


The Mission Paper of Zion

Praying |

Articles in English 2020 Spring | **Siionin Lähetykslehti** 



CONTENTS

- 3 Ask in His name
- 4 The Lord's prayer
- 8 Prayer is the heart's speech to God
- 12 Endeavoring requires endurance
- 14 The joy of believers in Mukama Sunday school was touching
- 16 Faith connects us across borders
- 18 Good person

Miika Kopperoinen
+358 50 330 9986
miika.kopperoinen@srk.fi

Jon Bloomquist
+1 (218) 255-0173
jbloomquist@llchurch.org


CHIEF EDITOR:
Olli Lohi
044 757 0056
olli.lohi@srk.fi

EDITOR:
Päivi Martikainen
040 660 4441
paivi.martikainen@srk.fi

LAYOUT:
Sisko-Liisa Karsikas

SUBSCRIPTIONS:
040 558 3972
tilaajapalvelu@srk.fi

PLACE OF PUBLISHING:
Suomen Rauhanhdistysten
Keskusyhdistys ry

PUBLISHER:
 Suomen Rauhanhdistysten
Keskusyhdistys ry
Kiviharjunlenkki 7, 90220 Oulu
www.srk.fi

The Mission Paper of Zion
Suionin Vähetyislehti

ISSN 0355-8940

The Bible exhorts us to pray. According to Christian doctrine, "Prayer is humble, earnest speech of the heart to God" (CD 78). Prayer has been given a great promise. Jesus said: "Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." (John 16:23)

What does this mean? Praying in Jesus's name means believing and trusting in Jesus's merit while at the same time accepting God's will. Every person can speak to God in Jesus's name; He has promised to be an advocate for everyone.

Jesus taught about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount. His teaching depicts a praying person who trusts in God. The prayer of such a person is not based on unnecessary wordiness; for such a person prayer is not a way to gain his own merit before God or other people. Jesus said: "This, then, is how you should pray." (Matt 6:9) Then He taught the Lord's prayer, which teaches us to ask for and seek that which is most important in our life.

PRAYER IS A PART OF LIFE

Often the theme of a prayer is distress and difficulties, and the hopes and requests that arise from them. This is cor-

Ask in His name

rect; the child can ask the Father for whatever he needs.

In the Lord's prayer Jesus puts our needs in the order of importance: "Thy will be done." It is not always easy to accept God's will. This requires trust in God, which Jesus taught.

Prayer is not intended only for difficult situations in life. We can talk to God in all kinds of situations. Prayer also includes thankfulness. It is easy to give thanks when we remember what we have received from God.

Prayer does not only concern oneself; we can also pray on behalf of other people. The prayers of others have carried us in many situations in life. It is also good to remember our homeland and its leaders in our prayers.

Jesus exhorted to ask in His name and promised that God would give it. At the same time Jesus also said: "Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."

Today's text is a part of Jesus's farewell sermon to His disciples. Jesus wanted to yet repeat His most important teachings. In the previous chapter Jesus said: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:11)

There is one objective in all of

Jesus's teachings: man's salvation. Even now He exhorts us to seek complete joy. Here on earth this means the joy of faith. At the same time Jesus tells us to look toward our destination. One day we will be able to experience perfect joy in our heavenly home. The most important request of the prayer is to remain as a child of God.

JESUS WAS VICTORIOUS OVER THE WORLD

The purpose of Jesus's farewell sermon becomes apparent in the gospel according to St. John. He reminds us what the basis of faith and salvation is: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Peace comes from the word of God; the gospel of the forgiveness of sins. We can turn to God in prayer in all situations of our life. God will answer our prayer. Nevertheless, salvation does not depend on prayer or our own merits. According to Jesus's words: Jesus has overcome the world. This victory is the basis of our salvation. □

Text: Teri Hiltunen
Published in Päivämies 22.5.2019
Translation: K.K.

The Lord's prayer

The Lord's prayer can be considered the most important prayer in the New Testament, as it sums up Jesus's teachings about praying. In the Sermon on the Mount, recorded by Matthew, prior to the Lord's prayer Jesus teaches His listeners to avoid piousness and wordiness when praying (Mat. 6:5–8). In the gospel according to St. Luke, Jesus teaches the prayer to those who feel unable and helpless when praying (Luke 11:1).

PETITIONS CONCERNING GOD

The Lord's prayer is divided into seven petitions. The first petition, "hallowed be Thy name", contains the thought that we want to revere God's name and keep it separate from all other names. Hallowing God's name was mentioned already in the Old Testament, and the second commandment forbids us from using the name of God wrongly and in vain (Exod. 20:7).

In Luther's Catechism, hallowing God's name is explained as teaching His word correctly and living accordingly. God's name is profaned if we teach and live contrary to His word.

The second petition of the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come", is con-

nected to the first petition in that the kingdom of God can only come into the midst of people where God's name is hallowed and where His word is heard. This petition is directly connected to Jesus's preaching and deeds, where the kingdom of God and its coming were the main message. In Luther's explanation the request for the kingdom of God to come is carried out when God gives His Holy Spirit through His word to the one who is praying. Thus, the gospel gives birth to faith, and as a result that person lives a life in accordance with God's will.

What is God's will, which we ask in the Lord's prayer to "be done on earth, as it is in heaven"? God has expressed His will in His word and commandments; their core is comprised of the double commandment of love. Yet the Bible testifies that not one person is able to fulfill the demands of the law (Rom. 3:12).

The demands of the commandment of love and God's will are only fulfilled in the faith that is received where – according to the order in the Lord's prayer – God's name is hallowed and a person becomes a partaker of the kingdom of God and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In his explanation in the Large Catechism, Luther says that we must also pray for God's will to be done, as the powers of destruction (the enemy of souls, the world, and man's own flesh) seek to prevent God's name from being hallowed and His kingdom from coming. The enemy also seeks to regain control over a person who has been moved under God's power, into His kingdom. Thus, the petition "Thy will be done" is a question of preserving all that has been received with the help of the previous two petitions.

DAILY BREAD

The hallowing of God's name, the coming of His kingdom, and the carrying out of His will are followed by the petition: "Give us this day our daily bread." Thus, the Lord's prayer follows the order of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Mat. 6:33).

The needs of spiritual life come first in this petition, and then everything else that is necessary. In this petition Luther considers daily bread to mean all of God's temporal blessings and care. He says that this is indeed given

without our prayer, but "we pray in this petition that He would lead us to understand that our daily bread is from Him and receive it with thanksgiving." (Small Catechism).

PETITIONS CONCERNING CARING FOR THE LIFE OF FAITH

The first three petitions of the Lord's prayer concern man's relationship with God, and the last three concern caring for one's life of faith and spiritual watching. Watching in faith is possible only by being a partaker of the gospel—the forgiveness of sins – again and again. Indeed, the fifth petition of the Lord's prayer says: "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Luther explains in his Large Catechism: "Not as though He did not forgive sin without and even before our prayer (for He has given us the Gospel, in which is pure forgiveness before we prayed or ever thought about it). But this is to the intent that we may recognize and accept such forgiveness."

This petition is also a reminder that no one would base their endeavor on their own blamelessness: "And let no one think that as long as we live here he

can reach such a position that he will not need such forgiveness.”

Forgiveness of sins should also apply to our neighbors “who trespass against us.” Thus, faith and love are manifested in our everyday life and our relations with other people. In everyday life we also encounter questions that prompt us to pray: “And lead us not into temptation.”

Temptation refers to a situation where a person is enticed away from everything in this prayer that has been

requested prior to this. A believer lives under pressure from many internal and external temptations, but sin cannot hurt him as long as he battles against it with God’s help. Giving up the battle and straying into unbelief mean falling away from hallowing God’s name, His kingdom, obeying His will, and partaking of the forgiveness of sins.

The Lord’s prayer culminates in the seventh petition, whose last word identifies what has been behind the whole prayer: “But deliver us from evil.”



(Mat. 6:13). The objective of the whole prayer is to be freed from “evil”. This means not only personal evil—the enemy of souls – but everything that is contrary to the will of God.

Luther summarizes the whole prayer in the Large Catechism: “For if we are to be preserved and delivered from all evil, the name of God must first be hal-

lowed in us, His kingdom must be with us, and His will be done. After that He will finally preserve us from sin and shame, and, besides, from everything that may hurt or injure us.” □

Text: Veli Matti Linnanmäki

The text is shortened. The original text was published in SRK's book, Uskon aakkoset, 2012

Translation: K.K.



Prayer is the heart's speech to God

According to Christian Doctrine, prayer is the heart's humble speech to God (CD 1948, 78). There are always two involved in prayer: the one who prays and God.

Does God need our prayers? Doesn't He already know what His children need? It is said in the gospel of St. Matthew: "your Father knows what you need before you ask him." (Mat. 6:8).

I think praying strengthens and reassures the one who is praying. The heavenly Father does not need our

prayers; He surely knows our most hidden thoughts, needs, and deeds, but we need prayer. Prayer is a gift, a benefit of a life of faith, the same way as confession is a grace benefit. Jesus exhorts us to pray without giving up (Luke 18:1). Prayer is the child's speech to the heavenly Father.

We can pray whenever we feel the need to speak about our own matters to the heavenly Father. Nevertheless, it is not a requirement of faith. In the same





way as speaking about temporal matters with a friend makes things easier for us, praying makes our life of faith easier. However, prayer does not bring us salvation; we believe by grace alone.

One fall Sunday I was going to services. My everyday life and its cares had been depressing me for a longer time, already. The enemy of souls had found a good target and kept reminding me about the weakness of my life of faith. On my way to services I prayed that the heavenly Father would reveal the gift of faith to me so I would have the strength to continue onward. At some point I already thought, “I’ll go this time yet, then I won’t have the strength to continue anymore.”

At the services an older mission speaker spoke so precious about

faith that it melted my hard heart. At one point he said, as if directly to me: “If you thought you would come the last time, forget those thoughts. You can even believe them forgiven.” After services I went to visit with the speaker with happy feelings of grace, and I marveled at how the heavenly Father had given him exactly the right words at the right moment.

The speaker burst out crying and said how he had prayed before his sermon that the heavenly Father would give him at least something to say, because he was feeling so poor. Thus we both – the speaker and I – received a direct answer to our prayers. There were at least two happy children of God present after those services!

GOD ANSWERS OUR PRAYERS IN HIS OWN TIME

The word of God promises in several places that you may ask whatever you wish, and the heavenly Father will give it to you (e.g., John 15:7). Does God answer our prayers? Yes He does, but not always in the way we would have wanted. He answers in His own time and in His own way. How many times have I prayed for health and recovery from illness for my dear ones. Their health has improved, but not as much as I have asked.

It is said that God hears prayers that are prayed with the right state of mind. Have I then not had the right state of

mind if my prayers have not been answered in the way I wished? Surely my prayers, and the prayers of many others concerning the same matter, have been sincere; a heartfelt desire to improve the matters of another person.

However, God's plans reach beyond the boundary of time, while our humans' ability to see into the future extends to tomorrow's weather forecast, and even that does not always come true. How can I doubt the wisdom of God's plans when I can only see this day and yesterday, but not tomorrow.

Most important in God's good plan is to bring us from this earth to our heavenly home. Indeed, those with ex-



perience say “schooling us for heaven.” This viewpoint differs completely from what I ask for: easiness or even reasonableness.

We do not know God’s plans. We can only be sure that He has good will toward us, His children. We can only believe in that. And we can pray: “Give me understanding, and if I don’t understand, give me the strength to accept your will.”

PRAYING ON BEHALF OF SOMEONE

I hear about a difficult situation in my friend’s life. I send her a WhatsApp message. I try to comfort her, but I

seem to be at a loss for words. I write at the end of the message: “I remember you in my prayers!” Some other day I receive a message on my phone from a colleague: “I’m having a really difficult time. Could you pray on my behalf?”

In the evening I fold my hands and tell my matters to a greater planner. I receive new hope. How many times have I had to admit I don’t know what to say or do, but I can pray on your behalf. Even that is enough.

PRAYER HAS A CALMING EFFECT AND HUMBLER THE MIND

I had an argument with my child. I am angry and irritated; in my mind I accuse the child of poor behavior. I don’t even notice my own part in the argument. Upon calming down I fold my hands and ask for wisdom and calmness of mind. God gives me a humble mind, and I notice that there was fault in me, also. I am able to more calmly go and discuss the matter and ask for forgiveness for my own behavior.

The most important prayer is that I would remain believing to the end of my life. I can pray for that reward of victory every day. □

Text: Marjaana Laivamaa

The article is shortened. The original text was published in SRK’s book, *Ajankohtaista*, 2017.

Translation: K.K.



Endeavoring requires endurance

Endeavoring brings to mind a story about a couple of birds that spent the entire early summer building a nest on a windowsill. The inhabitant of the house had been careful not to open the window so the nest would not fall on the ground.

One day, however, the inhabitant forgot to be careful. When he opened the window the nest dropped on the ground and fell apart. The birds flew

to the windowsill and wondered where the nest was.

The inhabitant felt sorry for the birds. The next day he noticed that the birds had begun to rebuild the nest—in exactly the same place.

As another example of endeavoring I recall a runner who fell down in the middle of a race. The other runners continued on and were soon quite far away. The runner got up and continued running.

Little by little he caught up to the other runners and finally won the race—in record time.

One who endeavors persistently trusts in his own ways to reach his destination, regardless of hardships. If one persistently continues and doesn't give up, he will finally reach his goal.



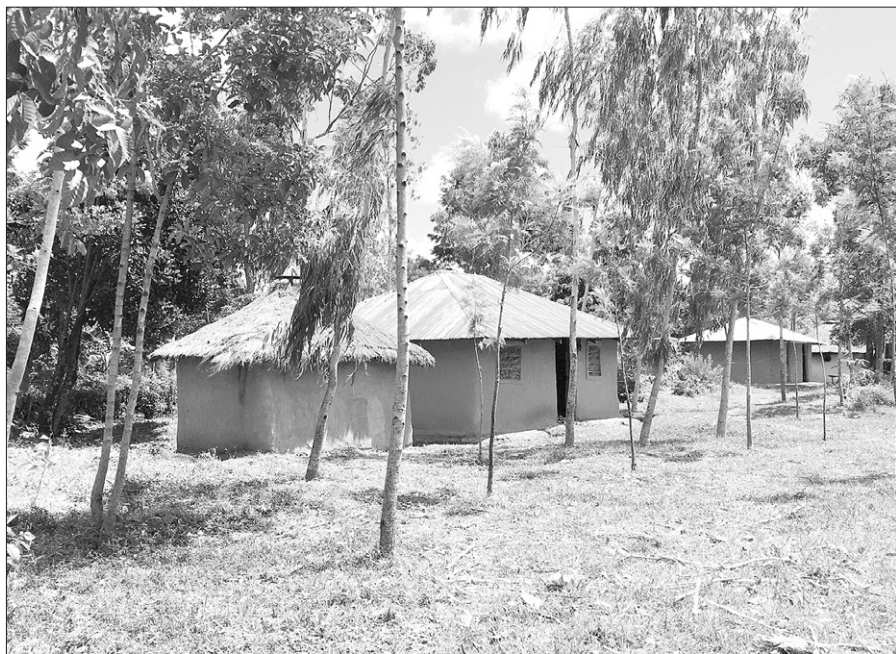
Chapter 11 of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells about the endeavor of faith and travelers in the time of the Old Testament: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets.

“Through faith [they] conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; [they] shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; [their] weakness was turned to strength; and [they] became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.” (Hebr. 11:33–34).

Among those who endeavored in the New Testament were John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul. By faith they gave up this world’s power, money, and welfare. They were content with little, knowing that their endeavor of faith would result in an unperishable treasure in heaven.

Paul himself encouraged others in his time to run the good race of faith and keep a good conscience so their faith would not be shipwrecked. □

Text: Matti Kontkanen
Published in Päivämies 4.12.2019
Translation: K.K.



The joy of believers in Mukama Sunday school was touching

When people have all their sins forgiven, their hearts are filled with joy and gratitude. This could be seen during a mission trip to Rwanda.

Sunday school in Mukama was part of the February mission trip to Rwanda. The topic of the lesson was trust in God and the salvation He has prepared for man.

Sunday school was kept by Jon Bloomquist. His main message was that God sees people and guides them on the way.

– He is here among us and helps us, Bloomquist encouraged his listeners. He reminded them that we should bless each other with the gospel: it strengthens our faith.

A LIVELY SINGING COMPETITION

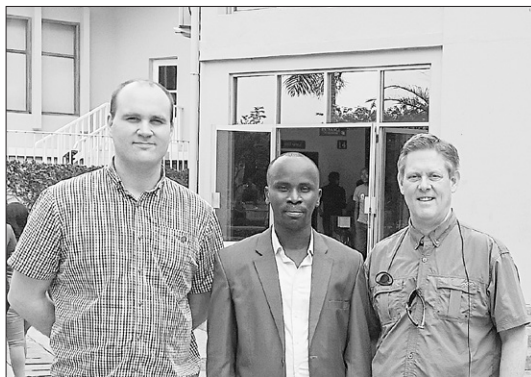
The Sunday school lesson aroused discussion. Those who were present asked Jon to explain several Bible portions.

– The children sang joyfully, and I arranged a small competition: who would sing louder, me or them, Juha Luukkala said.

There were many people present at the Mukama Sunday school, which was kept by Jon Bloomquist (right).



Jean-Claude Maniragaba is a representative of the Lutheran Church of Rwanda. Juha Luukkala (left) of SRK (Suomen Rauhanystysten Keskusyhdistys) and Jon Bloomquist of LLC (Laestadian Lutheran Church) made a mission trip to Rwanda in February 2020.



– I sang the hymn *O, sing to the Creator*, and they sang a spiritual song in their own language.

– When it was time to go, they left us in God's peace. We agreed that if we do not meet again on earth, we will meet some day in the joy of heaven.

THE IMPACT OF AWAKENINGS COULD BE SEEN

The mission trip lasted just over a week. The visiting speakers met people in Mukama, Bufunda, Rukamo, Rewempasha, Kagitumba, Ntoma and Nyagatare.

They visited families, kept Sunday school, Bible lectures and services, and attended a ministers' meeting and a board meeting.

Each time 100–150 guests gathered to services. The Lutheran Church of Rwanda has about 800 members.

– There were many believers. The ministers and many of the congregation members had received the grace

of repentance, said Luukkala, who was visiting Rwanda for the first time.

FAITH BRINGS PEACE INTO THE HEART

Luukkala found the joy and happiness of the new believers astonishing and touching.

– For them, faith was the most important thing in life. They were happy about it and grateful to God for His grace.

Luukkala was amazed at how quickly the Rwandan people had absorbed the key aspects of faith. The first mission trip to Rwanda was made last year.

– We felt united with them through the Spirit. The trip was a good experience. My own faith was strengthened.

Text: Päivi Martikainen

The text was published in Siionin Lähetyislehti on April 1, 2020.

Translation: S-L.L.

Faith connects us across borders

Juha Alanko worked for SRK as a mission work coordinator from the fall of 2014 until the spring of 2020, when he retired.

– I have been on 25 foreign mission trips. I have been to Russia several times as well as to Latvia and Estonia. The most remote places have been in Africa, Ecuador and Pakistan, he says.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

Alanko remembers particularly well his first trip to Kenya, because everything was so new to him.

– I had a chance to meet local people and see the unity created by faith. During our visit to Guinea we traveled by car from early morning until late in the night. The very first trip to Pakistan was exciting, but even there local people were extremely kind and hospitable.

JOY FOR THE GIFT OF FAITH

Meetings with people have been the best part of his experience.

– People have been friendly and cheerful. They have been especially happy about the opportunity to hear God's word and to believe it personally. God has awakened hearts to accept the gospel.

MISSION TRIPS ARE A COOPERATIVE EFFORT

Alanko says that trips can be very different, depending on the location. For each trip there are usually two speakers and, if necessary, a translator.

We agree about the itinerary in advance with our local contact person.

– Still, there may be changes in the program during the trip, so we need to be flexible.

The local conditions also vary. In Africa, for instance, it may be difficult to travel during the rainy season because of bad roads.

Juha Alanko worked for SRK as a mission work coordinator from the fall of 2014 until the spring of 2020, when he retired. – I still volunteer for mission work if I am needed. I am confident that this work will continue and God will continue to bless it according to His will. Photo: Juhani Ojalehto





People in charge of the Nairobi congregation in Kenya photographed together with mission speakers in front of their premises.

As regards mission work in Africa and South America, SRK cooperates with LLC and SFC according to a jointly drafted plan.

IMPORTANT LOCAL ACTIVITY

Alanko finds mission trips personally very significant, because they give him an opportunity to meet local believers and those in charge of local activity.

– We have been able to discuss various matters and to develop our work together. Each country has a local organization and a board that plan and conduct the work, Alanko says.

Mission speakers have encouraged local people to gather and discuss matters of faith and to keep Sunday school for children even between mission trips. This type of activity has increased during the recent years.

WORK OF THE GOSPEL IS EXPANDING

Mission work has recently increased especially in Africa: living faith has spread



Services in Janjanbureh, Gambia. Veli-Matti Heikkinen is serving with God's word.

to new countries, such as Rwanda, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

– Modern technology has been used in mission work. Thanks to online services, people are able to hear God's word more often.

Local believers have also been called to serve as speakers. They are also participating increasingly in mission trips.

– God has opened up opportunities, and we trust that He will bless this work, Alanko says contented.

"KEEP IN TOUCH WITH EACH OTHER"

Juha Alanko wants to send his greetings to all readers of this publication

– The most important thing in mission work and local activity is to proclaim the gospel of the forgiveness of sins. Keep in touch with each other and support one another, as that is God's will.

Text: Päivi Martikainen
Translation: S.-L.L.
Photo: Juha Alanko

Good person

Who is a good person? According to the Bible, man is corrupt because of the original sin and therefore incapable of doing good. Apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Romans: "All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one (Rom. 3:12)."

PAUL'S TESTIMONY OF PEOPLE IS NOT OPTIMISTIC.

But regardless of that, there are people who consider themselves to be good. A young man came to Jesus and said: "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" Jesus answered: "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." The discussion between Jesus and the young man continued, and they talked about the absolute need to keep the commandments. The man was confident that he had kept them all and asked: "What do I still lack?" Jesus advised him to sell his possessions and give to the poor and then to follow Him. The good person became sad and went away because he was wealthy (Matt. 19: 16-22).

While I was studying theology, I once attended a lecture by a German theologian who talked about Martin

Luther's doctrine of justification. That was when I first realized that man can never be good. Man is always evil by nature, but becomes acceptable to God, or sufficiently good, when he believes in Jesus. According to Luther, man is simultaneously evil as a natural human being and justified through faith in Christ.

When I received the grace of repentance and found God's kingdom, my life changed. God's Holy Spirit came into my heart and began to guide my life. The fruit of my conversion was a favorable change in my lifestyle. I was not given a guidebook of good life, but grace taught me to abandon my ungodly ways.

Things that had been important to me lost their meaning. I had peace on my conscience, and I no longer needed alcohol, dance floors or worldly entertainment. My greatest desire was to believe as a child of God and to attend services. I did not search for any other spiritualities once the Heavenly Father had heard my prayer: "Thy kingdom come."

When I sat in believers' services I marveled time and time again at the preciousness of this faith. I sometimes wondered if the speaker really preached in accordance with the Bible. But when I went home and checked the text in my own Bible, I found that he had preached

correctly. Living faith is based on God's word.

I also found that Luther's doctrine of justification through faith is not only theory but true in practical life in God's kingdom. I was allowed to believe out of sheer grace all my sins forgiven in Jesus' name and blood. It was a gift bestowed upon me through the merit of Jesus alone. I received this gift when the Holy Spirit counseled me to accept it through faith and conducted me into the kingdom of grace as a child of God.

When I received the grace to believe, I thought I would become good. But when the first feelings of grace were over, I realized I was not good. At services I learnt that my body, which was corrupted by the original sin, had not repented. Like Paul, I feel: "I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it." (Rom.7: 19-20).

As believers, we constantly feel the internal battle between the Holy Spirit that dwells in our heart and our corrupt nature that works through our body. Paul describes this battle: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" He means that nobody is good before God. We are evil by nature. Then he points out the way to goodness. "Thanks be to God, who delivers me

through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Later in his letter Paul instructs us quite concretely: "For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live." (Rom. 8:13).

Sin and evil beset us, and we fall into sin even though we do not want to. The Holy Spirit advises us to repent. Christians want to become free and to believe their sins forgiven in Jesus' name and blood. The gospel gives us back our freedom and bestows upon us the power to battle against sin.

What happens if someone is a believer but continues to live in their old sins? If a drunkard continues to drink, a violent person continues to beat their spouse, or a thief continues to steal? Those people use the gospel to cover and justify their sins. The goodness of God is not reflected in their lives. Rather, they choose to live in accordance with their sinful nature disobedient to the voice of God's Spirit. Their faith and life are not compatible. A person like that has the name of a believer, but is spiritually dead. God's word advises us to be obedient to the voice of the Holy Spirit, which speaks in the congregation: "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent." (Rev. 3:3). □

Text: Olavi Vallivaara

The text is an abbreviation of a blog post published in Päivämies on Aug. 14, 2019.

Translation: K.K.



The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
for Thine is the kingdom and
the power and the glory,
forever and ever.
Amen.