

The Content Of Received Prayer, and the Bible

Robin Calamaio – 2008

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Personal sin must be removed if God is to “hear” our prayers. “*Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God ... so that He does not hear*” (Isa 59:2). The only way our sin problem can be resolved - is by the blood of Christ (See, “*The Foundation for Received Prayer and the Bible*” for this discussion). Once sin is removed, one would do well to imitate the disciples request; “*Lord, teach us to pray ...*” (Lk 11:1). That request - if answered - provides hope for being able to place content before God that results in positive activity.

The First Prayer - “*Metanoia*”

So, what is the content of that first prayer that pierces sin’s veil and reaches Him? It is the powerful prayer of “*metanoia*” - repentance. This is a compound Koine Greek word; “*meta*” (preposition) plus “*noia*” (noun) - literally, “*after mind.*” It is an abandonment of some position after a reassessment. Unfortunately, three words are usually welded to “*metanoia*” ... “*from your sins.*” But, “*metanoia*” has nothing to do with “*sins.*” This “*change of mind*” can be about anything - and toward anything. **Context** determines what one’s mind is changed about. I am convinced God’s primary call of repentance is for a “*change of mind*” about one’s personal standing before Him - and the solution for pardon in Christ alone. One’s personal sins are then approached from an entirely different vantage point. I discuss this in detail in, “*The First Received Prayer (The Prayer of Repentance) and the Bible*”. Anyway, there is usually one particular “*sticking point*” keeping an individual from that “*change of mind.*” God knows the linchpin that must be targeted - to break the logjam. He goes right for it ... individual by individual.

Pray ... “*According to His will*”

So, once a changed mind is attained, what’s next? “*If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us*” (1Jn 5:14). It is that simple. Yet, such an enterprise is exceedingly deep, challenging and rewarding. But, how can anyone know His will? For many, this seems dark, mysterious and unknowable - and sometimes it is. But, there are **billions** of things we can ask Him ... and know these requests are in His will.

His Will Declared

The Bible exposes God’s will on a host of issues. For example, Christians are to “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2Pet 3:18). If a Christian asks for assistance in this, do you think God will respond?

Try this. “*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him*” (Ja 1:5). If you ask Him to teach you “*the base of the Christian faith*” ... what do you think might happen? And if you admit you do not really know what “*the base*” is - but you know Who does - hang on! God **delights** imparting wisdom to His own ... on this or any other issue.

Christians are “*created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*” (Eph 2:10). If a Christian asks, “*Father, help me see - and pursue - these opportunities*” ... will He? Or, if one asks for wisdom in walking “*towards those outside the faith*” (Col 4:5), will that request be granted?

Some Prayer Content Rattled Off

- "... if, by the Spirit, the practices of the body you kill, you will live" (Ro 8:13). We can ask God to reveal our sin, and for power to kill the deeds of the flesh. He will oblige.
- Pray "on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority" (1Ti 2:1,2).
- "Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins ... do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Lk 11:3,4 and Mt 6:13). That is four areas!
- Pray for fellow Christians. Epaphras was "always laboring earnestly for (the Colossians) in his prayers, that (they) would stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God" (Col 4:12).
- "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of the lips that give thanks to His Name" (Heb 13:15). Thanking Him for past and present deeds is a good start. But, as we are destined for an incomprehensible "future and a hope" (Jer 29:11) ... ask Him to make you ready for that. He will respond.
- Paul did not consider "the sufferings of this present time ... worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed" (Ro 8:18). But, when troubles do come, we are to seek Him for the purpose(s) behind them (See, "13 Reasons for Calamity, Disease, Accidents, Afflictions, Mayhem, and the Bible"). Paul did get an answer about his "thorn in the flesh" (2Cor 12:7-10) - though probably not initially welcomed. But, upon reflection, he embraced ... God's wisdom.

Prayer: A Learned Activity

Prayer is learned ... **by doing**. "In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil 4:6). Lay out anything, and everything, before Him. He will not be shocked - or blush. Prayer is forged and customized ... and is foundational to the relationship between an individual and God. Even in human relationships, we relate to different individuals ... differently. There are varying degrees of intelligence, interests, aptitudes and maturity. There are also individualized traits for hearing - or expressing - information. God obviously enjoys individualization ... because so much is. Ultimately, each Christian develops his/her own unique communicative life with Him. "When you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words" (Mt 6:7).

Misfires - Prayers That Bite the Dust

At one point, James informed his brethren - "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order that you might spend on your pleasures" (Ja 4:3). I am sure ... that was news to them. Even as a Christian, it is easy to get off track. "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can know it" (Jer 17:9). Fortunately, God can ... and does. And, when necessary, He injects remedies. "If in anything you have a different mind (than His), God will reveal that also to you" (Phil 3:15). Clashing wills ... He does not ignore. "I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart. I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me and how I might reply when I am reproved" (Hab 2:1). Of the two wills ... one must "stand down." Who's will ... will ultimately prevail?

Some Characteristics of Effective Prayer

Heart Purity

A crucial element for productive prayer (including the prayer of repentance) is honesty with Him. I believe this is what is meant by “*pure in heart*” (Mt 5:8). God hates hypocrisy, duplicity and base motives. “*With the kind Thou dost show Thyself kind; with the blameless, Thou dost show Thyself blameless; with the pure Thy dost show Thyself pure; and with the crooked Thou dost show Thyself twisted, shrewd, astute, crooked*” (Ps 18:25,26). He responds ... in kind.

Persistence

Paul “*entreated the Lord three times that (the thorn) might depart*” from him (2Cor 12:8). This was likely **three seasons** of persistent, fervent prayer - maybe even accompanied by fastings ... and prayer partners. Sometimes, we must present our case with great persistence. The most substantive arguments one can muster are to be forwarded - and pursuit must continue until a verdict is rendered. The widow wore down the judge and he finally granted her request ... just to get rid of her (Lk 18:1-8). Sometimes, ... we **do** need an answer.

Occasional Assistance

At other times, “*we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words ... He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God*” (Ro 8:26,27). I think this occurs most often when God Himself is carrying us “*through fire and through water*” (Ps 66:12 and Isa 43:2).

Conclusion

We are to be “*of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of ... prayers*” - **plural!** (1Pet 4:7). I was shocked the first time I read that. Additionally, we are to “*pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus*” (1Thes 5:17,18). God assures us “*the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much*” (Ja 5:16). Must we see the results of all our prayers here and now? Or, can we trust Him with our fervent concerns and look forward to Judgment Day to receive a briefing on His responses and actions? Finally, while this Article has exposed enough viable prayer content to occupy one’s every waking moment in this age, it has still only scratched the surface. And the greatest personal regret I know I will have is ... I did not pray enough.

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Robin Calamaio has a Master of Divinity - Emmanuel School of Religion, 1992.