

PRAYER

Ron Cosby

*About the author...*

Ron has been preaching the gospel for 25 years. At present he is actively seeking to hold meetings with small congregations that cannot afford to pay a preacher for evangelistic efforts in their community. Ron is an instructor in the Online Academy of Biblical Studies and also co-moderator of the Let Us Reason internet discussion group. He and his wife own a catfish restaurant on Grand Lake, located 5 miles east of Disney, Oklahoma. They have three children and four grandchildren.

“Pray without ceasing”; “continue in prayer”; “continuing instant in prayer”; “in everything by prayer, let your request be made known unto God”; “pray always, pray and not faint”; “men should pray everywhere”; “praying always, with all prayer and supplication.”

John boldly declares 1) God hears and 2) God grants us our petitions:

And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him (1 John 5:14-15).

Young’s Literal Translation says,

And this is the boldness that we have toward Him, that if anything we may ask according to his will, He doth hear us, and if we have known that He doth hear us, whatever we may ask, we have known that we have the requests that we have requested from Him (1 John 5:14-15)

With this passage, God has dealt with the main issue concerning prayer. He will hear, and He will answer. These thoughts and other issues are the focus of our study on the subject of prayer.

How Do We Know That God Answers Prayer?

God said He would (1 John 5:14-15). God exclaims He has the ability to answer even before we ask. “[B]efore they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear” (Isaiah 65:24). We are told that God set in motion the answer to Habakkuk’s prayer over a century before he asked (Habakkuk 1:1-5; 2 Kings 20:17). Though some would say that God did not answer David when he prayed to build a house for God, God did exceedingly, abundantly above all that David requested. The church is God’s house that was built through David. God set in motion its construction centuries before David prayed. Before the request left the lips of the faithful, God answered. Contrast this divinely revealed information to the baseless concepts of the religious world. We are told that, we

know God answers prayer because we get what we ask for (Ted Cherry, Ladies in Mustang, OK, religious world). Neither receiving or failing to receive what we ask for is evidence or proof that God answers prayer.

Does God hear the prayer of sinners? Since God is omniscient, He, without doubt, *hears* the prayers of all men. However, when people ask this question, they are not wanting to know if God hears, but whether or not He will answer. Thus, the question actually is, “Does God *answer* everyone’s prayer?” Prayer is a privilege which is reserved only for the child of God. God hears the righteous. *“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”* (1 Peter 3:12). John gives us the conditions God requires for answered prayer. We must *“keep his commandments”* and *“do those things that are pleasing in his sight”* (1 John 3:22). A third condition for answered prayer is the necessity of asking according to the will of God. Hear John again,

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him (1 John 5:14-15).

Neglect any one of these prerequisites (and others not mentioned) and God will not answer. Brethren, the sinner neglects all of them. Prayer is not a privilege for sinners. *“Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth”* (John 9:31). Some object, saying, “Jesus did not say this. The blind man said it and he is not inspired.” True, but the blind man was speaking truths revealed by inspired men, written in the Old Testament. Solomon, certainly inspired of God, said, *“He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination”* (Proverbs 28:9). Since the cross, until one is baptized into Christ, he is a servant of sin (Romans 6:16-18). Servants of sin are without the blessing of addressing the heavenly Father! Paul reiterates this when he says that *“all spiritual blessings are in Christ”* (Ephesians 1:3). The servant of sin is not in Christ; therefore, he cannot enjoy the spiritual blessing of calling upon the God of heaven in prayer. Furthermore, what would a non-Christian pray for? Shall he pray for a good night’s rest? How can he enjoy rest outside of the spiritual sphere of salvation? He cannot. Shall the sinner pray for forgiveness? Such can only be enjoyed in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Shall he pray for guidance to heaven? God has already provided (Romans 8:34; Ephesians 3:1-13). Shall he pray for a pure heart? God says we purify our souls through obedience to the truth (1 Peter 1:22). Shall he pray that God send a preacher? God has already done so (Matthew 28:18-20). So we ask, *“What shall the non-Christian pray for?”*

How Does God Answer Prayer?

“I don’t know!” (Franklin Camp in a sermon delivered in Newton, KS). Some things belong to God (Deuteronomy 29:29). Multitudes restrict God’s power, teaching that the answering of prayer must come through a direct operation upon men; however, the Lord need not resort to the supernatural. He has the ability to work through natural means.

Through Prayer, We Have an Enabling Power

A variety of religious leaders teach this erroneous doctrine. One has said, “[T]hrough the agency of the Holy Spirit, [God] bestows enabling grace sufficient for all that is required of us” (Bounds, 61). Another says it thus,

The gift of the Spirit, promised by Christ (John 14:16ff), has raised prayer to its highest power by securing for it a divine cooperation (Romans 8:15, 26; Galatians 4:6). Thus Christian prayer in its full New Testament meaning is prayer addressed to God as Father, in the name of Christ as Mediator, and through the enabling grace of the indwelling Spirit. (Orr 8:719)

One adds, “This grace is furnished without measure, in answer to prayer. So that, while God commands, He, at the same time, stands pledged to give us all necessary strength of will and grace of soul to meet His demands.” If true, not one Christian would ever sin. (Bounds 61)

In the 1998 Lockwood - Deaver Debate on the operation of the Spirit in the lives of faithful children of God, Mac Deaver presented that God gives an enabling power through the Holy Spirit. He taught that the Christian cannot fulfill the fruit of the Spirit without this enabling grace. However, we note ...

One of the characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit is patience. If we can find one saint who manifested patience without having the personal indwelling of deity, Mac’s error is refuted. Job is one who maintained patience in the face of hardship. He is held up as the example of patience for the Christian; yet, according to Mac’s doctrine, he did not possess the Spirit (John 7:39). Since Job did not need the Spirit to enable him to attain the patience required of God, then neither do others.

One of the characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit is self control. This control extends into the area of marriage. God demands and fully expects both Christian and non-Christian to remain sexually faithful to their spouses. Now, if Mac is correct when he espouses that we cannot possess self control to the degree necessary to live godly without the personal indwelling of deity, then God has commanded man to do what He knew was morally impossible. (Orr 8:719)

We need to call your attention to two other issues about prayer raised in the article by James Orr quoted above. When the writer says that the gift of the Spirit has “raised prayer to its highest power,” he is implying that we now have something that God’s children of old did not have. This language indicates that the saints of old like Moses and Daniel *lacked* something in prayer. It indicates that the Father could not do in prayer what the Spirit now does. Another issue presented from his article is the use of Romans 8:26 as a proof text of the intercession of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:33 clearly states that Jesus is the divine intercessor. Thus, having the third person of the Godhead do the same action as the second person of the Godhead, as the writer asserts, implies one or the other could not accomplish intercession alone. This dual divine intercession violates the law of parsimony. Actually, the intercessor of verse 26 is the human spirit (cf verses 18-26) and the intercessor of verses 27 and 33 is Christ. Deity need not personally indwell to intercede.

May Women Pray?

Yes! Of course, women may pray. Women, in similar fashion as men, are encouraged and commanded to pray (1 Corinthians 11). Similarly, the question is asked, may women pray in the presence of men? Yes. A vast difference exists between a father listening to his daughter petition God at bedtime and a so-called female youth-minister-to-be leading a class of young men and women in a devotional prayer. Furthermore, God has not condemned the prayer of a wife for her husband or father or son. God has, however, forbidden women to lead men in prayer.

The allowance: The male is to lift up holy hands in all places (1 Timothy 2:11-12).

The prohibition: The female is forbidden to have authority over the man (1 Timothy 2:11-12).

The blessing enjoyed only by women: Men cannot bear children; women ought not lead men in prayer (1 Timothy 2:15).

Works Cited

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Young, Robert. *Young's Literal Translation 1863 Version*. Albany, OR: AGES Software (1996).