Doctrine of Prayer

How Prayer Helps in the Christian Life

James 5:16-20

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. 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. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. 19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; 20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

A group of preachers were on a train on the way to a convention. They talked about many things, and finally the discussion came around to the needs in the preacher’s life. Many needs were spoken of and finally one old preacher who had lived a long and useful life for the Lord said, "Our greatest failure is that we do not spend more time upon our knees."

1. There are four points to be kept in mind about prayer

- Prayer is an instrument in the process of salvation. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). One day, two men went into the Temple of Jerusalem to pray. One was a Pharisee, the other was a publican. Later, the Pharisee went home dignified but the publican went home justified for he cried out to God for mercy.

- Prayer is natural and necessary for Christian growth. When Paul was first converted, he was blinded for three days. Ananias was told to go and find Paul who was praying. Later, Paul would tell others to pray without ceasing. This is not difficult when our whole life is God conscious and we live moment by moment in a spirit of thanksgiving according to 1 Thessalonians 5:18: “In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” There is so much to be thankful for. God is the source of all blessings.

As we give thanks so we should pray in the spirit of penitence. "There is not a just man upon the earth, who doeth good and sinneth not." By being conscious of our weakness, we will honestly confess our sins.

- We need to pray more often for others. 1 Samuel 12:23 says, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord by not praying for you."

- We need to pray believe that God answers prayers. Jeremiah 33:3 says, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."
2. Prayer helps.

- Prayer helps in time of trouble. We all have trouble be it physical, financial, emotional, marital, job related, family related etc.

- Prayer helps in time of sorrow. We sorrow but not as others who have no hope, no future, and no God.

- Prayer helps us find God's will for our lives. Perhaps you have heard of the preacher who was called to a new church and how he said to his wife, "Honey, you pack up while I pray about this call." Peter Marshall felt that he was under sealed orders (Romans 12:1-2).

- Prayer helps us to overcome temptation. We do not have to sin but we choose to sin. 1 Corinthians 10:13 teaches that, "There hath not temptation taken you but such is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear it."

- Prayer helps us to love Jesus more. The best friendships are based upon conversations. Intimate communion with Christ comes through prayer.

- Prayer helps us in our Christian service. The great men and women of the Bible were great because of prayer and close communion with God. Martin Luther said, "I have so much to do that I could never accomplish it if I did not spend at least two hours a day in prayer." Time spent in prayer is never wasted. From nature comes an illustration of the value of spending time with God.

  "The camel, at the close of day,
  Kneels down upon the sandy plain
  To have his burden lifted off
  And rest to gain.

  My soul, thou, too, shouldst to thy knees
  When daylight draweth to a close,
  And let the Master lift the load
  And grant repose.
Else how canst thou tomorrow meet
With all tomorrow's work to do,
If thou thy burden all the night
Dost carry through?

The camel kneels at break of day
To have his guide replace his load,
Then rises up anew to take
the desert road.

So thou shouldst kneel at morning's dawn
That God may give thee daily care,
Assured that He no load too great
Will make thee bear.”

3. There is power in prayer. We are living in an age of power. There is electric power. There is atomic power. There is nuclear power. There is rocket power. There is missile power. But the greatest power of all is the power of prayer, for behind prayer is God, who can harness or unleash all the other powers of the Universe. Jesus put the power of prayer at our disposal when He said in John 15:7 "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” John 14:4 says, “If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.”

4. Of course, other passages teach us that if we are to avail ourselves of the privilege of prayer, there must be a clean heart, a pure life, a surrendered will, a desire to know God's will, and the glory of God in view.

5. Why Should Christians Pray?

- Because Jesus set the example. Many times we find Jesus praying. Sometimes He prayed the whole night through. In His prayers Jesus prayed for others including His enemies (Luke 23:34; Matthew 5:44); He prayed that His words and His works might glorify the Father; and He prayed for the will of God to be done.

- Because there is a devil. The Bible speaks of him as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). There is only one way to overcome the devil. He is to be resisted in prayer (James 4:7) in the name of Jesus. The song writer encourages us to,

  “Take the name of Jesus ever
  As a shield from every snare;
  If temptations round you gather,
  Breathe that holy name in prayer.”

- Because prayer is God's way for us to obtain His blessing according to Matthew 7:7.
• Because our souls grow when we pray. When children are small we love the cute little things they do. But when the years pass and the body grows we expect signs of maturity. What a tragedy it is when the body grows but there are no signs of maturity of the mind. Spiritually we should grow in the spiritual grace of life.

6. How Should Christians Pray?

• We should pray submissively. We do not tolerate the talk or whining of a disobedient child. Neither does God. We can start obeying the Lord in the more simple things such as:
  - reading the Bible
  - not forsaking the assembly
  - sharing our faith
  - supporting the work of the ministry financially and verbally
  - praying for others on a regular basis
  - meditating on the Bible
  - looking for ways to serve others
  - acting in a loving manner
  - seeking to conquer known sin.

• We are to pray with thanksgiving. Dr. M.E. Dodd, pastor of First Baptist Church of Shreveport gave his personal formula for prayer. First, he would shut his eyes, then he would try to think about the kind of Father, God is. Soon, he would be counting the blessings of God for the graciousness of the Lord would always be remembered. Soon he was in the right attitude to pour his heart out.

• We are to pray with expectations. Jesus said we could move mountains if we had enough faith. We are to believe and we are to ask in faith. What was the last thing you asked God for believing He would answer?

• We are to pray in a spirit of perseverance. Paul said we are to pray without ceasing. Jacob did not receive an answer in the first hour of his midnight struggle so he wrestled with God until the breaking of the day (Genesis 32:26). Even Jesus did not receive an answer the first time He prayed in Gethsemane. Three times He prayed in agony and heaviness and blood. The Bible tells us that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

7. There are three conditions guiding prayer.

• The one who prays must have a vital connection with God. God has not promised His power and blessings to the sinner or to the man who has no connection with Him. The power of Elijah on Mt. Carmel came because he was connected with God. Fire fell and people cried out, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!"
• The channel of life must be pure. David said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me." David knew from personal experience this spiritual truth for David knew a season of spiritual bareness. After his great sin with Bathsheba, David knew the fruitfulness of religion without vital godliness. Then God granted repentance. We must go deep into our lives and clean out all the sin, the malice, the hatred, the impurities. Only then can we have a clean heart.

• Our prayers must be for God's glory. Sometimes we pray and we have our glory in view. We are ashamed of looking badly in front of others. Preachers are ashamed of small crowds and so they give out an "evangelist estimate." Spouses are ashamed of having an unsaved husband or wife and so salvation is prayed for in order not to look bad. We do have to be careful of our motives and yet after taking care of the conditions, we must be people of prayer.