

Prayer: Sense or Nonsense?

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Sense or Nonsense?

Have you ever listened to yourself pray? Did it ever occur to you to think through and analyze your prayers, to examine precisely what you are saying? Do it sometime. Listen carefully the next time you or someone else is asked to pray. Then make notes. You might be convinced that those prayers did not make much of an impression on God.

Since 1963 I have been giving full time to an itinerant Bible conference ministry in churches, colleges, seminaries, and camps. I enjoy my work thoroughly, sometimes coming away spiritually refreshed in my own soul. But I returned from one conference that left me mighty low. It was attended by more than two thousand, including about three hundred ministers, at every service. All of the sessions were recorded on cassette tapes. I purchased the complete set of tapes, and frankly I find it hard to believe all that I am hearing.

For one thing, some of the prayers both amaze and amuse me. If some of the brethren who prayed were really talking to God, I cannot see how our heavenly Father could have been favorably impressed with their ability to hold an intelligent conversation. If one brother preaches the way he prayed, God pity his congregation. His words were dull, lifeless, at times theological and academic, but mostly incoherent. He sounded like a walking ghost. I thought to myself, *It must be a frustrating experience for God to listen to millions of prayers that say nothing, ask for nothing, and expect nothing.*

Right here, I am reminded of a story about an author who needed money and wired his publisher, "How much advance will you pay for my latest novel of fifty thousand words?"

The publisher wired back, "How important are the words?"

I like that! Some of the words that make up our prayers are not very important.

I must tell you about a good doctor who attended that conference to which I just referred. I met him for the first time over a cup of coffee between sessions. He seemed like a regular and normal kind of fellow. We returned to the auditorium for the next session, and as we entered the main hall, the chairman approached him, asking him to lead in prayer.

Well, he led all right, but to where, I will never be able to tell you. He had not uttered a dozen words before I was convinced that the man who had spoken to me at that coffee break was not the man who was praying. It was the sound of his voice that threw me off. He sounded as if he had developed a steeple in his throat, or as if he were talking through a stained glass window. Now, I have never heard the voice of an angel, but he left me with the idea that he was trying to come through in angelic tones. It all sounded unreal, so unlike the man himself.

Later that day, some of the boys gathered for a "rap" session. I stood on the fringe of the group and listened to a bit of--shall I say--*gossip*. The discussion was about the brother's prayer. One of the men said he felt it was wrong to criticize a minister's "public prayer voice." I called a moratorium on that one and quietly slipped out of the room.

During a series of Bible studies in a southern city, the host pastor called on a college professor to lead in prayer. The professor stood before the microphone, and what he said is here recorded, in part, word for word:

God, You created the heaven and the earth. You created man, and You didn't do it by some evolutionary process. (That bit of news must have been an eye-opener to God.) And now, God, we thank You for sending the speaker. Bless the message of Dr. Strauss because we pray in his name. Amen.

Ah, brethren, that one touched my heart.

A tragic plane crash resulted in the death of all persons aboard. I was at a conference in northern Pennsylvania at the time. The conference director called on a man to pray. He apparently wanted to pray for the families who survived those who had died in the crash. Unable to recall the location of the crash, he said: "Lord, bless that plane crash out there in--out there in--out there in . . . Well Lord, You know where it is; You must have read it in the morning newspaper."

While I was in Europe to minister to servicemen in the United States Armed Forces, several couples met for prayer in the apartment of a Christian officer. After we had been formally introduced and were seated, the leader began, "We have a special way of praying. No one is permitted to pray for more than one request at a time. If someone has forty-seven requests, he may pray forty-seven different times, but only one request at a time, please. And we don't say amen at the end of the prayer."

Come to your own conclusions about such restrictions people put on praying.

A pastor in a large city church invited me to conduct a Bible conference for one week, with sessions planned for both mornings and evenings. On Monday morning the service was well attended. Tuesday morning the attendance was about half that of the preceding day. Came Wednesday, and the crowd grew to a new high.

One young woman approached me with the question, "Did you miss some of us yesterday?"

"Yes," I replied, "the attendance was smaller than it was on Monday."

She proceeded to tell me why. "A group of us have our conversational prayer meeting every Tuesday morning."

I apologized for my ignorance and then asked what she meant by a "conversational prayer meeting."

"Oh, it's a new way of praying. God revealed it to a friend."

"I am interested. Will you explain it to me?" I asked.

She paused and then said, "Well, it is not something I can explain. You would have to be there to experience it."

Now I have tried to be sincere in improving my prayer life, so I asked if she would arrange for such a meeting when I could attend.

Rather nervously she replied, "Oh no! That won't be possible. You see, when we meet for conversational prayer, it is for women only."

I might have been wrong in my conclusion, but somehow it just did not make sense to me. Since that experience, I have heard several different explanations of this "new" way of praying, but I cannot recall having read anything quite like it in the Bible. But I do have an open mind for the Lord to teach me. The desire to learn more about prayer is a growing one.

One of my favorite authors has written several books on prayer. In one of them, he has a chapter entitled, "Prayer Can Do Anything that God Can Do." Now that might sound good, but does it really make sense? Apart from our Lord Jesus Christ, there never has been a praying man, nor is there a praying man alive today who, through prayer, can do anything that God can do. There are things God has done, and can repeat, but He has not repeated them and possibly never will. Moreover, there are things God can do but which He will not do, notwithstanding our much praying. Still, there are Christians who have adopted as their favorite, "Prayer can do anything that God can do."

When I was pastor in Pennsylvania, I was called to the bedside of a dying man eighty-nine years old. His body was full of cancer. It was a family dream that he might live to be a hundred years of age. A daughter asked me if I would pray and ask God to raise up her father and spare him for eleven years more. I told her that I had no leading to make such a request.

Some bitter resentment showed as she snapped back, "Pastor, prayer can do anything God can do." In her expressed opinion, I was not a man of prayer. Yet, neither she nor the other members of that family could produce through prayer the result she expected of me.

In my opinion, she was misled by someone's nonsensical statement about prayer. Of course I believed that God was able to heal that old gentleman and keep him alive until he reached a hundred, but He did not do it. Nor did I have a sound reason to ask Him to do it.

Let Paul tell us why many of our prayers contain so little sense. He wrote, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26).

Do you believe that statement? Will you admit that it is true in your own experience?

The text says that we have an "infirmity." The King James Version says *infirmities*, but the word is in the singular in the original, and should read *infidelity*.

In the midst of the turmoil, trials, and sufferings in this life, we are placed in a position of disadvantage which sometimes renders us ignorant when it comes time to pray. Under just such circumstances, Paul himself prayed ignorantly, three times, for the removal of his thorn in the flesh. But God had to say to him, "Paul, you are not praying right. You have asked me to do something I am not going to do."

Concerning this experience, Paul wrote:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

Romans 3:26 tells us that we all have a weakness when it comes to the matter of praying. Whether this weakness is in the thing we request, in the phrasing of the request, or in the motive, makes no difference. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought."

The heathen philosopher Diogenes gave this as a reason why men ought not to pray. But he was wrong! Instead of our ignorance silencing our prayers and leaving us in despair, we have the help we need in the person of the Holy Spirit, who serves in the role of advocate in our behalf. We do not know how to pray, but the Holy Spirit wants to teach us. Without Him, we Christians are powerless in our praying.

In the pages which follow, we will examine some Scriptures on the subject of prayer. I am particularly anxious to cover only those things which will instruct and edify God's children. If it is true that many mighty successes come to God's cause through prayer, then we should be willing to learn all we can about this important subject.

Recently I read again that passage on prayer in Luke 11. Our Lord had just finished praying to the Father. The disciples were close by, listening. No doubt they had watched and heard Him pray on other occasions. They knew the value and importance of prayer, so they came to Him with the request, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Lk 11:1).

The late Dr. G. Campbell Morgan emphasized the importance of their simple request. He suggested that we lose its meaning by adding to the disciples' words. They did not say, "Lord teach us *how* to pray." A great many people know *how* to pray, but they do not pray.

Lord, teach us to pray.

Prayer and Unconfessed Sin

In my travels, I usually try to read the church ads appearing in Saturday's newspaper. On one occasion, a minister announced as his sermon title, "When Praying Is Sinful."

I started to do some serious thinking about that topic. I asked myself the question, *Is it ever wrong to pray?* Now, I have no idea how that minister dealt with his subject, but I am convinced that there might be occasions when praying at least does not make sense.

It does not make sense to pray for anything if there is unconfessed sin in the heart.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me (Ps 66:18).

Sin unconfessed and unforgiven hinders prayer. Many a prayer bounces off the roof of the mouth, never rising any higher, for this reason. It is impossible for any Christian to experience a successful and fruitful prayer ministry if the sin question is not faced squarely.

This is not to suggest that God demands sinless perfection before He will answer our prayers. If that were the case, none of us would have our requests granted. But we do know that sin in a believer's life breaks that sweet fellowship between himself and God.

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy (Pr 28:13).

Among the children of Israel, there were those who believed that God no longer answered prayer. They were saying "He answered prayer in Elijah's day, but He isn't doing it now. His arm is no longer mighty; His ear has become dull of hearing." But the prophet Isaiah said,

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear (Is 59:1-2).

The prophet was saying, "Don't blame God because He refuses to give you your requests. His power to save has not lessened; He is not losing his hearing. God never changes. He still wills that all men be saved, and His hearing is as keen as ever. He can hear the faintest cry of His weakest child. You are responsible for God's silence. The blame rests with you, not with God. Those sins you have not repented of have cut the lifeline of prayer. You raised the barrier between God and yourselves, and He will not answer you until you confess and forsake your sins."

Our churches could do with prophets like Isaiah, men who will tell it like it is, not fearing to expose sin. Not often do we hear men of God tell us that God hates worship and praying which are phony. It is brazen presumption which dares to ask anything of God while sin is in the heart. And if anyone feels I am putting it too strongly, then read the following verses:

Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood (Is 1:13-15).

Those are God's words, directed to His own people. Has it ever occurred to you that God hates sham in worship and prayers? That is right, God can and does hate. He tells His people they are wasting their time going through religious forms and ceremonies when their hearts are not right. He pays no attention to them.

There is, then, such a thing as sinful praying. If we refuse to judge and forsake our sins, we know that our prayers are an abomination to God. It is sheer nonsense to go on pretending, when all the while we have disqualified ourselves by refusing to meet God's requirements for successful praying.

And then Isaiah added the following exhortation from God:

Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil (Is 1:16).

You should read the prayer Ezra prayed. One feature that stands out prominently is the confession of guilt and the genuine repentance. Get alone in a quiet place and read Ezra 9:6-15. Before you begin to read, search your heart before God and ask Him to speak to you personally. Then read quietly and meditatively. Read those verses more than once if you must, but read them until the message grips your soul. The opening words of that prayer will make one stop and think seriously. Ezra began,

O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens (Ezra 9:6).

Now, *there* is a prayer God will hear and answer. Ezra put himself on praying ground. He qualified himself to ask and receive.

Read the prayer Daniel prayed. It is much like Ezra's. What a searching prayer it is! That holy man of God said,

And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said . . . We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments (Dan 9.4-5).

The apostle James wrote,

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (Ja 5:16).

Our prayers can be earnest and heartfelt, yet never avail if there is unconfessed sin in us. We are not heard for our much zeal and fervor and emotion and agony. Praying when we are disobeying God is powerless praying. Let us never forget that right living is a necessary condition for the person who prays.

Can you imagine God forbidding a man to pray? Well, He did. He gave a clear command to Jeremiah not to pray for his own people. And God told Jeremiah that if he persisted in prayer, he would not be heard.

Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee (Jer 7:16).

By sins, I am not thinking only of those acts we put in the category of gross immorality. What about those sins of lying, wrath, stealing, corrupt communication, bitterness, evil speaking, and malice (Eph 4:25-31)? These are followed by fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting, "which are not convenient" (Eph 5:3-4). Some of these things we refer to as "little sins," but do not forget that it is "the little foxes that spoil the vines" (Song of Solomon 2:15), and the "little member" that can spoil the membership (Ja 3:5).

The New Testament counterpart to the Old Testament exhortations to confess sins is in the first epistle of John:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9).

After David's disastrous fall into sin, he was cut off from fellowship with God. He had no liberty to pray or to worship God. He learned that it was useless to masquerade. So he came to God with an honest confession of his evil thoughts and deeds. And once again, David was in a position to pray. (Spend ten minutes in a quiet reading of Psalm 51.)

What God did for David, He wants to do for you and me, so why not go to God now, name that sin that has remained unconfessed, and start on the course that could revolutionize your prayer life. Let us search out and correct the causes of our prayer failures.

No one can both sin and pray. True prayer will prevent us from sinning, or sin will prevent us from praying. My own Christian experience is spotted by those occasions when I grieved God through sinning. Those were bad experiences which left a great deal to reflect upon. They were sad and disappointing times. But I am deeply grateful to my Lord for providing the means of restoration, whereby prayer could once more become effective.

It does make sense to confess our sins if we expect God to give us our requests.

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight (1 Jn 3:22).

Prayer and Selfishness

It does not make sense to pray with a selfish spirit.

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts [pleasures] (Ja 4:3).

We are all naturally and basically selfish. Honesty must admit that even our prayers are selfish. It is possible that some of the good things we do are motivated by a selfish spirit. We will do well to examine our motives periodically, especially with regard to this matter of praying. James tells us that one reason for our spiritual poverty and powerlessness in prayer is a wrong motive. It is not necessarily the thing for which we are asking that is wrong, but rather the reason we ask for it.

A member in a church where I was pastor expressed a concern for the salvation of her husband. She had gone to several members of the church, asking them to pray for his salvation--a legitimate request supported by 1 Timothy 2:1-4.

One day I asked her why she wanted her husband to get saved.

She answered, "Because we would be so much happier in our married life. We could share the same interests, and life for me in the home would be much easier."

I am not critical of that woman for wanting those things. A home is doubly blessed when husband and wife walk together in the Lord. But to pray for her husband's salvation for the reasons she gave was selfishness on her part.

How different our prayer life would be if only we were genuinely unselfish! And when the Holy Spirit succeeds in teaching us this lesson, our prayer life will be free from a major hindrance.

Our Lord said,

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Mt 6:21).

If we are carnal and desire material things merely to gratify the desires of the flesh, we cut the lifeline of prayer. It seems from James 4:3 that those to whom James was writing might have placed more value on material things than on spiritual things. They were putting last things first and first things last, thereby preventing their prayers from being answered. To pray amiss means to pray with wrong intent. What folly it is to bother God for our desires, rather than asking for that which is His desire for us. The psalmist said,

Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart (Ps 37:4).

Now do not make the mistake of attaching the wrong meaning to that verse. It does not mean that God will give to us all those things we desire. I have thanked Him more than once for not giving to me every desire of my heart.

When my mother sustained an injury which resulted ultimately in her death, it was my desire that she would live. But apparently my desire was not God's desire. I did a lot of heart-searching then, discovering that my desire was for Mother's recovery first. But it was God's time to take her to Himself. My desire was natural, human and therefore selfish. I failed to put God's desire first and mine last.

Now, as I look back on that experience, I can see my mistake. It was not wrong to desire life for my mother rather than death, but my motive was selfish, without any consideration for God's will. Therefore He did not give me that for which I prayed.

Have you ever tried to hide your selfish behavior behind a verse in the Bible? Many Christians do this, you know. Take, for example, Matthew 7:7, a frequently quoted prayer verse:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

The majority of Christians will tell you that this is a verse that does not work for them. They are correct; however, there is a reason why it will not work. No verse in the Bible is intended to stand by itself--that is, it must be studied in its context. Now, if we fail to note that Matthew 7:7 follows Matthew 6:33, and that the two verses are contextually related, we can get into difficulty. Jesus had just said,

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you (Mt 6:33).

If we obey the exhortation in Matthew 6:33, we will pray only for those things which concern God's kingdom and God's glory. The self-seeking person fails to put God's glory first; therefore when he asks, his request is not granted, and then he wants to charge God with not keeping His promise.

I am thinking of the man who came to Jesus with the request, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me" (Lk 12:13).

Now, there is a selfish spirit, if ever there was one. That fellow did not have God's glory at heart. He was a self-seeker; his request was a selfish one. The thing for which he asked could have been legitimate, but it was not motivated by a desire to glorify God. We know the man asked amiss, because Jesus did not grant him his request. Instead He rebuked the man when He replied,

Take heed, and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth (Lk 12:15).

This man's request was motivated by a covetous spirit. The true purpose of prayer is not to obtain the things we want from God but rather to make us content with the things He wants us to have.

I know businessmen who have prayed that God would make them successful and prosperous. A prayer like that can be right or wrong, depending upon the person's motive. Suppose prosperity *should* come to a man who prays for it. What will he do with the money after he gets it? Will he honor the Lord in the disposition of it? Or will he spend it on himself and his family for pleasure, luxuries and material goods? To pray from a heart that is set on things merely to gratify the desire of the flesh, is senseless.

Check up on yourself the next time you ask God for something. Examine the motive for that prayer request, and see if you are seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. You might discover that you are asking amiss. Surely, you do not want selfishness to rob you of answers to your prayers.

A mother prayed amiss for her two sons--a prayer Christ could not answer. Salome, the mother of James and John, desired a place for both children in Christ's future kingdom.

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, "What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom (Mt 20:20-21).

No doubt Salome believed she had some warrant for her petition. Moreover, she must have been sincere, because she came "worshipping Him," but her request was denied. Jesus said to her, "Ye know not what ye ask" (Mt 20:22). Let us be careful how we pray. Sincerity and a spirit of worship are insufficient to make up a valid petition.

And right here, self-examination is very important, lest we offer a prayer of pretense. The scribes and Pharisees were quite hypocritical in their prayers, but Jesus knew their hearts and motives. He pronounced a woe upon them for trying to fake it in their prayers. (See Mt 23:14; Mk 12:40; Lk 20:47).

It makes sense to examine our motives before we ask anything from God.

Prayer and the Holy Spirit

It does not make sense to pray if we do not pray in the Spirit:

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit (Eph 6:18).

Prayer and the Holy Spirit are vitally linked together. This is a truth taught in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Jehovah said to His prophet,

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the [S]pirit of grace and of supplications (Zec 12:10).

I have spelled the word *Spirit* with a capital *S* because I believe the reference is to the Holy Spirit. Possibly this verse has reference to the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Israel. He is called the "Spirit of supplications" because it is He who awakens us to the desire and need to pray. He quickens the believer to pray now as He will in the day of Israel's spiritual awakening.

In the little epistle of Jude, we have an exhortation like that in Ephesians:

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost (Jude 20).

In these two phrases, "praying in the Spirit" and "praying in the Holy Ghost," we have one of the truly great secrets of prayer. If anyone were to ask me, what was the first great secret of a successful prayer life, I believe I would answer, "Praying in the Holy Spirit."

But what does it mean to pray in the Holy Spirit? The superhuman task of praying according to the will of God demands more than mere human reasoning. It needs the wisdom and power which only the Holy Spirit can supply. Human wisdom and human desires can achieve human results, but praying in the Spirit produces divine results. In praying in the Holy Spirit, the child of God has the power and wisdom of God to offset the power and wisdom of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Real prayer is a spiritual warfare.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph 6:12).

Here the praying Christian is between God on the one hand and the devil on the other. He is engaged in prayer warfare, and in his own strength he is no match for the enemy. Satan is a strong man, mightily armed (Mt 12:28-29), and only as we pray in the Spirit can we overcome him. The power to be victorious in prayer was promised by our Lord when He said,

Behold, I give unto you power . . . over all the power of the enemy (Lk 10: 19).

We Christians are in a conflict, and prayer is our mighty weapon. But we must view prayer not as a ritual but as a relationship with the Holy Spirit. The spiritual weakness that plagues most of us grows out of our failure to enter into that experience which Paul called "the communion of the Holy Ghost" (2 Cor. 13:14). Effective prayer is found only in the experiential knowledge of this blessed communion.

When we are praying in the Holy Spirit, we will not be trying to talk God into doing something He does not want to do, but rather we will be yielding to the Holy Spirit, who knows what is best for us. If we are not praying in the Spirit, we must be praying in the flesh. All spiritual prayers have their source in the Spirit. It does not make sense to pray if my prayers originate with me and not with the Spirit.

There are some things to remember if we are to pray in the Spirit:

(1) There are times when we Christians do not know *how* to pray or for *what* we should pray.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself [Himself] maketh intercession for us . . . according to the will of God (Ro 8:26-27).

Here we are told that we have an infirmity which arises from our ignorance. We do not know what is best for us. It is right here that we need guidance, the guidance of the only Person who always and at all times prays "according to the will of God." The Holy Spirit assists us in our praying by giving to us the right desire and direction. Some of our prayers do not correspond to our needs. This is the infirmity that He "helpeth."

The word for *helpeth* occurs here and only one other time in the New Testament (Lk 10:40), where Martha requests help in the kitchen. What we need is the practical kind of help Martha was asking for.

(2) We need to know and be aware of the fact that the Holy Spirit dwells in us.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (I Cor. 3:16).

There are some professing Christians who claim to be saved but who say they have not yet received the Holy Spirit. If such persons have been saved, they have the Holy Spirit. It is not possible for one to be saved and not have the Holy Spirit.

Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His (Ro 8:9).

It will not be possible to enlist the Spirit's help in prayer if we do not have Him, or if we have Him and are not aware of His presence. It is common to hear someone pray, "Lord, send Thy Holy Spirit among us to bless us in this meeting." Such a request does not make sense. The Holy Spirit is here. Christian, He is in you. You can know Him and experience and enjoy His teaching and leading ministry. Do not treat this truth lightly. It is a mighty and holy truth to know. Your body is His temple (I Cor. 3:16; 6:19-20). The more closely we associate our praying with the Holy Spirit, the better will be our praying.

(3) To "pray in the Spirit," we must be careful that we do not grieve Him.

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God (Eph 4:30).

How do we grieve the Holy Spirit? Look at the context of Ephesians 4:30. We grieve Him through lying, anger, stealing, dirty and useless conversation, malice, unkindness. These sins are repulsive to His holy nature and thus grieve and offend Him.

In all of our praying, we need the Holy Spirit's help. But if we have offended Him and our sins remain unconfessed and unforgiven, we cut ourselves off from the Spirit's help, which is necessary for effective praying.

(4) In order to pray in the Spirit, we must be filled with the Spirit.

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18).

To be filled with the Spirit means to be controlled by the Spirit. When we are praying in the Spirit the mind and the will are subjected to His control. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Ro 8:14) and in no area of our lives do we need His leading more than in prayer.

I am not a master in the important business of praying. The difficulties I encounter are so insurmountable that I need the great Teacher. At times the work of prayer becomes burdensome, and it is then that I am keenly aware that I must look to the Holy Spirit to seek His help. At other times prayer is a hard and bitter struggle, and my prayers are empty. Then I thank Him for His indwelling presence. I search my heart for any sin that might have caused Him grief, and I ask Him to take control of my prayers and my praying.

If we cultivate praying in the Spirit, it will bring about a change in our prayer life which we hardly thought possible. Prayer will no longer be a tedious and tiresome experience.

It does make sense to avail ourselves of the privilege of praying in the Spirit.

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