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### On Learning How to Pray

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## ON LEARNING HOW TO PRAY

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF 1 JOHN  
NUMBER 26  
1 JOHN 3:22

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1 JOHN 3:22 "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

The opportunities we have in the realm of prayer are absolutely fantastic. Prayer is a privilege which belongs to every believer priest. This is true because every believer priest is in full time Christian service. In this service you perform as a believer priest prayer is one of your greatest tools. Most every believer, at one time or another, has read some book on prayer and everyone seems to be an expert in this field.

### YOUR MOST DIFFICULT TASK

Frankly, I believe that prayer is about your most difficult task as a Christian. Now, if you open your mouth and say, "O Jesus" or "O Holy Ghost" you immediately reveal your ignorance concerning the whole principle of prayer. Christ is said to be making intercession for you (Heb. 7:25) and you are never once in Scripture commanded to pray to him. We have a strange emotional group of people who insist on praying to the Holy Spirit. You will hear them pray "O Holy Ghost." But remember that the Holy Spirit also prays to the Father for us. (Romans 8:26) The very fact that God the Father is said to be the recipient of prayer, and the fact that both God the Son and God the Holy Spirit direct their prayers to God the Father, makes it quite evident that when we pray we should pray to God the Father. Many people pray to Jesus and to the Holy Ghost and they think it is real praying, but it just reveals their ignorance. Jesus said, "When you pray say, Our Father."

### GOD KNEW IN ADVANCE

Every bona fide prayer that has ever been made was known by God the Father millions of years ago. Did God build his plan around those prayers, or are those prayers built around his plan? This passage that we have before us is going to answer that question for us.

1 JOHN 3:22 "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." In this verse we have the exhale of prayer, but in the next two verses in this chapter, we have the doctrine of divine decrees. While this has been a source of theological controversy, there is no doubt that God's divine decrees in eternity past took cognizance of every prayer that has ever been offered, because every prayer represents the desires of believers. You might even say, "I think I will change my prayer and see if it will change the plan of God." Now isn't that ridiculous! God knew in eternity past all the prayers you would pray and he provided a perfect answer for every single prayer. He knew the state of mind of every believer at every point. However, the believer is free at any time to pray for anything that comes into his mind, and prayer is one of your most effective weapons.

Illustration

The Colt 45 Automatic is one of the most amazing weapons ever invented. You can drop it in the dirt and leave it there for weeks and go back and pick it up and it will fire. Or you can drop it in the water and leave it there for weeks and go back and pick it out of the water and it will fire. With the touch of one small release button, you can remove the clip and place another clip in it and release the slide and it is ready to fire again. But even though it is an amazing weapon, people have to be taught how to fire it effectively. The same thing is true of prayer. It is a terrific weapon but believers have to learn how to use prayer as a spiritual force.

STRANGE IDEAS ABOUT PRAYER

It is very easy to develop false and weird ideas about prayer. Very few people know how to use prayer as an effective weapon. Prayer is not reserved for that time when you get in a jam and then you cry out, "O God, help me!" Then just because you have had a prayer answered, you don't want to get the idea that you are a great prayer warrior. The Bible says, "Pray without ceasing" and this means that you are to use 1 John 1:9 every day and stay in fellowship so you can pray all the time. Prayer is the extension of your spiritual reflex, and when you are in fellowship, prayer is just as natural as breathing. Verse 22 is placed here in between verse 21 and verses 23-24 for a very special reason. In verse 21 we are reminded how important it is to be in fellowship with God. Then in verses 23-24 we read about the divine decrees. In between these two ideas, we have this verse on prayer. The first word in this verse "whatsoever" needs to be corrected. It is from ean in the Greek and this means it is a third class condition. So, this verse says, "And if we ask." Maybe you will ask and maybe you won't ask. The word for "ask" is the present, active, subjunctive of aiteo and means to make a request. The subjunctive mood indicates that this is potential and maybe you will make the request and maybe you won't. So, this phrase simply says, "And if we ask." "We receive" is the present, active, indicative of labano. It had two meanings, and it means not only to ask and receive but also to seize. Prayer is always answered. "Of him" is from apo and it means from the ultimate source of God. The asking is potential, and the receiving is potential. So, the first part of this verse is saying this--"Now look here, prayer is available to you. You may use it or not, it depends on you. And if you use prayer, God always answers." Answers to prayer always come from God. He is always willing to answer and he always gives the right answer. He may say "Yes" or he may say "No" or he may say "Wait" or he may say, "I'll give you something better." But remember this, God's answer to prayer is always a perfect answer.

BECAUSE WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS

This explains why prayers are answered. Hoti is the word for "because" and it reveals the reason why prayers are answered. "We keep" is the present, active, indicative of tereo and this means something that belongs to you and you keep it and guard it. "His commandments" is the accusative plural of entole and it means his decrees. His decrees are his plans from eternity past. We are a part of his plan and his eternal decrees. Next we have "and do" and this is the present, active, indicative of poieo. "Those things that are pleasing" really should be

translated "the pleasing things" from ta aresta. Everything that we will ever do that pleases him was known to him in eternity past. And this includes every effective prayer we will ever pray. His decrees are a little more than commandments, they are his plans for our lives. That third class condition that began this verse means that your prayers can please God or they cannot please God. God knew which prayers were legitimate and which ones were not and he built his plan around these legitimate things. It all depends on how much you know. You are a believer priest and prayer is your privilege, but just like the soldier needs to know how to use his weapons, you too have to know how to use prayer.

#### THE RANGE OF PRAYER

The range of prayer is 25,000 miles, or 12,500 miles, depending on the way you look at it. No one is too far away in this world to be touched by your prayers. You can pray for people far away and God hears and answers. So let us get a corrected translation of this verse--

"And if we ask (maybe we will and maybe we won't) we receive or seize from the ultimate source of him, because we keep his decrees, and we keep on doing the pleasing things in the presence of him (God the Father)."

To keep on doing the pleasing things depends on two things--

1. Your knowledge of doctrine.
2. Your use of prayer as a part of the angelic conflict. Since divine decrees are emphasized in verse 23 and 24 we will hold back on that until we come to those verses.

#### THE DOCTRINE OF PRAYER

##### 1. PRAY TO GOD THE FATHER.

When you open your mouth to pray, be sure you always say "Father." Prayer is always to be directed to God the Father. MATTHEW 6:9 "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name."

EPHESIANS 3:14 "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,"

We pray in the name of the Son. Why?

JOHN 14:13-14 "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."

The approach is through Jesus Christ. We go to God through the right channels. He is the High Priest at the throne of God, and we are believer priests here on the earth and we go to the Father through Jesus Christ. We never bypass our High Priest. As we say in military circles, "We never go over his head." Christ is the channel and there is no other channel open to you.

JOHN 14:6 "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

Therefore, don't get carried away and pray, "O Jesus!"

We pray in the power of The Holy Spirit.

EPHESIANS 6:18 "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

The only prayer we pray when we are out of fellowship is the rebound prayer. We name our sins and get back in fellowship then we can pray. NO MAN CAN GO DIRECTLY TO GOD AND DISREGARD THE CHANNELS.

2. THERE ARE THREE CATEGORIES OF PRAYER DIRECTED TO GOD.
  - a. Prayers are directed to God the Father from the Son.  
HEBREWS 7:25 "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."  
This indicates to us we need his help.
  - b. From the source of The Holy Spirit.  
ROMANS 8:26-27 "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."
  - c. From the source of the believer priest.  
HEBREWS 4:16 "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."  
Since the Son and Holy Spirit direct their prayers to God the Father, this indicates to us that we ought to do the same.
  
3. GOD'S AGENDA FOR PRIVATE PRAYER.
  - a. Confession.  
1 JOHN 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
  - b. Thanksgiving.  
EPHESIANS 5:20 "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;"
  - c. Intercession.  
EPHESIANS 6:18 "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;"
  - d. Petition.  
HEBREWS 4:16 "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."  
You are to pray for your own needs. There are certain things for which you do not pray. You do not pray for the Holy Spirit to indwell you. He is already in you. You never pray for doctrinal knowledge. You take your books down and get to work in study. You don't have to pray about the plain teaching of the Word of God. There is a relationship between prayer and spiritual growth. Certain people are given special power in prayer, like the older widows in the early church.
  
4. PRAYER IS AN EXHALE OF THE FAITH-REST PRINCIPLE.

You inhale doctrine and then you transfer by faith this doctrine into your human spirit and from your human spirit you exhale your prayer to God. Therefore, you see that doctrine and faith have a great deal to do with prayer. Doctrine guides your mind so you will know how to pray for the right things.  
MATTHEW 21:22 "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

5. EIGHT PRINCIPLES IN PRAYER.

- a. Prayer is most effective when you pray from a grace basis relying on doctrinal truth to guide you as you pray.  
JOHN 15:7 "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."
- b. Prayer is an extension of doctrinal knowledge linked with faith.  
MARK 11:24 "Therefore I say unto you . What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."
- c. Prayer depends on your knowledge of the will of God. The more you know about the will of God, the more intelligently you can pray.  
1 JOHN 5:14 "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:"
- d. Effective prayer is always offered from the filling of the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 6:18)
- e. Prayer is ineffective when the believer is carnal.  
PSALM 66:18 "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:"
- f. Prayer must always comply with the principles of grace. (Hebrews 4:16)
- g. Prayer is linked with the divine decrees.  
JEREMIAH 33:3 "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." (You see, God didn't forget to throw in a couple of things and now we have to agonize to get him to do it.)
- h. Prayer is related to our love for God. (Psalm 116:1-2)

6. NINE REASONS WHY PRAYERS ARE NOT ANSWERED.

- a. We are not filled with the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 6:18)
- b. No faith-rest exhale. (Matt. 21:22)
- c. Mental attitude sins. (Psalm 66:18)
- d. Lust type selfishness. (James 4:2-4)
- e. Lack of obedience. (1 John 3:22)
- f. Non-compliance with the will of God. (1 John 5:14)
- g. Pride which leads to self-righteousness (John 15:12-13)
- h. Lack of compassion. (Proverbs 21:13)
- i. Lack of domestic tranquility.  
1 PETER 3:7 "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered."

7. THE PRINCIPLE OF GRACE IN PRAYER.

- a. Prayer is the privilege and extension of grace function. Therefore, it is impossible to approach God on the basis of human good or human merit.
- b. The believer approaches God on the merits of Jesus Christ.
- c. The Father was propitiated by the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, but he is not impressed with us. God answers us on the basis of his character and perfection.
- d. God does not hear my prayers because I am sincere, fervent, moral, religious or self-effacing.
- e. God hears my prayers because of who and what he is and because of what he is able to do for and through me, on the basis of his grace.

8. THERE ARE FOUR TYPES OF PETITIONS.

To understand this, you must know what I mean. You have a petition for something because you think if you receive this something, then you will be happy or successful or prosperous. So, there are four possible results:

- a. Positive--negative.
- b. Negative--positive.
- c. Positive--positive.
- d. Negative--negative.

(You might pray for a million dollars and you think if you get it, then you would be happy. But you get it and find you are not happy--So this is Positive (You got the million) but it is negative (You are not happy).

Follow this idea on through for all four of these and you will find there are four possibilities. If we pray according to the will of God, then the result can be positive--positive every time.