

## Out Of The Abundance Of Our Prayers

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**"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." —*Matthew 12:34***

When we were first called and entered the church, we found that, rather than just attending church services on a Saturday, we were admonished to study God's Word and pray daily. Ministers, following Herbert Armstrong's lead, preached that we should study and pray at least half an hour a day each. For most of us, this was both a new and trying experience.

The study portion of this recommendation was not difficult due to the Correspondence Course and the interesting subjects our studies could unearth, but getting on our knees and talking to God for half an hour seemed impossible. We thought, *What does one say after the first five minutes? How can I possibly fill that much time?*

However, we have grown spiritually over the years, and prayer has probably become easier for us. We now realize that, of all people on the face of the earth, we alone have been justified by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and are able to come directly into God the Father's presence, before His very throne. We should by now have a greater appreciation for our unique standing before God and be able to thank Him profusely for this grace.

Still, there is a danger that, because time has gone on, and perhaps because we are living in the Laodicean era, we have become a little complacent in this area of Christian living. Prayer has slid from its former place of importance.

In Matthew 12:34, Jesus tells us that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." He elucidates this by saying, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart [the storehouse of the mind where thoughts, feelings, and counsels are kept] brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil things" (verse 35).

He concludes by warning us that our day of judgment is upon us. Even our "idle" words will be scrutinized, and we will have to give account of them to God (verse 36). Our words will either exonerate us or condemn us (verse 37).

Because we know and believe these scriptures, we work to watch what we allow to leave our mouths. We know that James admits in James 3:2, "If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body." Even though we work at being blameless in speech, we still realize that none of us has arrived at oral perfection.

### Consider That!

Have we ever considered applying this principle a little differently? Most of us naturally think of this passage to refer to our conversations with others at home, at work, at play, at the store, at church services, etc. But what about applying it to ourselves when we are on our knees before God? Have we ever considered that out of the abundance of our prayers—or the lack thereof—our heart speaks?

Further, do we deeply consider what we say to God? Do we take the time to organize and improve how we present our requests to Him? Do we think about the attitude in which we come before the great God of the universe?

Though we may not always count it a blessing, God knows our every thought, every desire, every emotion. It is impossible to hide anything from Him (Hebrews 4:13). The beauty in truly understanding this is that we may as well be totally honest with Him, telling Him everything, because He already knows the deepest intents of our hearts!

He sees the tender feelings we have toward the plights of others and our desire to help. He notes the patience, forbearance, and true outgoing concern we have for the brethren in the church. He knows the deep love we have for those who request our prayers for their healing. He observes our sighing and crying over the wretched world we live in (see Ezekiel 9:4).

Conversely, He also sees when we are being self-centered, pigheadedly pursuing our own desires, and justifying what we want as opposed to what is right and good in His sight. He notices when we ignore the needs of others. He surely must shake His head in shame when we excuse ourselves for not doing what we know to be righteous.

God is acutely aware of our attitudes when approaching His throne. He discerns whether we consider time spent in conversation with Him to be of great value, or whether we are just going through the motions. Because He knows what we are going through at all times, He knows when we are harboring grudges, doubts, malice, lust, impatience, covetousness, and any other carnal motivation against another. Certainly, He realizes that we will not be at our best every time we enter His presence, but He can tell when we are distracted or disinterested.

God is shaping us for future offices in His Kingdom, and He learns a great deal about us as we come before Him in prayer. He truly does listen to what we bring before Him, but He always considers our heart and our reasoning in His response to us.

This does not mean that we have to pray perfectly every time, having every word and rationale in its proper place, although doing so should be our goal. Romans 8:26-27 assures us:

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit . . . makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He [Jesus Christ; see verse 34] makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Even though we might not put every word or thought in its proper place, still the ideas, plans, and attitudes in our prayers are amplified and aided by God's Spirit flowing between God and ourselves, and the Father responds according to His will for us. Paul continues, providing us greater confidence and boldness before God, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (verse 28). What joy we should have in knowing that everything will work out splendidly in the end!

## **Praying for Our Enemies**

If we pray according to God's will for us, our prayers will help to shape our character to become more like God's. This is only logical, for if we continually express God's thoughts and desires, they will eventually become habitual to us and ingrained in our natures. For instance, in Matthew 5:43-45, Jesus instructs us to pray for those who have mistreated us:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy."  
But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.

This truly goes against our human nature, and it definitely takes thought and genuine concern to pray for blessing and good to come to one's enemy. Praying for soundness and fairness in thinking, and working to make sure we do no harm to that individual are difficult, yet in preparing us for our future responsibilities, this is what God wants from us.

The apostle Paul was undoubtedly faced with difficult personalities, general church problems, trials, and personal attacks, yet even in these circumstances, he understood what Jesus Christ wanted for His people. Therefore, he kept his general prayers, his thoughts, and his goals on par with those of Jesus Christ for God's people. We read one of his positive, uplifting, and encouraging prayers in Philippians 1:9-11:

And this is my prayer, that your love may grow ever richer in knowledge and insight of every kind, enabling you to learn by experience what things really matter. Then on the day of Christ you will be flawless and without blame, yielding the full harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Revised English Bible)

Were those in the Philippian church perfect? Certainly, they had their problems, yet Paul overlooked all the petty matters and focused on the goal that Jesus gives to each of the members of His church, praying accordingly. When we follow Paul's example, our sights are lifted above the trivialities that confront us daily, realigning us on what Christ desires for each of us.

### **Praying for the Ministry**

In Colossians 4:2-4, Paul again reminds us not to neglect our duty to pray:

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

Here Paul instructs us not only not to neglect prayer, but also to keep at it in earnest. He advises us to watch for opportunities to pray for others and for situations, especially in the church, that require prayer. This important work belongs to us individually.

As we see, Paul was at the time imprisoned in Rome, and he desperately longed to be released so that he could proclaim the gospel and teach God's way as he had been commissioned to do. He was certain that, through the power of prayer, God would open a door—perhaps the door to his prison—

to present God's Word to others. The apostle knew that this was God's will for him, so prayer according to that same will would be effective.

The lesson for us today is to pray for the ministers who speak to us, teaching the doctrines and principles that will help us to overcome, grow in grace and knowledge, and obtain the understanding to put on the image of Christ. We must realize that their messages go out, not just to us, but to other members of the congregation who may have different needs than we do. In addition, they are spread around the world to people who may have had a long association with God's truth, as well as to those who are truly babes in the Word of God. We need to pray that God inspires the ministry to fill the needs that He sees in today's very diverse audience.

Prior to each service, we should humbly pray in deep appreciation for whoever is presenting both the sermonette and the sermon, asking that God would guide their messages and that all who hear them might receive what Jesus Christ wants them to understand. Such an attitude and prayer will please God greatly.

### **Praying for Others**

James gives us further instruction regarding prayer beginning in James 5:16: "Confess your trespasses [faults] to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." Though he seems to be speaking about praying for those who are sick, the overall command is specifically to "pray for one another."

Further, James instructs us to confess our faults. The apostle does not mean that we should reveal every sin and foible to everyone in the congregation. He implies that we should confide our problems to a close, trusted friend so that he or she can help us by praying to God for help in overcoming it.

We should pray for one another, and it need not be known by others or even asked of us. We may notice a brother struggling with a problem, and rather than pointing out his flaw to others, we should get on our knees to petition God to come to his aid. The apostle James assures us that such a prayer, given seriously and thoughtfully, will make a difference.

The Jews say regarding prayer: "He who prays surrounds his house with a wall stronger than iron." Another of their sayings runs: "Penitence can do something, but prayer can do everything." To them, prayer is nothing less than contacting and employing the power of God; it is the channel through which the strength and grace of God is brought to bear on the troubles of life.

In the next two verses, James uses the illustration of Elijah to show just how effective righteous prayer can be. He chose Elijah because the biblical story of this prophet brings out his passionate—and sometimes still carnal—nature. Nevertheless, he prayed earnestly for drought, and God responded: No rain fell on the earth for three years and six months! When he prayed again for rain, God again heard and acted. What tremendous power can be unleashed through prayer that conforms to the will of God!

James 5:19-20 continues the theme. If we see a brother straying from the truth, and with the help of prayer, restore him to a right understanding, we may indeed be saving him from the Lake of Fire, from the second death! Such loving help is the essence of true outgoing concern.

A proper prayer life, one patterned after God's desires for us, helps us to develop His mind and character. It prepares us to serve our brethren better now, as well as to deal with those who will need our attention and instruction in the Millennium and beyond.

In the abundance of our prayers, our hearts do speak. They reveal what we are most interested in and what our goals and aspirations are. They tell us if we are trying to help ourselves alone or others also. They can be a gauge to monitor our spiritual growth and our transformation into God's image. What do your personal prayers say about you?