

Is It Ever Wrong To Pray?

By Rev. Sylvester Herbert

Prayer is a wonderful privilege that the people of God enjoy. It is a pervasive theme throughout Scripture. As you read the Word of God you not only come across numerous commands to pray but also many prayers uttered by the saints of old. Throughout Christian history a plethora of poems / hymns has been written about prayer. Who has not been comforted by these words from the pen of Joseph Scriven?

*"What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins
and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God
in prayer!"*

Prayer is indeed "the Christian's vital breath."

So, is it true to say that it is sometimes wrong to pray? The very Word of God which commands us to **"pray without ceasing"** (I Thess. 5:17) answers "Yes" to this question.

It is wrong to pray when

1. **your prayers are for things which God has clearly revealed you should not have**

It is simply wrong to pray for things that the Word of God prohibits you from having. To besiege the throne of heaven in this way is to exalt your will over the will of God. The words of Jesus regarding the will of God are very instructive: *"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."* (Jn. 6:38)

Why keep pounding on doors that God has closed in your life? Why pray for God's will to be revealed in a possible business partnership or a romantic relationship with persons who do not love the Lord? God has spoken clearly regarding what is permissible and what is off limits as far as relationships are concerned. *"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"* (II Cor. 6:14). Why pray for God to change His mind on this matter? It becomes a sobering reality indeed when God grants us things we should not have asked Him for in the first place. The psalmist recounts the tragic experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness: *"And He gave them their request but sent leanness into their souls and [thinned their numbers by] disease and death."* (Psalm 106:15, Amplified Bible). Clearly, no one should be praying prayers that are motivated by selfish concerns (James 4:3).

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2. your prayers are a substitute for obedience or decisive action

Sometimes one hears Christians saying, “all we can do is pray about that” and they

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remain in prayer mode without taking steps to resolve the situation. People who live in abusive relationships need to take action to end the abuse. Prophetic voices need to cry out against

matters of injustice. Christians should not just pray about deplorable conditions, they should work for improvement. Further, sin which is affecting the church should never be excused or accommodated, it must be dealt with. It is worthy of note that in the face of Israel’s humiliating defeat God commanded Joshua: *“Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them.”* (7:10). He continued, *“There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you.”* (7:13)

3. your prayers are nothing more than repetitions of the same phrase over and over again

The Lord Jesus Himself forbids this kind of praying in Matthew 6:7. Translations vary in the way they render this verse: “use not vain repetitions” (KJV) ; “Do not use meaningless repetition” (NASB); “Do not heap up empty

phrases” (ESV); “Do not keep on babbling” (NIV). However, the one common thread of meaning that runs through all these translations is that our prayers must have meaningful content and should be regarded as a heartfelt conversation with God.

Jesus has no problem with repetition in itself. In fact, repetition in prayer is desirable if the words are heartfelt, sincere and intentional (Luke 18:1-8). Useful repetition is one way in which God’s Word becomes etched on your heart especially if you are praying God’s Word back to Him. However, you definitely should not pray if you are merely repeating written prayers by rote (for example, just saying The Lord’s Prayer), reciting magical formulas, or saying a set prayer a number of times in order for your sins to be absolved.

4. your prayers are contributing to unhealthy emotional bonding



Christian author Richard Exley in the book “Dangers Toils & Snares offers some timely and timeless words of counsel to ministry leaders on the matter of “Handling Sexual Temptation.”

“When we pray for our counselees daily, we only reinforce our overdeveloped sense of responsibility. As incongruent as it seems, prayer itself can become an

incubator in which sexual temptation is hatched. Praying for someone you're attracted to only fills your heart and mind with fodder for the enemy."

Whether or not we are in a counseling relationship or we are dealing with a sexual or non-sexual matter, we need to take charge of our thought life (Philippians 4:8) and to avoid giving the devil the opportunity to establish footholds and strongholds in our lives (Eph. 4:27). We should do this even if it means scaling back on our prayers for some people.

5. your prayers are directed to angels or saints rather than to God



Michael the archangel plays a pivotal role in Scripture in defending God's people. Mary has a unique place in the Bible as the mother of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. The saints throughout history inspire us in many ways. However, there is no Scriptural basis for praying to any of these. In fact Matthew 4:10 speaks powerfully to the issue: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." Prayer is a form of worship and only God is worthy of worship.

Furthermore, we have direct access to the Father through Christ alone (Heb. 4:14-16) so there is absolutely no need to pray to angels or saints in order to receive benefits from God. It is noteworthy that prayers to Mary and Michael were not a practice in the New Testament church. The earliest known prayer to Mary dates from about the 3rd century A.D. and the prayer to St Michael was composed in 1886, twenty-four years after he was made a saint by the Catholic Church.

There is little doubt that the majority of Christians need to be praying more rather than less. However, more praying should be synonymous with praying the right kind of prayers. Let each resolve to pray in a way that truly honours the One who teaches us in His Word what true prayer is. ●