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YPS

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Same-sex Friendships

There have always been close friendships between members of the same sex since the beginning of the world. Over the thousands of years of the history of mankind men have had close friendships with other men and women with women without eyebrows being raised over the nature of that friendship. As the moral tone of this present world degenerates, however, so those who want to see wrong wherever they look will find it; those who

want to justify their own behaviour will try to see that behaviour in others and those who think every close relationship must have its sexual overtones will think it right to point the finger, or nudge one another. It is possible, however, to have a very good and a very close friend of the same sex without there being anything sexual in the relationship. John White once wrote that the difference between a friend and a lover is that 'friends stand shoulder to shoulder, but lovers stand face to face'. Many a man has had cause to thank God for a good male friend, and many a woman for a good female friend, when those friends have supported, cared for and stood shoulder to shoulder with them, as no one else could.



One of the most famous same-sex friendships in the history of mankind was that between David and Jonathan. The relationship between David and Jonathan shows us what a true friendship ought to be.

It was a selfless friendship

It probably wasn't too long after David appeared on the scene that Jonathan learned David would supplant him. Though Jonathan's father was the king, and Jonathan the heir-apparent, God had said He had chosen David to be king when Saul died. To Jonathan that meant, of course, that either he would die with

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his father or that David would take his place. Did this trouble Jonathan, did it destroy their friendship? Not at all. When David was being hunted by Saul, and his life was in danger to the extent that even he wondered if God's promise would ever come true, Jonathan went to meet David in the woods where he was hiding and said to him, 'Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth', 1 Sam. 23. 17. Here is a mark of a true friend: a selflessness and a longing to encourage a friend in need, even though that friend is destined for greater things. Jonathan that day strengthened David's hand in the Lord.

It was a loyal friendship

Saul soon found out how deep was the friendship his son Jonathan had for David. Jonathan was privy to Saul's thoughts and plans and warned David of his father's hatred for him. He defended David to his father, and managed to change his mind about killing David, 1 Sam. 19. 1-7. When things got worse, however, and Jonathan saw he could no longer turn Saul's thoughts away from murder, Jonathan was prepared to take David's side against his father, even to the extent that it meant Saul became violent with Jonathan and tried to kill him, 1 Sam. 20. 27-34. Even when Jonathan knew where David was, and met him whilst his father hunted him, he never gave him away or betrayed him

to his father. Here is another mark of a true friend: a willingness to stand up for that friend and defend him before all, and a willingness to bear trouble for a friend in need.

It was a godly friendship

One of the persistent characteristics of the friendship between David and Jonathan was that the friendship was brought together and held fast by a mutual love for God. This is why it beggars belief to think there was anything other than purity in their relationships one with another. It was David's refusal to let a Philistine, let alone a giant, defy the armies of the living God, and his absolute faith that God would fight for him that made Jonathan love David with all his soul, 1 Sam. 18. 1-4; 19. 5. When Jonathan saw that he could no longer prevent his father from killing David and that David would have to be a fugitive from Saul's anger, he bade farewell to David with these words, 'Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed forever', 1 Sam. 20. 42. Jonathan strengthened David's hand in the Lord in his time of trouble, 1 Sam. 23. 16-18. God, or God's plans feature strongly in virtually every incident that is recorded in the Bible between David and Jonathan. Both men loved one another in a pure way because both loved God and His ways first and foremost. They had the same thing in common; a love for the things of God.

It was a pure friendship

When David paid tribute to his dead friend, he said that Jonathan's love to him 'was wonderful, passing the love of women', 2 Sam. 1. 26. This phrase



The friendship between David and Jonathan was brought together and held fast by a mutual love for God.

has been used by some to justify homosexual love. 'You see,' they say, 'David and Jonathan had a love for one another that was obviously sexual and obviously more fulfilling than a heterosexual relationship can be'. But this is to read into a phrase what is not there. Though David was not married when he first met Jonathan, and though their friendship was deep right from the beginning, 1 Sam. 18. 1-4, there is absolutely nothing to suggest it was a sexual one and by the time of Jonathan's death both David and Jonathan had been married and had numerous children. To say they were homosexual, therefore, is altogether unjustified. We must also remember that the law of Moses was very much in force in David's day, and that law specifically said that sexual relations between members of the same sex was forbidden by God and that the punishment for it was capital – you would be executed for it, Lev. 20. 13. Some Bible scholars 'so called' have, in recent days, tried to water down the biblical prohibitions on homosexual relationships by saying that the law given by Moses was not God-sourced but a product of the prejudices of its day, that the same prohibition does not apply today, that such a practice was never condemned by Christ, etc. We would take issue with them on these points, stressing again that homosexual activity is never permitted by God. But even those scholars would hardly say that to be homosexual in David's day was either permitted or excused by society. It was forbidden. Adultery was also forbidden and when David committed adultery with Bathsheba God shamed him publicly over it and judged him for it. Do we think that God would turn a blind eye to 'the

man after His own heart' taking a homosexual lover? No. What David meant when he said Jonathan's love for him passed that of women was that, because it was non-sexual, it was a pure, uncomplicated love between friends that was a wonderful help to him. Sex, by its very nature, brings emotional and physical consequences and complications that a platonic, non-sexual love, does not.

It was a faithful friendship

This friendship lasted over the years. It lasted during years of separation when David and Jonathan were separated and did not see much of one another. It also lasted beyond death. Both men had pledged to look after one another and to look after one another's families. Long after Jonathan was dead, and long after David had become king, David remembered his friend and extended kindness to one of Jonathan's sons even though he was lame, 2 Sam. 9. 1-7. 'Don't be afraid,' said David to Mephibosheth, 'I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake.' True friendships stand the test of time.

Some men and women never marry, and never know the richness of married love in the Lord. They may never know the love that stands face to face.

This lovely friendship between David and Jonathan shows us what a true friendship should be; selfless, loyal, godly, faithful and pure. Do you have a friend like that? Thank God if you do. But what is more to the point, are you a friend like that? You could be.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (5)

Conclusion

Declaring God's Authority

The Lord's Prayer, which begins with an introduction that reminds us of the relationship we can have with the One to whom we are praying, finishes with a conclusion that reminds us of the power and authority He has to do His own will. This conclusion, therefore, is both a stimulus to worship and a stimulus to faith. It is added for the benefit of the one who is praying.

A stimulus to worship

The Lord's Prayer begins by reminding believers that they are praying to a Father in heaven. This Father is a holy Father, a righteous Father and a heavenly Father. With the words, '**Thine is the kingdom**', however, we remind ourselves He is also a royal Father. This is One who has both a kingdom and a kingship; One who rules in the spiritual kingdom which is in the hearts of men and women who believe, love and honour Him, and One who will one day establish an earthly kingdom when His Son will rule for a thousand

years upon the earth. This King has the might and power, even now, to command the armies of heaven to come and do His bidding should He wish it. One of the titles by which His earthly people, the Jews, knew Him was the Lord Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts. As such He was Commander of both the armies of heaven and of His people.

His is not only the kingdom, but His is also '**the power**'. Another title by which He has been known from of old is El Shaddai, the Almighty God, Gen. 17. 1. Such is His power that He can do anything that is consistent with His nature, and no external force or power can overcome Him. His Son, Jesus Christ, has been raised from the dead and is now seated at God's right hand, 'far above all'. In a time to come, 'every knee should bow and every tongue confess (whether willingly or not) that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father', Phil. 2. 10. We are assured by God that nothing at all 'will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord', Rom. 8. 38-39. His is the power to do anything He wishes.

His is also '**the glory**'. Glory is so much associated with God that He is called 'the God of glory', Acts 7. 2. There is little doubt that this refers to the outshining, visible glory of God which is such a feature of being in the presence of God. Yet the word 'glory' here can also refer to His moral perfections. Moses longed to see God's glory, the outshining of His magnificence, Exod. 33. 18. Yet, God said to him He would make His glory pass by, but Moses could not see it and live, for it would be too much for him. One day, however, we shall see Him in His unsurpassed glory, that glory which shall be revealed, 1 Pet. 5. 1, that glory which is excellent, 2 Pet. 1. 17.

This kingdom, power and glory of God are 'for ever and ever'. In other words, they will never come to an end. Empires, thrones and powers, and their emperors, kings and rulers, have come and gone. They shone for a while, bending all to their fierce will,



**We come before
Almighty God. Bow
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BY IAN REES

then they fell. The might and power of Egypt has come and gone, as has the power of the Philistine, the Assyrian, the Greek, the Roman and the British. Yet God's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, His power will never weaken nor fail, and His glory will never fade away. Just as He is, so is His power.

Surely, to remind ourselves of this at the conclusion of any prayer, whether one repeated as this one sometimes is, or one we frame ourselves, is to stimulate us to worship and adore the everlasting God. We do not come with our requests to a powerless God. We do not come to One who has been emasculated of His authority by another. We come before Almighty God. Bow down and worship; adore and give thanks; exult and be thrilled that your prayers come before the greatest being there ever has been.

A stimulus to faith

But these phrases should also be a stimulus to faith. Do you believe God has the power, the authority and the position to do as He wishes? Then be sure of this, that if you pray in accordance with His will, He can and will give you your requests. Faith is a vital part of prevailing prayer. Without it we cannot please God; without it we cannot move God. After all, did not His Son say, 'All things you shall ask for in prayer, believing, you shall receive', Matt. 21. 22? Did He not also say, 'Whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do', John 14. 13. Why then should we doubt His ability to do what He wishes to do?

'Amen', says the believer, and with this simple word we add our own feeble voices to the chorus that says,

'So let it be'. It is fitting that it should be so, and it is right.

We have seen in these studies on the Lord's Prayer that, though we would not wish to repeat it by rote and thus defeat the very purpose for which it was given by our Lord, the Lord's Prayer does have some fundamental truth for us to learn about God and His glories and about God's provision, pardon and protection. In particular, it shows us how to model our own prayers. Whilst there will always be room for prayers that are cries for help ('Lord, save me!' for instance) and whilst God will always hear prayers of intercession (when we pray specifically for others) the principle for prayer in general remains the same: call upon the name of God when you address your prayer to Him, pray for His interests first, then yours, and conclude all in such a way that your faith and worship of God is stimulated to believe you will receive what you ask for if it is in accordance with His will.

Same-sex Friendships

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You should be. That is the sort of friendship Christian men should have with other Christian men, and Christian women with Christian women. If we abstain from all appearance of evil and are godly in our relationships with others, the friend who stands shoulder to shoulder with you will be one of the greatest helps you will ever have other than the help of God Himself.

I LIKE THE ASSEMBLIES

Pardon me, but I just happen to like the assemblies. It seems almost counter-cultural to say something like that. The 'in thing' is to bad-mouth them, to highlight all their faults and failures. There are plenty of critics who pontificate on what is wrong with the assemblies. Maybe it's time for someone to step forward and say what is good about them. I'd like to be that person. Let me tell you why I like them.

I like the weekly remembrance of the Lord in the breaking of bread. For many years I have sought to remember the Lord every Sunday and it has never lost its charm for me. There is something special about a meeting where our beloved Lord is the sole attraction and the central object of worship. No wonder that when people leave an assembly for a different type of fellowship they invariably say, 'I do miss the worship meeting'. It makes me sad that they ever left it.

The assembly has endeared itself to me because I have seen Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 12 practised as nowhere else. Gifts were given for building up the saints for the work of the ministry. I have seen un-lettered men mature to the point where they preached the gospel with convicting power. I have seen home-spun men ministering to the hearts of God's people and not just to their heads. I have seen devoted women finding fulfilment, not only in raising sons and

daughters for God, but also in teaching other women and children, co-labouring with their husbands in support of their ministry, supporting the work of missionaries at home and abroad, visiting the sick and afflicted and showing hospitality to saints and strangers alike. I have seen young men encouraged to exercise their gifts in a way that would never happen in the average church. Many prominent evangelical leaders give lip-service to Ephesians 4. 12 and some even commend the assemblies in the way they practise it.

One of the glories of the assemblies is their steadfast refusal to divide an equal brotherhood into clergy and laity. To gather to the person of Christ rather than to a charismatic preacher is divine in both principle and practice. The New Testament teaches a plurality of elders and never a one-man ministry. But assemblies who preach and practise this will always be speckled birds in the Christian community. There is a certain measure of reproach to being in an assembly of this type and those who cast in their lot with the assemblies had better be prepared to bear it.

I like the fact that each assembly is autonomous, responsible to the Lord alone. There is no headquarters on earth, no humanly-ordained hierarchy, no organisation coming between the Head and the body. This impedes the take-over of assemblies by liberalism, alien doctrines or dictatorships.

The financial policies of the assemblies are commendable. It is extraordinary that in most fellowships there is only one collection or offering a week. And yet

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that one offering, taken without fanfare or begging appeals, is sufficient to meet the local expenses and to help support Christian ministries at home and abroad. Traditionally, full-time workers have looked to the Lord alone for the supply of their needs without publicizing those needs. The world cannot say of the assemblies what it says of Christendom in general, 'All the church wants is your money'.

I appreciate the fact that the assemblies are willing to exercise godly discipline when it is called for, even if in doing so they may be limiting their chances of ever becoming mega-churches. They are content to judge their fellowships, not by their size, but by the holiness of the members.

The literature ministry of the assemblies has been outstanding. Perhaps this has been their main contribution to the evangelical scene. The writings of Darby, Kelly, Mackintosh and Vine, and a host of others, have exerted a profound and beneficial influence throughout the world. Some years ago the librarian of a Christian college attempted to compile a bibliography of 'brethren' writers; he later despaired of ever finishing the project.

And mention must be made of the missionary movement associated with the assemblies, a movement that is all out of proportion to the number of local fellowships supporting it.

Other people have other reasons for liking the assemblies, some of them quite unexpected. For instance, a sister who recently came into fellowship after years of church-hopping said she was delighted to be in one with male leadership. That was a strange note to sound in a day of women's lib.

Probably few groups engage in as much self-criticism as the assemblies. Frankly, I feel it is grossly over-done, causing impressionable people to be un-necessarily disenchanting and turned away. Criticism comes best on the back of praise. It is time we balanced the two.

The foregoing does not mean that I am satisfied with the status quo. I recognize that there are areas in which we need to improve, such as evangelistic

outreach and development of leadership in the assembly. While unalterably committed to biblical principles, I recognize the need for changing methods from time to time. I agree that some of our people, including our young people, have legitimate concerns and need to be heard. But instead of calling out the wrecking crew, we need to roll up our sleeves and tackle the problems. Give us men who will show us how to do a constructive job rather than arm-chair generals who blackball the assemblies or bail out altogether. And those who draw their support from the assemblies should demonstrate a measure of loyalty and avoid the appearance of 'biting the hand that feeds them'.

One of the glories of the assemblies is their steadfast refusal to divide an equal brotherhood into clergy and laity.

Fools IN Fellowship

Mr. CYNIC

Recognizing, but not being, fools.



BY IAN REES

Meet **Mr Sarky**. You have probably met him and his sister, before now. They are always cynical and sarcastic. They never accept things at their face value; there is always some hidden agenda for them. Whatever anyone says, or does, elicits from them some negative comment. It is not that they have any constructive criticism to make. No one objects to constructive criticism. It is the mocking attitude that they show that undermines so much in an assembly and causes so much trouble and strife. And the mocking attitude is shown to any and to all who see things differently to them, even those in authority. The Cynics even despise God's assessment of things, Prov. 14. 9.

The Authorized Version calls them 'scorners', the ESV 'scoffers'. These terms reveal the attitude they show. They are **trouble-makers**. 'Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease', says Solomon in Proverbs 22. 10. Scoffers can even set something on fire with their negative, divisive, attitudes, Prov. 29. 8. You may see them working away, undermining this one's authority or that decision: 'Of course, that's never going to work, is it?'; 'We all know what he is really after'; 'That's just what you would expect from her'; 'Fat lot of good that will do'.

They are **unteachable**. The Cynics are unable to accept that anyone knows better than them. 'A scorner loveth not one that

reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise', Prov. 15.12. 'A wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke', Prov.13. 1. In fact, the Bible tells us it's a waste of time trying to correct them, for they will not listen. 'Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee', Prov. 9. 8. Mr. Sarky would not recognize sound advice if he heard it, Prov.14. 6. The only way to deal with him is to ignore him, and if he continues to cause trouble, to discipline him. 'When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise', Prov. 21.11, Prov.19. 25, 29. If he continues to cause trouble, he should be put out, Titus 3. 10-11. When the Cynics go, out with them will go trouble, strife, quarrelling and disgrace, Prov. 13. 8; 22. 10.

What does God think of Mr. or Miss, Sarky? 'Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly', Prov. 3. 34. And that contrast is a good one. What God wants is less of the cynical, sarcastic attitude, and more of that lowly, humble, teachable spirit in the attitudes of believers. The one God will bless is the one who trembles at His word, Isa. 62. 2. Sarcastic, cynical people are fools in the end, for they tear down, undermine, divide and discourage. Do you know any? Don't listen to them. Are you one? Don't be a fool. Be wise.

