

## *An Overview of Prayer:*

### 1. The Importance of prayer:

- a. We are commanded to pray
  - i. **1 Thessalonians 5:17** pray without ceasing,
- b. The bible is filled with the prayers of the saints
- c. Jesus practiced a life devoted to prayer
- d. Jesus taught the Disciples to pray
- e. Prayer is the desire of the New life
- f. Prayer is a glorious and divine privilege
- g. Prayer is of supreme importance in the life of the Christian because of all it can accomplish in supplying every need.
- h. Prayer is how the gospel is advanced
- i. Prayer is how the enemy is defeated
  - i. **Ephesians 6:18-19** praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, (19) and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,

### 2. THE REALITY OF PRAYER:

- a. Prayer is difficult. Like anything of great value, prayer takes great effort, tremendous care, and Spirit-filled discipline.

- i. This is one reason why we need to sit at the feet of our Lord and implore as the disciples did:  
“Teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).
  - b. Prayer is striving:
    - i. **Romans 15:30** I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,
  - c. Our flesh hates to pray:
    - i. **Matthew 26:40-41** And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour?  
(41) Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”
  - d. Satan opposes Prayer:
    - i. **Matthew 4:1-2** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (2) And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.
3. The world hurts because of a lack of prayer
- a. **Mark 9:28-29** And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” (29) And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

#### 4. PRAYER: THE BAROMETER OF THEOLOGICAL CONVICTION

- a. When we pray, we convey our entire theological system. Our theology is never so clearly displayed before our own eyes and before the world as in our prayers.
  - i. Praying forces us to speak our doctrines, convictions, and theological assumptions.
    - 1. When we speak to God we are explicitly revealing who we believe he is, who we believe we are, what his disposition toward us is, and why he has that disposition.
    - 2. Consequently, when we don't pray we reveal much about our beliefs and doctrine as well.
- b. Just consider what we learn about the apostle Paul's priorities and character from his prayer requests found all throughout Scripture.

- i. **2 Thessalonians 3:1-2** Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, (2) and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.

1. Paul's primary concerns were eternal matters and the kingdom of God.

## 5. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR PRAYER

- a. Christians are called to pray. Prayer raises a host of theological issues.
  - i. What are we trying to do in prayer?
  - ii. Are we trying to convince God to do what he otherwise would not do?
  - iii. Are we trying to negotiate with God—even to manipulate him?
  - iv. Are we trying to inform God of what he does not know?
- b. The primary theological foundation for prayer is the fact that there is one true and living God:

- i. **Isaiah 44:6-8** Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. (7) Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. (8) Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.”
- c. Along with affirming what prayer is—communion with God—we should note what prayer is not.
  - i. First, prayer is not a matter of creative self-expression. In John 4, Jesus, speaking to the woman at the well, said that those who worship the Father must do so “in spirit and truth” (v. 23)—which means we worship God according to who he is and the “truth” he has revealed in his Word.

- ii. Second, prayer is not an act of therapy. Some scholars of psychology of religion suggest that people pray because prayer produces serenity and alleviates anxiety and fear. Prayer certainly does often accomplish these things, but prayer also sometimes disrupts our tranquility. God uses prayer to radically reorient our hearts, which can be disturbing. Prayer can sometimes be “anti-therapy”
  - 1. This is because prayer is not first and foremost about us, but about the glory of God.
- iii. Third, prayer is not an act of manipulation or persuasion.
  - 1. We are not simply trying to find the right formula or secret code to force God to answer our prayer as we want it to be
  - 2. Nor are we trying to persuade or bargain with God as if he were one of his creations
  - 3. Prayer is about God’s will being done—not our own.

4. We must come to God and learn to pray “your will be done” just as Jesus did. If God’s will is truly perfect, then why would we want to persuade him to do something that is less than perfect
  - a. It is true that Scripture encourages us to bring our deepest concerns, anxieties, and needs before God—the Bible, in fact, is full of illustrations portraying as much—but we must not bring our needs to God thinking that we do so to break down a wall of hostility or complacency. We must bring our needs before God humbly, willing to submit to his perfect plan.
- iv. Fourth, prayer is not a news report to the Creator. God knows everything perfectly. This is what Christians mean by saying we worship God

1. We pray, confident of God's full knowledge but needing to remind ourselves of all our concerns in order to confess our sins, admit our dependence, layout our hearts, and pray for others. We do not pray to give God our daily briefing, but to bring everything that concerns us before the one who made us.
- v. Finally, prayer is not an act of bargaining. We have all heard prayers that sound like a negotiation meeting: "Lord, I will work on this sin if you will help me with this blessing. Also, I will try to do this for you, if you promise to do that for me."
  1. This type of prayer reveals huge theological misunderstandings. Prayer does not inform God of what he does not know, nor does it get him to do what he is reluctant to do. Prayer does not change God; it changes us