

Sunday, July 14, 2024

## COMMUNICATING WITH GOD (18)

### Our Public Prayers

We have now been studying prayer as part of our 2024 theme, Communicating with God, for the past 6 months. We have covered much ground – addressing God’s part in prayer, noticed several examples of prayerful believers, and a number of lessons dealing with HOW to pray – including the importance of persistence & faith in our prayers, attitudes that make prayer acceptable and unacceptable, and the past three lessons we have noticed some things we can and should pray for by examining the Lord’s model prayer, different types of prayers (emphasizing various words for prayers), and in our last lesson we noted some of the things that scripture talks about that we can and should be praying for.

We now come to the final portion of our study: Answering some questions related to prayer. Some of the topics I want to address include a brief examination of “sinner’s prayer” and if God hears the prayers of non-Christians, What about when I struggle to pray or feel unworthy? Can we pray TO Jesus? NOTE: IF you have some question about prayer you would like for me to address, now is the time to ask.

Today, I want to address public prayers.

#### I. **We ought to pray publicly**

- a. As we have addressed the content of prayer, obviously we have noted that it applies to anytime and anywhere we pray. However, we have also noted that different occasions warrant different elements of our prayers. Much of what we have addressed is our personal and private prayers.
- b. But what about public prayers? There are some specific considerations that I would like to address in this lesson. First, we find many examples of public prayers in scripture. Solomon praying at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8): Prayers offered by the church – Acts 4:23-24 – after Peter and John had been threatened and released; Acts 12:5, 12 for Peter while in prison (To what degree they were assembled is not specified. They were in a home).
- c. 1 Corinthians 14 addresses prayer in the public assembly, etc. More on this text in a moment.
- d. There are personal prayers that we might offer publicly - before a meal, or with a small group somewhere. It is a good way to demonstrate your faith.

#### II. **Our prayers in the assemblies**

- a. 1 Corinthians 14:15-16 – in the context of a public assembly. When we pray it must be “with the spirit and with the understanding”, an expression I believe means with a proper attitude and full awareness of the content of that prayer. IF we should not be preaching (or singing) error, we should not be praying error either.
- b. Must be led by Christian men – Consider passages that emphasize.
  - i. 1 Timothy 2:8, I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands... The term is masculine and contextually gender exclusive (contrasted with women in vs. 9ff).
  - ii. James 5:14 – if one is sick, call for the elders of the church and they will pray. A study of the office of elders (1 Timothy 3:1ff, Titus 1:6ff) would imply that in a public setting it is men who are praying.
  - iii. The Bible only permits men to lead the public assemblies. Paul taught that to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:12-15 & 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 which is dealing DIRECTLY with the

assembly. That is why we do not permit women to lead prayers in assembly where a Christian man is present.

- iv. They must be Christians. Matthew 6:9 – “our Father” – relationship is important as we consider our prayers. It is the righteous whose prayers he hears – Proverbs 15:29.
  - v. Acts 12:5 – “prayer was offered to God for him by the church.” When we understand what the church is (the body of the saved), any passage addressing prayers of its members would imply we are talking about the saved. IF someone is knowingly not in fellowship with God, they should NOT be leading the congregation in prayers. This accords with previous discussions about how prayer is a privilege of the saved.
  - vi. NOTE: We must also consider this with someone who is out of fellowship with God – withdrawn from, openly living in sin, etc. Clearly, if someone has been “disciplined”, until they make correction, they should not be utilized in any public capacity (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:4-7, 11ff).
- c. Should be suited to the occasion. In our worship services we offer several prayers, each with a different purpose. The content of such prayers should be appropriate for that occasion, and we understand this.
- i. The prayers for the Lord’s Supper is about the body and blood of Jesus and its ramifications (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).
  - ii. Our opening prayer is about being prepared in heart and life to worship God. This would include prayers at the opening of a Bible study.
  - iii. Our prayer for the offering is a prayer of gratitude for our material blessings and the work of the church
  - iv. Our MAIN prayer is the more general prayer where we present appropriate requests.
  - v. Our closing prayer is a contemplation of what has been said and done in worship and intercessions to be with us as we leave.
  - vi. Intercessory prayers offered when one responds are related to special requests. Or if some occasion arises that calls for us to pray immediately, we can do so, addressing that specific need.
  - vii. NOTE: Other than indications that they prayed often, most of these prayers are at the discretion of a local congregation. God has not regulated how often we ought to pray (with the exception of the L.S. prayers). He simply says we ought to pray often.
- d. Content needs to be appropriate – our petitions should be “according to His will” (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:16 – “amen”). Basically, the same structure and types of things we have discussed would apply to public prayers as well. It is not about my own personal needs, but for “us”.

### **III. Suggestions for those leading prayers**

- a. Prayer is NOT a time for preaching and teaching. It’s not a time to address your gripes and complaints about your brethren or others. It’s not a time to air your personal struggles or express your personal views about some subject (e.g., politics).
- b. Length is a consideration, as we consider the general audience. Remember, you are praying to God and not preaching a sermon. We must never look at prayer from a word count perspective. That is one of the things Jesus condemned. (Matthew 6:7) Say what needs to be said as concisely as possible.
- c. Prayers need to be offered from the heart, with reverence and natural. It is not about impressing others or being heard because you love the spotlight (Matthew 6:5-7).

- d. It is also worth addressing “vain repetitions”: The context would include public gatherings.
  - i. Let us think about phrases that we frequently use in our prayers, “Bring us back the next appointed time”, “Guard, guide and direct us”, “Give him a ready recollection of what he is about to say”, etc. Phrases we use over and over.
  - ii. Repetition is NOT wrong (we have noted this), but if an expression is uttered without thought, it can be vain.
  - iii. Furthermore, do we understand what the expression means (e.g., recollection; what do we mean by, “guard, guide and direct”? etc.), OR are we genuine (e.g., do we pray to “bring us back the next appointed time” when we know we have no intention of returning ourselves? “Give us a ready and receptive heart” when we will not really be paying attention to the message? etc.).
- e. Also, realize you are NOT praying as a representative of the church to God, but LEADING the congregation in prayer. For example, consider Acts 4:24, notice the plurality of those praying – who was leading the prayer is not mentioned. Vs. 31 concludes, “now when THEY had prayed...”
- f. Think about what you are going to pray for ahead of time (we try to give plenty of advanced notice so that you can be prepared). Consider upcoming and current situations – those mentioned in the announcements, upcoming gospel meetings, etc.
- g. If leading a public prayer, do you best to be clear, concise and understandable. Pray so that all can hear you.
- h. Finally, IF I am going to lead the public prayers, am I willing to be corrected if I say something that is questionable or erroneous?

These are some thoughts related to public prayers. Leading a public prayer is a privilege God has granted to faithful men. Like everything else we do, whether in worship or in life, it needs to be “according to His will” (1 John 5:14) and “with the spirit and understanding” (1 Corinthians 14:15). From time to time it would do us good to pause and examine when and how we pray when we come together, and resolve that we with one heart and one soul avail ourselves of the blessing He has provided us. May God be glorified as we pray to Him. Think about it.