

Sunday, July 28, 2024 am

COMMUNICATING WITH GOD (20)

Questions About Prayer (2)

Today we continue to answer questions about prayer. In our last lesson we addressed if God hears the prayers of sinners (including the sinner's prayer & "calling on the name of the Lord").

I. **Must our prayers be in the name of Jesus?**

- a. Prayers are to be offered in the name of Jesus. We have established that prayer is to be addressed to God the Father, through Jesus. Colossians 3:17, 1 Timothy 2:5 describes Him as our mediator, John 14:6 – He is the way... we come to the Father through Him; Philippians 4:6-7, Ephesians 5:20, *giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, etc.
- b. Notice Ephesians 2:12-13, *that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* Recall how in our last lesson we addressed how prayer is a privilege of Christians. This verse strengthens that point noting that through Jesus we are with God.
- c. But what if we forget to say, "in Jesus' name"? Is our prayer then rejected and not heard?
 - i. First, let me encourage you to MAKE IT A PRACTICE of saying, "In His name" as you pray. It keeps you reminded of who Jesus is and your need for Him to reach the Father.
 - ii. BUT I would ask, do you UNDERSTAND as you pray the part of Jesus as our mediator/intercessor? If it is understood, God know, whether you utter the phrase or not.
 - iii. There are many things we might do "in the name of Jesus" (meaning by His authority) without uttering the phrase (Cf. Colossians 3:17). For example: Mark 9:41, *For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.* If you give a thirsty stranger a cup of water, do you have to tell him/her, "I give you this cup in the name of Jesus" for it to be so? Keep that in mind as you consider Matthew 25:31-46, where Jesus gave examples of benevolent acts that if you did it to His saints, you did it to Him.
- d. Especially consider this as we offer public prayers. For the sake of anyone who does not have a fuller understanding of this, I ALWAYS recommend that you use the expression, "in Jesus' name" in some form. It also serves as a teaching moment that prayers are a privilege and completed through Him.

II. **What about our position when we pray?**

- a. Is there a set position we should assume when we pray? The simple answer is no.
- b. There are numerous different positions in scripture that men assumed when they prayed.
 - i. Matthew 26:39 – Jesus in the garden fell on His face and prayed. (So did Moses and Aaron when challenged by Korah – Numbers 16:22).
 - ii. Mark 11:25 – Jesus spoke of standing when you pray.
 - iii. 1 Kings 8:22-23 – Solomon stood and spread out his hands towards heaven as He prayed dedicating the temple.
 - iv. John 17:1 – Jesus, praying to the Father, lifted up His eyes (also Jn. 11:41).
 - v. Luke 22:41 – Jesus knelt down and prayed.

- vi. 2 Samuel 7:18 – David, accepting God’s blessing, sat before the LORD.
- vii. Nehemiah 8:6 notes that as Ezra blessed the people, they answered “Amen” and bowed their heads and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.
- viii. These indicates that a specific position is not a prerequisite to prayer being heard.
- c. HOWEVER, whatever position you assume, let it be with reverence, humility and attentiveness. 1 Timothy 2:8, *I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting*; We could identify the “lifting up holy hands” as literal, but more importantly, it is about our righteous disposition as we approach Him in prayer. ALSO, do not forget that in your prayers you should not be drawing attention to yourself (cf. Matthew 6:5-6).
- d. Typically, we (at least I do) close our eyes and bow our heads. This is done to lessen distractions when one is looking around.

III. What about using “old English” in your prayers?

- a. If it is the way you have always prayed, there is certainly nothing wrong with it. It is typically offered that way with the intention of making a distinction between addressing God and man. Thus, an older generation will use the terms, “Thee” and “Thou” to address God in prayer. And up until a few decades ago, this was the norm. It was a show of reverence toward God.
- b. But understand, that when the Bible was written (both Hebrew and Greek), it was written in the common language of the people.
- c. When our older English Bibles were written, the wording used was the common language at that time (E.g., “Thee”, “Thou” and “Thy” were commonly used in the 1600s when the KJV was written. Read some of Shakespeare’s (1554-1616) works (E.g., “*Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?*”). It was still in use when the KJV was revised in 1769 (the version most commonly used today, though there is VERY little change in meaning from the original). And these words to address God were retained in the 1901 ASV (& 1881 RSV). It was not until more modern translations of scripture were published, that the more common words replaced these references to God.
- d. So, IF you desire to use old English in approaching God, do so. Just, do not pass judgment on those who do not do that. AND if you do not use such language, do not judge those who do (cf. Matthew 7:1-2, Cf. Romans 14).

IV. What about when I feel unworthy?

- a. In a sense we are all unworthy.
 - i. Paul was unworthy and praying to God.
 - ii. Peter was unworthy when the Lord confronted him on that seashore.
 - iii. David was unworthy after his compilation of sins beginning with lust for Bathsheba. Note Psalm 32:3-4, *When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah*
 - iv. BUT in each of these examples, they were forgiven by God.
- b. When you think of this do NOT forget the cross – Jesus died for us even though we ARE unworthy (Romans 5:6-8).
- c. The first thought is an honest examination of WHY you feel unworthy.
 - i. Are you living in rebellion? If so, your prayer will NOT be heard (answered) – cf. 1 Peter 3:12. We have established that in this study.
 - ii. But at times, we are trying to do right, have repented and asked forgiveness, BUT we cannot get past our former guilt. This is a matter of faith (cf. James 1:5-8, Hebrews 11:6).

Learning to forgive yourself and accepting that God's forgiveness is NOT our standard! He is merciful, longsuffering, gracious and loving. He desires to save you and that you come to Him.

- d. My thought is to keep praying. Even if God is not recognizing your prayer because of some struggle, DON'T GIVE UP! When you quit praying, you are done (unless you begin again). This is the devil lying to you and striving to keep you FROM making yourself right with God.
- e. NOTE: I am NOT saying to ignore your sinful behavior. You MUST repent and confess your sins to Him (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10-11), but my point is God does not look at man the way we often look at ourselves.

V. What about prayer and fasting?

- a. Fasting is a subject within itself. But it was often accompanied prayer – cf. Acts 9:9, 11.
 - i. In the Old Testament, you find David praying and fasting for his dying child (2 Sam. 12:16),
 - ii. David when King Saul and Jonathan died (2 Sam. 1:12),
 - iii. Nehemiah 9:1, as the people plead for forgiveness (WITH sackcloth and dust),
 - iv. Daniel 9:1-3, as he realizes the 70 years are complete and Darius is now ruler, Daniel prays, with fasting and sackcloth, etc.
 - v. In the NT, as Paul and Barnabas were chosen to preach, the church in Antioch fasted and prayed for them (Acts 13:1-3)
 - vi. Acts 14:23 as elders were appointed for the churches.
- b. Jesus did speak about fasting a few times, including Matthew 6:16-18 where He gave instructions when they fasted as to how to do it – not for show. Matthew 9:14-15, when asked about why His disciples did not fast, Jesus spoke of a time coming when it would be appropriate, but not right then.
- c. As you study this subject, you will find that fasting was ALWAYS associated with crisis and serious occasions. It was not a regular ritual (in the same way we are commanded to “pray without ceasing”. And was associated with times of intense pleadings to God for favor and help.
- d. It is something that you MIGHT engage in at appropriate times and should accompany prayers as you are pleading with God for your needs. And it should be private (not for show). Furthermore, let it be for His glory.
- e. Addressing this topic in his book *Devoted to Prayer*, Marshall McDaniel answering the question, “Can we fast today?” (NOTE it is not MUST we fast). He answers, “Yes we can. Should we? That is an individual decision that requires awareness of oneself and his or her circumstances. We need to identify our motivations and determine how effective fasting will be for us personally. If we simply want to try something new and different, we may be disappointed with fasting. But if we recognize the spiritual benefits associated with fasting, it may prove profitable. Regardless, if we fast, we must do so only to the glory of God (see Zechariah 7:5, Matthew 6:17-18). When we do so, God will reward us.” That is a good summary of prayer and fasting today.

And thus, we see some questions answered about prayer. There are others, some of which I may address at another time and in a different way, but what we have addressed is a good sampling. I have one more lesson about prayer (how to make prayer more effective) and then we will turn to how God communicates with us through His word.

I conclude by again asking, “How important is prayer to you?” Think about it!