

QUESTIONS ABOUT PRAYER

Int.

1. Aim: To give some answers to questions that arise about prayer
2. 2 Tim. 2:23 "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes."
 - a. Foolish questions are bad
 - b. That implies that intelligent questions are good and produce good.
3. Asking questions is a good way to learn. Many people have asked questions about prayer down through the years. This lesson is in answer to some of these questions.

Discussion

I. WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF PRAYER ?

- A. It is talking to God
 1. He is our heavenly Father
 2. We are heirs of God and children of God
 3. Rom. 8:12-17 - Sons of God
 4. Revelation is God talking to man; prayer is man talking to God.
- B. Prayer is the sincere desire of the heart expressed in words unto God.
 1. Rom. 10:1 "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."
 2. Matt. 14:30 "But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me."
 3. Lk. 18:13 "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as [his] eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

C. Definitions:

1. "Prayer is the desire, opportunity and privilege of talking with God." [Herbert Lockyer]
2. "A prayer, in its simplest definition, is a wish turned heavenward." [Phillips Brooks]
3. Prayer is man speaking to God. In prayer man expresses the desires of his heart to God.

II. WHO CAN PRAY ?

A. Only those who are God's people can pray

1. 1 Pet. 3:12 "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil."
2. Jas. 5:16 "...the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"

B. Does God hear the prayer of an unrighteous man - a sinner?

1. He does hear it, for God knows all.
2. But he does not grant the petitions or acknowledge it.
3. John 9:31 "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth."

III. HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE PRAY ?

A. 1 Thes. 5:17 "Pray without ceasing."

1. This does not mean that one must pray 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
2. We should never get through praying ! We should pray to God on a regular basis.

We cannot pray too much

B. Illustration. Do you eat without ceasing?

C. Verses that discuss frequency of prayer:

1. Col. 4:2 "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; "
2. Rom. 12:12b "...continuing instant in prayer."
3. Ps. 55:17 "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice."

D. Every day should begin and end with prayer

1. "Prayer should be the key of the day and the lock of the night. At night it is our covering; in the morning it is our armor." O. Feltham
2. Between morning and night we must often go to God in prayer
3. We should pray at meal times for our food.
4. We should live in such close fellowship with God and his Word that prayer can be entered into at any moment regarding any circumstance with confidence that our prayer will be heard !

E. Christians should pray at all times

1. Not just at the church building when we worship God with our fellow Christians.
2. Pray in times of trouble, affliction, distress and discouragement
3. Pray in time of joy and happiness.
4. We can pray any hour of the day or night on any occasion.

IV. HOW LONG SHOULD OUR PRAYERS BE ?

- A. The Bible does not tell us how long our prayers should be
1. Short prayers
 - a. David - 2 Sam. 7:18-29 - would take about 2 or 3 minutes
 - b. Elijah - 1 Kings 18:36-37 - probably lasted less than 30 seconds
 - c. Solomon - 1 Kings 8:22-61 - at the dedication of the temple - 5 to 8 minutes
 - d. Disciples - Acts 1:24-25 - prayer of the disciples was only about 41 words and would have lasted about 15 to 20 seconds
 - e. Model prayer in Mt. 6:9-13 or Luke 11:2-4 can be prayed in 30 seconds or less
 2. Long prayers
 - a. Prophets of Baal called on Baal from morning till noon - probably about 6 hours - 1 Kings 18:27, 36-38
 - b. Jesus prayed all night - Luke 6:12 " ...went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God."
 - c. But the recorded prayer of Jesus in John 17 consisted of about 500 words and probably would have lasted three to five minutes in length.
 - d. In Matt. 23:14 the first century hypocrites would "devour widows houses, and for a pretence make long prayer."
- B. No Bible command on the length of our prayers
1. It could be short and only a few words
 2. Or it could be long.
 3. The occasion and circumstances would be the determining factor as to how long a person prays.

V. DOES GOD ANSWER PRAYERS TODAY THROUGH MIRACLES ?

- A. In Bible Times He did
1. Miracle = an act of God superseding or suspending a natural law
 2. Examples are abundant of how God answered prayers both by natural means and miraculous means.
 3. In the miraculous ways he would either suspend or supersede natural law.
 4. But today God does not answer prayer through miraculous means.
- B. One theory says that since miracles have ceased - [1 Cor. 13:8-13] then God cannot answer our prayers today.
1. This assumes that all answers to prayers involves a miracle - which is not true.
 2. Even in the days of miracles God could and did answer prayers by normal means without a miracle.
 - a. Elias prayed about rain
 - (1) James 5:17 "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months."
 - (2) 1 Kings 17 - 18
 - b. 3 ½ years later he prayed that it rain and it did
 - c. The clouds came from the sea and the wind blew them Eastward and when it came in contact with the cooler air it started to rain. It followed the same pattern as all rain.
 - d. Did God perform a miracle? No! If it had rained without a cloud then it would have been a miracle.

- e. God used the natural means and laws that He set forth when he established the earth to cause rain.
 - f. God answered the prayer but used normal means to make it rain.
3. Other examples:
- a. Hannah prayed for a son - God answered her prayer by allowing her to conceive. If she had given birth like Mary as a virgin without knowing a man, then it would have been a miracle. - 1 Sam. 1
 - b. Acts 9 - Tabitha was raised from the dead in answer to the prayer of Peter. This was a miraculous answer to his prayer.
- C. Some people contend that God does answer prayers through miracles today and this is the only way that prayer can be of benefit to us.
- 1. It is true He has done that in times past.
 - 2. But these miracles have ceased - 1 Cor. 13
 - 3. God made this world and the laws of operation for it. He can put His will into these laws and uses them in answer to the prayers of his children.
 - 4. We may not always understand how God operates in answering our prayers
 - 5. God today does not answer prayers through miraculous means.

VI. WHY PRAY IF GOD'S WILL MUST BE DONE ?

- A. The Bible teaches that we are to pray according to God's will.
- 1. 1 John 5:14 "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:"
 - 2. Even the example of Jesus shows the same practice - Mt. 26:39 "...not as I will, but as thou wilt..."

- B. Someone may ask, "If God's will must inevitably be done, why pray at all?"
1. Man should pray because God's will sometimes is conditional upon man's will
 2. Example in the O.T.
 - a. When Israel obeyed God, it was God's will to prosper and bless Israel
 - b. When Israel disobeyed God, it was God's will that they be punished.
 - c. God's will would take one of two courses, depending upon man's will.
 3. So in this sense God's will must be done.
 4. But what happens is conditioned by the response of man to God.

VII. ARE THERE LIMITS TO PRAYER ?

- A. The Bible says: "And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." Matt. 17:20
- B. God has limits on what can be accomplished by prayer:
1. We cannot reverse the seasons by prayer
 2. The moon cannot be plucked out of the sky by prayer.
 3. Gravity cannot be suspended by our prayers.
 4. A mustard seed cannot grow watermelons in answer to our prayers.
 5. Laws of nature
- C. Can we really move mountains by our prayers?
1. Is it possible to move any of the Big Mountains by our prayers?
 2. Has there ever been a case of where a mountain was literally moved by prayer?

3. We could not live in a world where mountains were constantly moving.
4. Our well being depends upon the faithfulness and constancy of such things as mountains, rivers, the law of Gravity, and the seasons.
5. Some things in this world must be governed by fixed laws and always be dependable. We can only endure in a faithful universe.
6. Suppose that young man is enjoying a wonderful evening with his girl friend and he would pray: "Oh that this night might never end!" And turn the world into prolonged or eternal darkness ??? There are some limits to prayer.

VIII. IS PRAYER NECESSARY SINCE GOD KNOWS ALL THINGS ?

- A. Does the omniscience of God make prayer unnecessary?
 1. God is all knowing
 2. God knows all of our needs - Matt. 6:24-34
 3. So why do we need to pray?
- B. God wants us to ask - Matt. 7:7-12 Jas. 4:1-3
 1. Parents many times understand what their children need and want before they ask, but they still let them ask for their training and development.
 2. We pray not to inform God of our needs, but to make request and to give thanks.
 3. If God did not know then there would be no need of prayer.
 4. We pray because God does know and desires to answer.
 5. Prayer is not for God's information as if He were ignorant, but it is for the expression of our desires.
 6. God knows our wants but hath not promised to supply our wants. He has promised to hear our prayers.

Conclusion

1. Prayer is a wonderful gift that god has given to His children.
2. Many questions about prayer can never be answered, but a few things can be learned in answer to some of the questions about prayer:
 - a. Definition - talking to God
 - b. Who Can pray ? - Christians
 - c. How Often - regular - without ceasing
 - d. How long should our prayers be
 - e. Miracles - no, by natural means
 - f. Why pray if God's will must be done - God's will is conditioned on man's
 - g. Limits ? Yes - limits of prayer
 - h. Is prayer necessary since God is Omniscient - we pray so God can answer our requests.
3. Question for you?
 - a. Are your prayers heard?
 - b. They are if you are a child of God.
4. If not then you need to obey the gospel now!

Sermon by Arthur Pigman - Oct. 22, 2006 - Sunday Evening
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