

It is Monday morning! When I was a young lad, Monday morning meant going back to school. You too? I have to confess that today's Devotional may seem just a little like school. Oh well! In our Christian lives, we are always learning. As you walk with me through "Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow," which is the heart of Psalm 100, I trust you will sense the presence of the Lord.

REQUIREMENTS – IMPERATIVES - OBLIGATIONS

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

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“He has shown all you people what is good, and what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

Micah 6:8 is the “springboard” into this brief Scriptural Devotional. By it we are launched into a review of Psalm 100. This Psalm is usually known as a Psalm of Thanksgiving. And truly, it is just that. However, there are some interesting facts about Psalm 100 that are challenging. The focus of this Devotional is on the form of the seven verbs found in this Psalm. Stated simply, they are all in the imperative form. Therefore, they stand as requirements or obligations to those who read, study, and trust the Word of God. Now, let's look at the idea of “requirements” as they pertain to how one is to live the Christian life. Yes, I know it all too well! The objection has been stated often: “I don't believe in a religion that is based on doing and not doing.” Well, neither do I! But let it be stated clearly, that what we do or don't do is not the means of our salvation from sin and our future entrance into eternal glory. Our salvation is ONLY through the precious shed blood of the Lamb of God on the Cross on Golgotha's hill, followed by His glorious resurrection on the morning of the first day of the week. At the same time, there are Biblically-stated character responsibilities or evidences that God has set before all who received His redeeming grace, and have committed themselves to follow Him. Therefore, we need to look briefly at the matter of “imperatives,” or “requirements,” or “obligations” as found in the Bible. So, let's look at this for a moment.

We do not always like or appreciate “requirements.” It depends on that to which such requirements relate. I so well remember as a young boy living on our family farm ... a small dairy farm in the Yakima Valley, State of Washington. We maintained a small dairy herd that had to be milked twice daily. On our land we grew corn, alfalfa hay, different grains such a wheat, oats, barley, or rye, and sometimes other crops for sale or for use on the farm. We had a considerable part of our farm land in pasture for our dairy herd. Yes, there were “requirements” or, if you like another word, “imperatives.” These were laid out to me, and to a lesser degree to my younger brother. You know ... those “chores” that came with living on a farm! Some were even pleasant, while others not so! But the consequences of failing to fulfill all the requirements? Even more unpleasant! Well, those were imperatives! They were not optional. Oh! You too? You had responsibilities assigned to you? Yes, I believe it is true of all of us. Life in any context has its requirements, its obligations, its mandates, its imperatives.

Yes, as growing children and young people, we learned that there were certain imperatives or requirements attached to being a student in school ... attendance, reading, writing, homework assignments, preparing for exams, and on and on and on. Then we found out what real requirements were all about when we registered for classes in college and graduate school, if we added the latter to our college experience. How could those Professors do that to us? Recall your response to your GPA at the close of the semester? For most of us, the number COULD have been higher ... maybe!!!

Remember when you learned about some of the requirements that were a part of your first or even subsequent places of employment? How could that supervisor be so demanding? Why, we even had to be at work by a certain time! How inconsiderate! But we learned to live with it, didn't we? The paycheck was important! To earn it? The imperatives! The requirements! The obligations! We had to “earn” our paycheck. Yet, we dare not forget that our salvation from sin is by grace through faith!

Yes, we learned that life has an abundance of “requirements” in the various arenas of life. In the Word of God we read of His requirements, imperatives, or expectations for His people ... the people who are followers of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. They are often written in the “imperative” form in the original languages. The text above, Micah 6:8, as well as Psalm 100 are for all God's people. Of one thing we are absolutely certain: we CANNOT in any way “earn” redemption from sin and its consequences. That was purchased for us on the Cross when Jesus Christ spoke triumphantly, “It is finished.” Remember ... always ... it is ours by grace through

faith, when we repent of sin, and place our trust in and reliance on Him. Therefore, the requirement set before us related to our salvation is repentance in honest sincerity and sorrow for personal sin, together with personal faith and trust in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. So again, it is salvation by grace through faith! Once related to the Lord through Calvary's love, there IS a life style God expects of us, and happily supplies the enabling power and grace for us to live obediently according to those expectations.

I am using a little grammatical language here. The meaning expressed by the verbs are based on the volition of the speaker – God, and the potential action by the hearers – His faithful children. The three basic requirements listed above in Micah 6:8 are foundational to our personal life as a Christian. Then, to be of immense help to us, the Lord is even a bit more specific in a special related passage in the Old Testament. It is Psalm 100, the great Psalm of Thanksgiving. When reading this Psalm, one's attention is immediately drawn to seven verbs, "make," "serve," "come," "know," "enter," "be thankful," and "bless."

Now, for a little lesson in Hebrew grammar. I am going to insert each of the seven Hebrew verbs at this point. I am asking you to look at each of them, and identify the one and only similarity that appears in all seven. OK?

Here we go! Hebrew 101!

Verse 1: הָרִיעוּ – "make,"

Verse 2: עֲבַדוּ – "serve,"

Verse 2: בָּאוּ – "come," (Note: the same as in verse 4, translated there as "enter; difference is contextual only.")

Verse 3: דָּעוּ – "know,"

Verse 4: בָּאוּ – "enter,"

Verse 4: הִודוּ – "be thankful,"

Verse 4: בָּרְכוּ – "bless."

Remember, that Hebrew reads from right to left. Therefore, the first "letter" you see on the left side in each word, is actually the final letter in the word. Did you notice the one and only similarity in each of the Hebrew words? Is this important? Absolutely, it is. It means that this similarity in each these verbs is the final letter, or suffix on each, and this form is the imperative indicator. It moves them from the "optional" to the "required" status.

Now, how do these "imperative" verbs relate to Christians? I want to list each of them again, and add to them the relationship each has to reality as expressed in the Word of God. Each is not only an imperative in form, but also what is known in Hebrew grammar as imperfect in aspect. That is, the imperfect aspect denotes a present action being pursued, or a future action yet to occur, but usually with movement toward a goal. The goal is to live in a manner that is pleasing to Almighty God Who has redeemed us by His grace. Therefore, these seven imperative verbs lay out before us that holy goal toward which we are to consciously and constantly move... pleasing to the Lord our God. They are as follows:

"Make a joyful shout;" rejoice in the Lord because of His fantastic blessings – הָרִיעוּ

"Serve the Lord with gladness;" always obey the Lord whenever, wherever, however – עֲבַדוּ

"Come before His presence with singing;" let your heart overflow in worship. (Same as in v 4) - בָּאוּ

"Know that the LORD, He is God;" live daily, fully depending on His enabling grace – דָּעוּ

"Enter into His gates with thanksgiving;" fellowship with Him meditating in His Word – בָּאוּ

"Be thankful to Him," spend time in prayer, humbly thanking Him for saving grace – הִודוּ

"Bless His name," render ceaseless praise to Him for His love, mercy, and grace – בָּרְכוּ

There we have it! Seven non-optional actions that are to become the very character of the Christian life. This is for every follower of the Lamb of God Who was slain from the foundation of the world to bring redemption to those repent of their ungodliness, place their faith in Him, and commit to following Him as taught in the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures.

I want to close this Devotional with a very old hymn. It is not sung in very many churches, and I assume it could be unfamiliar to many people who read this Devotional. In 1565, William Kethe placed his hymn of praise into the old Scottish Psalter. It is commonly referred to, especially in a traditional Presbyterian fellowship, as "The Old 100th." The music score by which we usually sing this hymn is attributed to Louis Bourgeois, composed in 1551. We know his music score, for it is the precursor to what we know as "The Doxology." With the exception of a brief time of a few months in 1937, from age 3 years in 1933 until I graduated from High School in 1948, I was involved in the United Presbyterian Church, the major church in our community. One of the practices I remember so very well, is that EVERY Sunday morning we began our worship service by singing the first verse of that old hymn. At that time, I did not know there were "additional" verses. Therefore, verse one is very familiar to me. However, I have included here the traditional five verses. Let's sing at least the first verse of this great old hymn, using the music we know as The Doxology.

1. All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

Him serve with fear; His praise forth-tell. Come ye before Him and rejoice.

2. The Lord, ye know, is God indeed; without our aid He did us make.

We are His flock; He doth us feed. And for His sheep He doth us take.

3. O enter then His gates with praise; approach with joy His courts unto.

Praise, laud, and bless His name always. For it is seemly so to do.

4. For why? The Lord our God is good; His mercy is forever sure. His truth at all times firmly stood, and shall from age to age endure.

5. To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the God whom heav'n and earth adore,

From earth and from the angel host be praise and glory evermore.

Amen.