

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

March 14, 2010 Certainty in Prayer

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Dear Radio Friends,

We have spent a number of weeks looking at Jesus' answer to the disciples' request, "Lord, teach us to pray." We've looked at the necessity of prayer, the way to approach God in prayer, the proper content of prayer in the six petitions, and now today, we look at the proper way to end our prayers.

We've done all this with the goal of being instructed in and improving our own prayer as believers. And that puts a question to you: Has this helped? Do you pray? Do you pray without ceasing? Do you pray daily? Do you pray throughout the day? Are you earnest in prayer, in your lives as individuals and in your home? Do you teach your children how to pray by example and by instruction? Would they say, "My parents are prayerful believers"? Young people, do you in the busyness of your lives, as you have your mind filled with aspirations for life, do you pray? All the knowledge and instruction about prayer is worthless if we do not put it into practice.

We need to pray. We need to pray not only because we are dependent on God for all things, but also because if we do not pray, we are forgetting God in our life. Prayer, to the believer, should be something like breathing. We breathe to stay alive, to keep oxygen in our body. So it is with prayer for the believer. He needs to pray to stay spiritually alive.

Now, as we come to the end of our treatment on prayer, we ask this question: Does God hear our prayers? That is the question that Jesus answers in the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer recorded in Matthew 6:13, in these words: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." These words tell us that God does answer our prayers and that we can have certainty and confidence as we bring our prayers to God. That is a great encouragement for us in prayer.

We need this encouragement. In prayer, doubt is common place. The believer makes his requests and then he either doubts whether he will receive what he has asked, or he doubts whether God is actually able to give him what he asks. If you examine your prayers, you will see this. You are in temptation, and then you pray. And then you think, "Well, that's not really going to help." You confess your sins and you pray for forgiveness, and then you are plagued with doubt: "Am I really forgiven?" You pray for your daily bread, but at the same time you are torn with anxiety about your earthly needs.

This kind of doubting is something that you can see also in the lives of the people of God in the Bible. Abraham and Sarah prayed for a son. And when God told them that He was going to answer this prayer, Sarah laughed. Jacob, Moses, and Gideon, when God told them that He was going to answer their prayers, were not sure, and so they asked for a sign, a visible proof from God. The disciples out on the water in a storm were afraid. They cried out for help because their faith was not strong. At the grave of Lazarus, when Jesus came, Martha did not think that Jesus Christ would raise till the last day. Thomas was plagued with doubt about Jesus' resurrection.

So doubt is a reality.

But understand, doubt is not something that we should just accept. No, to doubt is to sin. Jesus responded to the doubt of the disciples with rebuke. He said in Luke 24:25, ""O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken."" In a storm, He said to His disciples: ""Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?""

The reason that God and Jesus are so opposed to doubt in prayer is that when we doubt, we are saying something about God that is not true. We are saying, ""God cannot answer my prayer. His arm is weak."" We are saying, ""He cannot see. He does not know what's going on in my life."" That is a wrong attitude to have towards God in prayer. This is the way the ungodly and the unbelieving pray to their gods. The prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel cried out from morning to evening, not sure whether Baal would hear them. And he did not, because Baal was not god, but just an invention of their minds.

For us to pray with doubt is destructive to the witness of God's name in the earth. Who is your God? Does He hear prayer? Maybe those are questions that the unbeliever asks you. How will you answer them? Paul and Silas in prison, in the middle of the night, after they had been beaten, did not doubt that God would hear their prayers. No, they sang praises to God. And God heard them. There was an earthquake. The prison doors opened. Their faith was used for the conversion of others.

And so we should not come to God in prayer doubting. In James 1:6 we are told that when we come to God in prayer, we should ask in faith, nothing wavering. And James says of the one who comes wavering and unsure, ""Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.""

When our prayers are not answered, God is not to blame. But the problem is us. Maybe we have not asked in faith. Maybe our request is wrong. Maybe we have some other sin in our life that stands in the way of our receiving what we ask. Isaiah puts it this way in chapter 59:1, 2: ""Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."" And so, what I am saying is this: If our prayers are true; if they follow the pattern that Jesus gives us in the Lord's Prayer; then we should come and we may come with confidence to God. Doubt is debilitating. It creates in our minds untrue concepts of God. It takes away from Him.

It is not good to doubt. It is a fruit of the remnant of sin in us. We ought to fight against this doubt.

In the concluding words of the Lord's Prayer, that is what Jesus is telling us. We can have confidence in prayer because God's is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. And we say, ""Amen."" If we look at this word by word, we see that there are five things here that are all expressions of confidence in God for answer to our prayers.

First, we praise God as King. ""Thine is the kingdom,"" we say. Sometimes we will view this world as our kingdom. And we will try to manipulate and orchestrate things in our favor. Or sometimes we will look at our enemies (Satan, and the world) and we will be intimidated and fearful. But the kingdom is the Lord's. In I Chronicles 29 David says, ""Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all; both riches and honor come of thee; and thou

reignest over all." What an important thing to remember in relation to prayer. David was king. He was rich. He was strong. But he acknowledges that God is King. God will answer our prayers because God is making His kingdom come.

Second, we say, "Thine is the power." This is absolute power. This is not the same as saying that God has power, or that God is very powerful, or even that God is more powerful than anybody else. Every earthly king has some power. But all of it is from God, and earthly power is always limited. There are territorial and economic and military and political limits. But God's power knows no limits. He is the almighty God.

And we are witnesses of His power. We can see His power in the making and the upholding of the universe. We can see His power in history as we look at the marvelous events and miracles recorded in the Scriptures, or as we see His hand controlling and unfolding all events in history and directing them to their final end. God's power is eternal. His eternal counsel and will is the cause of all things. God's power can be seen in His judgments and in the punishment that will come on sinners. God's power is displayed in the creation around us—in the power and heat and light of the sun; in the power of water in a flood; in the intensity of cold. God is very powerful. God is almighty. And His power is all around us.

But the important thing for us to remember is that power means ability. God is able to answer our prayers. He is not like Baal or the gods of this world who cannot answer. Jesus has taught us to make petitions that cover every area of our life. And now He gives us a word of confidence in God: "Thine is the kingdom and the power." When we say this, we make a confession of trust in God. Ephesians 3:20 tell us that He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we could ask or think. His is the power.

What needs do you have? What sins have you confessed? What temptations threaten you? Pray. And confess: Thine is the kingdom and the power.

Third, the doxology mentions the glory of God. The word glory is one that we tend to use without thinking much about its meaning. In biblical language, the word "glory" refers to the weight or the worth of something. And we understand that the worth and the value of God cannot be measured. When Moses desired to see the glory of God, it was not permitted, lest he should die. So he saw God only from behind and heard His name. And that was enough to leave Moses' face shining in reflection of the glory of God.

When we speak of the glory of God, we speak of the essence and the substance of who God is. He is God alone. There is none like Him. But this glory is something that God reveals and shares with the creature. He reveals it to us in Jesus Christ (John 1:14). He reveals it in us by giving us His own life in the Holy Spirit and making us partakers of His glory. And understanding and seeing the glory of God will produce a proper response of praise and humility in us. It will bring us into conformity with God and His will.

How important this is as we pray. To give us the right words and petitions in prayer, so that our prayers can be answered, we need to know the glory of God. To make us obedient as we pray, so that sin does not stand in the way of our prayers, we need to know the glory of God.

Fourth, we say in the doxology the word "forever." "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever." This word puts the doxology of the Lord's Prayer outside of our reach. We

can never understand forever. We are time-bound. It is hard enough for us to think of the time that will elapse between now and the end of our short life, or to think of the short amount of time that is the history of this world. There is so much for us to take in. Time means change. And we cannot remember, we cannot handle all the changes that time brings. But God is from eternity to eternity the same. His is the kingdom forever. His is the power forever. And His is the glory forever.

So, if it is beyond our reach, what does it mean for us? Why say, "Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever"? Well, it certainly means this, that all of our existence, every moment and every particle of energy we owe to God in praise. In all of history, from the very first day till the last day when it comes, the kingdom and the power and the glory belong to God. The Bible is a doxology of praise to God. History is a doxology of praise to God. Your life, and mine, ought to be doxologies of praise to God.

This doxology puts the future and the purpose of all things in the hands of God. It takes us, it transports us, from the earth and our lives into the presence of God, so that we look at things from His perspective.

What is your confidence in prayer? When you are done praying, what are you thinking? Why should God answer your prayers? Will He answer them? At the end of your prayers, how are you viewing things in your life? Where are you? Are you still on earth looking at things from your limited perspective, seeking things for your earthly life, and according to what you see as necessary? Or does prayer take you on its wings into the presence of God? What and who is the reason that God should answer your prayers?

These closing words of the Lord's Prayer should humble us. They should bring us before God. Thine, O Lord, is the kingdom. Thine, O Lord, is the power. Thine, O Lord, is the glory. Forever! When we praise God that way, then we will depend not on ourselves, but on God as the sovereign who will answer our prayers in the best way for Himself and His glory, and for us and our good as His people. That should give us confidence in prayer.

Jesus teaches us to end our prayers with this word: "Amen." This is a word of faith that looks to God.

What does the word "Amen" mean? It is not simply a word to signal that we are done praying. It is not the same as saying, "The end." No, this word is an old Hebrew word that has been carried over into almost every other language. It refers to the truth and the firmness of something. Jesus used this word this way. In several places He said to His disciples, "Verily, verily, I say unto you." And the word there, in the original, is "Amen." He said, "Amen, Amen, I say unto you." He used the word to emphasize the truth of what He was about to say. That is how we should use it at the end of our prayers.

What a fitting end to prayer. When we say "Amen," we express agreement with all the praise and the petitions that Jesus teaches us to pray. We say to God, "These petitions come from our hearts with sincerity. We mean what we ask. Lord, we want Your name to be honored. We desire the coming of Your kingdom. We want Your will to be done, even if that means personal sacrifice for us. We depend on Thee for daily needs. We need forgiveness. We need help in the face of temptation. Lord, to Thee be the glory." "Amen" expresses agreement and conviction.

And then, also, ""Amen"" expresses surrender to the will and the way of God. Immediately after we say, ""Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever,"" we say, ""Amen."" We surrender ourselves to the sovereign God. We commit our way to Him. We affirm that He knows what is best for us. And we rest in Him.

And so, in this word ""Amen,"" we also express our confidence in prayer. Jeremiah 28:6 says, ""Amen, the Lord do so."" That is the idea here at the end of prayer. God will hear our prayers. He will do what we ask, even more than we can feel it in our hearts. God's willingness is stronger than our desire. He has promised to give us what we ask in prayer. He does not give us prayer as the means to come to Him and then not receive us when we come. No, He hears the prayers of all who seek Him in faith and sincerity.

And that means that, as the book of Hebrews tells us, we should come boldly to the throne of grace. That is what ""Amen"" is: an expression of our boldness and confidence to come to God.

Now, I am not saying that that boldness should arise out of ourselves. No, the foundation is God Himself and what He has done for us in Christ. The word ""Amen"" takes us to Jesus. In fact, this is one of the names of Jesus in the Bible. In Revelation, chapter 3, verse 14, we read this: ""These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."" That is in reference to Jesus Christ. Christ is the foundation, the truth, the confidence behind our prayers. In II Corinthians 1:20 we are told that all the promises of God in Him (that is, in Christ) are Yea and in Him Amen unto the glory of God by us. It means this: that as we come to God through faith in Jesus Christ, God will certainly hear us and fulfill His promises to us. Every promise, from the beginning to the end of Scripture, all the different kinds of promises in the Bible, all of them found their Yea and Amen, their Yes, their fulfillment, in Jesus Christ.

And that is because of the suffering and the death of Jesus Christ. On the cross, Jesus said to God, ""Father, judge me. Curse me. And bless these, my people."" Through His suffering and death, He secured us, He sealed us as the people of God. He is the One who brings all the promises and blessings of God to us. And so we can be confident in prayer.

Today, Jesus lives in the presence of God, making intercession for us, praying to God for us, that God will bless His elect people because Christ has paid for their sin and removed the curse from them. And that, too, is why we should pray in Jesus' name.

Do you have confidence in prayer? Can you be certain that God will answer your prayer? As you come, through faith in Jesus Christ, as you seek first the honor and the glory of God, as you make your petitions according to the pattern of the Lord's Prayer, God will answer your prayers.

How glad we can be that God gives us here, in the darkness of this life, this access, through prayer, to Himself. May we, the people of God, be a praying people.

Let us pray.

Lord, thanks for the gift of prayer and for the instruction that Jesus gave us on prayer. Help us in this important area of our life, to draw near to Thee. For Jesus' sake we ask, Amen.