

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

by Tommy Kelton

God speaks to us in the Bible; we speak to God in prayer. One reads the Bible to discover God's will; he prays in order that he might receive power to do that will.

These two qualities are interdependent. Unless we know what God's promises are, we will not be able to pray the way we should. Unless we pray, we will not have the disposition of heart that keeps us studying.

THE APOSTLES AND PRAYER

The apostles devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 6:4). They regarded prayer as one of the two most important works of their lives. Much of Paul's time, strength and thought was given to prayer (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:15-16; Col. 1:9; I Thess. 3:10; II Tim. 1:3).

PRAYER AND THE EARLY CHURCH

The church devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 2:42). The church lifted their voices together to God (Acts 4:24). Prayer without ceasing was made by the church (Acts 12:5).

PRAYER IS TO BE MADE FOR ALL

For all the saints (Eph. 6:18); for all men (I Tim. 2:1). All men and women need our prayers. We should pray for those in authority, those in need, those preaching the gospel, and all that are alone. We should pray for those we love and those who are our enemies. There isn't anyone that doesn't need our prayers.

PRAYER IS TO BE MADE IN EVERYTHING

"In everything . . . let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6). "Pray everywhere" (I Tim. 2:8). There isn't anything too big or too small to pray for. From our daily bread to the direction of our lives, we need to talk to God and depend on Him to hear us. All of our problems should be talked over with Him. Tell Him all your needs and rely on Him to meet them.

PRAYER IS TO BE MADE CONTINUALLY

"Pray at all times" (Eph. 6:18). "Pray always" (Luke 21:36). "Pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5:17). "Be constant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12). "Continue steadfastly in prayer" (Col. 4:2).

These passages make it plain that we must always be in an attitude of prayer and that we must pray much and often. These prayers do not have to be long, for-

mal prayers. They can be brief sentence prayers spoken as we go through our busy daily lives. The important thing is to have communication with our Father continually on our minds.

PRAYER IS TO BE MADE IN THE NAME OF CHRIST

"Whatever you ask in My name, I will do it." "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:13-14). "Whatever you ask the Father in my name, I will give it to you" (John 15:16). "If you ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in My name" (John 16:23-24). "Ask and ye shall receive."

These three promises of Jesus tell us if we will ask the Father in His name, then "He will do it," second, "He will give it," and "we shall receive it." Thus, we have a threefold promise that we will be heard; He will do and give and we shall receive

WE MUST PRAY BY FAITH

"What things soever you desire, when you pray, believe that you have received them and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). "Lift up holy hands without doubting" (I Tim. 2:8). "Ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind" (James 1:5-8). "Without faith it is impossible to please Him. He that cometh to God must believe that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). "Everything you ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21:22).

Faith is definite, specific, asking for and expecting the things for which we ask. It must be free of doubt. It must believe that what "He saith shall come to pass."

Prayer is the highest expression of faith. You no longer let yourself be guided by the invisible. Unbelief believes what is seen; faith sees what it believes.

If we are to have real faith, we must study the word of God and find out what is promised, then simply believe the promises of God. Trying to believe what you want to believe is not faith. Believing what God says in His Word is faith (Rom. 10:17). If I am to have faith when I pray, I need a specific promise of God on which I can base my faith. The most wonderful thing is that such promises are always to be found.

No matter how positive any promise of God's word may be, we will not enjoy it in actual experience unless we confidently expect its fulfillment in answer to our prayers. We must act as if our prayers have

been heard and answered long before we actually receive, or realize the answer.

Faith does not grow discouraged because prayer is not immediately answered; it takes God at His word, and lets Him take what time He chooses to fulfill His purposes. Faith knows there will be delays in answering prayer and regards such delays as times of testing. Faith knows that He that has promised is faithful.

WE MUST KEEP GOD'S COMMANDS FOR PRAYER TO BE ANSWERED

"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (I John 3:22). "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). We are to "lift up holy hands" (I Tim. 2:8).

The one who expects God to do as he asks Him, must do whatever God bids him do. If we give a listening ear to God's commands to us, He will give a listening ear to all our petitions to Him.

His commands are not grievous. In all the scriptures, there is not a single instance recorded of God having commanded any man to do a thing beyond his power. If we will obey Him, God will answer our prayers.

PRAYER MUST BE ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL

"If we ask anything according to His will He hears us" (I John 5:14). Christ prayed, "Not My will, but Thine be done" (Mark 14:36).

God has revealed His will in His Word. When something is definitely promised in the Word of God, we know it is His will to give that thing.

When we have a specific promise in the Word of God, if we doubt that it is God's will, or if we doubt that God will do the thing that we ask, we make God a liar. God has made His will known in His word. By diligent study, we can know that will.

What we ask of God must be in accordance with His revealed will and not just our desires. We must ask for what He wants us to have, not just what we want. We must always be assured God will hear us when we ask according to His will.

WE MUST ABIDE IN CHRIST

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7/NASB).

To abide in Christ is for us to bear the same relations to Him that the branches bear to the vine; that is to say, to abide in Christ is to renounce any independent life of our own, to give up trying to think our thoughts, or form our resolutions, or cultivate our feelings, and simply and constantly look to Christ to think His thoughts in us, to form His purposes in us, to feel His emotions and affections in us.

In addition, if we are to obtain from God all that we ask from Him, Christ's words must abide or continue in us. We must study His words, fairly devour His

words, let them sink into our thoughts and into our hearts. We must keep them in our memory and constantly obey them in our lives.

Prevailing prayer is almost an impossibility where there is neglect of the study of the Word of God.

WE MUST PERSEVERE IN PRAYER

"Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight and say unto him, Friend lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine, in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give you. I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is a friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth" (Luke 11:5-8).

"And he spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man; and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while; but afterwards he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you he will avenge them speedily" (Luke 18:1-8).

Importunate praying never faints nor grows weary; it is never discouraged; it is sustained by a hope that knows no despair, and a faith which will not let go. Importunate praying has patience to wait and strength to continue.

These passages of scriptures clearly set forth the truth that prevailing prayer must persevere. We must ask and keep on asking without growing tired or wavering. We must have the courage to so fix our purpose in mind to such an extent that we will not give up. If we do this, we will be heard.

PRAYER IS TO BE WITH THANKSGIVING

"Have no anxiety about anything; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7). "Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thess. 5:17-18). "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2).

In approaching God to ask for new blessings, we should never forget to return thanks for blessings already granted. One of the reasons we have so little faith when we pray is because we take so little time to meditate upon and thank God for blessings already received. To pray like we ought to pray, we must be thankful and express our thanks continually to the Father.

THE SPIRIT HELPS US WHEN WE PRAY

“Likewise, the Spirit also helps our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:26).

When we pray, both Christ and the Holy Spirit make intercession for us. The Spirit helps us even when we do not know all we should pray for.

This promise should give us assurance, when we pray, that our needs will be met. The prayers will work together for good, and we will be heard.

BLESSINGS OF TWO AGREEING IN PRAYER

“If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 18:19).

This passage shows the power of Christians joining in prayer. We should pray with and for one another. We should tell our prayer needs to others and request them to join with us in praying for these needs. The church has the power to move the world if we will only join together in concentrated prayer.

GOD IS ABLE TO DO ABOVE ALL WE ASK OR THINK

“He is able to do exceedingly above all we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph. 3:20). “He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things” (Rom. 8:32). “With God, nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

The only limit to prayer is the promises of God and His ability to fulfill these promises. We must believe that God is able to do all He has promised and that He has proved by giving His Son that He will fulfill these promises. Our challenge is to meet the requirements that He has made of us in our prayers.

WE CAN KNOW WE HAVE RECEIVED WHAT WE ASK

“This is the confidence that we have in him that, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us: and we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we shall know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (I John 5:14-15).

“Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believing that you have received them, and they shall be granted you” (Mark 11:24/NASB).

No matter how positive any promise of God’s Word may be, we will not enjoy it in actual experience unless we confidently expect its fulfillment in answer to our prayer. Act and speak as if you have already received all your desires. Make your desires real in your mind, by prayer, based on the promises of God. Accept them as realities when you pray.

ADDITIONAL PROMISES FOR PRAYER

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

“The Lord is nigh unto all that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth” (Psa. 145:18).

“He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him” (Psa. 91:15).

“Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice” (Psa. 55:17).

“In the day when I cried thou answered me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul” (Psa. 138:3).

“Yes, the Lord hears the good man when he calls to him for help, and saves him out of all his troubles” (Psa. 34:17/LB).

“Be delighted with the Lord. Then he will give you all your heart’s desires” (Psa. 37:4/LB).

“Commit your way to the Lord, trust in him and he will do it” (Psa. 37:5/NASB).

“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor me” (Psa. 50:15/NASB).

“In the day of trouble I shall call upon thee, for thou wilt answer me” (Psa. 86:7/NASB).

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (II Chron. 7:14).

HINDRANCES TO PRAYER

“Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:2-3).

“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:1-2).

“Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard” (Prov. 21:13).

“Let us ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:6-7).

“When you pray, forgive, if you have ought against anyone: that your Father which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25).

These hindrances can cause us not to receive an answer to our prayers. If we are going to be blessed by our prayers, we must be certain that we avoid all these hindrances.

CONCLUSION

I affirm, with absolute certainty, that Almighty God answers prayer. That He hears and answers every and

all prayer where the true conditions outlined in this study are met. Either this is so or it is not. If not, there is nothing in prayer. Then prayer is just the recitation of words, a mere verbal performance, an empty ceremony. But if what we have said in this material is true, then there are great possibilities in prayer. It is far reaching in its scope and wide in its range. Prayer can lay its hand upon God and move Him to do great and wonderful things.

I beg everyone that reads this to realize the power of prayer. To realize His promises to answer, and to do and give "all things," "anything," "whatsoever," and "all things whatsoever" are so great that we cannot "stagger at the promises through unbelief."

We cannot afford to prove faithless to His Word. His promises are for all of us. He means to do for all of us who pray just what He says He will do. "For he is faithful that has promised."

Make prayer a vital part of your life. "Pray without ceasing" and you will be more than a conqueror. God will be with you and help your every need. You will have strength and encouragement when you are low and a friend you can always turn to.

THE MODEL PRAYER

That this prayer was intended to be a model, and not to be prayed verbatim, is seen in the comparison of Matthew's and Luke's account given in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. Luke records it in fewer than one-half the number of words used by Matthew; the phraseology is different; and part of that included by Matthew is omitted by Luke. If the Lord was giving us a prayer to be memorized and recited, He would not have given us different words the two times He gave it.

In Luke 11:1, the disciples said, "Teach us to pray." They did not say, "Teach us a prayer." It is something else to know how to pray.

Matthew 6:7 says, "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen." Would Christ then immediately follow by giving us a prayer to repeat?

In addition, there is no occasion in the entire New Testament on which this prayer is ever repeated by anybody else.

It is a model, a skeleton upon which to put flesh.

"OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN"

Seldom was the term "Father" used to speak to God in the Old Testament. Of all the terms used to address God in prayer in the Old Testament, Father is not among them.

Jesus was the first to make prayer a personal discourse with His Father.

Jesus constantly prayed to God as His Father, and spoke of Him as His Father. The gospels contain about 170 occurrences of Jesus praying to God as His Father or referring to Him as being His Father. Except for praying, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" from the cross (Mark 15:34), every prayer of Jesus recorded in the gospels is addressed to

God as Father.

Jesus prayed not to God as a distant "Father" but a close and loving "Abba" (Mark 14:36). Jesus spoke to His heavenly Father with the same simplicity and intimacy that a small child uses to speak to his earthly father.

This great privilege of approaching God in such a personal way belongs only to the body of Christ. Only those who have been adopted into His family can call Him Father. Those who are His children can cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:14-17).

Christians do not have to approach God in fear. We are sons and daughters, confidently approaching our Father. Through Jesus Christ we have a great intimacy with God. We can go to our Father with our every need and He will hear us.

"HALLOWED BE THY NAME"

To hallow is to sanctify; to deem and render sacred. I Peter 3:15 may throw light on this. Peter says, "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." The meaning is: set apart the Lord God in your hearts as the only true object of supreme, eternal adoration, worship and praise. Place Him alone on the throne of your hearts. Let Him be the only hallowed object there.

Our prayer is to let all adore God — the infinite Father — as the only object of universal adoration, praise, worship and love. Without such reverence for Jehovah's name, no prayer can possibly be acceptable.

"THY KINGDOM COME"

We cannot pray "Thy kingdom come" today, because the kingdom came on the First Pentecost of the Jews after the resurrection of Christ (33 A.D.).

Paul declared that he and the Colossian Christians had been "translated into the kingdom of the son of His love" (Col. 1:13). The Hebrew writer says, "Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe" (Heb. 12:28). John declared, "He made us to be a kingdom" (Rev. 1:6), and he professed to be in the kingdom (Rev. 1:9).

There are some ways in which we can pray similarly. We can pray that the church, or kingdom, may spread, that the church may grow, and that the good news of the kingdom might be preached or come to others who have never heard it.

"THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN"

Whenever we pray, we are to pray in accord with God's will. The literal Greek of this statement says something like this: "You will, whatever You wish to happen, let it happen." And then the Greek adds, "As in heaven, so in earth." In other words, "God, do what you want."

This attitude is seen in Christ's life. "My food is to

do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34). "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38). "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to Him" (John 8:29). "I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10).

This attitude of Christ, "Not my will but thine be done," must fill our prayers.

"GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD"

This shows our dependence on God for all the blessings we either possess or need.

This petition is remarkably comprehensive. It names only bread, and only the bread for "this day," yet it includes our water and our needful clothing — whatever we really need for our health and usefulness on earth. For all these we look to God.

This prayer implies a state of heart that leans upon God for everything. Our minds look to God, expecting from Him, and from Him alone, every good and perfect gift. And this is daily dependence.

After you have prayed for "our daily bread," He wants you to trust Him for the supply. Paul wrote, "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

And verse 19 of the same chapter assures us: "And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

They pray best who pray for today's needs.

"FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE ALSO HAVE FORGIVEN OUR DEBTORS"

Of the requests in the prayers, the matter of forgiveness is of such enormous importance that it is the only one which our Lord later took the time to reemphasize and develop in length.

When we pray, "Forgive us our debts," we are openly admitting ourselves to be guilty of wrong doing.

To receive the forgiveness of these sins we must be willing to forgive those who sin against us. We must forgive all that wrong us, and forgive them from the heart. God requires us to love our neighbors as we love our friends — He requires us to forgive others as surely as we ask forgiveness for ourselves.

"LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL"

Jesus is not suggesting that God will tempt us to evil if we do not petition Him otherwise. James 1:13 specifically says that God tempts no one.

Jesus is saying that we should ask the Father to deliver us from the evil one. In His "High Priestly Prayer," Jesus asks the Father not to take His disciples out of the world, but rather to ". . . keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15).

In foretelling Peter's denial, Jesus said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). In other words, Jesus was telling Peter that on his own he would be putty in the hands of Satan.

Likewise, we need the help of our Father to deliver us from the evil one.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

I cannot say, "Our," if I live only for myself.

I cannot say, "Father," if I am not His child.

I cannot say, "Who art in heaven," if I am laying up no treasure there.

I cannot say, "Hallowed be Thy name," if I am not striving for holiness.

I cannot say, "Thy kingdom spread," if I am not doing all in my power to see it grow.

I cannot say, "In earth as it is in heaven," if I'll not serve Him here and now.

I cannot say, "Give us this day our daily bread," if I will not work for it.

I cannot say, "Forgive us our debts," if I harbor a grudge against anyone.

I cannot say, "Lead us not into temptation," if I deliberately place myself in its path.

I cannot say, "Deliver us from evil," if I do not put on the whole armor of God.

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Brother Kelton says anyone can use this material freely.