

LET US PRAY AS JESUS DID

We have learned that we are to pray often: in fact, the Lord, through the pen of Isaiah (**Isaiah 56:7**), said that the place where He dwells — His house — is to be called a “house of prayer.” Prayer is the principal characteristic of His house. Jesus Himself thought this to be so important that He cited the words of Isaiah when he rid the temple of the merchants, who had ended up occupying it:

Matthew 21:12-13 *And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. ¹³And He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’; but you are making it a robbers’ den.” [NASB]*

In another well-known passage, Paul instructed the Thessalonians to pray always:

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 *Pray without ceasing. ¹⁸In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. [KJV]*

Prayer is not only our refuge when we have a problem. Prayer is the will of God for us: that’s why we pray; we pray in order to do His will.

Furthermore,

Deuteronomy 5:11 *You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. [NRSV]*

Thus, in a world, which often violates God’s will by disrespectfully taking His name in vain in careless verbal exchanges; when we pray, we do honor His name.

And we are confident that our prayers are not a waste of time nor an idle running-at-the-mouth, because we are assured that God pays attention to our prayers:

1 Peter 3:12 *“for the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and his ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” [NASB]*

We should not fret that we might not be among the righteous, whose prayers the Lord attends to: such fear is nothing but blasphemy. As believers in the Lamb of God, Who took away our sins, we bear the righteousness of Christ:

Romans 3:21-22a *But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been mani-*

fested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ^{22a}even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; ... [NASB]

Furthermore, we have the strongest possible words from Jesus Himself, that God will grant our requests:

Matthew 21:21-22 *And Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it will happen. ²²And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” [NASB]*

Here, the attentive ones amongst us may notice a condition in the words of Jesus: “believing.”

Jesus, in effect, is asking us to watch our heart, watch what we believe and, especially, Whom we do believe, when we pray.

James explains what is meant by “believing”:

James 4:2-3 *You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. [NASB]*

Superficially, it may seem that James’ “motives” and Jesus’ “believing” are different and have nothing to do with each other. We shall see shortly how they are related.

Praying is not pushing a button and receiving what we want. We sort of suspected this all along, because sometimes our prayers “have not been answered.”

Consequently, we may: **1]** be hesitant about what we ask, because we are unsure of our standing before God and then **2]** cover our backs, appending to our request a little formula “if it is Your will” (and the more learned and godly might even say “if it is Thy will”).

Logically, this is not a necessary clause, because God never needs to be warned that, by heeding our prayer, He may do something that He does not particularly like or want. We can be confident that God knows better than that.

Spiritually, however, the little formula spells unbelief.

We may see how this is, by reflecting on just one verse: the famous prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, a prayer He repeated three times.

Mark 14:36 *And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will."* [NASB]

There are two parts of His prayer:

The first request to the Father is direct, crystal-clear and unequivocal: "remove this cup." It is even "logical": since all things are possible for the Father, it stands to reason that He could grant the request.

This is important, because it encourages us to be direct and forthcoming in our prayers to our Lord: we can make our untrammelled wishes and our deepest needs known without limitations and without embarrassment or fear. We should not worry whether our needs are consistent with God's will or not: Jesus clearly was not. For we know the Father had no intention to "remove" the cup from Jesus' future.

The second part ("*not what I will, but what You will*") is not at all our usual little formula (e.g., "Please God heal my little dog, if it is Thy will"); rather it is a much stronger, much deeper and formidable promise and commitment by Jesus' to surrender His will to the will of the Father.

Our little formula ("*if it is Thy will*") indicates we have no clue about His will and do not care much about what it is. It is very much like saying: "Oh, God, do what You will and I'll suffer through."

On the contrary, in the second part, Jesus first acknowledges that there is such a thing as His own will of Son ("*what I will*"): there is a will there, separate from that of the Father. This expressed the full and complete humanity of Jesus Christ.

Next, comes the confirmation of Jesus' divinity. This is not so much the acknowledgment of the obvious: the Father's will must ultimately carry the day; rather it is the spontaneous willingness of Jesus to submit Himself unconditionally and to subordinate His own will to that of the Father.

Jesus not only accepted the inevitable supremacy of the Father's will, but Jesus prayed that the will of the Father be done, over and above His own will.

What Jesus shows us in His prayer is that it is not a matter of suffering the Father's will, as of one saying: "I want this, but if You — God — would rather do that, that's fine, have it Your way. I shall manage."

Rather it is this: "*Here is where I am, Lord, being open and 'transparent' in my poverty of spirit. However, my **belief** in You makes me abide in You, and, abiding in You, I have an overriding desire, an overriding **motive**: my will is to be united with Your will. My will is that Your will be done.*"

Here we see how Jesus' belief and James' motives are joined.

In other words: "My will — far more than that 'this cup be removed' — is that 'Your will be done.'"

It is not: "**if** it is Your will"; rather, "**I want** Your will, because I am one with You."

In the Lord's own words:

John 15:7-10 *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. ⁹Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."* [NASB]

And:

John 10:29-30 *"My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one."* [NASB]

In conclusion, let us:

- Recognize and repent of our sin rather than hide and pretend it does not exist;
- Be confident in His mercy to forgive, thanks to the Cross;
- Pray about everything, big and small;
- Be honest, transparent and sincere in our requests and not afraid that we may be contravening His will — Jesus was not;
- Devote ourselves to denying our own priorities and denying ourselves, so that His will may be done, not because of obligation, but because of love, because we know His will is for the good of our requests and the good of ourselves and of those dear to us.