

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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We Need To Pray! (Part 4)

I Timothy 2:1-2, 8

As we began focusing on the process of prayer, we considered that prayer must involve praise. We finished up last month thinking about God's performances as recorded in Psalms 99 and 145. To conclude this thought, we turn to the model prayer in Matthew 6:10 to see how Jesus teaches us to praise God for His performances.

After praising God for His Person in the words "*hallowed be thy name,*" Jesus says, "*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*" While at first glance this may not seem to constitute praise, I believe if we understand what Jesus is teaching, we can come to the conclusion that this does indeed form words of praise. These words show one's submission to God. His will is more important than our will. His work is more important than our work. Jesus does give the example of asking for personal needs to be met, and we will focus on that in a few minutes. But those personal needs are to be talked about only after we surrender ourselves to God. It is that surrender to God that praises Him because it acknowledges Him as superior to us. He knows what is best. His will is best.

To me, verse 10 is a continuation of the last thought in verse 9. We can surrender our will to God and want His will to be done here because He is holy and will always do what is best. To surrender ourselves to God is to praise Him by acknowledging how great and wonderful He is. God deserves our praise for Who He is and What He has done. May we learn to pray correctly by beginning our prayer with praise to God.

True prayer does involve praise, but it also Involves Petitions. After spending some time in praising God, we can bring our needs

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before God. Praying is a wonderful privilege that you and I have because we are saved. Prayer should not be a burden. It should not be seen as something that we are obligated to do. We should not do it just so we can cross it off our list to begin the day. There should be nothing sweeter throughout the day than our time of prayer. There are many passages that we can look at as we consider our petitions to God, but we will limit them to just a few.

Before we can petition God for our needs, we must have a clean heart. Psalm 66:18 says, "*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*" The word regard means "to see; to perceive; to feel; and to enjoy." The psalmist acknowledges the fact that if there is sin in his life, God will not hear his prayer. Sometimes people will complain that they have prayed, but God did not respond. Perhaps God did not hear because there was sin in that life. If we have sinned and have not confessed that sin before God, we are wasting our time in prayer. God will not hear us. God desires for us to pray, but He will only answer our prayer if we are clean in His sight. We must confess our sins before God and be clean. Then we can make our petitions to Him.

But what should be the focus of our petitions? As we examine some of the prayers in the Bible, we can see that we can petition God for *Ourselves*. This may surprise some people, but it is not wrong to pray to God to meet our own needs. Some may think that this is selfish, but it is Biblical and right to pray for ourselves. In fact, this is one of the great privileges of prayer—I can ask God to meet my own needs. It is not wrong to ask someone else to pray for you, and we will consider praying for others later in this message, but I am not limited to only let someone else mention my name before God. God is a personal God—He is my Father. I can talk to Him about my own needs.

We can see a Biblical example of praying for ourselves in Luke 1:13. In this passage, Gabriel comes to Zacharias to tell him that Elisabeth will have a son, John the Baptist, who will be the

forerunner of Jesus the Messiah. Before giving him the information about John, Gabriel says, “*Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard.*” Zacharias was probably still so startled from seeing the angel that he did not fully understand these first words from Gabriel. But we can. Gabriel said, “*Thy prayer is heard.*” No doubt, many people had been praying for Zacharias and Elisabeth to have a child, but God did not acknowledge those prayers. It was Zacharias’ own prayer for his own personal need that God said he heard. What a wonderful truth! God can hear my own prayer for my own need.

If we need further evidence that praying for ourselves is Biblical, we can turn again to the model prayer in Matthew 6:11. As we have noticed, the first few sentences in this prayer focus on praising God. After praising God, Jesus teaches us to pray for our own personal needs by saying, “*Give us this day our daily bread.*” Admittedly, the first person plural is used in this prayer, so Jesus is not just focusing upon the one praying, but the one praying is included in the request. It is not, “*Give them their daily bread.*” Jesus is not teaching that one cannot pray for himself. In fact, he is teaching the opposite. We can and must pray for ourselves. Again, this is marvelous. I can pray for God to meet my daily needs, and God will do just that. I do not have to depend upon someone else praying for me (and again, there is nothing wrong with praying for others). I can go boldly before the throne of God and pray for myself. I can spend time personally with God, asking Him to meet my own personal needs. I hope that we can grasp how amazing prayer is—I can talk to God about things that are important to me. (I am not talking about being selfish, for that is rebuked and forbidden in James 4:3.) Someone else may not know how to ask in my behalf, but I do, and I can take that burden and bring it before God. Some things I may not want to let anyone else know, but I can pray to God about it. Prayer is wonderful. It is personal. I can talk to God about my own needs.

We will consider one other passage as we ponder praying for ourselves. In II Corinthians 12, Paul describes his “*thorn in the flesh.*” He does not say in particular what that thorn is, but in verse

8 he says, “*For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.*” Paul may have had others to pray about this thorn, but he does not talk about that. He says, “*I besought the Lord.*” Paul prayed for himself. It is not wrong to do so. It is Biblical and right.

Before we move on, I must mention something else that we can learn from this passage about Paul’s thorn—God does not always answer our prayers the way that we want Him to. Paul asked for the thorn to be removed, but God did not remove it. Is it because God did not love Paul? Absolutely not. God had something greater to demonstrate in the life of Paul—His all-sufficient grace. Paul learned to be submissive to God even when it was different from what he wanted.

We must learn, like Paul, that God’s will is always best. This goes back to what we mentioned in the model prayer—our will must be submitted to God’s will. We may ask for something from God, but it must be asked in total submission to what God wants. If God does not give us what we ask, we must still praise Him for doing what is best. Paul learned that what God did was better than what he had initially asked for. When we submit our will to God, we will learn the same.

It is right and Biblical to pray for ourselves, but Scripture also teaches us to pray for *Others*. While we should bring our own needs before God, we also should not be neglectful of what others need. This is not contradictory, but supplementary. We can understand this truth about prayer as we look at some other teachings in the Bible.

Scripture abounds with the teaching that we should work to provide for ourselves, but we also should help those in real need. For example, in II Thessalonians 3:10, we read, “*For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.*” This verse teaches that we should work to provide for ourselves. But we are also commanded, in James 1:27 and other places, to take care of those in need such as widows and orphans. Is

this contradictory? No. We should take care of ourselves, but also keep in mind others that need help. In the same way, we can pray for ourselves and also pray for others that have needs.

Let me also mention Galatians 6:2 and 6:5. Galatians 6:2 says, *“Bear ye one another’s burdens.”* Galatians 6:5 says, *“For every man shall bear his own burden.”* These verses do not contradict one another as they may initially seem to do. You will understand them when you recognize that the word burden has two different meanings. The word in verse 2 carries the idea of something that cannot be handled by one person. The word in verse 5 means something that one person can easily carry. To picture this, we can use a couch and a lunch box. While one can easily carry a lunch box by himself, he will need help with the couch. That is what Galatians 6:2 and 6:5 are saying. Do what you can on your own, but help others when needed.

I mention these passages to help us as we pray. We can pray for ourselves and should do so. But we must also remember others and pray for them. We will continue considering praying for others next month.