

# Prayer

A Look At Intercessory Prayer

November 28, 2010

## I. Review of Previous Teaching on Prayer

### A. So far, in our study on prayer,

1. we have looked at three important characteristics of prayer – humility, honesty, and persistence.
2. We have talked about praying often – especially when faced with trials and tribulation, praying persistently – in order to convey the message that what you are praying for is truly important to you, and praying unceasingly.
3. We looked at Psalm 24 – which is the first of three Psalms I am encouraging you to consider as templates for prayer in relation to encouraging and directing your prayers.

### B. And beginning on the first Sunday of this series and each Sunday thereafter, I have reminded us that all prayer is a form of fellowship and communion with God. Therefore, I am encouraging all of us to treat prayer as something that can grow from being primarily need based to being both need based and companionship based.

### C. Today, we will look at intercessory prayer.

### D. Prayer

## II. One Thought Concerning Honesty In Prayer.

### A. **Proverbs 19:3** . . . The foolishness of man ruins his way, and his heart rages against the LORD (NASB).

1. In other words, people bring hardship and trouble, conflict and worry, damaged or broken relationships, financial concerns, along with sickness and on-going physical maladies like high blood pressure, heart problems, depression, and the like into their own lives by their own foolishness – and then blame God for not protecting them or for not quickly freeing them or instantly healing them from the consequences of their foolish choices and behavior.
2. Anger at God over consequences we have brought on ourselves is not only a dishonest assessment of reality, it represents dishonesty in reading and taking seriously the simplest truths of scripture.
3. For example, we read a very clear and easy to understand truth about the connection between our choices and behavior – on the one hand – and the consequences we bear – on the other hand – in **Galatians 6:7-8** . . . Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man

sows, this he will also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

4. In the Old Testament, God made a similar kind of statement to Israel in **Exodus 15:26** . . . when He said, “If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer.”
- B. The point here is that when we are dishonest about the fact that we are reaping what we have sown, this dishonesty shows up in our prayers in two primary ways:
1. First, we blame God instead of ourselves, or in some way hold Him responsible – instead of ourselves – for the troubles and hardships that have come our way because of our own foolishness and sinfulness. And let me add here that living in denial about reality is just another form of selfish dishonesty.
  2. Second, in our dishonesty, we seek relief or help or provision or protection in relation to the troubles we have brought on ourselves, when what we ought to be doing is confessing our sin, repenting of our sinful ways, and humbling ourselves before God by acknowledging that we deserve even more in the way of consequences and punishment than we have received.
  3. And how does this dishonesty show up in our prayers? When praying about these things our focus is on gaining relief from our troubles rather than submitting to God’s use of discipline and consequences to teach us and grow us further in Christ-likeness. We expose our selfishness by asking for happiness over holiness and by making God the bad guy instead of ourselves.
- C. If we were to pray honestly when blaming God for the troubles we have brought on ourselves, we’d pray something like this: “I know I am being selfish and turning my back on your will for me and on your wanting to change me more and more into the likeness of Christ, but the truth is, the most important thing to me right now is relief and a good dose of happiness. So do for me as I ask, or else I won’t like you very much!”
- D. Of course, our manners teach us that only an egotistical, arrogant fool would pray like that – so we would never let such words come from our lips. Yet the important point here is to not only do away with the dishonest words, but to also do away with the dishonesty that hides within.

III. A look at intercessory prayer – **I Timothy 2:1-8**. Pray prayers of intercession for the well-being of the community, the salvation of unbelievers, and your own spiritual growth

A. [1] First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, [2] for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. [3] This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1. [1] First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, [2a] for kings and all who are in authority . . . ,

a. Note the four words used to denote prayer: (1) entreaties (supplication), (2) prayer, (3) petitions, (4) thanksgiving.

b. The first three words pose a difficulty because in both the Greek and English language, they are four different words – yet their definitions are similar enough that it is hard to define them in three specific and different ways.

(1) However, it also seems unwise to assume that the Holy Spirit, in speaking through Paul, had no other purpose in using these first three words than to simply be wordy or repetitive.

(2) And so, in an effort to at least do justice to what I believe is intentional on God's part, I will give a short explanation for each word according to their Greek definition, Webster's original dictionary definition, and the definitions given to these words by the early church fathers.

c. **Entreaties** (supplication): a humble yet earnest expression of need; to humbly persist in making a request.

(1) The church fathers refer to "supplication (entreaties)" as it is used here to confessing past sins, begging for forgiveness, and pressing God for an added abundance of grace and strength to overcome or resist future sin.

(2) Remember, this word is used here in relation to intercessory prayer. We don't often think of personally confessing the sins of our nation, yet Nehemiah and Daniel did this in their prayers (Nehemiah 2:4-11; Daniel 7:3-20). And in the Lord's prayer the reference to seeking forgiveness for sin is plural: "forgive us our sins" and can be taken as a group prayer as well as a personal prayer.

(3) It seems there is no clear definition of this word.

- d. **Prayer**: earnestly asking for a favor; also a general term referring to entreaties, petitions, confession, adoration, praise, and thanksgiving.
- (1) The church fathers refer to “prayer” in this portion of scripture as speaking of vows we make to God, such as (1) telling God we will renounce the values, wisdom, ways, and things of this world and devote ourselves to serving Him, (2) or telling God that we will turn away from worldly acclaim and honor live a humble life of service to Him.
  - (2) The idea here is that of vowing to live in such a way as to influence the world around us in accordance with our prayers for it.
  - (3) But again, It seems there is no clear definition of this word.
- e. **Petitions** (intercessions): This is the only verse in the NT where the noun form of this word is found – so we have no direct support for its meaning. However, the verb form is translated “intercede” in **Romans 8:26, 27, and 34**, and **Hebrews 7:25**. Though the word is translated “petitions” in the NASB, it can just as accurately be translated “intercessions.”
- (1) To petition or intercede is to speak on behalf of another who needs support in making his case, or to speak in place of another who cannot speak for himself or is not speaking for himself.
  - (2) The church fathers taught that this word refers to praying on behalf of others – be they Christian or unbeliever.
  - (3) Therefore, it is very reasonable to understand that God is calling us – with this word and with the context in which it appears – to pray for others, and especially those in authority.
- f. **Thanksgiving**: the giving of thanks; expressing appreciation and gratitude for favors given. Thanksgiving as part of our praying is encouraged here. And we can give thanks for past benefits received, current blessings and help from God, or future expectations in regard to what God has prepared for those who love Him.
- g. Possible paraphrase of **I Timothy 2:1-2a** . . . Regarding intercessory prayer, I urge you – first of all – to confess the sins of those you are praying for and ask God to be gracious to them in spite of their sin, to commit yourself to living in such a way as to support your prayers rather than counter them, to seek God’s favor in giving wisdom, moral strength, integrity, or whatever else is needed, and to thank God for what He has done, is doing, and will do in accordance to your prayers. Pray this for all people, including those in authority.

2. [2b] so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.
    - a. Praying for those in authority and those under authority is not so we can be left alone to live out our religious beliefs unmolested or free from persecution. Rather it is so we can live like Jesus in the midst of suffering. He was meek and humble of heart. He overcame evil with good. He suffered in silence. He prayed for those who so maliciously mistreated Him.
    - b. Therefore, we are praying for those around us – those in authority and those under authority – so that they will allow us to lead the kind of tranquil and quiet life that exemplifies the Christ-like life.
      - (1) In other words, we need freedom from the kind of relentless provocation and harassment that would make it especially hard to resist giving way to anger and resentment.
      - (2) Not even Jesus endured constant provocation, harassment, and the level of mistreatment He endured before and during His crucifixion.
    - c. We ought to expect hard times, mistreatment at the hands of others, and even persecution. But we also ought to pray that such things will not be relentless so we can maintain a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. Why? So we can lift up Jesus by being salt and light in a tasteless and dark world.
  3. [3] This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
    - a. The “this is good” statement refers back to praying for others, including those in authority. And why is this good and acceptable to God? Because He wants all to be saved and come into a meaningful and personal relationship with Himself.
    - b. Therefore, we can confess the sins of others and seek God’s grace for them. We can commit ourselves to God to live in such a way as to support our prayers. We can seek God’s favor in giving wisdom, moral strength, integrity, or whatever else is needed to those we are praying for. And we can thank God for what He has done, is doing, and will do in accordance to your prayers.
- B. [5] For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. [7] For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

1. These three verses form a parenthesis between the first four verses and verse eight.
  2. In simplest terms, God is making it clear that there is ONE God, ONE savior – who intercedes for us, and that the gospel is for ALL people, not just the Jews.
- C. [8] Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, **without wrath and dissension.**
1. Therefore I want the men in every place to pray – Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is directing all of us who belong to God to PRAY for others! This is not just private prayer he is commanding, this includes corporate prayer. This is why the Church, down through the ages, has held prayer meetings.
  2. lifting up holy hands – there are two important points in these four words:
    - a. First, it was the custom of the Jews and the early Christians to spread out raised hands in prayer. This raising of the hands signified humble entreaty of one in authority. In the early church, Christians would both kneel and raise their hands to God in a show of humility before God. Two good examples from the OT are found in:
      - (1) **I Kings 8:22** . . . Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven.
      - (2) **Psalms 141:2** . . . May my prayer be counted as incense before You; The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering.
    - b. Second, it is not just raised hands that is commended, but raised **HOLY** hands. The HOLY part is as important to prayer as prayer is to life itself. Remember **Psalms 24!**
      - (1) God made it clear that the lack of holiness of life when praying kept Him from hearing Israel's prayers. **Isaiah 1:15-17** . . . So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. [16] Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, [17] Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.
      - (2) James points to the necessity of a holy life in drawing near to God so that He will draw near to us. **James 4:8-10** . . . Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Be

miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

3. **without wrath [anger] and dissension** – This is an important truth that we are wise to take to heart.
  - a. We cannot pray for others in any way that is selfless on our part, that truly seeks their highest good, and that conforms to the will and longings of God when we are angry with the one we are praying for, or when we are part of the conflict causing discord and dissension between us. This is true whether we are praying for our spouse, our children, friends, neighbors, co-workers, our boss or bosses, and those in the government – be it those who rule in the US or in other countries around the world.
    - (1) For example, when we are angry with someone or a willful part of the dissension between us, we will not pray according to **Romans 12:14** . . . Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse, or Stephen's words while being stoned to death: **Acts 7:60** . . ."Lord, do not hold this sin against them!"
    - (2) And why won't we pray according to God's word and will and longings for those we are angry with? Because we are not even thinking God's way in relation to them. Instead, our mind is being ruled by our anger – and where our mind goes our prayers go.
  - b. Let me say this differently. An undertow of anger, or manifestations of anger such as resentment, bitterness, a desire to hurt back or get even, and unforgiveness – even though they may be hidden from most of those who know us – make up part of who we are. And since we cannot separate our lives into sealed compartments, sinful anger in its varied forms and our refusal to resolve conflict influences our thinking about God, His Word, and therefore our prayers.
  - c. Now it is true that in our anger and willful dissension, we may know the right words to say when we pray for those we are angry with, but our heart will not agree with our words. And I am reminding us, here and now, that God not only hears our words, He knows what is in our heart – and when our heart and words don't match, He judges us by the intent of our heart.
  - d. This is not to say that we cannot come to God when we are angry or frustrated or upset or impassioned or in conflict with someone else – but it is to say that prayer is not the place to remain in an upset or angry condition or in conflict that we are perpetuating.

- (1) Prayer is the place to confess and repent and throw overboard angry thoughts and feelings and intentions, and replace them with the meekness and humility of Christ, along with faith in God to work all things out for good, that inner peace that comes from God, a hunger for righteousness, and a love for others that takes its likeness from the love God has for all mankind.
- (2) If we do not deal with our anger according to God's will, we will not pray according to God's ways and desires.

#### IV. Conclusion