

Some Thoughts on Prayer

One of the unique privileges given to a redeemed Christian is the right to answered prayer. God has promised that He will hear the prayers of those who are His, and live a genuine Christian life. In John 16:24 Jesus tells His Apostles “...*hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name, ask, and ye shall receive that your joy may be full.*” So what is the catch? Surely there is one, or else every real Christian would be rich, never be sick and live for centuries. The catch is in the phrase “in My name.” It is loaded with meaning that can only be obtained from deep study of God’s whole Word, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

There are two thoughts that must first be dismissed. One, although God is all powerful and nothing is beyond His ability to provide, He isn’t a genie in a bottle waiting to grant our every wish. And second, He answers prayers in accordance with His will, not ours. Furthermore, He is not in the business of granting frivolous wishes, but only those that in His judgment are responses to genuine needs and unselfish hopes. Through James 4:3, we are told not to ask unreasonably, for He say, “Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss.” Asking amiss means asking unreasonably, beyond your actual needs. We should pray according to our need. Prayer should not be offered recklessly.

To simply end a prayer with “I pray these things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, amen,” is meaningless unless what proceeds is from a sincere, redeemed, contrite, worshiping and trusting heart. It’s not enough to just want. We must want what He wants for us, if our prayers are to be answered affirmatively.

There is another “catch.” Sin must be dealt with! If one has a known sin in his or her heart, it must be confessed and there must be sincere repentance. Sin standing between God and man is a basic hindrance, a barrier between them. How can, or why should, God answer the prayers of anyone in a state of sin even though that person is actually saved? But you say Jesus died for our sins, and those who truly believe have had their sins forgiven. That is true. But where ongoing prayer and petitions are concerned, sin can

still get in the way, shutting down communication. Any known unconfessed sin is a big obstacle to true communion with God and to His willingness to hear His children's prayers. In Psalm 66:18 we read, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." That makes it pretty clear. Iniquity is simply sin. If anyone has a known sin in his or her heart, which one clings to, will not give up, the Lord will not hear that person. Confession of that sin while knowing that we still desire it in our hearts and will continue in it is of little value. This is more than a weakness of outward conduct; it is an iniquity of the heart, which must be corrected.

Now one last "catch" (that I know of), and that has to do with the word trusting, which is underlined above. Let us read Mark 11:22-26.

And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.

For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses

I called this the last "catch," but as we read the above, there are two parts to it. First we must "have faith" and "believe," and "not doubt in his heart" that one's requests "shall come to pass" and "he shall have whatsoever he saith" (asks for). Second, we find in verse 25 that we are to have forgiven all whom we have something against, or God cannot forgive us. So, if we can't forgive, He won't either, and then again, that is an obstacle to His responding to our prayers.

From these verses, we get the clear message that in order for our prayers to be answered, we must believe that they are being answered. This is empathetic in verse 24, where it

says, "...when ye pray believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them." That's where real faith and a trusting heart come in Big Time!

Notice that in verse 24, it says, "believe that ye receive." It doesn't say, believe and ye will receive, but that ye receive! It's a done deal! God is in the process of dealing in some affirmative manner with your petition. Assuming all is right with you, in God's eyes, you are redeemed, you've confessed all known sins, your prayer is consistent with His will, and you believe He has heard and answered your prayer; then it's finished, done; He has given His ok; it's in the works. If your faith is that complete, that true, you know it is done, and need not, you should not even pray for that matter again, except only in profound gratitude for His presence, His love and graciousness.

How many of us can become such cleansed vessels? How many of us can know that we have dealt with all of the above noted "catches" so that our Lord can hear us. How many can generate such a faith as to know that their prayers are answered before there is evidence of the fact. For the truly redeemed soul who is mature in the faith and knowledgeable of the Scripture, becoming a cleansed vessel need not be very difficult. But this is why we find in Luke 18:1 "...that men ought always to pray and not to faint." This verse tells us to pray and continue to pray without weakening. If our prayers are petitions and we don't have faith that God has heard or is yet willing to respond, we must continue to pray until our faith is strong enough to know that we have received. In this context one may say that Luke 18:1 tells us to pray repeatedly until Mark 11 "kicks in," that is that our faith is finally sufficient to believe, to know that it is done, that what we prayed for, whether already manifest or not, is in the process of being accomplished.

I thank brother Watchman Nee, a great 20th century evangelist, expositor and martyr, for having shared these insights, which the Holy Spirit gave him, and which now He has allowed me to elaborate and share as well.