

Introduction

In 1Thessalonians 5:17, the Holy Spirit by the hand of Paul commanded Christians to, “Pray without ceasing.” Paul not only commanded prayer but also demonstrated an active prayer-life (Romans 10:1; 2Corinthians 9:14, 13:7; Philippians 1:4, 9; Colossians 1:3, 9; 1Thessalonians 3:10; 2Thessalonians 1:11). Jesus certainly demonstrated an active prayer-life (Matthew 14:23, 19:13, 26:36; Mark 6:46, 14:32; Luke 6:12; 9:18, 28, 11:1, 22:45). With such commands and examples in the Bible, an active prayer-life should be the fiber and lifeline of individual Christians and congregations of the Lord’s people today.

It could be prayer is not as pervasive in the church today. Some older members of the church are able to tell of a time in the past when the mid-week service of many congregations was a prayer service. Others can remember when groups of Christians or congregations had special prayer meetings dedicating an amount of time solely to prayer. It seems things of this nature are not happening as much today.

The general attitude toward prayer seems to be as a last resort. In other words, when all else fails or there is nothing else to do, people (Christians and non-Christians alike) will resort to prayer. Yet, the idea Paul was emphasizing in 1Thessalonians 5:17 is how prayer is a mind-set. The idea is that anything Christian’s think about, they should be willing to bring before God in prayer. One person stated, “Prayer is a first response, not a last resort.” In order to return to the biblical example and exhortation of prayer, a study of prayer in the Bible is in order. The Bible answers what prayer is, how Christians ought to pray, and why Christians ought to be a praying people. There are also benefits for the Christian who seeks to be the praying person God desires.

What is Prayer?

The verb form of prayer (to pray) comes from a compound Greek word (*proseúxomai*) literally meaning “towards or exchange” from *prós* and “to wish” from *euxomai*. The idea is to exchange wishes. Clearly, in the Bible, prayer is associated with personal faith and, often times, is a reference to wishing for divine intervention from God. There are numerous examples of saints praying to God asking for His intervention (Acts 1:24, 6:5-6, 8:15, 9:40).

Prayer is more than simply making requests of God. In 1Timothy 2:1-4, Paul instructed Timothy, *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*

The ways Paul describes communication with God (supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks) in addition to some biblical examples provide insight for the Christian in understanding prayer. The descriptions further give potential applications for the Christian to use. The immediate and remote contexts of the passage additionally lead to significant conclusions.

A supplication is simply asking God to supply the needs of His people. Examples of this are seen in the model prayer – “give us this day, our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11) – and in the prayer of the poet – “Give us help from trouble; for vain is the help of man” (Psalm 60:11). Prayer, in the context of 1Timothy 2:1-4, is a reference to all communication with God. Intercessions are praying on behalf of someone else. Jesus prayed for the church in John 17:13-19. Simon, realizing

he could not pray for himself, asked Peter to pray for him (Acts 8:24). Another part of prayer is thankfulness. Paul thanks God for his fellow-Christians (Colossians 1:3; Philippians 1:3; 1Corinthians 1:4). The poet was thankful in Psalm 100:4. Being unthankful is mentioned as a sin in 2Timothy 3:2-5.

How Do We Pray?

In Luke 11:1-4, one of the disciples of Christ asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Jesus provides the model prayer for Christians to learn how to pray.

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

Prayer, as seen in the model prayer and by example in the New Testament, is to be directed to God. Jesus prayed to God in John 17:1-26. Paul prayed to God for the Philippians (Philippians 1:3-11). Some have pointed to John 14:14 as an authority to pray to Jesus but this does not fit the context of John 14 nor is this the example of prayer in John 17.

Prayer is not to Jesus, but through Jesus. This is the thrust of John 14:14 – “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (see also John 15:16). Jesus taught man how to pray and provided the avenue to pray through him. This is consistent with other aspects of Christianity. Christians overcome through Christ (Philippians 4:13). Christians are to seek authority for all they do in Christ (Colossians 3:17). When Peter commanded those on Pentecost to be baptized, he said to do such in the name of Jesus Christ. The idea of doing something in the name of Christ is to do it by His authority. Jesus gave Christians the authority (right) to pray. Thus, the biblical way to pray is in the name of Jesus.

Why Do We Pray?

A praying Christian is following the commands of God (1Thessalonians 5:17) and, in the process, acknowledging God's existence. The psalmist declared the fool does not acknowledge God (Psalm 14:1a). When the children of God pray to God, they are acknowledging God is real and genuine comfort can be found in knowing God is. Knowing God is in control, involved in the lives of men today, and allows mankind to petition Him is similar to simply knowing someone (friend, relative) is there in times of distress.

Prayer is also an avenue by which Christians can worship God. Jesus declared in the model prayer: "Hollowed by thy name" (Matthew 6:9b). Many of the Psalms (which are transcribed prayers) focus on the grace, mercy, greatness, and majesty of God. The psalmists were worshiping God in their prayer-life. The first-century church worshiped God through five avenues, one of which was prayer (Acts 2:42). The church of today follows the biblical pattern in worship.

Prayer helps people to understand their own finite state. The very mind-set of prayer commanded in the New Testament (1Thessalonians 5:17) helps Christians to constantly know they are nothing without God. Prayer reminds Christians how fearing God and doing His will is the entirety of life. Prayer is an avenue by which the Christian can ask God for the help. Jesus declared, "...with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27). When the child of God aligns his will with God's will (as Jesus did in a prayer shortly before He went to the cross – Luke 22:42), he acknowledges his desperate need for God.

Conclusion

It would be difficult to study about prayer without remembering how Jesus prayed all night before He

selected the apostles (Luke 6:12). Before going to Calvary, Jesus spent time in prayer (Mark 14:32). Jesus spent time praying for the future of the church in John 17. It is clear that when life was stressful for Jesus, He did not forget to pray. Christians everywhere need to follow this example of the Savior.

Throughout the letters of Paul, the apostle told his recipients how he was praying for them (Romans 1:9; Ephesians 1:16; 1Thessalonians 1:2; 2Timothy 1:3; Philemon 4). Paul exhorted the brethren in Thessalonica to pray for him (1Thessalonians 5:25). The Holy Spirit through Paul exhorted Christians everywhere to pray (1Timothy 2:1-4). Today, Christians follow the example of the first-century church praying for themselves and others. It is a great encouragement when Christians know brethren are praying seeking the providence of God.

James 5:16 says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Hannah prayed for a male child and praised the Lord in prayer when the request was granted (1Samuel 1:27, 2:1-10). Jabez prayed and was granted his request (1Chronicles 4:10). Jesus prayed for the modern-day church in John 17. These examples (and many others) indicate the mind-set of prayer God desires His people to have. Some have argued prayer is not effective but it is impossible to know the whole story being finite man. God sees things from a divine perspective and is in tune to the prayers of His people.

This tract is condensed from a lesson presented at the
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I Know...

How To Pray (And Why)

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