

What about Praying for Wealth?
Proverbs 30:7-9; 1 Timothy 6:17-19
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The Disciples of Christ asked Him to teach them how to pray (in Luke 11:1). Even though they had been raised in Jewish families and attended Jewish synagogues where prayers were constantly offered up to God, they wanted some form or pattern of prayer that would guide them as they approached the one true living God in prayer.

Prayer is the lifting of our hearts and lips to the Triune God (through our only mediator Jesus Christ) in praise of who He is, in thankfulness for all that we have received from Him, and in request from Him of various lawful needs and desires—all which is done to the glory of God. There are many different prayers found in the Scriptures—all of which help guide us in offering to the Lord acceptable worship. The prayer that we find in Proverbs 30:7-9 is one upon which we would do well to meditate and to reflect often. It addresses our greatest temptations and sins in this world which we must be ever vigilant and alert that we be not overcome by them.

Let us consider together this Lord's Day the following main points from our text in Proverbs 30:7-9: (1) The Fervency of Faith in Prayer (Proverbs 30:7); (2) The Requests Made in Prayer (Proverbs 30:8); (3) The Reasons for the Requests Made in Prayer (Proverbs 30:9).

I. The Fervency of Faith in Prayer (Proverbs 30:7).

A. This prayer is attributed to one, Agur, who is mentioned only here in Proverbs 30:1. Some of the Jewish Rabbis and early Church Fathers thought this Agur to be a figurative reference to Solomon. Others have understood Agur to have been a real historical prophet, whose inspired words were included along with those of Solomon. This second explanation would seem more likely to be the case, in as much as Agur is also called "the son of Jakeh." If we understand Agur to be Solomon, then Jakeh must be David, Solomon's father. This is not very likely. Unless we have some very good reason for departing from the natural understanding of a passage, we should adhere to it (lest we become carried away with fanciful interpretations the Spirit of God never intended).

B. We see the fervency of faith in Agur's prayer, for he "requires" (literally, "asks") and prays that God will not withhold two requests from him.

1. This is not a prayer wherein Agur demands that God serve him, as if he (Agur) were the master and God were his celestial genie performing two wishes for him. Such blasphemy may be heard on the radio or on the TV by false ministers who act as though they could put God in some box and require Him to act according to their self-centered whims. Dear ones, that is not faith, but presumption. That is not humility, but pride. Such prayers are not uttered for the glory of God, but for the selfish desires of man. God hates all such prayers and even if God should give what is demanded, it is given not as a blessing but as a judgment. In Numbers 11:4, Israel demanded that God give them meat to eat for they were sick of the manna. God gave them what they wanted, but along with the quail God sent a plague that consumed them even as they chewed the quail with their teeth. Thus, dear ones, never demand from God what you want as if He existed simply to serve us, lest He give you what you want in His wrath and anger.

2. Now in your desire to avoid all presumptuous demands, do not go to the other extreme wherein you fear even asking God to meet your needs and to fulfill all your lawful desires in His good time. Agur confidently brings his two requests to the Lord because he knows they are according to God's revealed will (1 John 5:14).

a. Your heavenly Father delights in the prayers of His children. He wants you to come to Him to praise Him, to thank Him, and, yes, to bring your lawful requests unto Him—not because God must be informed of your needs (as if He were ignorant of them), but because He delights to meet your needs through His appointed means of grace, i.e. through prayer (Matthew 7:11; Psalm 84:11; James 4:2).

b. Dear ones, you must not be afraid to approach your Heavenly Father (through Christ your mediator) with requests befitting an omnipotent God and Sovereign King. If God delighted to take Gideon's 300 and defeat 135,000 Midianites, are you afraid to pray that God will remove all sins and errors that divide Christians, that He will destroy all false religion, that He will grant us a multitude of faithful ministers, elders, and deacons, that He will grant to us children who are faithful witnesses for Christ, that He will overcome the greatest besetting sins in our lives, and that He will give us sufficient funds as families that we will not only be able to provide for ourselves, but will even have enough to help others who are in need and to promote the Kingdom of Christ? You are even authorized by Christ to be steadfast and constant in your lawful requests to God (Luke 18:1). You are even to persevere in your lawful requests to God and to give Him no rest (Isaiah 62:7). Never forget the persevering faith and prayer of the Canaanite woman whose daughter was afflicted by an unclean spirit and who would not be shaken by the Lord's silence or the Lord's words to her (Matthew 15:21-28). This is the fervent faith of Agur that is manifested in his request that the Lord not withhold from him what he asked.

C. There is one more aspect of Agur's fervent faith which is manifested in his prayer: He prays with a view to his own death ("Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die"). Prayer unto God that remembers and accounts that our days are numbered, that our years are like a dream in the night, or like a vapor of mist that is here today and gone tomorrow—this is a prayer that will be fervent in faith. For it looks away from perishable man to the one true living God who is from everlasting to everlasting and to a Savior who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

1. I use to think I was nearly invincible when I was young. I was afraid to think of my death. The older I grow, however, the more I realize that reflection upon my own death is not some morbid exercise, but a glorious means of sanctification in my life. It gives me a sense of urgency in prayer and directs me to that which is truly important: glorifying God and serving Jesus Christ.

2. How fervent would your prayers be if you knew you had only one day left upon this earth? Would you find time to spend in prayer if you knew you had 24 hours to live? Dear ones, death is an appointment for which none of us will be late. It is an appointment that none of us can miss. Our certain appointment with death should ever make us humble and fervent before the Lord in prayer. There are no second chances after death. Like Agur, may our certain appointment with death give to us a sobriety and fervency in the prayers which we offer to the Lord.

II. The Requests Made in Prayer (Proverbs 30:8).

A. A request for sufficient grace to overcome sin ("Remove far from me vanity and lies" Proverbs 30:8).

1. Agur prays (literally), "Pluck out, tear out, or remove far from me vanity and lies."

a. Dear ones, the sins in your life cannot be dealt with as if they were guests whom you've invited for tea. They must be treated as hostile enemies who have invaded your mind, desires, and will, and they will destroy you if they are not violently removed far from you. If you have developed a comfortable attitude toward your sins (like the Israelites who did not drive all the Canaanites out of the land of promise as they were told to do by the Lord), your sins will gradually and eventually overcome you (as did the Canaanites with Israel). Is that not why we find such violent language used in Scripture when speaking of our duty toward our own sins? We are told to crucify them, to mortify them, to pluck them out as if we were plucking out one of our own eyes, or to cut them off as if we were cutting off one of our own hands or feet. Sin will not be

satisfied with occupying one small little closet in the house. It will not be satisfied until it has occupied and destroyed every room in the house. Do you view sin in your life as being such an enemy? Until you view sin as such a destructive enemy in your life, you will not use the necessary means to pluck it out, or to remove it far from you. You will rather play with it like a child playing with matches. But eventually, dear ones, you will be burned to such a degree that the scars from that burn will be difficult to remove from your life. This first request mirrors that of the Lord, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Let us grow in our hatred not only for the sin itself, but even for the temptations, the enticements, and the solicitations to commit sin.

b. The removing of sin far from you cannot be accomplished in your own mere strength, for not one of you is stronger than the sin in your life. And even if one should put away some habit into which he has fallen without calling upon the Lord, his sin simply changes forms and manifests itself inwardly or outwardly by boasting in what he has accomplished. Dear ones, note that Agur pleads with God to remove his sin far from him. God alone through our Savior, Jesus Christ, can remove sin far from you who trust Him. Only Jesus Christ fulfilled all the righteous demands of the Law which His elect have broken, and only Christ died to remove far from you the guilt and the power of sin in your life (Psalm 103:12). Only the Lord Jesus Christ can bring you to heaven where all your former temptations, sins, and spiritual struggles will forever pass away (Revelation 21:4). Although the Lord grants you faith to lay hold of Christ and His promises and grants you repentance to hate your sin and to endeavor new obedience, it is God alone who removes sin far from you. You can take NO credit or glory for this in the least.

2. That which Agur asks to be removed far away or to be cut off from him are vanity and lies.

a. Vanity means emptiness. For vanity promises you pleasure, fun, excitement, being cool, or looked up to by your peers, but in the end vanity is empty, hollow, futile, and meaningless. Oh, dear ones, the devil is so good at knowing your weaknesses and telling you exactly what you want to hear so as to set a trap of vanity for you. You may be weak in the area of lust, and vanity lures you away from communion with Christ and away from those means of grace which the Lord has set in your life to keep you pure, such as godly parents, a loving spouse, or Christian friends, and puts you near places where your lusts may be satisfied. Or you may be weak in the area of wanting the praise and acceptance of others, so vanity sets a trap for you in which you hear praise and receive acceptance from the ungodly who applaud you for doing as they do. Whatever your besetting sin, vanity will provide the opportunities and occasions for you to fulfill the lusts of your flesh. Only Jesus Christ can fill the emptiness in your life and mine, for He created us and died to bring life and to bring it more abundantly. It is Christ alone that gives meaning to life. He is your reason for living (Philippians 1:21). The devil promises satisfaction and fulfillment, but delivers vanity and everlasting death. Christ promises satisfaction and fulfillment, and delivers peace, joy, forgiveness, righteousness, and everlasting life.

b. Agur prays that God would remove far from him lies as well. Lies will only deceive and delude those who tell them and those who receive them. You should hate all lies because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Dear ones, to the degree that you are honest and transparent before God to that degree you will be honest and transparent before others. You lie and deceive others because you seek to hide from God what He already knows with His all-piercing eye. Lies are sins that make it easy to continue in any other sin. We lie to ourselves that our sin is not so bad, that no one will ever know, and that God will forgive us anyway, so why not enjoy the sin for now. We lie to ourselves that the sin will not hurt us or our loved ones, or that we will be able to stop the sin before it gets too bad. We receive lies when we accept what is false as if it were true. Whatever is contrary to God's Word is a lie, and Satan is the father of lies. Remember, dear ones, that lies are such an abomination to our holy God that He lists liars as those who shall have their part in the lake of fire (Revelation 21:7-8). Lies begin in our minds with the same temptation which Satan brought to Eve, "Hath God really said." Lies attack the very authority of God and treat Him as if He did not exist. Agur,

therefore, prays that all such falsehood might be cut out of him and so should we.

B. A request for sufficient means to live while on this earth (“Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me” Proverbs 30:8).

1. Agur now moves from a plea for sufficient spiritual grace to a request for sufficient material means. Note the order of these requests for that which is most important is grace to trust Christ, grace to repent of sin, grace to love God, and grace to obey Him. But it is not sinful, dear ones, to ask the Lord to meet the physical and material needs we have in this life.

2. Note carefully the parameters laid out in Agur’s prayer: “give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.” Agur prays that the Lord would keep him from one extreme or the other: from poverty or from riches. Perhaps it is difficult for us to clearly understand what Agur means by poverty or riches.

a. For some may think of poverty as being unable to buy what they desire rather than what they need. For example, your television goes out and you cannot immediately afford to buy a new one to replace the old one—that is not poverty. Poverty is not being unable to purchase the comforts of life, but rather being unable to purchase the necessities of life (like food, clothing, and shelter). Agur prays that God would in His providence mercifully keep him from falling into such a state of poverty in which he and his family would go hungry, be without a safe place to lay their heads, or suffer for lack of clothing.

b. How you ought also to look at the other extreme which Agur prays that God will not give him: riches. Here it would seem (in light of what Agur says in Proverbs 20:9) that being rich means having the means to acquire essentially whatever you want in this life.

c. Now there is nothing sinful (in itself) with poverty or riches. In the parable of Christ, Lazarus was a beggar who could not live without the charity of others, and yet he was righteous. Job (on the other hand) was one of the wealthiest men in the east, and yet He was righteous. What is wrong with either of these extremes from Agur’s wise vantage point are certain temptations that would likely accompany either poverty or riches. And because Agur wants to be cut off from sin and its temptation, he also prays that God would give him neither poverty nor riches.

d. It is far more likely that you would pray that God not give you poverty, but far less likely that you would pray that God not give you riches. Why? Because by nature we do not like to be without anything that we want. The sinful lusts and desires of our eyes are never satisfied. However, God warns us in Scripture that we make it not our aim in life to seek after riches as if that were our chief end (Proverbs 23:4-5). When our will is God’s will and when our desires are God’s desires, there will be no problem here. When we can sincerely and humbly pray, “Not my will but Thine be done”, no matter what that may mean (whether prosperity or poverty, whether good health or chronic illness, whether joy or sorrow), riches will not be a problem to us. How much of your day is spent in craving more and more of what you do not have in this world? Agur isn’t praying to become rich. However, if in God’s providence, God blesses him with riches, he no doubt will seek to use it for God’s glory.

e. Agur is praying to have enough for himself and his family (and enough to promote the kingdom of God and to help those who are in need, 1 Corinthians 9:14; Ephesians 4:28). Agur would not discourage anyone from seeking to find a good paying job or from making a profit off of money that is invested. But the chief goal of the righteous should not be to become rich, but to become faithful with whatever God chooses to bless him with. Why do you really want to prosper financially? Do you need to fall upon your face and confess before the Lord your covetousness? The goal of the righteous should be contentment in all situations and circumstances (whether in gain or in loss to find contentment in Christ). “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). If asked if you were rich, none of you would likely view yourself as being in that category. But I can guarantee you that compared to the vast multitudes throughout the world who are living in abject poverty, you are rich. You have not only your day to day needs

met, but you enjoy so many of the comforts of this life as well. Try to convince those who go to bed hungry, who have little more than a hut in which to live, who have no shoes upon their feet that you are not rich who have fridges with more than enough food in them, who have closets with clothes and shoes in them, who live in houses that keep you warm, and drive cars from one place to another, and they would laugh at you with unbelief.

III. The Reasons for the Request Made in Prayer (Proverbs 30:9).

A. Why does Agur not pray for riches? Because he does not want to become so self-sufficient that he forgets God. Fullness so often breeds forgetfulness, dear ones. Excessive sufficiency so often breeds complacency. He does not want to fall in love with his riches and make them his god and declare, “Who is the Lord?” That is why Paul gives the following warning to those who are blessed with an abundance of riches in 1 Timothy 6:17-19 (which to varying degrees may include us all).

B. Why does Agur not pray for poverty? Because he does not want to dishonor God and discredit his profession of faith in the Lord by stealing—even stealing due to hunger. He does not say because he wants to avoid being punished by the civil magistrate (although I am sure he did not want that), but because to do so would cause the name of the Lord to stink in the nostrils of the ungodly who would scorn the God whom he loves with his whole being. Agur says in effect, “I don’t even want to be tempted to forget the Lord my God nor treat the Lord my God with such contempt.”

Is that, dear ones, the motive that moves you to pray for the material blessings in this life? Let me not be put into a situation where by my poverty or riches I would bring disgrace to the God of my salvation. That is the humble plea in prayer of one who wants his/her Christian life to bring glory supremely to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian does not first and foremost care about his/her own dreams, his/her own goals, his/her own aspirations, but cares chiefly for God’s honor, God’s name, and God’s glory. That, dear ones, is what should be your chief end in prayer as well as your chief end in life.

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