

Prayer

Pray Often, Persistently, Unceasingly

November 14, 2010

I. Review of Previous Teaching on Prayer

- A. Last Sunday, I spoke of three important characteristics of prayer: humility, honesty, and fervency. Over the next weeks I intend to add more truths to what I said last Sunday about each of these.
- B. I also emphasized the fellowship part of prayer last week and ended last Sunday's teaching by saying that when we pray we are engaging in fellowship with God. In fact, all prayer is a form of fellowship and communion with God, for we are speaking to our loving, heavenly Father just as we speak to our earthly father. And though this fellowship of prayer is at the very least mystical, and in many ways beyond our ability to explain, it is nonetheless encouraged by God and modeled by Jesus Christ.
- C. Prayer

II. Two More Thoughts Concerning Humility In Prayer.

- A. In the Old Testament, a fair amount of prayer was directed at such things as calling down plagues, scattering enemy armies, asking God to avenge His people by destroying their enemies, and withholding rain. The New Testament presents prayer – almost in a contrasting way to the Old Testament. In the New Testament, there is an emphasis on praying for our enemies rather than against them and of asking God to bless those who persecute us rather than cursing them. Such praying not only requires great faith in God's goodness, provision and protection, it also requires great humility. Why? Because it is humility that sees what we truly deserve from God, and therefore it is humility that stands in the way of wanting something worse for our enemies than we want for ourselves.
- B. The second point about humility that I want to make today is that humility recognizes that God knows the intent of our heart. Therefore, it is humility that stops us from praying to the crowd – as it were – so that we in no way seek to impress those who are listening to our prayer with the way we are praying. Instead, humility compels us to pray simple, honest, respectful and unassuming prayers. Besides, God knows when we are showboating in our praying.

III. Exhortations and Instructions for Praying

- A. Pray often, pray persistently, pray unceasingly
 - 1. Pray Often

- a. **Luke 18:1** . . . Now He was telling them a parable to show that **at all times** they ought to pray and not to lose heart.
 - (1) The ALL TIMES in this statement is directly related to those times when we are most likely to lose heart.
 - (2) We are not told what to pray, but we are encouraged to pray instead of losing heart, instead of becoming anxious or discouraged or depressed or hopeless.
- b. We are also told by Paul to be devoted to prayer. We are devoted to prayer when it is the first thing we think of doing when prayer is what we ought to do or when we don't know what to do. Other words which have similar meaning to the word "devoted" are dedicated, consecrated, zealous, strongly attached, and addicted.
 - (1) **Romans 12:12** . . . rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.
 - (2) **Colossians 4:2** . . . Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.

2. Pray Persistently –

- a. **Luke 11:5-8** . . . Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; [6] for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; [7] and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' [8] 'I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.
- b. **Matthew 7:7-11** . . . Ask (keep on asking), and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. [8] For everyone who [keeps on asking] receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. [9] Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? [10] Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? [11] If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

3. Pray Unceasingly

- a. **I Thessalonians 5:17** . . . pray without ceasing;

B. An examination of praying without ceasing

1. In reality, no one in this room has the kind of circumstances and time to get alone with God for most of their waking hours, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Yet if we apply the words “pray without ceasing” in a literal manner, it seems that is what we would have to do.
2. So what are we to do with these words from God?
 - a. We could ignore them, and fit prayer into our lives as we feel the urge or need to pray.
 - b. We could admit there is no way we can live out those words if they must be lived out in the literal way in which they are written.
 - (1) After all, how is it reasonable for the average Christian to fit an active, unceasing prayer life into a life already filled with a spouse, with children – especially through their late teens, household responsibilities, employment responsibilities, church responsibilities, evangelism, hospitality, volunteer opportunities, care for aged parents, social times with friends, exercise needs, a little bit of relaxation time, and just one hobby?
 - (2) Now it is possible we could come real close to fulfilling these words in a literal way by abandoning all our earthly relationships, commitments, and responsibilities and heading off to the wilderness to live alone with God the rest of our days? But is that realistic, or even right given our other commitments?
3. So what are we to do? It seems to me that most of us try to deal with the call to pray without ceasing by seeking explanations or practices that give us the sense that we are at least trying to fulfill this scripture. And to me, that seem realistic for the average Christian.
4. However, it also seems to me that there is something about this exhortation to pray without ceasing that we simply don’t understand. Therefore, if we want to take this exhortation seriously we should:
 - a. First, ask God to give us a clear understanding of how to merge praying without ceasing with a full, active life.
 - (1) This appeal to God for help should include asking God what we ought to **weed out** of our activities to make room for more prayer time.
 - (2) And it seems wise to press God to show us how to better organize our time in order to increase time for prayer.
 - b. Second, we should nurture the thinking that prayer is fellowship with God – the God we love or at least ought to love.
 - (1) You see, love and fellowship go hand-in-hand whenever possible. After all, who doesn’t want to be with someone they love? And

who doesn't try to figure out how to get more time with the one they love? And who doesn't sacrifice other things to be with the one they love?

(2) Now should we lack the degree of love that compels us to talk often with God in prayer, then we ought to go back to Him – in prayer – and press Him for help in growing in love for Him – a love that feeds within us a strong hunger for fellowship with Him.

c. Third, we should accept the reality that, barring some cataclysmic change to our life-style, we won't ever literally fulfill this exhortation to pray without ceasing. But we can head in that direction to the best of our ability. We can nurture love for God and the desire to be with God. And we can press God to show us how to continue making progress in praying more often than we do now.

5. One last thought on praying without ceasing: If Jesus – who was without sin – prayed often and sometimes for a many hours at a time, how much more should we, who are sinners, pray. If he, the holy one of God, wanted and seemed to need prayer, how much more should we want to pray, and how much more do we need to pray!

C. There are a number of other exhortations and instructions concerning prayer that we will look at in the weeks ahead. But having spoken some about praying without ceasing, I want to turn our attention to the first of the three Psalms I encouraged you to consider as templates and encouragements for how to think of God in prayer, and how to pray, and what to pray for.

IV. Using **Psalm 24** to Guide and Direct Our Praying

A. **Psalm 24:1-10** . . . The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. [2] For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. [3] Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? [4] He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully. [5] He shall receive a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. [6] This is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face—even Jacob. Selah. [7] Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! [8] Who is the King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. [9] Lift up your heads, O gates, and lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! [10]

Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory.
Selah.

- B. Psalm (24) provides us with a view of God that nurtures respect toward God, confidence and faith in God, humility and holiness in us, and the boldness to ask for great and mighty things.

V. Conclusion

- A. I want to remind us that there is great diversity in prayer. This is all well and good – for just as children communicate with their parents in a variety of ways during their growing up years, so Christians will communicate with God in a variety of ways.
- B. It is also true that much of our praying is need based. This too is acceptable to God for He is the One who tells us to pray in this way. Yet I urge you to keep before the fellowship side of prayer.
- C. And finally, beware of neglecting this exhortation from God to pray without ceasing. Look to God to show you how to make prayer more and more a part of your life, and nurture times of prayer and focused prayer to help make prayer more a part of your life than it is now. This is the path to unceasing prayer.