

PRAYER

Lesson 2: Prayer Is a Vital Part of a Christian’s Worship Life

1. Prayer is an act of worship that pleases God

2. Christians worship God with both private and group prayers

Prayer: O Lord God, you who are enthroned in the heavens, we thank you for the privilege of worshipping you in prayer. Teach us now to pray in awe of your power and love. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps you have attended a civic function where some religious leader is asked to offer a prayer. As he begins his prayer, some people cross themselves, some raise their hands, some kneel down, others fold their arms or put their hands into their pockets. As he prays, the officiant is careful not to offend any religious group, and so he says little beyond a vague request that "God" would "bless" the occasion. Really, the only purpose for his prayer is to inject "a little religion" into the proceedings. This done, an audible sigh of relief goes up from the crowd. The prayer is over with, and everyone can sit down. God, too, sighs with relief when such prayers are over with. Today we will look at the kind of prayer that is satisfying to God's people and pleasing to him.

I. Prayer is an act of worship that pleases God

Exodus 20:7 “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.”

1. Every commandment has a negative (“don’t do”) side and a positive (“do”) side. How does the Second Commandment show us that prayer is not optional for the believer?

Psalms 50:9-15

⁹ “I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens,
¹⁰ for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.
¹¹ I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine.
¹² If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.
¹³ Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?
¹⁴ Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High,
¹⁵ and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”

1. God had given Israel the privilege of offering him animal sacrifices. Even though God had commanded sacrifices in the Old Testament, what was wrong with the attitude with which Israel was bringing them? (verses 9-13)

2. What higher form of worship does God ask for? (verses 14 and 15)

3. Why is the prayer for help a wonderful expression of worship to God?

Psalm 141:2 May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

1.) How are our prayers like incense?

Psalm 27:7 Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.

1.) What assumptions are we automatically making whenever and to whomever we pray?

His Word in My Life

1.) Roman Catholics pray to Mary, angels, and saints, but they vigorously deny that they “worship” them. Respond to this.

II. Christians worship God with both private and group prayers

Luke 5:15,16 Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

1. What was Jesus' regular practice?

2. What lesson is there for us in this regular practice of Jesus? (cf. Matthew 6:6 “When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”)

Matthew 18:19,20 “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

1. When we join with other Christians in prayer, what does Jesus promise?

•

2. Commenting on these verses, Saint Cyprian said: "He [Jesus] shows that he is rather with two or three who pray with one mind, than with a great many who differ, and that more can be obtained by the concordant prayer of a few, than by the discordant supplication of many" ("Treatise I: On the Unity of the Church," The Ante Nicene Fathers). Put this thought into your own words.

1 John 4:1-3 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit who does not confess Jesus is not from God.

1.) Because only God can see the heart of a person, how can we know if we are in full agreement with another Christian?

Galatians 1:8-9 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Romans 16:17 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

3 John 10-11 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

1. Explain: When we pray, we are saying something about God; when we pray with someone, we are also saying something about that person.

2. Give some examples of how having divergent teachings or understandings of God's Word totally undermine the unity that is expressed in joint prayer.

3.) While it is tempting to compromise this practice for the sake of outward unity and social pressure, what does a willingness to compromise complete unity reveal?

His Word in My Life

1. Respond to the following: "I don't need to come to church to pray; I can pray alone at home."

SUMMARY

To summarize this lesson, discuss the following:

What makes prayer an act of worship?

What are the benefits of praying alone? What are the benefits of praying in a group?

Life with God

- Day 1: Before you begin your personal devotion, look around at the place where you're doing it. Is it private? worshipful? conducive to meditation and prayer? Make a list of things you could do to make it more so.
- Day 2: Do the things to enhance your "prayer corner" that you listed on Day 1.
- Day 3: When you sit down to a meal, after praying, ask the members of your family about your mealtime prayers. Do they like the way you've been doing them? Would they suggest any changes?
- Day 4: Choose at least one of your family's suggestions and implement it.
- Day 5: At your local library, look in the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature for articles in current, secular magazines (Time, Newsweek, etc.) about prayer. Read one or more of the articles. Does the author view prayer as worship? Does he seem to recommend praying? Why? Do his remarks agree with what Scripture says about prayer?
- Day 6: Ask your pastor about the prayers he uses in the worship service (the Prayer of the Day, the General Prayer or Prayer of the Church, etc.). What is their purpose? Where does he find the prayers he uses?
- Day 7: Make a point of arriving at church early. Find a seat near the entrance. Before the service begins, thank God for the privilege of joining with other Christians in prayer. As your fellow members file in, thank God for bringing them to church to pray with you.