

PRAYER IS A GREAT PRIVILEGE

1 Thessalonians 5:17, 18

(Not entirely original with me)

Introduction: One of the greatest privileges a Christian has is direct contact with God through prayer. It is through prayer that the Christian can find forgiveness of sins, he/she can find peace to replace anxiety and he/she can receive strength from God. Sadly, some Christians tend to become slack in their prayers and their prayer life suffers. The Christian is encouraged to be diligent in his/her prayers, being vigilant and with thanksgiving and to pray without ceasing. Basic principles of prayer are taught in God's Word.

I. THE KIND OF PRAYER THAT IS ACCEPTABLE

1. It must be a prayer offered "in faith."
 - ***"...And all things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive..."*** - Matthew 21:22
 - One must have faith in God and in His ability to answer otherwise, his/her prayer will not be answered - Hebrews 11:6; James 1:5-8
 - If one's faith is weak, then it can be increased with the help of God's Word - Romans 10:17
2. It must be a prayer offered "in the spirit of humility."
 - Jesus gave an example of prayer with the Pharisee and the Publican - Luke 18:9-14
 - ***"The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart and saves such as have a contrite spirit"***
Psalm 34:18
 - James wrote: ***"...God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.."*** James 4:6
3. It must be a prayer offered "in harmony with God's will."
 - God answers prayer that is offered "according to His will" - 1 John 5:14
 - Jesus set the example of prayer for the Christian in His prayers at Gethsamane - Luke 22:42
 - Prayers often go unanswered because they are more concerned with a person's own will rather than God's will - James 4:3
4. It must be a prayer offered "by one who is righteous before God."
 - ***"...For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil..."*** 1 Peter 3:12
 - The prayers of a righteous person are effective - James 5:16-18
 - The prayers of those staying in sin, God will not hear - Proverbs 28:9; Isaiah 59:1-2
 - To be righteous before God:
 - requires that one submit to the righteousness of God offered in Jesus - Romans 10:1-4
 - requires one to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ - Romans 1:16-17
5. It must be a prayer offered "in the spirit of thanksgiving."
 - ***"...giving thanks always for all things to God..."*** - Ephesians 5:20
 - ***"in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving..."*** - Philippians 4:6
 - ***"...prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving..."*** - Colossians 4:2
 - ***"...pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks..."*** - 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18
 - How can God help a person with his/her present burdens if that person hasn't taken the time to thank Him for all the past blessings?

6. It must be a prayer offered "with persistence."

- Jesus stressed emphasis on persistence in two parables:
 - The parable of the persistent friend - Luke 11:5-10
 - The parable of the persistent widow - Luke 18:1-8
- Persistent in prayer is demonstrated by :
 - Jesus at Gethsamane - Matthew 26:44
 - Paul and his "thorn in the flesh" - 2 Corinthians 12:7-8
 - The early Church - Acts 2:42

7. It must be a prayer offered "in the name of Jesus."

- **"...Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.."**
Ephesians 5:20
- Effective prayer is more than simply adding the little phrase "in Jesus' name" at the end of one's prayers.
 - One must realize that Jesus is the ONLY way by which one can approach God - John 14:6
 - One must view Jesus as his/her "high priest" who intercedes for him/her - Hebrews 7:24-25;
John 14:13
- Asking God to answer one's prayer in the name of His Son can give a person great confidence that God will give what is being asked for - Hebrews 4:14-16

II. THERE ARE OBSTACLES TO ANSWERED PRAYER

1. Unconfessed sin will block answered prayers:

- **"...If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear..."** Psalm 66:18
- The basis for answered prayer rests on one being in fellowship with God but that fellowship is broken if one does not confess his/her sins to Him.

2. Improper treatment of others will cause prayers to not be answered:

- How one treats others has a bearing on whether God will answer one's prayers.
 - How one treats the poor - Psalm 41:1-3
 - How one treats his/her friend - Matthew 5:23-24
 - How a husband treats his wife or a wife treats her husband - 1 Peter 3:7
- One must correct, if possible, broken relationships with others before he/she can expect God to answer his/her prayers - especially if there is a desire to receive forgiveness of one's sins -
- Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-23

III. WHEN GOD DOES ANSWER ONE'S PRAYERS

1. The prayer request may be granted.

- God may answer "yes" and grant what one is asking of Him.
- This will happen when one tries to do God's will in his/her life - 1 John 3:22

2. The prayer request may be granted, but not right then.

- God may have another time in mind according to His plans for the one making the request/prayer.
- **"...To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven..."** - Ecclesiastes 3:1
- It might seem that God is saying "NO", when He is really saying, "Not yet, wait a bit."

3. The prayer request may be granted, but not as one might expect.

- Sometimes God says "yes" but answers the prayer in a different way than was asked.

- God's thoughts and methods are usually different than anybody else's' - Isaiah 55:8-9
- When asking God for strength and perseverance:
 - He may give new trials to bear, which in turn develops that which one had prayed for.
- One should be careful and not tell God how to answer his/her prayers.
 - The way some pray for the sick, limits God as to how He might restore them.
 - By limiting the "how" one might be limiting the result God had in mind.

4. The prayer request may be denied.

- Often God says "NO!"
- One must learn to trust God, who knows all and what is best and would deny a prayer request if granting it might not be for the good of the one asking - Hebrews 12:5-11
- One might not fully understand why his/her prayer wasn't answered, but he/she can still fully trust God, especially in the light of the found in 1 Corinthians 10:13

CONCLUSION:

1. The ability to pray to God and then receive answers to one's prayers is truly one of the greatest blessings a Christian can have.
2. Do YOU find it easy or difficult to pray?
3. Do YOU believe in the power of God to answer YOUR prayers?
4. Are YOU disappointed when it appears that God is not going to answer your prayer the way you want?
5. How much time are YOU spending each day in deep, devoted prayer?