

Prayer

Prayer is an attitude of heart of the Christian, before his God. Therefore it can be expressed in many ways. I have communicated with the Lord in prayer, off my knees, with eyes open, while driving a car on a crowded expressway. As to kneeling when we pray, this is proper since we are addressing the God who made us, the One to whom we all shall give account of our lives. Yet the Bible describes different postures for prayer. At the dedication of the Temple at Jerusalem, Solomon knelt (1 Kings 8:54), and in Ephesians 3:14 Paul speaks of bowing his knees in prayer. In administering the Old Testament rituals, the priests commonly stood. We read of David, in 2 Samuel 7:18, that he went in "and set before the Lord," to offer his prayer of thanksgiving to God. So one may stand, kneel, or sit while praying, and it can be acceptable to God. The question of posture in prayer, like the question of praying with eyes closed or open, is a matter of why we do what we do and what effect it has on our communion with God.

In the Bible we find numerous conditions which believers must meet if they are to receive the petitions they ask of God. These conditions can be placed in two different categories: (1) The thing we ask for must be in His will for us. (2) We must be in a right relationship with God; we must be on what someone has called "praying ground." While there are many places in the Bible where these conditions are not mentioned, they are implied, since they are given elsewhere in the Bible. I believe it is wrong to take a general statement such as is found in John 14:14 and claim it as a promise without considering other conditions. There Christ said, "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it."

1 John 5:14-15 clearly states that acceptable prayer must be "according to His (God's) will," and James 4:3 says, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that he may consume it upon your lusts." 1 John 3: 20-22 makes it clear that our hearts must be right with God. James 1:5-7 shows that our asking must be in faith, in keeping with our Lord's words in Mark 11:24, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

The verses which follow that promise of Christ show that we must have a forgiving spirit toward others. These verses do not refer to salvation but to the believer's communion with God. It is broken if we harbor an unforgiving spirit toward others. The parables of Luke 11 and 18 show that we must be urgent and persistent in our praying.

The effectiveness of praying does not depend on particular features of the prayers themselves, other than their being in the will of God. It is rather a question of the state of the one who prays, in his relationship to God. Ordinarily, prayers should be specific, yet we are instructed in Scripture to engage in some praying which is not specific. For instance in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 the Apostle Paul wrote, "I exhort therefore that . . . supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." "All men" is as general as any term could be; and while "kings, and all that are in authority" is more specific it can hardly be classified as a specific request. Yet verse 3 says, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior."

The general and specific are combined in Ephesians 6:18-19: "Praying always with all prayer and

supplication in the Spirit . . . with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, . . . that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.” Instructions to pray for people generally would not have been given if such prayer did not have value. Yet some persons pray only in general terms. But needs are often very specific, and I believe we ought to pray for people by name, and for particular needs. This constitutes a prayer ministry, and enables us to share the burdens of work which God has given others to do. In praying for all men, or people in a certain country or category, we ought to obtain as much information about them as possible, so that our hearts will be really burdened about their needs and their welfare. Then we can be sure that our prayers on their behalf will not be without value.

Answered prayers, how known? Obviously, when answers are according to preconceived desires, there is no problem. However, in most lives prayer requests are according to “wants and not to “needs” (see Philippians 4:6, 7, 19). To recognize answers to such prayers present no problems. In my opinion, it is easier to recognize God’ answers to prayers of faith, by the backward look over life’s path, rather than “now”. Then His answers (which probably do not conform to our expectations) are possible of recognition. They are part of a life pattern.

Prayer - directly to God? - through the Lord Jesus? We are urged to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16). Also, we are told to be in a constant attitude of prayer (1 Thes 5:17). Personally, I approach the Father, asking in the name of the Lord Jesus (John 14:13, 14; 15:16; 16:23, 24). There is no other name or manner in which to approach God, outlined in the words of the Holy Bible.