

# IN RESPONSE – SEEK THE LORD PROPERLY, PART 1

by Dennis Prutow

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There are two primary considerations before us. The first is that of seeking the Lord. The second is that of not only seeking God but also doing so in accordance with His rules and guidelines. The text we examine is 1 Chronicles 15:13. “Because you did not carry it at the first, the Lord our God made an outburst on us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance.” My plan, to expose these two primary facets of the text, is fourfold; we will review the teachings of this text in four parts.

My first step is to review the historical background of the text and David’s analysis of the situation. My second step is show David’s analysis of God’s outbreak presupposes the propriety seeking God. Here we shall see that the fall into sin does not militate against this presupposition. My third point is to show that David’s analysis of the situation presupposes the propriety of seeking God according to His guidelines. We are not privileged to seek God willy-nilly according to the ideas of our own hearts. Finally, we shall see that how this principle holds in the broad sense and how it also holds in the narrow sense. My hope is to show that God’s ordinances stipulate the place, the times, and the manner men and women ought to seek Him.

Early in the tenure of Samuel, the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and placed it in the house of Dagon their god (1 Samuel 5:1-2). Things did not go well for Dagon (1 Samuel 5:3-4). Nor did they go well for the people. “The hand of the Lord was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories” (1 Samuel 5:6). The same result occurred in Gath and Ekron. The Philistines therefore sent the Ark back to Israel. “From the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim, the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord” (1 Samuel 7:2).

After so long a time, David determined to bring the Ark up to Jerusalem.

David and all Israel went up to Baalah, that is, to Kiriath-jearim, which belongs to Judah, to bring up from there

the ark of God, the Lord who is enthroned above the cherubim, where His name is called. They carried the ark of God on a new cart from the house of Abinadab, and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart. David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, even with songs and with lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals and with trumpets. When they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, because the oxen nearly upset it. The anger of the Lord burned against Uzza, so He struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark; and he died there before God (1 Chronicles 13:5-10).

The apparent kindnesses of David and especially Uzza were met with God’s wrath. Our reaction is horror. “I’d never believe in a God who would do such things.” After all, the Ark was placed on a brand new cart. How appropriate! When the oxen stumbled or the cart hit a rut in the road, the Ark was in danger of falling off the cart. Uzza simply put out his hand to stabilize the Ark and prevent a disaster. God rewarded him with instantaneous death.

David was afraid to go further. He placed the Ark of the Covenant in the house of Obed-edom. Sometime later, he gave the analysis written in 1 Chronicles 15:13. Speaking to the Levites he declared. “Because you did not carry it at the first, the Lord our God made an outburst on us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance.”

God quite clearly stipulated how and who should transport the tabernacle furnishings.

This is the work of the descendants of Kohath in the tent of meeting, concerning the most holy things. When the camp sets out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and they shall take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it; and they shall lay a covering of porpoise skin on it, and shall spread over it a cloth of pure blue, and shall insert its poles.... When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy ob-

jects and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is to set out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them, so that they will not touch the holy objects and die. These are the things in the tent of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry (Numbers 4:4-6 and 15).

In the case of the death of Uzza, the Ark was transported in a fashion contrary to the direct command of God. It was carried in neither the manner nor by the personnel specifically designated by God. Furthermore, God issued a specific warning that those who transport the Ark should not touch it no matter how well meaning they might be. The penalty was death. God struck down Uzza for this infraction of His holy Law.

Matthew Henry observes,

Let the sin of Uzza warn us all to take heed of presumption, rashness, and irreverence in dealing with holy things (v. 9), and not think a good intention will justify a bad action. In our communion with God we must carefully watch over our own hearts, lest familiarity breed contempt, and we think in any way God is beholden to us.<sup>1</sup>

This is a lesson in grace. The sons of Kohath were not to touch the Ark, “lest they die” (Numbers 4:15, KJV). “God by this instance of severity, would show how he might justly have dealt with our first parents, when they had eaten that which was forbidden under the same penalty—*lest you die*.”<sup>2</sup> Surely God extends grace to us as we yet live and have opportunity to hear His word. In the death of Uzza, God graciously called David back to Himself. David realized his sin and error. His analysis of the situation is correct. “The Lord our God made an outburst on us, *for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance*.”

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry’s *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (Westwood, NJ: Revell, n.d.), 2:872.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 473.

## IN RESPONSE – SEEK THE LORD PROPERLY, PART 2

by Dennis Prutow

With this brief look at the background of 1 Chronicles 15:13 I go my second point. David's analysis of the God's outbreak against Uzza presupposes the propriety of seeking God. The New Testament indicates that seeking God is a purpose given to all humanity from the point of creation. Acts 17:26-27 seems to make this clear. Speaking of the creative work of God, Paul declares, "He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, *that they would seek God*, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us."<sup>1</sup> The grammar indicates God's purpose for his creatures.<sup>2</sup> His purpose was that they would seek Him.

In verse 26, Paul tells us God made all the families of the earth *to live on all the face of the earth*.<sup>3</sup> This was God's purpose in creation. In verse 27, Paul then adds "a further statement of the end for which this one race was created and established in the earth."<sup>4</sup> It was simply in order to seek God.<sup>5</sup> "What was God's purpose in thus arranging time and place so providentially for the well-being of man? It was, says Paul, in order that men might seek God, 'in the hope that they might feel after him and find him' (RSV)."<sup>6</sup>

God's purpose for his creatures, for men and women, young people and children, was that they should seek His face. This is a purpose *in creation*. It is there-

fore no different than other so-called creation ordinances. For example, we have the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:26. "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"

This purpose of God stands as does the purpose of God given in Acts 17:27.

The fall of humankind into sin does not alter the purposes of God. As the cultural mandate remains valid after the fall, our purpose for existence in seeking God also remains valid. The ability of fallen creatures to fulfill their purposes is undoubtedly altered. The purposes themselves are not. This should be our posture with regard to a text offered in opposition to the notion of seeking God. It is Romans 3:11. "There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God." Paul quotes from Psalm 14 to indicate the utter sinfulness of sin and the desperate straights into which men and women have fallen. Psalm 14:1-2 reads, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good. The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God."

Spurgeon comments on the text.

The objects of the Lord's search are not wealthy men, great men, or learned men; these, with all they can offer, cannot meet the demands of the great Governor: at the same time he is not looking for superlative eminence in virtue, he seeks for *any that understand* themselves, their state, their duty, their destiny, their happiness; he looks for any that *seek God*, who, if there be a God, are willing and anxious to find him out. Surely this is not too great a matter to expect; for if men have not yet known God, if they have any right understanding, they will seek him.<sup>7</sup>

Matthew Henry adds, that God "took a view of all the children of men, and the question was *Whether there were any among that did understand* themselves aright, their duty and interests, and did seek God and set him before them."<sup>8</sup> Our the purpose and duty is to seek God. Alas, among fallen creatures, ill disposed to have God in their thinking, there are not to be found those who seek God.

Beyond doubt, hostile human hearts oppose God. Hostile human hearts do not and cannot seek God because they will not seek God. This still does not abrogate God's purpose. Nor does it set aside *commands* to seek the Lord.

Can we command people to do that which by nature they are not inclined to do? Are fallen creatures inclined to repent of sin and turn to Christ in faith? No, they are not. Do we therefore withhold the commands regarding repentance and faith? No, we do not. Acts 17:30 is a prime example. "Having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30). Inability abrogates neither the purposes of God nor the commands of God.

We also take for granted that God intervenes in human lives to provoke seeking. David prays to God about his enemies. "So pursue them with Your tempest and terrify them with Your storm. Fill their faces with dishonor, that they may seek Your name, O Lord" (Psalm 83:15-16). God may use desperate providential measures to promote seeking. David knew this was the case.

David's analysis of the death of Uzza presupposes the propriety of seeking the Lord stemming from creation. "The Lord our God made an outburst on us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance" (1 Chronicles 15:13). Lest God use desperate measures with us, we too must understand the propriety of seeking Him. This is God's purpose for us. This also brings us naturally to the idea of properly seeking Him.

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<sup>1</sup> Italics added.

<sup>2</sup> Greek: ἐποίησεν τε ἐξ ἐθνῶν πάντων ἀνθρώπων κατοικεῖν ἐπὶ παντὸς προσώπου τοῦ θεοῦ (οἰκισαίαν προστάγματων καιρῶν καὶ τῶν ὁροῦσάων τῶν κατοικησάων αὐτῶν ζῆτειν τὸν θεόν (εἰς ἄρα γε ἠλπίσθησαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὐροῦσιν (καὶ γε οὐκ ἀκράν ἀπο ἐθνῶν ἐκαστοῦ ἡμῶν ὑπαρκοῦσα)

<sup>3</sup> "Infinitive (present active) of purpose, so as to dwell." A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1939), 2:287.

<sup>4</sup> J. A. Alexander, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols. in 1, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1963), 2:156.

<sup>5</sup> "Infinitive (present active) of purpose again." Robertson, 288.

<sup>6</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 358-359.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *A Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (Newark, DE: Cornerstone, n.d.), 1:181.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Henry, 3:284.

## IN RESPONSE – SEEK THE LORD PROPERLY, PART 3

by Dennis Prutow

My first point was the historical background for our text, 1 Chronicles 15:13, and a basic explanation of the words, “Because you did not carry it at the first, the Lord our God made an outburst on us.” Next I turned to the idea of seeking. David was obviously concerned with seeking the Lord and his analysis of the death of Uzza presupposes the propriety of seeking God.

Now we turn to David’s basic concern. “We did not seek Him according to the ordinance.” David’s analysis presupposes the propriety of seeking God as God directs. God requires us to follow a set protocol.

What are ordinances? My office is directly across the street from the city hall. There the city commission meets on the first and third Monday evenings of each month. The city commission passes laws governing our fair town. These laws are frequently called city ordinances. Simple enough. Ordinances are laws or rules that govern the body politic and rule the church.

In the situation before us, God set forth certain legislation governing how men and women were to approach Him. In the case of the outbreak against Uzza, David wisely states, “We did not seek Him according to the ordinance.” We did not seek Him in the manner prescribed. In other words, we are not privileged to come to God in the ways we deem appropriate. Let’s look at this concept from two perspectives. First, take the broad scope in three points.

Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). Are there a variety of ways to approach the Father? No. There is one way. One must come to God through Jesus Christ. “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). No other way will do.

This is in fact a narrow way. Here is the command of Christ. “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few

who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). Yet many refuse the narrow way and do not seek God according to this simple ordinance. The result is death, eternal death.

In order to embrace Christ, one must be born again. God brings about this new birth through the instrumentality of His word. “You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). God acts sovereignly in granting new birth. He does so using His word.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism leads us in this direction. Question 88 asks, “What are the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?” Answer, “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.” One of the ordinances God uses to bring men and women to Himself is the reading and preaching of Scripture.

If we seek God according to the ordinance, we seek Him by coming to a knowledge of Jesus Christ through the reading and study of Scripture and by listening to and sitting under the teaching and preaching of Scripture. This is the ordinance. And we must seek God according to the ordinance. Failure here results in death, eternal death.

Hebrews 10:24-25 gives us a third and simple ordinance. “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” Coming together for worship with God’s people is essential. We have the false idea we can worship God in any place at any time. Although there is some truth to this claim, pushed to extremes, we easily become disobedient.

Deuteronomy 12:5 exhorts, “You shall seek the LORD at the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come.” The people of God were to attend the worship

of God, to seek God, in the place determined by Him. God promised He would dwell there. We pause. Certainly God is everywhere. However, beyond doubt, God was present in particular places at particular times to manifest His grace in saving ways. As God manifests love and mercy in heaven to the exclusion of wrath, so He manifests wrath in hell to the exclusion of love and mercy. As God is essentially present everywhere, He is graciously present in the places He designates as special dwelling places.

In the New Testament, the church is the temple of the Spirit. Believers within individual churches “are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22). The Spirit is not simply present in the church as to His essence only. He is present to bless with special grace. Since this is the case, those who come together with God’s people enter into the special presence of God. The words of James 4:8 take on special meaning. “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

We will pursue this idea further in the next lesson. For now, it is sufficient to say that if God is present with special grace in the midst of the assembly of His people, this is the best of all possible places to hear His word with saving benefit. This is no slight of hand maneuver. We forsake the assembly of God’s people at the peril of our souls. The ordinance is that we fail not to assemble. We must seek God according to this ordinance in order to draw near to God and meet God with profit for our souls.

Shall we “seek Him according to the ordinance”? We must seek God on the narrow way through Jesus Christ. We must seek God by reading and studying Scripture and by listening to and sitting under the preaching and teaching of Scripture. We must seek God by faithfully attending the worship of God in the assembly of God’s people.

If, in the broad brush, it is essential to seek God according to the guidelines established by God, is it necessary to do so in the details? We look at this next.

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## IN RESPONSE – SEEK THE LORD PROPERLY, PART 4

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The thrust of our lessons is simple. It is incumbent upon us to seek God according to His ordinances. Uzza died. David answered. “Because you did not carry it at the first, the Lord our God made an outburst on us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance.” Having looked at the broad requirements to seek God according to His ordinances, we turn to a more narrow scope. My hope is to show that God’s ordinances stipulate the place, the times, and the manner men and women ought to seek Him.

As to the place, we made a beginning in our last lesson. The place stipulated by God in the Old Testament was the Tabernacle and later the Temple. “You shall seek the LORD at the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come” (Deuteronomy 12:5). The implications of this text are clear.

As already shown, the New Testament Temple is the church. Here the basic covenant promise of God finds fulfillment. Leviticus 26:11-12 gives the special promise of God. “I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.” The apostle Paul, addressing the church at Corinth speaks of the people of this church as the temple of God and His special dwelling place. He quotes Leviticus 26:12 to prove his point. “We are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people’” (2 Corinthians 2:16). In other words, the church is the place of encountering the special presence of God as He fulfills His covenant promises among His people.

For this reason, the assembly of God’s people is the special local where one may be said to have “been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:4-5).<sup>1</sup>

If the assembly of God’s people with the special presence of God is the place the Spirit gives enlightenment and gives men and women a taste of the age to come, it is the locale in which we must seek God and draw near to Him. If we are going to seek God according to the ordinance, we must repair to the assembly of God’s people. This is the way we should, in part, seek God properly.

We also find God directly joining the concept of seeking with His commandments. Psalm 119:2 “How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart.” To seek God involves following His testimonies. There is a connection with God’s covenant here. “His testimonies may denote his covenant; the ark of the covenant is called *the ark of the testimony*.”<sup>2</sup>

To follow the testimonies of God is to keep covenant with Him. When Moses reviews the covenant, he indicates God equates the covenant with the Ten Commandments. Moses says of God, “He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone” (Deuteronomy 4:13). The Ark of the Covenant carried the Ten Commandments, the testimony of God regarding His righteousness. The benefits of the covenant include God’s own presence. The requirements of the covenant center in the Ten Commandments. Psalm 119:10 makes the same connection. “With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments.”

To seek God according to His ordinance, His Law, and His Testimonies means to seek Him as He outlines. The Fourth Commandment stipulates *when* we are to worship as corporate bodies. “Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you” (Deuteronomy 5:12). Christians meet on the first day of the week in celebration of the resurrection. “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together....” (Acts 20:27).

This goes with Hebrews 10:25 and the injunction as to “not forsaking our own

assembling together, as is the habit of some.” Seeking God according to the ordinance therefore means coming together with God’s people for worship and joining in worship on the Christian Sabbath, the first day of the week, the Lord’s day (Revelation 1:10). We have a principle place to seek the Lord, the assembly of God’s people, and a principle time to seek the Lord, the first day of the week.

We also have a guidelines regarding the manner of our worship. Answer 51 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism states, “The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word.” In other words, seek God according to the ordinance.

We commonly acknowledge that Scripture stipulates certain elements as part of the public worship of God. “The parts of public worship named in the Word of God are: praise [Psalm 22:22 and 25]; prayer [Psalm 111:1]; the reading [1 Timothy 4:13], preaching [2 Timothy 4:2], and hearing [Hebrews 4:2] of the word of God; the presentation of offerings [Malachi 3:10]; the benediction [Numbers 6:22-27]; and the administration of the sacraments, baptism [1 Corinthians 12:12-13] and the Lord’s Supper [1 Corinthians 11:20-26].”<sup>3</sup> Scripture directs us as to the content of worship, how we must worship God. To seek God according to the ordinance is to come before God in the manner He commands. It is not permissible to worship in any way *we* deem fit.

Applying 1 Chronicles 15:13, we seek the face of God only through Christ, by means of God’s word in Scripture, principally in the assembly of God’s people. Failure in these matters may indeed result in spiritual death. We seek God in the assembly of His people, the principle place designated by Him. As a minimum, we do so on the first day of the week. We also seek God using the Scriptural elements of worship.

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<sup>1</sup> For further explanation of this text and the visible church, see *In Response*, April, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry, 3:686.

<sup>3</sup> *The Directory for the Worship of God*, Reformed Presbyterian Church of north America, Chapter 1, Paragraph 8. References added.