

THE REALITY AND BASIS OF PRAYER

Introduction

As we've seen in Matthew 6, Jesus speaks about the practical application of righteousness. We saw Him condemn the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees and others, who gave, prayed, and fasted for human applause and not the glory of God. We also saw that Jesus does not want us to pray like the Gentiles, who believe that they must earn the right to be heard by praying many words, and who have no confidence in the knowledge of God.

Before we move into the Lord's Prayer, I want to take two weeks and talk about prayer. I don't think that we understand prayer very well – I certainly don't – and I don't think any of us pray as well as we should. Prayer is so important because it is where our theology – our beliefs – are worked out in practical terms. For instance, we might say that we trust God no matter what. But are we completely at peace with the outcome of the election? Let's be honest; many are not. So how do we get our beliefs, our theology, worked into our day to day lives? Through prayer. We come to our Father in heaven, knowing that He knows our every need, including our need for peace right now, and knowing that, because He is our Father, He is prepared to meet that need.

Today I'm going to speak about the Reality of prayer – that prayer is a real thing, and not just self talk; and the Basis of prayer – what gives sinners the right to approach God in confidence?

Next week I'll speak about the Source of prayer – where does prayer, any particular prayer, begin? And I'll speak about the Enabling of prayer – what makes prayer effective?

I want to say that I am very much in debt to a book by Graeme Goldsworthy titled, *Prayer And The Knowledge Of God*. It has to be ordered from InterVarsity Press in England (at ivpbooks.com) – it's not available in the United States – but it is well worth spending \$15 dollars for. Dr. Goldsworthy's study of prayer in Scripture has really changed my own prayer life, and I am in his debt as a Christian. Since I am still very much a student when it comes to prayer, I need a trustworthy teacher, and I have found one in Graeme Goldsworthy.

So let's open our time in a prayer of faith that our Father knows what we need before we ask Him, and ask Him to help us understand and grasp the wonder of prayer.

THE REALITY OF PRAYER

Why isn't prayer simply religious self-talk, a sort of spiritual thinking-out-loud? It is because our God is a speaking God. In fact, God spoke first.

God spoke to create

The first words spoken in the Bible are spoken by God: "Let there be light!" (Genesis 1:3). As creation week moved on God continued to speak, separating the earth from the atmosphere, the waters from the dry land, creating vegetation, and the sun, moon, and stars. God spoke to create sea creatures and birds and earth-bound creatures. He spoke His intention to create man in His own image, and then formed man from the dust of the ground.

God also spoke to communicate

God spoke to Adam and Eve before the fall (Genesis 2:15-16). He called out "Where are you?" when Adam and Eve hid themselves after the fall. He interrogated them with speech, and then passed judgment on Satan, Eve, and Adam with spoken words. He spoke to Cain, warning him of the sin that was lurking within him. Later on He spoke to Noah, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and then Moses. With Moses God commanded that His speech be written down for all the people. As Hebrews 1:1 says, God spoke at many time and in many ways.

Hebrews 1:1 (ESV) — 1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,

God the Word Became a Man

At last God spoke in a final, conclusive way through His Son, Jesus Christ:

Hebrews 1:2 (ESV) — 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

What Jesus said was written by His apostles; after His ascension and the giving of the Holy Spirit, the apostles continued to hear from Jesus as the Holy Spirit gave them the words Jesus wanted written for His church. Everything that Jesus has to say to us today is written in the Scriptures.

Now, because Jesus was and is both God and Man, He is several things:

Jesus Is:

- the God who speaks
- the Word of God which is spoken
- the Man who perfectly hears God's Word
- the Man who perfectly prays the perfect, faithful response to God's Word

It was as the God who speaks, and the Word spoken, and the Man who hears, and the Man who prays, that Jesus taught us to pray.

In Matthew 6 He teaches us about when and where and why to pray; He teaches us what kind of prayer is invalid; He teaches us what to pray for in the Lord's prayer. Over the course of His ministry He taught us the need for prayer, and shows us that prayer is a key element of our relationship to the Father. But beyond this, Jesus Himself prayed.

He prayed alone, and with others. He prayed in isolated places, and in synagogues and the Temple. The most significant events of His life and ministry are inseparably linked to prayer:

- His temptation (Matthew 4:1-11; fasting is always accompanied by prayer)
- Choosing His disciples (Luke 6:12-16)
- Peter's confession that Jesus is God in human flesh (Matthew 16)
- The transfiguration (Luke 9:28-29)
- At the raising of Lazarus (John 11)
- In Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-44)

- On the cross (Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:34, 46)

Jesus shows us that prayer is not something that only sinners need; He was holy and sinless, and yet prayed frequently.

The Reality of Prayer is Simply This

God is a speaking God. There is constant speech within the Trinity. He spoke creation into existence. He made man in His image, and then spoke to man, and made a way for man to speak to Him. Jesus Christ is the God who speaks, and the Word spoken by God; He is the sinless Man who perfectly listened to the Word of God, and perfectly prayed in response to the Word of God.

BUT!

THE BARRIER TO PRAYER

Does God hear every prayer from every human being? Clearly, no. Prayer is the right and the privilege of sons. Adam gave up his sonship when he sinned against God. The Garden was the place where Adam and Eve experienced intimate communication with God. As a result of the fall, God barred them from the Garden. They ceased to be children of God, and became children of wrath. Every human being is born into Adam's fallen nature, and is in rebellion against God from the moment of conception. The magnitude of this barrier is shown in the eternal judgment God passes upon sinners, AND in the enormous sacrifice made by the Lord Jesus in order to redeem sinners. It's not just that sinners and God 'aren't talking,' but that there is hostility and warfare between man and God. God does not hear the prayers of the wicked, because their prayers – if offered up at all – are always offered to false gods, which is a deadly insult to the One True God. The point of the Old Testament sacrifices was to cover sin, so that a sinner could approach God in worship and prayer without being destroyed. Without those sacrifices, Moses himself would have been destroyed just as were the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, who offered an unauthorized sacrifice, and were consumed by fire from heaven. These sacrifices had to be repeated every single time someone came before the Lord in formal worship.

The reason Jesus died was to take away our sin, right? Yes; but taking away our sin was not His ultimate purpose. He took away our sin and joined us with Himself on His cross, SO THAT we who trust in Him would be made children of God through adoption.

Let me put it differently. Jesus did not die on the cross just to forgive our sins; He forgave our sins so that, through His atonement, we would be brought into a whole, loving, right, eternal relationship with our God, who becomes our true spiritual Father when He adopts us in Christ.

I'll put it yet another way. God did not choose to love us when Jesus satisfied His wrath against us. Rather, God's love was changed to wrath when we sinned in Adam, and He sent His Son in order to satisfy that wrath, and freely give His love to us again.

WHAT IS THE BASIS OF TRUE PRAYER?

The basis of true prayer is being in Christ. A Christian is not simply a person who has decided to worship Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. A Christian is a sinner whom the Father has chosen for redemption, and whom the Father has placed IN CHRIST. There is just one requirement for true prayer: we must be sons of the Father. There is only one way for sinners to become sons of the Father: the Father Himself must place us in Christ, and then adopt us as His own, so that we share Jesus' Sonship.

If we are not in Christ, there is no hope of prayer. If we are in Christ, then there are no barriers to prayer.

What does it mean to be in Christ?

You received a handout this morning. Being in Christ means, in Scriptural order:

Redemption (Romans 3:24)

Eternal life (Romans 6:23)

Freedom from condemnation (Romans 8:1)

Freedom from the Law (Romans 8:2)

The love of God (Romans 8:39)

Unity in the church (Romans 12:5)
Sanctification (First Corinthians 1:2)
Grace (First Corinthians 1:4)
Victory (Second Corinthians 2:14)
New life (Second Corinthians 5:17)
Reconciliation (Second Corinthians 5:19)
Justification (Galatians 2:17)
The blessing of the Abrahamic covenant (Galatians 3:14)
Sonship (Galatians 3:26)
Every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3)
We are already raised and seated in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6)
The immeasurable riches of God's grace in kindness (Ephesians 2:7)
Good works (Ephesians 2:10)
Intimacy with God (Ephesians 2:13)
Forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32)
Encouragement (Philippians 2:1)
Humility (Philippians 2:5)
Righteousness (Philippians 3:9)
The upward call of God (Philippians 3:14)
The peace which passes understanding (Philippians 4:7)
God's supply for every need (Philippians 4:19)
Spiritual maturity (Colossians 1:28)
Orderly and firm faith (Colossians 2:5)
Thanksgiving (First Thessalonians 5:18)
Faith and love (First Timothy 1:14)
God's calling (First Peter 5:10)

Prayer belongs to the sons of the Father

This is what Galatians says,

Galatians 4:4-7 (ESV) — 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, **5** to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. **6** And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" **7** So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Does this leave women out in the cold? Of course not!

Galatians 3:28-29 (ESV) — 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Sonship does not mean male; it means having a specific relationship with the Father, the relationship of one who inherits. As far as human birth goes, it doesn't matter whether someone is a Jew or a Gentile, whether they are a slave or free, or, whether they are male or female.

But as far as our standing with the Father goes, it matters very much that we are sons.

Galatians 4:6 (ESV) — 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

We become sons of the Father when we are placed in Christ BY the Father. We are not natural-born sons; only Jesus is that. But we ARE adopted sons, and adopted sons inherit just as the natural-born son inherits.

We see this in Genesis 15. Abraham said to God, **O LORD God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus.** Since at that Abraham had no natural-born children, he was prepared to adopt Eliezer of Damascus, a male born in his household; as Abraham's adopted son, Eliezer would have inherited everything Abraham possessed.

How does adoption work out in practical terms?

Remember Galatians 4:4-5,

Galatians 4:4-5 (ESV) — 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And we are told in Romans 8:15-17,

Romans 8:15–17 (ESV) – 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

This is not a suffering that earns salvation, but the suffering of being joined to Jesus in His death, as Romans 6:5 tells us: **For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.** So then, if you are in Christ, then you have received the Spirit of adoption – the Holy Spirit – who causes you to call upon God as “Abba! Father!” Even though we are not natural-born sons of God, the Holy Spirit bears witness with us that ARE children of God through adoption, and therefore heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

THE BASIS OF TRUE PRAYER IS SONSHIP

We are not natural sons, but Jesus is. Jesus is always heard because of His natural sonship. In Christ we are made adopted sons of God. We don't make ourselves sons of God; God makes us sons by putting us IN CHRIST. Being in Christ, we have His righteousness; His life is presented to God as a substitute for ours so that we are accepted; He Himself IS our righteousness before God. Justification by faith means that God looks on us and regards us with the same acceptance with which He regards Jesus. And, we have a perfect, sinless Man in heaven, Jesus the High Priest, who always lives to make intercession for us.

BRINGING IT HOME

There are some truths that we must accept, and accepting them might mean having to abandon other ideas or thoughts we have about what it means to be God's true child, and what prayer actually means.

We are not natural-born children of God. We are naturally born as children of wrath.

We cannot make ourselves natural-born children of God. No amount of good works or right living will change our essential nature and standing before God.

We are only adopted as sons of God when the Father places us in Christ. He sends the Spirit of adoption into our hearts at the moment of salvation. With the Spirit comes all that is in Christ, and all that belongs to the natural-born Son, including the right of prayer. When we pray as adopted children of the Father, He hears us just as He hears Jesus Himself.

Since to be a Christian means to be in Christ, those who are in Christ enjoy every privilege Jesus possesses in the Father, including prayer.

We cannot fail in true prayer. We cannot be condemned as inadequate pray-ers, or failed pray-ers. We must not think that the Father is less inclined to hear US than He is to hear some so-called “prayer warrior.” If we are in Christ, then we are heard as Jesus Himself is heard; there is no so-called “prayer warrior” who can have a higher standing than Jesus Himself. And if we are in Jesus, and therefore sons of the Father, then we are heard as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is heard.

Does this mean that every request is granted? No; we’ll find out more about this next week. But it does mean that every true prayer is heard.

So ... let’s pray!