Doctrine of Prayer

The Promises, Purposes and People of Prayer

Matthew 6:5-8

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. 7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. 8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.”

The Promises of Prayer

1. God promises to hear the prayer of the Christless unbeliever asking for salvation. Romans 10:13 says that, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." This includes the thief on the Cross and the vilest sinner who ever lived, Saul of Tarsus. He said he was the chief of all sinners.

2. God promises to hear the prayer of the Christian who confesses sin honestly and openly.
   
   - **1 John 1:9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
   
   - **Psalms 51:1** To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bath-she'-ba 51 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

3. God promises to hear the prayers of the Christian who can pray for his enemies. Jesus said in Luke 6:28 that prayer was to be made for such people. "Bless them that curse you and pray for them which despitefully use you."

4. God promises to hear the prayers of the Christian who is concerned enough for the pastor to pray for him as the saints in Thessalonica prayed for Paul.
   
   - **2 Thessalonians 3:1** Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: 2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

5. God promises to hear the prayers of the Christian who desires the wisdom of heaven.
   
   - **James 1:5** If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.
6. God promises to hear the prayers of the Christian who draws upon Him for divine healing.
   - **James 5:15** And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

7. God promises to hear the prayers of the Christian who delights in seeking the Lord for his needs.
   - **Philippians 4:6** Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.
   - **Philippians 4:19** But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

8. All prayer should be offered in the name of Jesus (John 14:13, 14). God will answer every true prayer that is offered in His name, in the right spirit, and according to His will.
   - **John 14:13** And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

**The Purpose of Prayer**

9. We must pray in order to get things from God. Prayer is not window shopping but it is asking and receiving. Therefore, prayers are to be definite and specific.

10. We must pray in order to get into the right attitude with God and man. When we are angry with someone, when we are upset, we do not want to pray for others. Usually, we do not want to pray at all. But when we are obedient to the will of the Lord and pray in spite of our feelings, a change comes into the heart. Prayer cleanses the heart.

11. We must pray in order to keep from worrying.
   - **Philippians 4:6** Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. 7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Dr. W. Hershel Ford writes in one of his many books, "Every preacher who has ever tried to do anything for the Lord has had those in his church who tried to hurt him and tear down his work. I have had my share, but God has always brought me out. I have learned to take my burden to the Lord, to thank Him for what He has done in the past and to ask for His help in the present. And I can testify that he does give a peace that no one can understand."

I guess every pastor has those who oppose his ministry. The tension comes when individuals rise up against the pastor according to an established pattern.

The pattern begins by simply meeting together on a regular basis to share "concerns."
Then recruiting takes place one by one of those who come into the select group. Time and secrecy and the spreading of fear become allies.

Finally, when the numbers have grown and the group feels bold enough, they move against the pastor who has been set up with labels.

There are doctrinal labels.
There are personal labels.
There are professional labels.

More often than not, the labels are unjustified as presented. Mostly the labels are not fully understood but they sound sinister. Labels sound full of substance though they are simply nothing but an empty note of sounding brass. The Psalmist wrote, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." (Psalm 34:6).

12. We must pray in order to keep in close communion with God. The song writer wrote,

"What a fellowship, what a joy divine,
Leaning on the everlasting arms;
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,
Leaning on the everlasting arms."

The People of Prayer

13. The Bible speaks of many people who prayed.

- Hezekiah prayed. One day the great army of the Assyrians came down and encamped against Jerusalem. Sennacherib sent an insulting letter to King Hezekiah. "Your God cannot save you," he wrote. "We have destroyed other cities and we will destroy yours unless you surrender immediately." When Hezekiah received the letter, he did not confer with court officials or advisers; he went into the house of the Lord. There, he spread the letter before God and he began to pray. In answer, that night, God sent His angel into the camp of the Assyrians and slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. The victory was won because of prayer.

During his days as President of the United States, Jimmy Carter tells that he had a small room next to the Oval Office where he would go often to pray. One of the many things he prayed for were the safe return of the hostages held in Iran. The Lord was faithful. Though Ronald Reagan got the credit, all the hostages were returned home safe. From a human point of view, the hostages were returned in an act of political good will. From a divine point of view, the hostages came home because of prayer.
Peter prayed. While he was in prison waiting to be executed the next day, Peter prayed. Sixteen soldiers guarded him and still Peter prayed. Then he went to sleep. Meanwhile, in the home of John Mark's mother, a group of Christians continued their prayer vigil and the Lord was gracious. An angel was sent to lead Peter out of prison and to the place where loving saints were crying out to God. God answered prayer in such a marvelous way it was too good to be true.

George Muller prayed. In Bristol, England, this man of God prayed. During his lifetime, he took care of more than 2,000 children and raised more than seven million dollars. He never asked anyone for money or anything that he needed. He just told God. In addition to the children, George Muller supported hundreds of missionaries, gave away thousands of Bibles, and established many schools for poor children.

14. Wonderful things happen when people pray. We believe that and yet we do not pray.

We are much like the slave who lived in the South after the Civil War. At the end of the Civil War a southern man's slaves had all been set free. But he had one servant whom he loved and who was devoted to him. He called him in and made a promise. "Samuel, if you will stay with me, and if you will care for me, I'll see that you are cared for even after I am gone." The faithful servant stayed. The years passed and the old man died. Then Samuel mowed lawns, chopped wood and ran errands until he was too old to work very much. He lived in a poor shack and could hardly find enough to eat.

One day a man said to him, "Samuel, your old master told me that he put $5,000.00 in the bank for you. Go down and get what you need." So the next morning Samuel went down to the bank. He shuffled up to the teller's window and asked if it were true that Marse Tom had left him money. "How can I git it?" he asked.

The teller knew that Samuel could not write, so he said, "I'll make out a check for the amount you want, then you make your mark on the check and I'll give you the money." "Can I have as much as fifty cents?" the old man asked. "Yes," answered the teller, "you can get any amount up to $5,000." Then just make out the check for fifty cents," Samuel said. The check was made out. Samuel put his mark on the paper and got .50 cents leaving 4,999.50 in the bank. And that is the way it is with most of us. Either through ignorance or indifference we leave heaven's spiritual bank with very little. "We have not because we ask not."

That can change as we learn the promises of prayer, understand the purposes of prayer, and then become in the end, true people of prayer.