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DOING A BACKGROUND CHECK ON THE PRAYER OF AGREEMENT

By Candace Davis

"Pray in agreement with me," said a friend, taking my hands. "Agree with me that the Lord will pay in full the \$16,000 I owe to Chrysler Credit Corporation."

Sara was recruiting me to partner with her in praying what is popularly coined "the Prayer of Agreement." Devotees to the Prayer of Agreement believe the following: God will do whatever we ask provided we have a partner who agrees with our request and who prays it with us in unison.

We might ask, "If this is the case, if answer to prayer is this simple, why stop with car payments-why not ask the Lord to pay off your mortgage too?"

Some things are too good to be true, and the Prayer of Agreement is one of them. Pointing out its fallacy, however, can be tricky. After all, this prayer is plucked straight from Scripture. In Matthew 18 we read: ... that **by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.. . . Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven** (Matt. 18:16, 19, *NKJV* throughout).

In isolation these two verses seem to "promise the moon" just for the asking. But serious students of the Bible know better. When seeking to interpret a verse or passage, we do as the Word instructs. We search the Scriptures to find out whether these things are so (Acts 17:11). We perform a background check, if you will. Employers perform these checks all the time to hire individuals best suited for the job, along with weeding out those who have presented credentials that are inflated or fraudulent. Helpful is the fact that we all have context in our lives which helps define us, and it is this context that employers search out and examine to get a view of their candidates that reflects the truth. Employment history, education, court records, even social networking sites are but a few areas of context that can be examined.

Regarding the Prayer of Agreement, I claim it to be fraudulent. To see if this is so (Acts 17:11) let us perform a background check, studying the contexts that define our verses in question.

A good place to start is with the immediate context of our passage, so we turn to Matthew 18. Right away in the first verse we learn something important-we learn to whom Jesus is speaking. And this will be disappointing news for my friend Sara, because it is not to her that Jesus is speaking after all. He is not speaking to me, either. Nor is He speaking to you or to anyone else living in the Dispensation of Grace. Rather, Jesus is addressing a specific group of individuals, the Twelve Disciples in the early stages of the Kingdom of God. The Lord selected these men to be His governmental representatives (*ekklesia*) on earth. As such He endowed them with power and authority and wisdom to act on His behalf.

Knowing now to whom our passage is addressed, our two verses can be read like this: "When two or three *of these twelve disciples* agree concerning anything they *ask-anything requiring them to act as representatives of Christ-it* will be done for them by the Father in heaven."

Our search of Matthew 18 does not end here. We next check out the passage in proximity to our two verses. What do we learn? We learn the topic of the Lord's teaching. We learn what it is our Lord is talking about. Here in Matthew 18:15-20 a scene is in play where Jesus is giving instructions to His twelve disciples as to how they should settle a dispute between two believers. The Lord is teaching that it takes the

agreement of two or three of His disciples for a matter to be settled legally.

We have further context to search, this time in the Old Testament, since the New Testament is written in context of the Old Testament. With the aid of a concordance, we locate in Deuteronomy two key verses:

Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness (Deut. 17:6).

One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established (Deut. 19:15).

The context here is the Law of Moses. In these two verses we are introduced to a principle prescribed by the Law: The testimony of two or three witnesses is required in the courts of the Jews. One witness is not sufficient to convict a man of a crime. Any matter, whether civil or criminal, must be decided by the testimony of two or three witnesses to ensure justice. If this sounds familiar, it should. Here in the Law of Moses, we find the very foundation upon which our passage in Matthew regarding witnesses is based! And relative to today, the Lord-by requiring two or three witnesses to make legal decisions-was establishing what we know as a quorum. According to Robert's Rules, a *quorum* is the minimum number of voting members who must be present at a properly called meeting in order to conduct business and to make the proceedings of the meeting valid.

By now we have examined the Prayer of Agreement by way of a background check, focusing on Scriptural context both immediate and historical. As a result, we can cast this passage in a light that is true to Scripture, not the fancies of man. We have uncovered three truths. First, true is the fact that the passage is not written to us in our day, but to the twelve disciples of Jesus, as His representatives on the earth. Also true is that the passage is not a prayer strategy promising that God will do anything we ask provided we have a buddy to pray our request with us. Rather, the passage shows the Lord as He teaches His disciples how to legally and fairly settle disputes by way of agreement between two or three of them in their role as His governmental representatives. And last, we uncovered how the principle of requiring the agreement of two or three witnesses to decide a matter finds its roots all the way back in the Law of Moses.

We return to our illustration using background checks in hiring. Just as an employee with fraudulent credentials can do damage to a business, likewise a dishonest interpretation of Scripture can do damage, as we find with the Prayer of Agreement-it can destroy people's faith in God when He does not make good on what this prayer leads them to expect. Sadly, I have seen this time after time: folks who angrily renounce the Lord, accusing Him of not keeping His promises.

A dear friend of mine took a fall down some steps and was left paralyzed. Shocking and tragic. Bruce believes in the Prayer of Agreement. From his hospital bed he asked me to pray in agreement with him for God to heal his paralysis. Bruce is a man of faith, but what happens when he does not receive healing? What happens to his faith then? Today the Lord does not promise to heal like He did early in His Kingdom when He covenanted with Israel for their blessings and miracles. The book of Matthew happens to be part and parcel of the early Kingdom of God, not our Dispensation of Grace wherein miracles are not promised. God at times today does bestow miracles, but in absolute secret only so that the credit cannot be traced back to Him.

As far as presenting Bruce with a tutorial on rightly dividing the word of truth, this was not the time. But I did the next best thing. I assured Bruce that God's grace is sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9) to help us endure anything

that life or Satan throws at us. I went on to say that personally, in all situations from trivial to dire, I pray like this:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanks-giving, 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 (Phil. 4:6-7).

I thank the Lord that a discussion followed between us expounding on this prayer. And all the while I prayed silently that Bruce would come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4) sometime soon.

As for my friend Sara, apparently, she had spent herself into a pickle and was at risk of losing her car to repossession, and thus was expecting - expecting! the Lord God Almighty to save her from this mess. In her case I suggested that, after taking stock of her spending, she pray for the fruit of self-control (Gal. 5:23). I added another bit of advice, that praying for wisdom and spiritual understanding benefits our daily walk in all areas. Then I prayed this with her:

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:9-10).

In those instances when we are presented by way of popular books or preachers with a promise from the Bible that seems too good to be true, we know better than to snap it up naively as being the truth. Instead, we proceed to perform a Biblical background check of the passage, inspecting context both immediate and historical. And on this I think we can all be in agreement.