
Words of Truth

Our Prayers Need To Be According To His Will

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The privilege of prayer is often abused. Many erring Christians think that prayer is as simple as just beginning a prayer to God the Father and ending it in Jesus' name. While those two things are necessary in a correct prayer (Ephesians 5:20), that is not all there is to it. Jesus and John the Baptizer taught their disciples how to pray (Luke 11:1). There is a reason that they taught their followers to pray. Prayer is a learned action.

Face it; churches of Christ have many traditions of men. Such is certainly wrong (Mark 7:1-9, Colossians 2:18-22, and Titus 1:14). The way many pray, including some of us (in the past when we erred), is based on what they hear others say in public prayers. Statements like, "Lord, be with those who are on the highways and byways" or "guide, guard, and protect us" are often heard in public prayers. There were times when such prayers would have been Scriptural. Those times were when God directly guided men like Paul (Acts 16:1-10). Today however, the guidance we receive is not directly from the Holy Spirit like it was then (John 16:13 and I John 2:27), but through studies of the Scriptures (II Timothy 3:16-17).

As we addressed in four articles prior to this one, the way God worked directly on men in a miraculous way has also ceased. Thus, prayers for healing, etc. that we read about in the Scriptures (James 5:14-15) do not apply today (I Corinthians 13:8-13). As God told Paul, His grace is sufficient for us (II Corinthians 12:7-10). Thus, prayers often heard amongst the erring for God to heal people with cancer or such the like are prayers that are offered in ignorance. Most of us have been there.

Since we all know that it is easy to pray about or for things incorrectly, we should also realize the need to keep some things in mind about prayer so that we do not err (cf. II Peter 3:1-2). In this article we are going to remind ourselves of some things we have studied so that we do not let them slip. We are going to start with how our prayers need to be acceptable to God according to His terms.

According To His Will

The Scriptures teach us to ask and it shall be given to you (Matthew 7:7-11). Is that unconditionally true? The answer is, NO! Prayers can be offered incorrectly. Notice: "*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts*" (James 4:3). So, how do you prevent that? You can keep yourself from praying incorrectly by making sure your prayer is in accordance with God's will. Consider these two verses: "*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him*" (I John 5:14-15). Let's take some time looking at how to make sure our prayers are in accordance with God's will.

Making Sure Our Prayers Are In Accordance To His Will

Why didn't Jesus ask the Father to keep Him from dying as the sacrifice for the sins of many? Answer: "...nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt... thy will be done..." (Matthew 26:38-44). There are things in God's will that should keep us from asking for many things. For example, it is God's will that all die (Hebrews 9:27), unless Christ comes first (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). Therefore, prayers to prevent death aren't going to be acceptable. It is also God's will that Christians face trials and tribulation (Matthew 5:10-12, John 16:33, Acts 14:22, Romans 8:17, and II Timothy 3:12). Thus, praying for things such as a life free of troubles is not in accordance with God's will. Things, such as the above two examples, are what we should think about as we pray. There are also certain principles of truth that we should consider.

One point of truth that is often forgotten in prayer is that God is not a respecter of persons (Deuteronomy 10:17, Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11, Galatians 2:6, Ephesians 6:9, Colossians 3:25, and I Peter 1:17). Therefore, God is not going to do something for us that would make Him a respecter of persons. He is not going to protect your job, keep your family safe in the car, keep your airplane safe, etc. Time and chance happens to ALL (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Therefore, God not being a respecter of persons, He is not going to make you or I the exception to "all".

Another point of truth often overlooked in prayer is that God allows everyone to have free will. That means, we can all choose to do good or choose to do evil (Exodus 15:26, Deuteronomy 30:19-20, Joshua 24:14-16, Luke 11:28, John 5:28-29, Colossians 1:21-23, and Hebrews 10:36). Therefore, a request to God cannot require God to make choices for you or someone else.

When studying prayer, remember that many New Testament Scriptures were written in a time when the Holy Spirit directly aided Christians because the Scriptures were not fully revealed (John 14:26, Acts 13:1-4, Acts 19:1-7, and Romans 5:5). Therefore, when they prayed for wisdom (James 1:5) or knowledge (Colossians 1:8-9); those prayers were answered through the Holy Spirit giving those gifts to men (I Corinthians 12:3-11). That has ceased (I Corinthians 13:8-13). The Holy Spirit is no longer given to men today for we no longer have Apostles to do so (Acts 8:12-24). Rightly dividing the word of truth (II Timothy 2:14-18) requires that we keep that in mind when studying about prayer. Things have changed since the work of the Spirit has changed.

Conclusion

In this brief article we have covered much to keep in mind concerning prayer according to God's will. One thing we should all realize from this study, and others we have had in the past, is that we certainly have a lot more to be thankful for than to ask for (I Thessalonians 5:18). All things pertaining to life and godliness have already been given to us (II Peter 1:3). How many things more is there to request? We should be mindful that it is easy to misspeak in ignorance. Ignorance however, is unacceptable (Acts 17:30-31). Think before you pray. Speak carefully to God (Ecclesiastes 5:1-2; cf. Proverbs 17:27-28). Use the Scriptures, rightly divided, rather than men for your standard on prayer. **For more on this subject, consult our studies from the past on understanding prayer (<http://www.wordsoftruth.net/PDFGivinganAnswerTheThingsWePrayForAnswers.pdf>).*