

## **G. Prayer**

### ***I. The Importance of Prayer***

Even a cursory perusal of the Scriptures will reveal the large and important place which the doctrine of prayer finds therein. The Christian life cannot be sustained without it; it is the Christian's vital breath. Its importance is seen when we recall:

That the neglect of prayer is grievous to the Lord (Isa. 43:21, 22; 64:6,7, R. V.).

That many evils in life are to be attributed to the lack of prayer (Zeph. 1:4–6; Dan. 9:13, 14; cf. Hosea 7:13, 14; 8:13, 14).

That it is a sin to neglect prayer (1 Sam. 12:23).

That to continue in prayer is a positive command (Col. 4:2, R. V.; 1 Thess. 5:17; we are commanded to take leisure or a vacation for prayer: 1 Cor. 7:5).

That it is God's appointed method of our obtaining what He has to bestow (Dan. 9:3; Matt. 7:7–11; 9:24–29; Luke 11:13).

That the lack of the necessary blessings in life comes from failure to pray (James 4:2).

That the apostles regarded prayer as the most important employment that could engage their time or attention (Acts 6:4; Rom. 1:9; (Col. 1:9).

### ***II. The Nature of Prayer***

It is interesting to trace the development of prayer in the Scriptures.

In the life of the patriarch Abraham prayer seems to have taken the form of a dialogue—God and man drawing near and talking to each other (Gen. 18; 19); developing into intercession (Gen. 17:18; 18:23, 32), and then into personal prayer (Gen. 15:2; 24:12); cf. Jacob (Gen. 28:20; 32:9–12, 24; Hosea 12:4). The patriarchal blessings are called prayers (Gen. 49:1; Deut. 33:11).

During the period of the Law. Not very much prominence is given to formal prayer during this period. Deut. 26:1–15 seems to be the only one definitely recorded. Prayer had not yet found a stated place in the ritual of the law. It seems to have been more of a personal than a formal matter, and so while the Law may not afford much material, yet the life of the lawgiver, Moses, abounds with prayer (Exod 5:22; 32:11; Num. 11:11–15).

In the Books of Joshua (7:6–9; 10:14) and Judges (chap. 6) we are told that the children of Israel "cried unto the Lord."

Under Samuel prayer seems to have assumed the nature of intercession (1 Sam. 7:5, 12; 8:16–18); personal (1 Sam. 15:11, 35; 16:1). In Jeremiah (15:1) Moses and Samuel are represented as offering intercessory prayer for Israel.

David seems to regard himself as a prophet and priest, and prays without an intercessor (2 Sam. 7:18–29).

The prophets seem to have been intercessors, e. g., Elijah (1 Kings 18). Yet personal prayers are found among the prophets (Jer. 20—both personal and intercessory; 33:3; 42:4; Amos 7).

In the Psalms prayer takes the form of a pouring out of the heart (42:4; 62:8; 100:2, title). The psalmist does not seem to go before God with fixed and orderly petitions so much as simply to pour out his feelings and desires, whether sweet or bitter, troubled or peaceful. Consequently the prayers of the psalmist consist of varying moods: complaint, supplication, confession, despondency, praise.

True prayer consists of such elements as adoration, praise, petition, pleading, thanksgiving, intercession, communion, waiting. The closet into which the believer enters to pray is not only an oratory—a place of prayer, it is an observatory—a place of vision. Prayer is not “A venture and a voice of mine; but a vision and a voice divine.” Isa. 63:7 and 64:12 illustrate all essential forms of address in prayer.

### **III.     *The Possibility of Prayer***

This possibility consists in five things:

#### **1.     The Revelation of God Which Christ Has Brought to Us**

John 1:18—“No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Matt. 11:27—“... Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”

Christ reveals God as a *personal* God, as a Being who sees, feels, knows, understands, and acts. Belief in the personality of God is absolutely necessary to true prayer (Heb. 11:6).

Christ reveals God as a *sovereign* God (Matt. 19:26)—“With God all things are possible.” God is sovereign over all laws; He can make them subservient to His will, and use them in answering the prayers of His children. He is not bound by any so-called unchangeable laws.

Christ revealed God as a *Father* (Luke 11:13). In every instance in the life of Christ whenever He addresses God in prayer it is always as Father. The fact of the fatherhood of God makes prayer possible. It would be unnatural for a father not to commune with his child.

#### **2.     The Sacrificial Work of Jesus Christ**

Heb. 10:19–22, R. V.—“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a great priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith.” It is because of the death of Christ, which removed the barrier that

stood between God and us so that He could not consistently hear and answer our prayers, that He can now hear and answer the petitions of His children.

### **3. The Inspiration of the Holy Ghost**

Rom. 8: 26—“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” See also Jude 20. The thought is this: Even though we are assured that there is a personal God to hear us, and although we have the confidence that the barrier of sin which stood between us and God has been removed, so that we now desire to pray, we often are hindered because we either do not know what to say or what to ask for. We may ask too ardently for wrong things, or too languidly for the things we most need. And so we are afraid to pray. The assurance that this verse gives us is that the Holy Spirit will pray within us, and will indite the petition, helping us in our prayer life.

### **4. The Many Promises of the Bible**

We are told that there are over 3300 of them. Each promise is yea and amen in Jesus Christ”; He is the guarantee and the guarantor of them all. They are not given to mock but to encourage us: “Hath he said and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken and shall he not make it good?” See John 14:13; 15:7; 1 John 5:14, 15; Luke 11:9, etc.

### **5. The Universal Christian Testimony**

Christians, by the millions, the world over, can and do testify to the fact that God both hears and answers prayer. The credibility, character, and intelligence of the vast number of witnesses make their testimony indisputable and incontrovertible.

## ***IV. The Objects of Prayer—To Whom to Pray***

### **1. To God**

Neh. 4:9; Acts 12:5—“Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him”: God is holy—hence there must be no impurity in the life of the one praying; righteous, hence no crookedness; truthful, hence no lying or hypocrisy; powerful, hence we may have confidence; transcendent, hence reverence in our approach.

### **2. To Christ**

Acts 7:59—“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 2 Cor. 12:8, 9; 2 Tim. 2:22.

### **3. The Holy Spirit**

Rom. 8:15, 16 sets forth the relation of the Holy Spirit and prayer, as do also Zech. 12:10; Eph. 6:18; Jude 20. The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3, 4; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14), hence is to be worshipped (Matt. 4:10; Rev. 22:9).

The normal mode of prayer is prayer in the Spirit, on the ground of the merits of the Son, to the Father: In the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father.

## **V.     *The Method or Manner of Prayer***

### **1.     With Regard to the Posture of the Body**

The soul may be in prayer no matter what is the attitude of the body. The Scriptures sanction no special bodily posture. Christ stood and prayed (John 17:1), knelt (Luke 22:41), He also fell on his face on the ground (Matt. 26:39); Solomon knelt (1 Kings 8:54); Elijah prayed with his elbows on his knees and his face buried in his hands; David prayed lying on his bed (Psa. 63:6); Peter prayed on the water (Matt. 14:30); the dying thief, on the cross (Luke 23:42).

### **2.     Time and Place**

Time: *Stated times* (Dan. 6:10; Psa. 55:16, 17; Acts 3:1; 2:46; 10:9, 30). *Special occasions*: Choosing the twelve (Luke 6:12, 13). Before the cross (Luke 22:39–46). After great successes (John 6:15, cf. Mark 6:46–48). *Early in the morning* (Mark 1:35). *All night* (Luke 6:12). *Times of special trouble* (Psa. 81:7, cf. Exod. 2:23; 3:7; 14:10, 24). *At meals* (Matt. 14:19; Acts 27:35; 1 Tim. 4:4,5).

Place of Prayer: Inner chamber (Matt. 6:6); amid nature (Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35). In the church (John 17:1; Psa. 95:6). Before the unsaved (Acts 16:25; 27:35). In all places (1 Tim. 2:8, R. V.).

## **VI.    *Hindrances and Helps to Prayer***

### **1.     Hindrances**

Indulged known sin (Psa. 66:18; Isa. 59:1, 2). Wilful disobedience to known commandments (Prov. 28:9). Selfishness (James 4:3). Unforgiving spirit (Matt. 5:22, 23; 6:12). Lack of faith (Heb. 11:6; James 1:6). Idols in the heart (Ezek. 8:5–18; 14:1–3).

### **2.     Helps—Essentials to Prevailing Prayer**

Sincerity (Psa. 145:18; Matt. 6:5). Simplicity (Matt. 6:7, cf. 26:44). Earnestness (James 5:17; Acts 12:5; Luke 22:44). Persistence (Luke 18:1–8; Col. 4:2; Rom. 12:12, R. V.). Faith (Matt. 21:22; James 1:6). Unison with others (Matt. 18:19, 20). Definiteness (Psa. 27:4; Matt. 18:19). Effort (Exod. 14:15). In the name of Jesus (John 16:23; 14:13, 14). With fasting (Acts 13:2,3; 14:23).