remnant of His people from their sin. God Himself would remove His curse that was upon them for their having broken their covenant with Him. God would send His Messiah, who would be as a Shepherd to His flock, a remnant of Israel. As we read in **Micah 2:12**:

“I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob,
I will surely gather the *remnant* of Israel;
I will put them together like *sheep* of the fold,

³ Thomas Manton, **Works of Thomas Manton** (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2008), Vol. 17, pp. 157f.

⁴ Ibid, p. 158f.

⁵ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Matthew* (Banner of Truth, 1995), p. 181.

Like a *flock* in the midst of their pasture;
They shall make a loud noise,
Because of so many people.

This Canaanite woman had no claims upon Jesus. She knew that He was the Promised Jewish Messiah. She knew He had the power to heal. But she knew that she had no basis of appeal, for she was not a Jewess. Nevertheless, she was driven by her need and by her concern for her daughter. We read in **Matthew 15:25**, *“But she came and knelt before Him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’”*

But our Lord gave her further cause for believing He would *not* help her. **Verse 26** reads, *“And He answered, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’”* What hope had she? She was not one of the privileged and blessed “children” of the Father’s household. What she desired belonged to the Jews only, not to “dogs.” Of course God made provision for all people in Jesus Christ, whether Jew or gentile they are equal in the sight of God through their one Savior Jesus Christ. But she did not know this when she had come to Him.

Our Lord referred to this woman as “a little dog.” The term “dog(s)” was a common and demeaning metaphor that the Jews used for Gentiles. Generally, the cruel, marauding, unclean, scavenger of a dog was in view. But here there is a ray of hope suggested in Jesus’ words. He uses the word for “dog” that referred to the small household pet of many homes. Though not among children, Jesus did not depict her as the mongrel outcast, but rather as one that was cared for and provided for by a loving family. It made possible her response in **verse 27**, *“She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’”* She sought a great deliverance for her daughter.

Great as was the blessing which she sought, it was but a crumb to the Lord’s bounty, and to Israel’s portion, and therefore she begged to have it, dog as she owned herself to be.” Let us accept the worst character that the Scripture gives us and still find in it argument for hope.” (C. H. Spurgeon).

Our Lord then responded to her. **Verse 28** reads, *“Then Jesus answered her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.”* The Lord blessed her through her *faith* in Him. She had her petition granted her; her daughter was wholly healed. She glorified God through this even in her refusing to cease, but to wait upon the Lord until He granted her request.

II. God’s purposes in having His people wait for Him to fulfill His promises

A. God has people wait upon Him in order to discover who truly trusts Him and who does not.

King Saul was the first king of Israel. He was the people’s choice to be king. God’s appointment of him was in some ways an object lesson and a punishment for Israel. Saul was ultimately a great disappointment and a cause of much loss to the nation. Although he was a very tall and handsome man with every possible privilege and resource available to him, he was not a man of faith. He did not trust and wait upon the Lord in times of trial. He was an anxious man, filled with fear about many things. We may see this played out in the account recorded in **1 Samuel 13**. We will read in **verses 5-9**:

Then the Philistines gathered together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude. And they came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth Aven. When the men of Israel saw that they were in danger (for the people were distressed), then the people hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits.⁷ And some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.

As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were

scattered from him. So Saul said, “Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me.” And he offered the burnt offering.

The prophet Samuel had told Saul to wait seven days for his arrival. But Saul saw the threat. He feared the consequences of the threat. He responded to the things he saw--the enemy gathering, his people fleeing—not in faith, patiently waiting in obedience to his God; rather, he acted out of fear. He did that which was forbidden. He would force matters. He took matters into his own hands. He failed to wait upon the Lord. He stepped in and assumed the role of the priest and made a sacrifice unto God, something that he knew was strictly forbidden. He was no priest. He was not from the tribe of Levi. But because he was so fearful (anxious) of what he thought might befall him, he acted.

What happened? **Verses 10-14:**

Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him.

And Samuel said, “What have you done?”

Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, ‘The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.’ Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.”

And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”

Had Saul followed the principle that is everywhere reflected in Scripture but is stated in **Philippians 4:6**, he would have been okay.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Our cares on a small scale, day-to-day cares, can be injurious to us. **Charles Spurgeon** described it well:

Once more, *cares (anxieties) are of no use to us, and they cause us great damage.* If you were to worry as long as you wished, you could not make yourself an inch taller, or grow another hair on your head, or make one hair white or black. So the Savior tells us; and he asks, if care fails in such little things, what can care do in the higher matters of providence? It cannot do anything. A farmer stood in his fields, and said, “I do not know what will happen to us all. The wheat will be destroyed if this rain keeps on; we shall not have any harvest at all unless we have some fine weather.” He walked up and down, wringing his hands, and fretting, and making his whole household uncomfortable; but he did not produce one single gleam of sunlight by all his worrying, he could not puff any of the clouds away with all his petulant speech, nor could he stay a drop of rain with all his murmurings.

What is the good of it, then, to keep gnawing at your own heart, when you can get nothing by it? Besides, it weakens our power to help ourselves, and especially our power to glorify God. A care-full heart hinders us from judging rightly in many things. I have often used the illustration (I do not know a better) of taking a telescope, breathing on it with the hot breath of our anxiety, putting it to our eye, and then saying that we cannot see anything but clouds. Of course we cannot, and we never shall while we breathe upon it. If we were but calm, quiet, self-possessed, and God possessed, we should do the right thing. We should be, as we say, “all there” in the time of difficulty. That man may expect to have presence of mind that has the presence of God. If we forget to pray, do you wonder that we are all in a

fidget, and a worry, and we do the first thing that occurs to us, which is generally the worst thing, instead of waiting till we saw what should be done, and then trustfully and believingly doing it as in the sight of God? Care is injurious; but if you only turn this care into prayer, then every care will be a benefit to you.

B. God has His people wait upon Him in order to teach them not to lean on their own understanding, but to desire that the will of the Lord will be done.

We read in Proverbs these wise words of instruction:

⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths. (Prov. 3:5f)

Many of us could probably testify of the wisdom in following this instruction and the folly of failing to do so. Those times when we failed to wait upon the Lord, but rather leaned upon our own understanding, were times when we tended to make a mess of things. But those times when we waited patiently for the Lord to lead and guide us, we can testify of the wisdom and goodness of the Lord to instruct us and lead us in the course that was best for us and what was pleasing to Him.

We might call upon Abraham in this matter. Abraham was a man of God, a man of great faith. He is even called the friend of God (Cf. James 2:23). It would seem that if anyone could be said to have been called upon by God to wait upon Him, it would be Abraham. Abraham waited all of his life in faith. He “died in faith, *not having received the promises*, but having seen them afar off.” He had been persuaded of God’s promised, having embraced them, and therefore lived as a stranger and pilgrim on the earth.

Abraham was an idolater for a good portion of his early life. But God came to him in his homeland of idolatry and called him to leave homeland and family to travel to a land that God would one day give to him. We read of God initially calling Abraham in Genesis 12:1ff:

Now the LORD had said to Abram:

“Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father’s house,
To a land that I will show you.
²I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
³I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram *was* seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. (Gen. 12:1-5)

Abraham obeyed God and traveled to distant Canaan. There God again appeared unto him, promising him great blessing.

⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸And he moved from there to the mountain

east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. (Gen. 12:7-8)

Later God appeared unto Abraham once again. We read of this event in Genesis 15:1ff.

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

²But Abram said, “Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!”

⁴And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” ⁵Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

⁶And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

The Lord then confirmed to Abraham His will by cutting a covenant with him, whereby God bound Himself to fulfill His promise to Abraham. Abraham would father a son who would be the one through whom God would cause Abraham to bear numerous offspring who would inherit the Promised Land.

We read in the same chapter God’s covenantal promise to Abraham:

¹⁸On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying:

“To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates— ¹⁹the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.” (Gen. 15:18-21)

Abraham would have to wait upon the Lord for an extended period of time as he waited for God to fulfil His promise to give him a son. It would be 25 more years before He appeared to him once again. But only after about 10 years of this extended waiting period, Abraham made the greatest mistake of his life. He listened to his wife, Sarah. Abraham ceased to wait upon the Lord in faith, and he wrongly trusted in his own effort and his own wisdom, assuming that by doing so God’s promise would come into realization. We read of this in Genesis 16:1ff:

Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. ²So Sarai said to Abram, “See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. ³Then Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. ⁴So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. (Gen. 16:1-4)

We read that Hagar bore Ishmael, the son of Abraham. “So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. ¹⁶Abram *was* eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.” (Gen. 16:15-16)

Abraham had failed to wait on God in faith. He had a lapse of faith, in which he trusted in his own flesh to fulfil the promise of God. Rather than waiting faithfully upon God to fulfil His Word in His own way and His own time, Abraham faltered. Ishmael was born. And the impact of his birth continues to this day.

It was after 25 years from the time that God had confirmed His word to Abraham that he would have a son, through whom He would bring to pass His promises, God appeared to Abraham regarding the coming birth of Isaac. We read of this in Genesis 17:1ff.

When Abram was *ninety-nine years old*, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. ²And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.” ³Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: ⁴“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. ⁵No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. ⁷And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. ⁸Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God”...

¹⁵Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.”

Now in verses 17ff we read of Abraham’s reaction to God’s glorious promise to him. Abraham struggled to accept God’s plan. He even protested, for he desired that Ishmael might be the one that God would favor as his promised descendant. Here is the account:

¹⁷Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” ¹⁸And Abraham said to God, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!”

Because Abraham had failed to wait upon the Lord and had fathered a child through Hagar, he was not desirous to submit to God’s will. He had, of course, come to love his son, Ishmael, and desired God’s blessing on him. Isaac had not yet been born, so Abraham had not affection for him at this stage of his life. But God declared to Abraham that His will would be done. We read in verses 19ff:

¹⁹Then God said: “No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. ²⁰And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. ²¹But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.” ²²Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

Thereafter God revealed more fully to Abraham the folly of fathering a son with Hagar. After Isaac was born and weaned, Ishmael persecuted much younger Isaac, which in turn brought great tension between their mothers, Sarah and Hagar. The time came when Abraham had to exile Hagar and Ishmael from his lodging and camp.

This lengthy account that we have rehearsed is the seminal illustration of what it is to try to relate with God through one’s own works or through faith alone. The Apostle Paul later called upon this incident to illustrate the conflict between law and grace and the need to jettison legalism from one’s thinking and behavior. We read in Galatians 4

²¹Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. ²³But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, ²⁴which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—²⁵for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is,

and is in bondage with her children—²⁶but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.
²⁷For it is written:

“Rejoice, O barren,
You who do not bear!
Break forth and shout,
You who are not in labor!
For the desolate has many more children
Than she who has a husband.”

²⁸Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. ²⁹But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. ³⁰Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” ³¹So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free. (Gal. 4:21-31)

And so, the purpose of God in causing us to wait upon Him is so that He might reveal and confirm to us that the folly of our own carnal desires and ways and to teach us the wisdom of all of His ways.

C. God has His people wait upon Him in order to teach them to be content in all conditions and situations in life.

The Lord would have His people experience His peace and to exhibit joy irrespective of what kind of pressures and difficulties they are having in life. We read of God having produced a work of grace in the lives of Paul and Silas when we read of their attitudes and behavior after having been abused in Philippi. We read in Acts 16 this account:

¹⁶Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. ¹⁷This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” ¹⁸And this she did for many days.

But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour. ¹⁹But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities.

²⁰And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; ²¹and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.” ²²Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods. ²³And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed. ²⁷And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. ²⁸But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”

Of course the outcome of that even was the conversion of the jailer and his household who believed on Jesus Christ as a result of the witness and testimony of Paul and Silas.

But Paul and Silas had learned over time to have faith in the Lord in these times of difficulty. There is no doubt that there were times when they had waited perhaps for extended periods for the Lord to intervene. But it was in their times of waiting upon the Lord when they saw His works performed to deliver them or provide for them that they became convinced that their Lord would preserve them and provide for them in all

of their need. This is why Paul could later write to the Christians at Philippi, some of which would have been the family of this jailor, saying:

¹¹Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: ¹²I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Phil. 4:11-13)

This grace could only have been produced in Paul by having to wait upon the Lord in his times of distress and difficulty.

D. God has His people wait upon Him in order to lead them to highly value what He has promised them and in order that their joy will be greatly enhanced when He fulfills His promises to them.

Every day of having to wait, enhances our appreciation of God who has promised good and eternal things for His people. Every day of waiting will result in our joy being full when He in His own good time delivers us from this wicked, fallen world, and we are brought into our “everlasting habitations” (Cf. Luke 16:9). John closed the Revelation by saying, “He which testifieth these things saith, ‘Surely I come quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

“Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” (1 Thess. 5:24)
