

# THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

## SINK OR SWIM

A "sink or swim" situation is a situation in which a person must put forth effort or fail. This figure of speech comes from the idea that if someone enters deep water he will either sink to the bottom or swim to safety (source: [www.goenglish.com](http://www.goenglish.com)). One could say that Christianity is a "sink or swim" endeavor, because we must put forth real effort or fail.

**When we become Christians we "take the plunge"** - This is true both in a literal and figurative sense. We are plunged into the waters of baptism to become Christians (Colossians 2:12), and it can also be said that when we become Christians we "take the plunge" of total commitment to Christ. When a person becomes a Christian, receiving God's grace through obedient faith in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:8; Hebrews 5:9), he should realize that there is the possibility that he could fall from that precious grace (Galatians 5:4). This could happen if that initial obedient faith gives way to a lack of obedient faith. Therefore, we must put forth full effort or we will fail. We will either sink or swim!

**The Word of God teaches us how to "swim"** - The only way we can stay afloat and keep our heads above the water spiritually is to keep our focus on Christ and His Word (Psalm 119:105). Christ left us the ultimate example of someone who "swam" through this life without sinking, and we are to follow the example He left for us in the Bible (I Peter 2:21,22). We must use the Word of God to keep from sinking into the temptations of sin (Psalm 119:11; Matthew 4:1-11). In the days of Noah, he and his family were kept above the destructive flood waters because they had obeyed God's Word to enter the one place of safety (Genesis 6:22; 7:16; I Peter 3:20,21). Today the one place of safety is Christ's church that He built (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23).

**After becoming Christians, some never even try to stay afloat!** - It amazes me how some people show interest in the Gospel and are baptized, only to never be seen again! Of course we should try to encourage them to persevere, but sadly this type of person often shows no interest in doing what is right after his baptism. One doubts if such a person was ever really converted at all. It is as if this person entered the water and immediately began sinking because he refused to swim.

**After becoming Christians, some stay afloat for a while, but then they allow themselves to drown in the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life**—It is so easy to start sinking down into the affairs of this world (Luke 8:14). Americans' lives are busier than ever before. We have to keep calendars within arms' reach to keep all our appointments organized. Wallace Huffman, a professor at Iowa State University in Ames who is a specialist in labor economics, said "American work longer hours than their European counterparts. While many Europeans take four to six weeks of vacation—often including the entire month of August when factories close—many Americans take no vacation at all" (Source: [www.cbsnews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com)). While being busy is not necessarily a bad thing, the problem is when we are always busy for the world instead of being busy for the Lord! Not only are we busier than ever in secular areas of our lives, we also have a wide array of materialistic "toys" which often distract us from God and His Word (TV, Internet, cell phones, iPods, video games, etc.). It seems that there are more avenues of sin than have ever existed at any point in history. Brethren, if we take

**COMMON SENSE CHRISTIANITY:**  
**INSIST TO PERSIST**

Text: \_\_\_\_\_

I. Persistence Requires \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

II. Persistence Requires \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

III. Persistence Requires \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

IV. Persistence Requires \_\_\_\_\_

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**THE FINISH LINE**

“A friend of mine is one of those crazy runners. You know the type—fifteen miles a day, marathons, pilgrimages to his favorite running routes all over the country, an obsession with breaking personal records, or in fanatical running lingo, his ‘PRs’...

“But don’t you want to know why anyone would want to do this to his body? I asked my friend recently what he likes about running. ‘The finish line,’ he said. And there you have it. He runs because he has the finish line in sight. It motivates him to keep putting one blistered foot in front of the other. I guess we can all understand that to some degree. If we can remember our purpose, we can be motivated to improve our practice.”

-*Kindred Spirit*, Spring 2008

our focus off of the Lord, we will drown in sin, just as sure as Peter began sinking when he took his focus off Jesus!

*“And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Matthew 14:28-31).*

If we have unwavering, obedient faith in Christ, we will be saved by the grace of God, but let us remember that being a faithful Christian requires effort! Will we sink or swim?

-*Jason Hilburn*

**THAT MARCY BOY!**

At 14 years of age, the “bad boy” of a little Massachusetts town, was so powerful in his influence for evil that no one found able to teach the district school which he attended; it seemed “pretty poor soul.” Everyone said the student in question was “hopeless,” and “bound to go to ruin.”

One day a new teacher came who said he was not afraid to try. The school friends were quick to tell him all the stories of “the Marcy boy.” All advised that he be forbidden to enter the school. However, he was allowed to enter. The teacher analyzed the “hopeless soil,” and began at once to enrich it with kindness, justice, goodwill, and confidence, and at the right time, dropped in seeds of ambition, hope, and self-respect. The seed took root, developed, grew, and began to bear fruit.

The promising young student dropped his bad habits, studied day and night, went to college, and graduated with honors. He studied law, answered the call for men in 1812, became associate justice of the Supreme Court, United States senator, governor of New York, and finally Secretary of State. His name was William L. Marcy. He served faithfully in every situation.

All of this happened because a good teacher saw in a child, not a “hopeless soil,” but a soil, if properly nurtured, could bear good fruit just as any other child in the class.

**FOR THIS CAUSE I BOW MY KNEES—5**

A final thought that would perhaps be pertinent to Paul's statement regarding his prayerful state on behalf of the Ephesian church might pertain to how he approached prayer. Previous thoughts have expressed the explicit dedication and commitment that the great characters of the Bible had to a prayerful life, but more specifically here we speak of how we are to pray. From Ephesians 3:14, a foundation is established by which this topic can be better approached. Again remember Paul's statement: "*For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...*" Pay close attention to the words "I bow my knees," because contained in those words is a point regarding the attitude with which prayer must be approached that is both universal and eye-opening. In a very explicit but picturesque way, Paul states that in prayer he came before God in humility. Bowing to one's knees has always been a sign of respect, humility, and obeisance. This does not imply that this physical posture is required, but the attitude that it illustrates is. Never should the physical posture used during prayer be a point of contention. The story is told that "years ago one preacher was castigated by a Christian for not bowing his knees to lead public prayer, and the preacher retorted: 'Which is worse, not kneeling or peeping?'" This story humorously points out that physical posture is of little importance. However, the attitude that accompanies our prayers determines how we truly view this powerful tool as well as our relationship with God.

A first characteristic of prayer should be reverence. The word reverence is defined as "bashfulness, modesty, or shamefacedness" (Strong's). Literally the attitude of reverence carries with it the realization that we do not deserve to enter God's presence or petition Him through prayer. It carries with it the concept of humility, a common New Testament principle. Perhaps of all places of which this is spoken in scripture, Luke 18 would be the clearest:

*"And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14).*

Notice the clear distinction between the prayers of these two men. The Pharisee felt as though he were doing God a favor by blessing God with his presence and his words reflected his attitude. The publican, on the other hand, did not even feel worthy enough to lift his eyes in the direction of God's domain and his words also reflected his attitude. Absolute humility. Such reverence should be characteristic of our prayers as we bow our knees to God.

A second characteristic of prayer must be fervency. One of the most often quoted verses that pertains to prayer in the New Testament is James 5:16, where the this needed characteristic of prayer is mentioned: "*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*" Strong's defines the words "fervent" as "to be active, efficient, to be mighty in." Matthew Henry said that it carried with it the implication that "it must be a pouring out of the heart to God; and it must proceed from a faith unfeigned." A truly fervent prayer will be said by one whose heart trusts fully in prayer's power and for that reason commits one's self wholly to its practice. Prayer cannot be approached skeptically or pessimistically. Fervency is needed in prayer as to our knees we bow before God.

Then, a third characteristic of prayer must be gratitude. God has been gracious to allow this avenue by which we can approach Him with our innermost cares and concerns, and we should be eternally and infinitely appreciative of that blessing. Christ gave thanks to God in prayer (Matthew 15:36). Paul, on numerous occasions, mentioned the thanks he gave to God (I Corinthians 1:4; Philippians 1:3-4; Colossians 1:3; I Thessalonians 1:2; II Thessalonians 1:3; II Timothy 1:3; Philemon 4). A heart truly filled with thanksgiving to God will be reflected as knees are bowed before God's throne of grace in prayer.

Prayer is such a powerful and prolific tool with which man has been blessed. Even pondering the love the eternal God must have to give His unworthy children this avenue boggles the mind. But because it has been graciously bestowed, we should strive to know more about it and use it in the bountiful ways we can. For yourself, for others, for your family, for your friends, for the church, for the world, for your allies, and for your enemies; remember them all, realize their needs, and know God's ability to bless—and for this cause bow your knees.

-Andy Brewer