

Teaching Sound Doctrine

“GOD HEARETH NOT SINNERS”

John 9:31 The disciples come to Jesus with a simple, yet not so simple request. “And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1).ⁱ They had seen the importance that Jesus had placed on prayer in His life. He was often found in prayer, and especially at any major event in His life. When Jesus was baptized He prayed (Luke 3:21); before choosing His apostles (Luke 6:12-13) He spent the whole night in prayer; at the transfiguration (Luke 9:29) He was praying; He prayed when He raised Lazarus from the dead (Luke 11:41). Jesus is often found in prayer just before his death: in connection with His death upon the cross He was found in prayer (John 12:20-28); in the very shadow of the cross He prayed for Himself, His disciples, and all believers (John 17); He prayed in behalf of Peter (Luke 22:31-34); when He instituted His Supper (Mat. 26:26-29); and His three fervent prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-45). Upon the cross His first words were a prayer (Luke 23:34); still upon the cross (Mat. 27:46); and at the end of the ordeal (Luke 23:46). Prayer characterized His life. Thus, the disciples request, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

One of the great privileges of being a Christian is that we have the same right of prayer as Jesus had available to Him. While it possibly is not something we take advantage of as we should, it is still a wonderful gift which God has given unto us. L. O. Sanderson stated it correctly in the words of the song: Pray All The Time when he wrote, “The world has lost the right of prayer, And saints have failed to pray; What loss sustained beyond repair! How blind of heart are they!”
PRAYER’S POWER

James explicitly states the power which prayer possesses when he writes, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jam. 5:16). The idea behind availeth is that it has power, is able, or can do its intended purpose. Then Inspiration adds that it avails much, not just a little. One way God informs us of the power of prayer is by examples He gives us.

James gives us the example of Elijah. “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit” (Jam. 5:17-18). Elijah

(Elias) was the same (like passions) as we are. Notice the great power of prayer in his life. He prayed for it not to rain, and it did not rain for a period of three and a half years. He then prayed for rain, and it rained. One important point in this is that there was no miracle involved in all of this. Everything which happened was purely natural. There was great power in Elijah's prayer, even as there is in the prayers of any righteous man today, in exactly the same way as Elijah's—through the providential working of God.

Abraham and Abimelech the king of Gerar would testify to the power of prayer. When Abraham dwells in Gerar, he withholds vital information from Abimelech concerning Sarah, his wife; only saying she was his sister. The failure to inform Abimelech concerning their marital status was wrong, causing Abimelech to take Sarah to be his wife. However, God intervened in this prior to Abimelech coming near her, and his actions were done in the innocence of his heart. God tells Abimelech to return Sarah to Abraham. We then find the power of pray. "Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine" (Gen. 20:7). Because of the power of a righteous man's pray, Abimelech would not die, however failure to pray would have resulted in Abimelech's death. Prayer possessed preeminent power.

Space forbids us to discuss all the different men and women of faith who prayed to God and the wonderful power which prayer brings. However, consider and study on your own the power of prayer in the lives of David as he records God's deliverance because of his prayers in 2 Samuel 22:1-7, along with other times. God spared the rebellious Israelites destruction in the wilderness because of the prayers of Moses (Exo. 32; Num. 14). Think of Samson and when he was sore athirst and prayed; God provided water for him (Jud. 15:18-19). Also at the end of his life, he prays for strength and receives it (Jud. 16:28-30). Look at the power of prayer in the life of Hannah, who prayed for a man-child and God provided (1 Sam 1). Or consider Daniel, who because of prayer was cast into a den of lions, but God shut the lion's mouth (Dan. 6). And certainly Jesus is our perfect example in this area as He is in all areas of life. Often Jesus prayed and the Father heard and answered His prayers. At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 11:41-42). While there are many other examples these are sufficient to show the power of prayer in the lives of the faithful. However, let us consider a few of the ways prayer is powerful.

Prayer gives strength and comfort. Even an atheist prays in times of trouble for the comfort that it will bring. It was said that there are no atheists in foxholes

and that everyone prayed in them. The reason is simple, the comfort and strength that prayer brings. What greater comfort and strength could one have than the opportunity to take everything to God in prayer. “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). Knowing He cares for us, brings great comfort and strengthens us against whatever may come.

Closely associated with the previous is that prayer will bring peace to ones life. Paul writes, “Be careful for nothing [In nothing be anxious—ASV]; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phi. 4:6-7). We all have difficulties in life, but in prayer we have the right to take those problems to our God. Then we can let God take care of them knowing He cares for us. The result is that we do not have to be anxious or troubled with cares.

Prayer will stop sin, even as sin will stop prayer. When the faithful pray, part of that prayer will be concerning sin. They will be confessing sin within their life. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Notice also the emphasis Jesus placed on this in the example prayer he gave. “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven....And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mat. 6:9-13). The very fact that we are praying these sentiments will help us to stop sin in our lives. Our minds will be centered on living as God wills, and ending sin in our lives. However, when we decide to live in rebellion to God’s will, we will stop praying.

Prayer will bring us closer to God and things spiritual. Again, like the preceding, when we pray our minds are brought into harmony with God and spiritual matters. This not only serves the purpose of bringing us closer to God and spiritual matters when we pray, but also will do this for our entire life. Prayer will alter what would be. What a marvelous thought, that our prayers will effect the God of heaven to such an extent, that He through providential means will change what would be. We observe this with Moses’ praying for the rebellious Israelites. God had determined to destroy them, however through Moses’ prayers, God spared them. It is also observed in Elijah’s prayer that it not rain and it did not rain; then his prayer for rain and it rained. The God of the universe hears the prayers of the faithful. “O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come” (Psa. 65:2).

However, there are some whom God will not hear. The man healed of blindness said the words of our title: “Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth” (John

9:31). What a sad situation: that the God of heaven will not hear the sinner's prayer. However, some do not accept what the blind man said. We will spend the next few lessons proving the truth of what the blind man who had been healed stated.

