

"A CLOSER WALK WITH GOD"

Principles Of Prayer

INTRODUCTION

1. One of the greatest blessings enjoyed by Christians in this life is the privilege of PRAYER, by which we can approach God
 - a. Through prayer, the Christian can find FORGIVENESS for sins - 1Jn 1:9
 - b. Through prayer, the Christian can find PEACE to replace anxiety - Php 4:6-7
 - c. Through prayer, the Christian can receive STRENGTH from God through His Spirit - Ep 3:14-16
2. For such reasons, Paul frequently exhorted Christians to be diligent in their prayers...
 - a. "praying always with all prayer and supplication..." - Ep 6:18
 - b. "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" - Col 4:2
 - c. "Pray without ceasing" - 1Th 5:17
3. Yet Jesus knew that people would tend to become slack in their prayers - Lk 18:1
 - a. It is out of a similar concern that prompts two lessons devoted specifically to "PRAYER"
 - b. It is hoped that you will be encouraged to be more diligent in prayer as we examine:
 - 1) Basic PRINCIPLES of prayer taught in God's Word
 - 2) Suggestions concerning the PRACTICE of prayer in our daily lives

[In this lesson, then, PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER, beginning with...]

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF ACCEPTABLE PRAYER

- A. IT MUST BE OFFERED "IN FAITH"...
 1. "And all things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive." - Mt 21:22
 2. We must have faith in God, and in His ability to answer - He 11:6
 3. Otherwise, prayer will not be answered - cf. Jm 1:5-8
 4. Is our faith weak? Then increase it with the help of God's Word - Ro 10:17
- B. IT MUST BE OFFERED "IN THE SPIRIT OF HUMILITY"...
 1. Notice the example of the Pharisee and the publican - Lk 18:9-14
 2. Remember, "The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit" - Ps 34:18
 3. As quoted by James: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" - Jm 4:6
- C. IT MUST BE OFFERED "IN HARMONY WITH GOD'S WILL"...

1. God answers prayer that is offered "according to His will" - 1Jn 5:14
2. Jesus provided the example for us in His prayers at Gethsemane - Lk 22:42
3. Too often, prayers are unanswered because they are more concerned with OUR will, rather than GOD'S will! - cf. Jm 4:3

D. IT MUST BE OFFERED "BY THOSE RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD"...

1. "For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil" - 1Pe 3:12
2. The prayers of the righteous person are effective - Jm 5:16-18
3. But those continuing in sin He will not hear! - Pr 28:9; Is 59:1-2
4. To be righteous before God...
 - a. Requires that we submit to the "righteousness of God" offered in Christ - cf. Ro 10:1-4
 - b. I.e., respond to the gospel of Christ - Ro 1:16-17

E. IT MUST BE OFFERED "IN THE SPIRIT OF THANKSGIVING"...

1. "giving thanks always for all things to God" - Ep 5:20
 2. "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving" - Php 4:6
 3. "...prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" - Col 4:2
 4. "pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks" - 1Th 5:17-18
- Do we think God will help us with our PRESENT BURDENS if we don't take the time to thank Him for PAST BLESSINGS?

F. IT MUST BE OFFERED "WITH PERSISTENCE"...

1. Jesus illustrated this aspect of prayer through two parables
 - a. The parable of the persistent friend - Lk 11:5-10
 - b. The parable of the persistent widow - Lk 18:1-8
2. The virtue of persistence is demonstrated in the prayers of:
 - a. Jesus at Gethsemane - Mt 26:44
 - b. Paul, pertaining to his "thorn in the flesh" - 2Co 12:7-8
 - c. The early church - Ac 2:42

G. IT MUST BE OFFERED "IN THE NAME OF JESUS"...

1. "Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" - Ep 5:20
2. This means much more than simply adding a little phrase "in Jesus' name" at the end of our prayers!
 - a. We must realize that Jesus is the only way by which we can approach God - Jn 14:6
 - b. We must view Him as our "high priest" who intercedes for us - He 7:24-25; Jn 14:13
3. Appealing to God in the name of His Son can give us great confidence that God will give us what we need! - He 4:14-16

[Such are the conditions that make prayer acceptable to God. But it might be helpful to also notice a few...]

II. OBSTACLES TO PRAYER

A. UNCONFESSSED SIN...

1. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear"
- Ps 66:18
2. The BASIS for prayer rests upon our being in fellowship with Him; such fellowship is broken if we do not confess our sins to Him!

B. IMPROPER TREATMENT OF OTHERS...

1. How we treat others has a bearing upon whether God will hear our prayers!
 - a. E.g., how we treat the poor - Ps 41:1-3
 - b. E.g., how one treats his friend - Mt 5:23-24
 - c. E.g., how a husband treats his wife - 1Pe 3:7
2. We must correct our relationships with others (if possible) before we can expect God to hear our prayers!
3. Especially if we desire to receive forgiveness for our sins!
- Mt 6:14-15; 18:21-23

[Finally, it is important to bear in mind that God answers prayer in various ways...]

III. ANSWERS TO PRAYERS

A. "REQUEST GRANTED"...

1. God may answer "YES" , and grant the petitions we ask of Him
2. Such will be the case the more we try to do His Will in our lives - 1Jn 3:22

B. "REQUEST GRANTED, BUT NOT YET"...

1. God may grant our request, but in time and according to His purpose for our lives
2. "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" - Ec 3:1
3. So we may think God is saying "NO", when He is really saying "YES, BUT WAIT"

C. "REQUEST GRANTED, BUT NOT AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT"...

1. Sometimes God says "YES", but answers it in way differently than we anticipated
2. Remember, God's thoughts and methods are often much different than ours - Is 55:8,9
3. Like asking God for strength and perseverance...
 - a. He may give us trials to bear
 - b. Which in turn develops the virtues we prayed for!
4. We should be careful and not dictate to God HOW to answer our prayers...
 - a. Limit the "HOW" and we might be limiting the "RESULT"
 - b. For example, the way some pray for the sick, they limit God as to how He might restore them

D. "REQUEST DENIED"...

1. Often God says "NO"

2. But we must trust that God, who knows all and what is best, would do so only if granting our request might not be for our good - cf. He 12:5-11
3. We may not fully understand, but we can still fully trust Him! - cf. Hab 3:17-19
4. Especially in light of the promise in 1Co 10:13

CONCLUSION

1. The ability to pray to God and receive answers in our lives is truly one of the greatest blessings we can have as children of God!
2. Hopefully, understanding and applying the principles discussed in this lesson will assure greater success in having our prayers answered
3. Our next lesson will deal with "**THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER**", offering suggestions on the when, with whom, how and what of prayer

SOME QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE YOUR THINKING...

1. Do you find it easy or difficult to pray?
2. Do you believe in the power of God to answer prayer?
3. Should you be disappointed when it appears that God has answered your prayer with a "NO"?
4. Are you spending time every day devoted to prayer?