

Sunday, May 19, 2024 am

COMMUNICATING WITH GOD (14)

What Makes Prayer Acceptable?

We are continuing our study of how to pray. In our last lesson we noted some qualities that will make prayer unacceptable. Today, we examine the positive side of what makes prayer acceptable.

- I. **Everything we discussed last week - do the opposite.**
 - a. We must have faith – Hebrews 11:6
 - b. We must be obedient and living righteously – 1 Peter 3:12
 - c. We are asking according to His will and not in pursuit of selfish desires – 1 John 5:14-15
 - d. We confess our sins to God and as needed – 1 John 1:9, James 5:16
 - e. We are willing to forgive others – Matthew 6:14-15, Colossians 3:13
 - f. Our prayers are unpretentious and thoughtful – Matthew 6:5-7
 - g. With respect for our spouse – 1 Peter 3:7
- II. **We approach God with a proper attitude toward Him**
 - a. **Thanksgiving** – if we desire God to hear our prayers, we need to first be thankful for what He has already done for us.
 - i. Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, 1 Timothy 4:4. Thanksgiving is often associated with prayer. God EXPECTS us to be grateful to Him!
 - ii. The history of Israel is one of continued ingratitude. You see that in the wilderness over and over where 10 times their grumbling is recorded (cf. Numbers 14:22).
 - iii. If we are unthankful for what He has already given us (and adjusted our attitude TO BE thankful), how will we be thankful if He answers our prayers in the affirmative. Much more, what if He doesn't answer our prayers the way we desire it to be? AND, should He answer in the affirmative how long before we will demand more?
 - iv. We will develop this further in another lesson.
 - b. **Reverence** - Hebrews 12:28-29. With grace (we are thankful to Him) we serve Him “acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”
 - i. We frequently emphasize the importance of reverence. It is foundational to properly respecting and approaching Him.
 - ii. The word “reverence” is only used twice in the NT. Here and 1 Timothy 2:9 where it addresses modest apparel, “with **propriety** and moderation...”
 - iii. Let us realize that when we pray, we are worshipping God. And that demands proper decorum – John 4:23-24. After all, we are approaching Him in His domain! Cf. Habakkuk 2:20, in a text of woes for wicked behaviors, including the foolishness of Idols, he says, “*But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.*”
 - iv. If we do not view God with the respect and honor He deserves, it WILL be reflected in our prayers, AND how He hears and responds.
 - c. **With humility**
 - i. Humility is the state of a lowly (and honest) perception of oneself. It is the one who is not prideful and arrogant.
 - ii. God expects us to be humble, both in His presence and before others – Philippians 2:3-4, James 4:6 which states, “*He gives more grace. Therefore He says, ‘God resists the*

proud, But gives grace to the humble.” Notice the context – James is dealing with the selfish and worldly (Jas. 4:1-5).

- iii. When we go to God in prayer, we need to do so with an honest understanding of our state before Him – who He is, who I am and what I REALLY deserve. Consider Micah 6:6-8, *With what shall I come before the Lord, And bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?*
- iv. Again consider the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector – Luke 18:9-14, but THIS TIME think about the tax collector (“sinner”). It is also how Jesus began the sermon on the mount, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” (Matthew 5:3)

III. **With importunity –**

- a. Means, with intensity and urgency, pleadings. We are approaching God knowing that we genuinely need Him and His help.
It is tied to our persistence that we discussed in a previous lesson. Consider the desperation of the defrauded woman in Luke 18:1-8, Jesus noted that God will avenge those who “cry out day and night to Him...” (Lk. 18:7).
- b. Or Jesus in the garden praying 3 times (Matthew 26:44) Hebrews 5:7 notes of Jesus, *who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear.*
- c. Meaningful prayers are those based upon genuine need and requests with a full understanding of the One we are approaching and through whom we approach Him.

IV. **Genuine and thoughtful**

- a. Our prayers need to be authentic. Authentic means it is genuine and from the heart. This means that when we pray, we THINK about what we are saying and requesting. We really mean it and it is consistent with who we are. We are not just muttering words recklessly.
- b. Last week we did address the pretentious and empty prayer that Jesus condemned in Matthew 6:5-8. These prayers were not genuine. They were self-promoting and empty.
- c. The heart needs to be at the foundation of everything we do as Christians. Matthew 5:8 speaks of the pure in heart seeing God. Hebrews 10:22 notes that with Jesus our High Priest, *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*
- d. Matthew 15:8 Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13, condemning the corrupt traditions of the religious leaders, *“These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.”*
- e. The truth is God knows our hearts and when we pray he knows how serious and genuine we really are. Psalm 17:1-3 finds David praying to God, *Hear a just cause, O Lord, Attend to my cry; Give ear to my prayer which is not from deceitful lips. Let my vindication come from Your presence; Let Your eyes look on the things that are upright. You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing; I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.*
- f. Having said this, I do wish to remind you of Romans 8:26 which notes that as we pray, the Spirit helps us, interceding for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. The point being, its not

about WHAT words we use, but what is in our heart. We try to put our requests into the right words, but even if we struggle, the message is going to get to God. Why? Because of its genuineness and authenticity.

g. God knows this if we are being genuine, and we do too! And that IS sobering!

V. **A willingness to do our part**

- a. As we have noted before, prayer is not expecting God to do everything.
- b. We leave it in His hands, but we still do what we can.
- c. That is a part of prayer being “according to His will” (1 John 5:14-15). Remember again **Luke 6:46**, *“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?”*
- d. E.g., You pray for “daily bread” (Matthew 6:11), but you still need to look for a job. This is also tied to the idea of obedience – Hebrews 5:9 (cf. James 2:17-18ff); You pray for wisdom, but you STILL need to study (2 Timothy 2:15). You pray because you are sick or struggling – you still need to listen to your doctor. You still need to work to overcome whatever you are struggling with.

VI. **Being watchful and serious –**

- a. 1 Peter 4:7, *“But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.”* Also, Ephesians 6:18 as prayer is part of “the whole armor of God”.
- b. The word for serious here is to sober or alert (Romans 12:3 – we need to be think soberly; Titus 2:6 – young men are to be sober-minded). The NASB says, “be of sound judgment”
- c. The word for watchful actually means to be alert or aware (1 Peter 1:13 - *Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be **sober**, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*)
- d. When we are praying to God it is NOT a game. Our souls and the souls of others are at stake. Our relationship with God is “in play”. That is why we need to be careful HOW we pray and what we say. But some thought into it.
- e. Our state of mind also factors into this as we need to literally be sober (alert & not drunk) when we pray.

VII. **According to His will –**

- a. 1 John 5:14, cf. Matthew 26:39, 6:9.
- b. We have addressed this throughout our studies of prayer. If our prayers are to be acceptable, it is first and foremost about God and Jesus, EVEN IF we are making requests about ourselves and others. Are we genuinely seeking that He be glorified in all that we ask of Him?

VIII. **By His authority**

- a. On numerous occasions scripture emphasizes that we pray TO God THROUGH Jesus.
- b. FIRST, He is our High Priest and mediator – Hebrews 4:14-16 – He is our High Priest, 1 Timothy 2:5 – He is the one Mediator, Hebrews 7:25 – He lives to make intercession, Ephesians 2:18 – through Jesus we both have access to the Father.
- c. John 14:13-14 the apostles were called to ask for whatever in His name.
- d. Colossians 3:17, *And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*
- e. 1 Peter 2:5, *you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*
- f. Proper prayer is made with the understanding that we are approaching our heavenly Father through Jesus.

And thus we are reminded of some qualities associated with acceptable prayer to God. Throughout this lesson we have emphasized God hearing our prayers. Understand we are not speaking of His knowing what you are saying (His omnipresence and omniscience), but how and if He will acknowledge and answer your prayers (even if it is not how you desire).

God's people enjoy the special privilege of prayer. Are we striving to live and praying according to His will? Think about it!