

What About Prayer • Part 3

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Heavenly Reward*

1. A bus driver and a minister were standing in line to get into heaven.
2. The bus driver approached the gate and St. Peter said, "Welcome, I understand you were a bus driver. Since I'm in charge of housing, I believe I have found the perfect place for you. See that mansion on that hilltop? It's *yours*."
3. The minister heard all this and began to stand a little taller.
 - a. he said to himself, "If a bus driver got a place like that, just think what I'll get."
 - b. he approached the gate and St. Peter said, "Welcome, I understand you were a minister. See that shack in the valley?"
4. The irate minister said, "I was a minister, I preached the gospel, I helped teach people about God. Why does that bus driver get a mansion, and I get a shack?"
5. St. Peter responded, "Well, it seems when you *preached*, people *slept*. When the bus driver *drove*, people *prayed*."

B. *Today - Moved To Pray*

1. It's my sincere desire that no one here today would be lulled to sleep
2. But rather, as we steer through the scripture, we'd all be moved to a more effective prayer life
3. Since this is our third week in our study of prayer, let's recap what we've learned so far
 - a. first we saw that Jesus reminds us that prayer must never become a pretense for just talking to other people -
 - 1) genuine prayer is conversation with God
 - 2) and those who use prayer to preach to others are hypocrites
 - b. second, we saw that we must be on guard against vain repetitions; as though God's hand could be forced by the sheer number of our words
 - 1) prayer is not a magic formula for getting our will done in heaven and earth
 - 2) a young soldier was fighting in Italy during World War II
 - 3) there was a fire fight and he jumped into a shallow foxhole just ahead of some bullets
 - 4) immediately he tried to deepen the hole for more protection and was frantically scraping away the dirt with his hands
 - 5) he unearthed something metal and brought up a silver crucifix, left by a former resident of the foxhole.
 - 6) a moment later, another leaping figure landed beside him as the shells screamed overhead.
 - 7) when the soldier got a chance to look, he saw that his new companion was an army chaplain.
 - 8) holding out the crucifix, the soldier asked, "Am I glad to see you! How

- do you work this thing?"
- 9) prayer is not something we "work"
 - 10) there isn't some set formula we recite, like an incantation
 - 11) prayer is conversation w/God in which His Spirit works us and conforms us to His will
- c. last week we took a look at the first half of what is commonly called the Lord's prayer, but which should really be known as the Disciple's prayer, since this is the manner in which Jesus taught His followers to pray
- 1) we saw that our prayers should begin with *worship* and *praise*
 - 2) then we move to *intercession*, which is praying for the needs of others,
 - 3) then we pray prayers of *petition*, which are personal requests
4. This brings us to v. 12 of Matthew 6

II. TEXT

A. V. 12

{12} And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.

1. In order for our prayer to be effective, it must include *Confession*
2. In confession, we ask the Lord to forgive us for the sins we have committed
3. As in the previous elements of prayer we've already looked at, Jesus doesn't mean that we would just repeat these words as a rote prayer
4. We are to be *specific*
 - a. we should ask the Lord to remind us of *specific sins* we've committed and then renounce them
 - b. and once we've confessed and been forgiven, we need *never* mention them again
 - c. God's forgiveness is like everything else he does - it is perfect!
5. The Apostle John applied this teaching of Jesus in his own prayer life so that years later he could write

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. {1 John 1:9}

6. Prayer that does not include confession of sin is prayer that may very well go unheeded by God
7. Psa 66:18 says . . .

If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.

- a. the word "Regard" means "to look with favor upon" or "to plan."
 - b. if instead of sincere confession we *cultivate* or *nurture* sin in our hearts, then the Lord will *not* hear us
 - c. we must take the same attitude toward sin God does it if our prayers are to be effective
8. But Jesus takes this even farther; He links the forgiveness of our sins with our readiness to forgive the sins that have been committed against us

And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors

- a. our being discharged of our moral guilt is tied to our release of those who

- have wronged us
 - b. the measure of our forgiveness by God is directly proportional to the measure we use in *forgiving*
 - c. look at what He says - forgive us our debts, *AS* we forgive our debtors
 - d. in other words, "Forgive us in the same way we forgive."
9. Now, lest you think that I am teaching heresy, Jesus knew this would present a certain amount of trouble to His followers so He purposely amplified it in vs. 14 & 15

{14} "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

{15} "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

10. We could obviously spend a lot of time digging in to the real meat of this but let me cut to the heart of the matter by saying that the crux of what Jesus is saying here is that one of the primary evidences of being born again, one of the foundational realities of salvation is that *if* we have been forgiven - we will forgive!
- a. if we remain *unforgiving*, then it's evidence we have *not been* forgiven
 - b. once we see the magnitude of our offenses in the eyes of God and realize the incredible mercy He has shown us -
 - c. it makes the offenses that have been committed against us *pale* in comparison
 - d. once the reality of grace has gripped our hearts - we *will be* gracious
 - e. a graceless, unforgiving Christian is a contradiction
11. When Leonardo da Vinci was painting the *Last Supper*, he had an intense, bitter argument with a fellow painter.
- a. Leonardo was so enraged that he decided to paint the face of his enemy into the face of Judas.
 - b. that way the hated painter's face would be preserved for ages in the face of the betraying disciple.
 - c. when Leonardo finished Judas, everyone easily recognized the face of the painter with whom Leonardo quarreled.
 - d. Leonardo continued to work on the painting.
 - e. but as much as he tried, he could not paint the face of Christ - something was holding him back
 - f. he finally realized his hatred toward his fellow painter was the problem.
 - g. so he worked through his hatred by repainting Judas' face, replacing the image of his fellow painter with another face.
 - h. only then was he able to paint Jesus' face and complete the masterpiece.
12. Some of you here this morning are completely *stuck* in life
- a. when you hear the gospel, you know it to be truth but you feel no corresponding touch to yield
 - b. and you wonder at your own indifference to what your mind tells you is surely the most important decision in life
 - c. maybe this is your problem - forgiveness is barred to you because of some past hurt that you hold on to

- d. you've held on to it for so long, you've come to identify your very life with it
 - e. there is some smoldering hatred that you keep privately stoking the fire of
 - f. some keen resentment for past abuse, unkind words, or malicious gossip
 - g. and the poisonous roots of bitterness have now worked their way down into your very soul and wrapped themselves around your heart and squeezed the joy out of it
13. Truth be told, the reason why you seem dead to the gospel's offer of forgiveness is because of the pain and hatred you are holding on to so tightly
14. Several years ago I talked with a woman who was at death's door
- a. she had heard the gospel many times
 - b. and she knew her days on earth were few
 - c. as I tried to persuade her to receive Christ, she got stuck right at the point of making that commitment
 - d. when I pressed to find out way, it came out that there was a lot of bitterness toward another person
 - e. it was clear that this was the sticking point, and finally I was waved away
 - f. I left that room heartsick that she would rather hang on to such paralyzing and soul crippling bitterness than be set free from it and then receive the hope and promise of eternal life
 - g. as I got into my car, I wondered how much of the physical sickness that was killing her was just the *outward manifestation* of the *spiritual* sickness that had long since destroyed her soul
15. If you consider yourself a disciple of Jesus, then weigh these words carefully

Forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors

- a. just as you are so careful to ask God for forgiveness for your sins
 - b. do you exert them same amount of care to letting go of the wrongs done you?
16. Confession might seem like a small part of prayer compared to intercession and petition, but notice the emphasis Jesus gives to it here!

B. V. 13a

{13} And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.

- 1. You and I have said these words many times - but have you really thought about them?
- 2. Once you do, you realize that this verse presents us a problem -
- 3. Why would Jesus instruct us to pray for something that we know God would never do in the first place; and that is, lead us *into* temptation
 - a. James 1:13 says

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

- b. God would never scatter a trail of bread crumbs for us to follow and eventually be trapped by sin
4. So then, what does Jesus mean by this? How do we apply this to our lives and prayer

5. Really, the whole verse has to be taken together

{13} And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.

- a. the very first word, "And" gives us a clue to what's going on here
 - b. you see, verse 12 & 13 properly all go together
 - c. after making confession for sin in v. 12, Jesus instructs them to ask for protection *from* sin in v. 13
 - d. v. 12 *restores* holiness, v.13 *maintains* it
6. We live in a fallen world which is dominated by a system ruled by none other than the devil
- a. temptation is all around us and presents us with a continual challenge
 - b. some days, the battle seems light - other days, it is fierce and heated
7. Jesus tells us to maintain a habit of asking the Lord to protect us from the pressing weight of temptation and to keep us from being deluded by the lies of Satan
8. We walk a fine line of balance
- a. on one hand, the temptation to sin presents us a spiritual challenge that can actually strengthen our faith and deepen our spiritual resolve
 - 1) in James 1:12 we read

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

- 2) just as in weight lifting, resistance makes us stronger
 - b. but on the other hand - just like in weight-lifting, if the weight is too much, it's not going to make you stronger, it's going to hurt you
9. This is what Jesus is telling the disciples to pray about; that God would preserve them from being in the place of temptation that would be overwhelming
10. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 Paul wrote,

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

- a. if it is against God's nature to allow us to be tempted above our ability to resist -
 - b. and if He's already promised to *not* do this, then why does Jesus tell us to pray this?
11. He tells us to pray "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" because this way, when we are beset with a severe temptation, one that seems to be overwhelming, we might be *reminded* that there *is* a way out
12. Flip Wilson's comic character, Geraldine, in excusing herself for having spent an outrageous amount of money on new clothes would say, "The devil made me buy this dress."
13. But the fact of the matter is, the devil *makes* no one do anything - he merely makes it *easier* for them to follow their own sinful desires
14. Many people want to be delivered from temptation but would like to keep in touch!
15. Regularly praying this prayer weans our desires away from sin toward holiness

C. V. 13b

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

1. The prayer ends as it begins, with worship and praise -
2. With a humble meditation on the Person and Work of God
3. Just as it is fitting to begin our prayer with praise so that we might have things in their right perspective -
4. It's equally fitting that we end prayer with praise so that we go away, not weighed down with the burden of all the world's problems but with a joyful expectancy at what God will do
5. Because ultimately -
 - a. the *Kingdom* is His; He rules and reigns!
 - b. the *power* is His; and no one can thwart His plan or purpose
 - c. the *glory* is His; when all is said and done, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

D. Amen

1. The last word of the Disciple's Prayer is "Amen"
 - a. which simply means, "Truth!" with an exclamation point
 - b. if we were to put this in a modern idiom we might end our prayers with the words, "God, I am really sincere about this - my heart is in full agreement with the words of my mouth."
2. Once again we see the emphasis Jesus puts on *sincerity* in prayer,
 - a. that our prayers *not* merely end up being attempts at public speeches calculated to impress or persuade others
 - b. but that they be genuine conversation between ourselves and God
3. Now, this leads us to another element of prayer that Jesus taught the disciples in another place

E. Prayer In Jesus' Name - John 14

1. That last night Jesus spent with the disciples was filled some of the most important teaching of Jesus' ministry
2. These things are recorded in John 14-17
3. And 6 times in those chapters He told them to pray "in His name"
4. For instance, John 14:13

"Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

5. From these verses we learn the importance of praying in Jesus' name
6. And so -- many people will end their prayer with the words, "In Jesus name, Amen."
7. But what does it *mean* to pray in Jesus name?
8. Really, it's quite simple
 - a. if I go to the bank and hand them a check with my name signed on it, I am asking them to give me money in my own name
 - b. if I have money on deposit there, they will cash my check - if not, it won't be

- c. if I go to a bank with someone else's name signed on the check, I am asking in *their* name, and it doesn't matter if I have money in that bank or not -
 - d. if they have money there, the bank will cash it
 - e. there is no credit to my account in the bank of heaven, *in my name*
 - f. if I go to God in *my* name and write out a prayer check - it will bounce!
 - g. but if I go in Christ's name, my drafts are honored to any extent because His account is unlimited - it cannot be overdrawn
9. Jesus has given every one of His disciple permission to use His name in prayer
10. In John 16:24, Jesus said,
- “Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”**
11. Of course, praying in the name of Jesus also acts as a needed filter for our prayer
- a. we cannot pray for things in Jesus' name if we know they are displeasing to Him
 - b. in light of the lifestyle and mission of Christ, there are some requests that just won't fit
 - c. maybe it would be good for us to not only end our prayers in Jesus' name, but to *begin* them in His name!

III. CONCLUSION

A. More On Prayer

1. There is still much that we have to learn about prayer, so we'll carry on next week
2. But as we end today, let's return to something we looked at earlier: The need to be right with God to be effective in prayer
3. A young boy saw a pack of cigarettes on the ground and decided to try them
 - a. he went to a field near his home and after several fumbling attempts, got one lit
 - b. it didn't taste good, in fact, it burned his throat and made him cough and his eyes water
 - c. but it made him feel grown up
 - d. then he saw his father coming
 - e. desperately trying to distract him, the boy put the cigarette behind his back and pointed at a nearby billboard advertising a local circus
 - f. he asked, "Can we go, Dad? Please, let's go when it comes to town."
 - g. the father replied, "Son, never make a petition while at the same time trying to hide a smoldering disobedience."
4. Prayer is a privilege for the one who has been born again
5. The only prayers of the lost God hears are the prayers of confession and repentance leading to salvation

B. The World's Idea of God

1. The world's idea of God is that He is little more than a heavenly paramedic
2. That he sits in heaven and awaits the call of the distressed

3. They see prayer much like dialing 911 on their phones
4. That view of God is faulty
5. God is much more than a paramedic - He is God
6. And quite frankly, life was given to each one of us by Him as a unique gift so that we might live with and for Him
7. He is our Creator, our Master, our King, and our Lord
8. it is not enough to be a good person, seeking to live life without hurting anyone
9. If we live, then it is proof we should be living for Him
 - a. not just going to church on Sundays
 - b. but every moment of every day
10. Jesus Christ came to restore the broken relationship between God and man, to heal the rift caused by sin
11. Believe in Jesus today, and be saved.