

## Hindrances to Prayer (I)

**INTRODUCTION** – Prayer is a common belief in almost all religions used to appeal to a higher being than the one who prays. It is an unspoken statement that “the one we pray to is greater than we are” and the pray-er is asking for “divine” intervention. In times of great distress like bombs falling all around us, even the most hardened atheist might go on his knees and pray. Psychologists will say that to those who pray it gives peace. When a person prays, his soul experiences a sense of calm. Those who pray might not believe in the reality of prayer and that God is real, but the mere act of praying brings about a psychological relief. To this end, it is said that the ones who pray have a healthier mind and body than those who do not. Therefore, they might even conclude that it augurs well to pray than not to pray.

But prayer for the child of God must not be likened to a psychological experience that avails a better mind and body; it should be a reality whereby he actually communes with the one living and true God whose ears are inclined to hear all his cries. This is a privilege God gives only to his beloved children. If one is not a child of God, which means he is God’s enemy, God will not hear him. The only prayer God hears from His enemy is his prayer of repentance and when he accepts Christ into his heart as his personal Lord and Saviour. Other than this prayer of salvation, God will not hear the prayers of unbelievers!

God’s people must not view prayer as a futile exercise. It is one of the best avenues of blessing that God has bestowed upon His children as they serve Him on earth. It is for their benefit and not God’s. God already knows what we are going to pray for before we ask. Prayer is to encourage the believer’s heart so that he might know that God is near Him. He will gain much experiential knowledge in his personal walk with God when his prayers are answered. His worship and service life will be enhanced greatly. He will be well protected from the attacks of the evil one because his walk with the Lord is real and close! The attractions and seductions that Satan throws at him will not entice him. He will want to turn his back on the world with all her foolish deceptions and will keep his eyes focussed on Christ, his wonderful and personal Saviour and Lord! To receive these spiritual blessings, the believer needs to make sure that the hindrances to his prayer life are avoided or removed. He does not want his privileged access into the most holy place to be forfeited because of his ignorance of what hinders him from being heard by his heavenly Father.

### I. Do not Regard Iniquity – Psalm 66:18

The psalmist testified of what the LORD had done for his soul (cf verse 16). Verses 17 to 20 contain the testimony. **Psalm 66:17-20 (KJV):** “I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue. **18** If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear *me*: **19** *But* verily God hath heard *me*; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. **20** Blessed *be* God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me.”

**He cried and the LORD heard** – The psalmist experienced what every believer must identify with -  
 - To be heard by God in times of great trial. He gave all praise to the LORD in his time of deliverance. When people experience trials in life and by their own strength get through them, they become proud and take all the glory for their ability. But when the child of God cries to his heavenly Father for help and experiences deliverance, he will be filled with a deep sense of gratitude that it was his heavenly Father who helped and saved. The joy in his soul is unspeakable. He does not want to lose this privilege and joy in his life. He knows he can lose them. So the psalmist shared the hindrance that can take away this open access to the ears of almighty God!

**If he Regards Iniquity, the LORD will not Hear** – If the believer regards, i.e. sees, iniquity in his heart, the LORD will not hear him. The psalmist did not say that he has lost his relationship in

terms of salvation. He said that he has lost his relationship in terms of fellowship – the Lord will not hear him. What a sad state to be in – to be like an unbeliever whose prayers are never heard by God. In the case of the psalmist, it was deliberate because he wanted to hold on to sin. In the case of an unbeliever, he has no choice, for as an enemy of God he is disqualified from being heard. A believer is a child of God chooses not to be heard by God when he chooses to hold on to sin in his heart! If God were to answer his prayers while he held on to his sin, it would mean that God is encouraging him to sin! God would never do that. This is against His very nature as God! God always wants the best for His children. His best is for His children to live a holy life by repenting of his sins and obeying all that God wants him to do in his life. God will answer the prayers of His children when they pray with a heart of holiness and righteousness.

**No Iniquity, the LORD Hears** – Thank God the psalmist testified that God heard his prayer which means that he had repented of his sin in his heart. God heard him and he was very glad and thankful. He blessed God. Note that he deliberately used the term “Lord” in verse 18 and “God” in verses 19 and 20. The name “Lord” refers to the master-servant relationship whereas “God” refers to the Creator and creature relationship and the power of God is emphasized. In the former, the psalmist wanted to highlight the fact that he needed to submit to the will of God and not hold on to sin as this displeased his Lord. In the latter, when he repented of his sin and his prayers were heard by God, he wanted to emphasize God's power because God came to his aid and delivered him from his trial. His faith was strengthened in the process as he declared that God did not turn away his prayer and God's mercy was still upon him. He happily acknowledged that it was because of God's mercy that God came to his aid. This is what prayer will result in for the believer who sees the hand of God; whereas the believer who does not pray will not be able to see the hand of God even though he is delivered from his trial.

## II. Do not Pray against God's Revealed Will – Deuteronomy 3:21-29

Prayer is not to get God to do whatever the believer wants. Prayer is to find out and obey what the will of God is in the believer's life. Moses was reiterating what happened in the desert of Zin in a place called Kadesh. Miriam had passed away and was buried at the same place. Israel complained again when there was no water for them to drink. God told Moses to speak to the rock and water would come forth. Instead, Moses smote the rock twice in anger. This was a public transgression committed by Moses and Aaron in front of God and God's people. For this public transgression, Moses was judged by God and not allowed to bring Israel into the Promised Land. **Numbers 20:7-13**, “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **8** Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. **9** And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. **10** And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? **11** And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts *also*. **12** And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. **13** This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them.” [Emphasis added] This was the revealed will of God to His faithful servant Moses. The judgement was pronounced by the LORD for the serious public transgression of Moses!

In his final words to the people of Israel before the LORD took him home, Moses shared with them that he prayed and asked the LORD to change His mind and let him enter the Promised Land. **Deuteronomy 3:21-28 (KJV)**, “And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, Thine eyes have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto these two kings: so shall the LORD do unto all the kingdoms whither thou passest. **22** Ye shall not fear them: for the LORD your God he shall fight for you. **23** And I besought the LORD at that time, saying, **24** O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God *is there* in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? **25** I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. **26** But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. **27** Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold *it* with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan. **28** But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see.” [Emphasis added] Moses was very honest and perhaps blunt as well in sharing from his heart what the LORD said.

The LORD was wroth, i.e. angry, with Moses for making such a request. What was wrong with Moses’ request? What was seriously wrong was that he was asking God to show partiality towards him and toward sin! That was why the LORD was angry with Moses who should have known better. It is true that Moses was a faithful servant of God for the past 39 years of his ministerial life. He was the greatest servant Israel ever had to look after more than 2 million stiff-necked men, women and children wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. He was such a great servant of God that God contrasted his ministry with that of Christ’s in Hebrews 3 and 4. However, just because Moses had been a faithful servant and was given privileges like speaking to God face to face, which God did not give to any of His servants before or after Moses, does not mean that God should close one eye and lower His standard of holiness. In fact, the standard of holiness for Moses was much higher than for other servants because much has been given and much was expected from him. If God were to let Moses off this time, the message that God was sending to all of us would be that when His servants serve Him faithfully, they will be allowed to get away with sin! This would have been a serious transgression on the part of God with a terrible message across the face of the earth! Instead, the opposite is true. Moses was held to a higher standard compared to the rest of Israel. Israel sinned numerous times and yet God patiently taught them. Moses committed sin once and he was barred from entering the Promised Land!

The message from God was very clear! The LORD told Moses to stop praying this prayer. He would not hear Moses, i.e. did not grant him his request because his prayer was against His revealed will. The revealed will of God is the BIBLE! God was merciful to allow Moses to look across the River Jordan into the Promised Land from the top of Mount Pisgah. Then he was to charge Joshua to be his replacement to finish the task of conquering the Promised Land. Moses must encourage Joshua to make sure he succeeds. He must strengthen Joshua in the faith so that he can be strong in the LORD to lead Israel into the Promised Land and conquer it. Moses submitted to God's will by obediently and happily handing over the final phase of the conquest of the Promised Land to Joshua his successor.

**APPLICATION** – Do not regard sin in our hearts, otherwise our prayers will not be heard by God. If God were to hear our prayers when we hold on to sin in our hearts, then God would be encouraging us to sin. God loves us too much to harm us in this way. He always wants the best for us and His not hearing our prayers when we are in sin is right and is also good for us. This will cause His children to

get rid of sin by repenting and returning to a right relationship with Him in order for our prayers to be heard. The NT teaches the importance of getting rid of sin in the believer's life. **2 Timothy 2:19**, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Believers are privileged to enter into the presence of God almighty through our great High Priest Jesus Christ. Prayer is to commune with our heavenly Father. But we must remember never to pray against the revealed will of God. God will not answer us by "bending" the Rules revealed in His Scriptures just because we serve Him faithfully or we are His children! God is just and holy and will always do what He has revealed in His holy and perfect Word. The more we know the Word of God the more we will pray in accordance with His holy will. God wants to answer all the prayers of His children in the affirmative. Therefore He has given us His holy Bible to guide us in our prayer life. Amen.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. A father prays that he will give \$1 million to the church building fund if God will heal his critically ill son lying in ICU. Will such a prayer be heard by God? What is the right way for him to pray for his son before a merciful God?
2. A member (A) in the church quarrelled with another member (B). A wants to make right his relationship by meeting up with (B). But B refuses to meet and continues to bear a grudge. Will both prayers not be heard by God or only one? Which one will be heard by God?
3. A Christian husband and Christian wife cannot get along at home. They do not read the Bible and pray. They quarrel often. They love the world and focus much on material things and academic success. But they pray with their children every morning before they leave for school and before they go to sleep at night. Will their prayers be heard by God?
4. Would you say that when the prayers of the Christian father or mother are not heard by God, he or she is useless to God, their children and God's people?