

Sunday, May 12, 2024 am

## **COMMUNICATING WITH GOD (13)**

### **What Makes Prayer Unacceptable?**

Today, we continue our study of prayer. The past few lessons we have begun addressing how to pray. We have noted our need to take time to pray and our need for faith as we pray. Today, we want to talk about what makes prayer unacceptable. 1 John 5:14-15

#### **I. A lack of faith.**

- a. James 1:5-8, as we noted in our last lesson of this study that when we pray we must have faith.
- b. We addressed the type of faith we need – a genuine trust that is willing to take a risk by putting our fate (for whatever we are praying for) in God’s hands. Recall Hebrews 11:6.
- c. James 2:6-8 notes the unstable doubter will receive nothing from God. He is described as a wave of the sea (indecisive).
- d. He is described as double-minded. A term used only in James (here & 4:8). This describes one that cannot make up his mind. “Do I trust God or myself?” (Or something else?) Cf.:
  - i. 1 Kings 18:21, *And Elijah came to all the people, and said, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people answered him not a word.* Elijah is challenging the people to make a choice – choose God or whoever else. This is similar to Joshua’s farewell address – Joshua 24:15.
  - ii. Matthew 6:24, *No one can serve two masters...*”
  - iii. Luke 9:62, describes one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back. He is not fit for the kingdom of God.
- e. If we do not genuinely believe that God can and will answer our prayers, why are we praying to Him? IF you have doubts, your prayers WILL be weak!

#### **II. Substituting prayer for obedience – we HAVE to obey God.**

- a. The Bible emphasizes obedience. Hebrews 5:8-9, Cf. Matthew 7:21-23, Luke 6:46. 1 John 5:3 notes that “this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”
- b. 1 John 3:22 notes, *And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.* John 9:31, the healed blind man observes rightly, *Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.* Consider the antithesis of this!
- c. The truth is, how can we expect God to answer our prayers when we refuse to submit to His will.

#### **III. Wickedness in our lives –**

- a. Related to the previous point, if we are living an evil and rebellious life, how can we expect God to hear our prayers?
- b. Psalm 66:18, *If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.*  
Proverbs 15:29, *The Lord is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.*  
Pro. 28:9, *One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.*  
Isaiah 59:1-2, *Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.*

- c. When we refuse to repent we are declaring we do not care what God wants us to do. Yet, we expect Him to do for us whatever we demand. It does not work that way in society and will not work with Him either.
- d. Suppose someone keeps sinning and “repenting” over and over. Is God going to hear that request for forgiveness?
  - i. Consider Israel’s rebellion – they eventually reached the point where God did not answer them. Isaiah 1:15, *When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.*
  - ii. It is arrogance to be living a sinful life and expect God to forgive us when we have no real intention of repenting.
  - iii. NOTE: This does not mean God will NOT answer your prayers ever again, but He expects you to TRULY repent! He knows. God knows our hearts. If we eventually genuinely repent, He will hear and forgive. Cf. 2 Corinthians 7:9-11
  - iv. Judges 19 records a sad event during the time of the judges. Benjamin had been guilty of gross immorality, including homosexuality, rape and murder (Judges 19:22ff). When Israel was called to deal with this, we read of their inquiring of the Lord if they should go and deal with the town of Gibeah (and Benjamin). The LORD said to go (20:18-20), BUT they went and were defeated (22k died). They weep and ask again and are told to go, BUT they are again defeated (20:23-25). They are again defeated (18k more died). (CF. Judges 10:14, Jeremiah 2:28, - passages where the LORD tells the people to turn to their gods and let them save them) Finally, when they turn to Him with sacrifices and penitent inquiry, the LORD goes with them and they defeat their brethren (20:26-28).

IV. **Selfishness –**

- a. James 4:3 – asking amiss for selfish pursuits. Often people pray selfishly expecting God to give them whatever they want.
- b. God has always despised selfishness. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 describes the selfish and we are told, “From such people turn away”. Philippians 2:3-5 – calls for us to think about others.
- c. We have emphasized that our prayers need to be “according to His will” – 1 John 5:14-15.
- d. Recall the prayer of Jesus in the garden – Matthew 26:39-42.

V. **When we fail to confess our sins –**

- a. 1 John 1:9 calls for us to confess our sins and be forgiven. BUT this is contingent on walking in the light as He is in the light (1:6-7).
- b. James 5:16 – calls for us to confess our trespasses to one another and pray for (spiritual) healing. Genuine confession is often a part of our repentance.
- c. Matthew 5:22-24 – note that if we bring our gift to the altar and know our brother has something against us, we need to go and make it right BEFORE we offer our gift.

VI. **An unwillingness to forgive –**

- a. Matthew 6:14-15 – elaborating on how to pray, Jesus emphasized our need to forgive. This is clearly taught throughout the NT (Colossians 3:12-13, Ephesians 4:32, etc.)
- b. Luke 17:3-4 – forgive your brother 7 times in a day...
- c. NOTE also Matthew 5:23-24 AND 18:15-16. Putting these 2 texts together, we find that YOU (regardless of which side you find yourself in a dispute) do what you can to resolve it.
- d. The truth is, if we harbor hatred and an unforgiving spirit, God is NOT going to forgive us and hear our prayers!

VII. **An outward show –**

- a. Matthew 6:5-6, as Jesus explains how to properly pray, he notes what we are NOT to do. Do pray to be seen by men. Don't make it about you and drawing undue attention to yourself. Jesus said, "they have their reward".
- b. Luke 18:10-11, this is further illustrated in the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector. While the Pharisee was praying with himself, clearly he was interested in outward show. Jesus was not and neither is God (vs. 14).
- c. God cares about the heart. NOTE: This is not saying we should not pray publicly. I think we ought to as a declaration of our belief in God. BUT, our motives are important. Don't make a show out of it!

VIII. **Vain repetitions –**

- a. Matthew 6:7 – continuing to explain how to pray properly, Jesus also mentioned that we avoid "vain repetition". NOTE: This is NOT a condemnation of repetition in prayer. There is certainly a time for that. Jesus prayed 3 times in the garden (Matthew 22:44). Paul prayed 3 times for God to remove his thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:8). The REJECTED repetition is mentioned. It is EMPTY or vain. It is praying to be seen by men because of your many words.
- b. We may not be guilty of this, but are there times when we pray the same words over and over and WITHOUT putting thought into what we are praying? It becomes a rote uttering of mere words.

IX. **When we fail to treat our spouse properly –**

- a. 1 Peter 3:7 – a godly family needs prayer. Here husbands are called upon to treat their wives honorably so that their prayers are not hindered.
- b. When we are not treating family properly, how can we expect God to hear us? Understand that the family is the foundational unit of both society and the church.

X. **When we refuse to obey the gospel.**

- a. We will address this more in another lesson, but here we want to notice that if you have not obeyed the gospel, how can you expect God to hear your prayers AS a believer.
- b. WE have established that prayer is a privilege of God's people – cf. 1 John 1:7-9, 3:22, etc.
- c. And while God certainly knows if you are praying to Him to know what you ought to be doing (cf. Acts 10:1-4 – Cornelius), its scope is VERY limited. This goes back to previous points about one who refuses to obey God's will.

And thus, we can see that HOW we pray is important. In our next lesson, we will look at the other side of this noting some elements that are needed for our prayers to be heard. But we conclude here by simply asking, are praying according to His will or your will? Think about it!