

Ps. 17 (LD 45, Q117) “Praying from the Heart”

For the Children: It's just as well we can't tell what people are really thinking. Imagine if someone asked you to lend them some money. You are about to give them some, when you read their mind. They are thinking, "I really hate this person, but I need the money"; or, "This person is so stupid, they don't even know that I'm just taking advantage of them – I have the money, but why use mine when I can cheat them?!" Well, God knows all our thoughts and reasons. That is why we must be sincere and trusting when we pray to Him asking for help. We must sincerely trust in what the Bible says about God, His Person, His works and His promises. Otherwise we are secretly insulting Him as we pray – but it is no secret to Him. **Questions:** What does it mean to pray "sincerely"? Can we ever pray with perfect sincerity and trust in this life? If not, then how can we expect that God will hear and answer our prayers with kindness and mercy?

Introduction:

First Point: Why and What the Psalmist Prays

- 1) Under Attack: David was assailed by exceptionally wicked and violent men (vss. 4,7,9-14). They were proud and unfeeling. They were worldly. They were after him like a hunter or a ravenous lion. David's experience of hostility pointed to the persecution of Christ. In Him, we also experience hostility from Satan and his allies.
- 2) Seeking Help: David sought the Lord's protection and deliverance– as did Christ, and as should we. Part of that prayer includes a plea for the Lord to bring the enemy low (v. 13). The "imprecatory Psalms" are ultimately a plea for Christ to defeat all His enemies and share His victory with His people.

Second Point: The Sincerity of the Psalmist's Approach to God

- 1) Trust that God Will Hear: Seeking an Audience: When you see the danger you are in, there is all the more reason to seek God's help in prayer. But prayer is like an audience with a great king: the Lord must be approached properly – with humility and sincerity, since God sees the heart. One of the first aspects of that approach is that there is a sincere trust in our hearts that God will grant us an audience. That implies a sincere belief in His existence, sovereignty, omnipresence and omniscience.
- 2) Sincerity Reflected in Life: That sincerity and trust will mark the believer's life. His life will be marked by the love and fear of God. David seeks to approach God without deceit, violence or worldliness; rather, sincerity, obedience and satisfaction in the Lord. He is willing for the Lord to test/try him in this. This is not a claim of perfection or works-righteousness, but of sincerity.

Third Point: His Sincere Trust in the Lord

- 1) Trust that God Will Answer: Sincerity and trust are not only needed in approaching God, but also with respect to our particular requests. We sincerely trust that God will answer favourably – according to His will (v. 6). This, too, involves sincere belief in God's existence and sovereignty.
- 2) A Just and Gracious Answer: It also involves a sincere trust in other attributes of God – that He will answer justly because He is just/righteous (vss. 2,15); and that He will answer graciously because He is gracious. Note the reference to His lovingkindness as our Saviour (v. 7). This requires faith in Christ, because our justification is grounded in the meeting of justice and mercy in Christ, imputing His righteousness to us. On this basis alone, God will grant us an audience, accept our prayers and answer us favourably.
- 3) Sincere Trust in God's Person and Works: In all of this, both sincerity and trust are required. If we lack that, we are actually rejecting God's Persona and works. Whatever other reasons may lead someone to pray, this rejection is an insult against the Lord. We cannot expect such prayers to receive a favourable answer. For then we are not actually praying, in faith, to "No other than the One true God, revealed in His Word." Insincerity results in false prayers to a false idol-god of one's own imagination.

Conclusion: