

## A Prayer That Is Effectual and Avails Much #2

Daniel 9:1-19

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Some might think that the sermon is the highlight of worship. Others might think that singing is the highlight of worship. They are both necessary parts of worship. But how many think that the public prayer is the highlight of worship and can hardly wait to hear and join in the prayers offered to God through Christ? Public prayer in worship is not a time to tune out or to doze off. Listen to the very helpful instruction found in *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* (one of our Subordinate Standards) as to the importance of public prayer before the sermon:

After reading of the word, (and singing of the psalm,) the minister who is to preach, is to endeavour to get his own and his hearers hearts to be rightly affected with their sins, that they may all mourn in sense thereof before the Lord, and hunger and thirst after the grace of God in Jesus Christ, by proceeding to a more full confession of sin, with shame and holy confusion of face, and to call upon the Lord . . .

Public prayer and private prayer should express not only our praise of God's greatness and confession of our sin, but as we see in the words of the Directory (and shall see from Daniel's prayer), our prayers should express the "shame" that we sense over our sin against the Lord. Daniel's prayer (as a model for us to follow) expresses that shame. The effectual prayer of Daniel teaches just the opposite of what our corrupt culture teaches us. Popular culture and almost all media promote the idea that we are to exalt ourselves, please ourselves, and most highly esteem ourselves; whereas, Daniel's prayer teaches us to pour shame upon ourselves while exalting, pleasing, and most highly esteeming our holy and sovereign God.

Last Lord's Day we considered two parts of Daniel's prayer: (1) Daniel Exalted God; and (2) Daniel Confessed Sin. This Lord's Day we move to the next two parts of his prayer: (3) Daniel Was Ashamed of Sin; and (4) Daniel Hoped in God's Mercy.

### III. Daniel Was Ashamed of Sin (Daniel 9:7-8).

A. The occasion for Daniel's prayer was that in studying God's Word (particularly the prophecy found in Jeremiah 25:12) he discerned that the 70 year desolation of Jerusalem and the temple was soon to come to an end. As he meditates on the promised restoration of God's people back to their land, he is humbled before the Lord and pleads with Him to bring to pass what He has promised (that's faith—praying according to God's character and promise, not presumption—praying according to our whims and impulses).

1. In his prayer, Daniel moved to the subject of Israel's shame over their sin (or confusion of face). The Hebrew words translated confusion or shame of face speak of the way that our transgressions against our holy and merciful God and His commandments should affect us: our shame should make us blush (as it did Ezra in Ezra 9:6) for the way we have sinfully treated our great and glorious God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), who has created us, saved us, and provided for us—even in the midst of great trials we have faced and even when we have fallen away from Him. He has not been unfaithful to us, but we have been unfaithful to Him.

2. Biblical shame is our sense of disgrace over the violation of God's good and holy Law. Biblical shame is an aspect of our repentance for sin. Holy shame directs our attention to the fact that it is God's honor, God's holiness, and God's grace that we have offended by our sin (Psalm 51:4). If we are not ashamed of our sin (first and foremost) as sin against God, our confession of sin will be mere words—a mouth without a heart.

3. People are not ashamed of sin because rebellion against parents, sexual immorality, pornography, blasphemy, Sabbath-breaking, and abortion are protected by law and so commonplace on TV, in movies, in novels, in magazines, and on the news. When there is no shame for sin, there will certainly be little concern about sin in our lives, family, church, or nation.

4. So many churches avoid altogether any idea of shame for sin committed against God. That

is just too negative to communicate to people.

a. It is now in this “enlightened” age believed that preaching must be positive and entertaining; otherwise people will not continue to come back to fill the auditorium and to pay for the weekly pep-talk from the pulpit. It is only love that is emphasized. And yet if we are not ashamed of our sin, why should we flee to God’s mercy in Jesus Christ?

b. People may admit they have sinned (and remain in their sin), but it is true shame that gives legs to our confession and sends us to Christ (Psalm 51:17).

B. Daniel now gives in his prayer the reason for this shame of face: “because” in Daniel 9:7; and “because” in Daniel 9:8 (Psalm 38:4).

1. It is God’s holiness reflected in His holy commandments that reveals our sin and need for our shame. If we do not begin in prayer by exalting the greatness, the glory, the holiness, and mercy of God, there will be no shame for sinning against Him. When we truly understand the glory and greatness of our Father’s holiness and His mercy to us in Christ Jesus, we will be ashamed of having shown Him dishonor and scorn.

2. When we ask our children aren’t they ashamed for how they have disobeyed or rebelled, we often are only focusing upon their shame against themselves. And though that may be true, we need to focus on the greater shame—the shame of their disobedience and rebellion against God.

3. What do we do to avoid godly shame in our lives over sin? We make excuses for our sin. We blame others for our sin. We compare our sin with the sin of others. We procrastinate in mortifying our sin. We become comfortable with our sins the longer we have no shame over our sins. We refuse to forsake our sin so that we might maintain personal relationships that lead us away from Jesus, and so that we might continue to entertain and indulge those sinful desires.

4. Shame before God for our sin, however, is not an end in itself. We are not ashamed for our sin in order that we might live in that shame for sin. Shame for sin must always be with a view to the hope, mercy, and forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ, which takes us to the next important part of Daniel’s prayer.

#### **IV. Daniel Hoped in God’s Mercy (Daniel 9:9).**

A. In spite of the rebellion of God’s people against the Lord and the shame before God that was theirs for having done so, “to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses” (not just mercy and forgiveness in the singular, but “mercies and forgivenesses” in the plural). Though our sins reach to the clouds, His mercy reaches into heaven (to the very throne of God’s grace, Psalm 103:10-11).

1. It is not unloving or cruel to preach about shame for sin, IF it points us to the infinite mercy and forgiveness of the Lord in Jesus Christ.

2. Preaching shame without mercy and forgiveness is to send one drowning in hopelessness and despair (the covenant of works). However, preaching shame with mercy and forgiveness is to send one to an endless supply of hope and joy in Jesus Christ (covenant of grace). Godly shame sends you to Christ—worldly shame sends you away from Christ. Always remember, the end of holy shame before God is a certain hope in the mercy and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. We are not ashamed for shame’s sake, but for mercy’s sake.

B. Forgiveness is the promise of God to remove and bury the guilt and punishment of sin that separates the sinner from Himself.

1. God blots out our sin—Isaiah 43:25.

2. He casts our sins into the depths of the sea—Micah 7:18-19.

3. The Lord forgives not part of our sins, not most of our sins, not only the sins we remember to specifically confess, but “all” our sins without exception—Colossians 2:13.

4. He remembers our sins against us no more—Hebrews 8:12.

5. This unfathomable forgiveness of God is grounded in the redemptive love and perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

6. This free gift of God’s forgiveness of sin is received through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone (not by our works of righteousness in obedience to God). Our shame for sin is no payment for our sin. It sends us to Christ who alone can show us mercy and forgive sin—not a partial payment, but a full payment. “It is finished” (John 19:30—*tetelestai* was a commercial term that meant, “Paid in full”). If paid in full, nothing more can be added to it.

7. **God as Judge** legally forgives all our sin (past, present, and future) when we trust alone in Christ alone (justification).

8. **God as Father** daily forgives us of our sin as we see in Matthew 6: “Our Father which art in heaven”—“forgive us our debts”—not as our Judge, but as our reconciled Father (sanctification).

9. God’s forgiveness of all sin in the believer is not being lenient or tolerant of sin. It is actually the display of God’s absolute justice on the one hand and His infinite love on the other hand. We deserve God’s everlasting judgment and condemnation, but Jesus bore the wrath and condemnation of God for His people chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began. God’s justice was absolutely satisfied, and not compromised. Do you know how much of God’s condemning wrath is now owed to you who have been forgiven by God? Zero! Not an ounce! Not a speck! That is God’s infinite love to you who believe.

10. God’s forgiveness sets us free from sin (the guilt, condemnation, and power of sin). God’s forgiveness does not set us free to live in unrepentant sin. When you can live in unrepentant sin—When sin does not bring you to shame—When sin does not drive you to Jesus Christ, you must seriously examine yourself to see whether you truly understand what it means to be forgiven of sin. You have either forgotten that you were purged from all those sins (2 Peter 1:9), or you have never been forgiven at all. The forgiven Christian knows he/she cannot live in unrepentant sin.

### C. Some Final Thoughts.

1. Your qualification to come to Christ is that you know you are a sinner in need of a Savior. Period! Bring your sin to Him and bring the shame for your sin with you (like the publican that beat his chest, crying out, “God be merciful to me a sinner” Luke 18:13).

2. It is only through a biblical sense of shame for our sin committed against such a righteous yet such a merciful God and Savior that we come to know with a joy unspeakable, the glories of God’s undeserved love shown to such undeserving sinners. Biblical shame leads to hope and joy, not to despair and hopelessness.

3. We can’t force ourselves or others to be ashamed of sin. Godly shame is a work of God’s Spirit. But we can sincerely go before the Lord and cry out to Him to graciously grant to us a shame and blushing over our sin committed against Him.

4. As we grow in understanding the greatness, glory, holiness, love, and mercy of God in Christ Jesus, we will also grow in our shame in sinning against such a holy and loving God.

5. As we behold what Jesus suffered in being mocked, cursed, spat upon, beaten to bloody pulp, and crowned with thorns, and in suffering on the cross such anguish in body and especially in His soul in order to pay in full our debt of sin and its eternal condemnation in hell, the weight and shame of our sin that sent our blessed Lord Jesus to that cross will have its effect in our hearts.

6. His nail-scarred hands and feet will forever remind us why He suffered. He suffered in order to take upon Himself the just punishment of His Father and to pay the everlasting debt which we as sinners chosen in love before the foundation of the world owed to an absolutely holy God for having broken His law.

7. Jesus did not die for His shame. In love He voluntarily took my shame and guilt of sin upon Himself, calling my shame and guilt of sin His shame and guilt of sin. It is the holiness, mercy, and love of our Savior that bring upon us the shame for our sin. Praise God for the shame of our sin that sends us to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

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