

Major Bible Themes

BY

LEWIS SPERRY CHAFER

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CHAPTER XL

PRAYER

Prayer, whether it be petition or praise, is the direct communion of man with God, and, according to the Scriptures, is subject to a four-fold classification:

I. PRAYER BEFORE THE FIRST ADVENT OF CHRIST

Though individual and private prayer was offered by godly men in all the ages, it is evident that prayer, in the main, was offered by the patriarch in behalf of his household (Job 1:5), and during the period between Moses and Christ, by the priests and rulers in behalf of the people. Throughout these centuries, the ground of prayer consisted in pleading the covenants of Jehovah (1 Kings 8:22-26; Neh. 9:32; Dan. 9:4), and His holy character (Gen. 18:25; Exod. 32:11-14), and followed the shedding of sacrificial blood (Heb. 9:7).

II. PRAYER IN EXPECTATION OF THE KINGDOM

The Messianic claim of Christ and the acceptance of the kingdom at His hand were rejected by the nation Israel; but during the early days of His preaching and when the kingdom alone was in

view He taught His disciples to pray for the kingdom to be set up in the earth. The "manner" of this prayer is stated in Matthew 6:9-13, and the prayer is adapted in every particular to the kingdom expectation. Its appeal is for the glory of God by the manifestation of His power in the realization of the kingdom on the earth (Matt. 6:13. Note, also, added teaching relative to prayer in the kingdom, Matt. 7:7-11; Luke 11:2-13).

III. THE PRAYER OF CHRIST

In this aspect of prayer we recognize the utmost freedom in communion between the Father and the Son, and, as in the High Priestly prayer recorded in John, Chapter 17, the theme of His prayer is of those eternal issues between the Father and the Son relative to the saved ones on the earth. Record is given that Christ spent long seasons in prayer (Matt. 14:23), even all night (Luke 6:12), and it is probable that the form of His prayer was the same familiar communion with His Father. There is no ground of appeal in the prayer of Christ. He pleads no mediation or covenant. The privilege of "listening in" when Christ is in prayer concerning us is most blessed (John 17:13).

IV. PRAYER UNDER THE RELATIONSHIPS OF GRACE

As already pointed out, prayer is not the same throughout all the ages; but, like all other human responsibilities, it is adapted to the various dispensations, and prayer in the present age is no exception.

Among the seven outstanding features of the believer's life under grace which Christ mentioned in the upper room (John 13:1 to 17:26), prayer is included as one of them; and the teaching of Christ on this most vital theme is given in three passages (John 14:12-14; 15:7; 16:23, 24). According to this word of Christ, the present possibility of prayer under grace is lifted out of earthly limitations into the sphere of the infinite relationships which obtain in the New Creation. This form of prayer may be considered under four aspects:

1. As to Its Office.

Rationalism teaches that prayer is unreasonable since God must know what is required better than the man who prays. Perhaps God did not need to arrange it thus; but it is revealed (John 14:13, 14) that prayer has now been divinely constituted an office, or trust. When Christ can say of prayer, "Whatsoever ye shall ask ... that will I do," He has elevated its importance to a point where, to a large degree, God has conditioned His own action on the faithful prayer of the believer. It is no longer a question of reasonableness; it is a question of adjustment. This responsibility in partnership has been established. It is probable that we cannot know all that is involved, but we do know that, in the ministry of prayer, the child of God is brought into vital partnership in the work of God in a manner in which he could not otherwise partake. Since the Christian may share in the glory that follows, he is given this opportunity of sharing in the achievement. This responsibility in partnership is not extended to the believer as a special concession; it is the normal function of one for whom the sacrificial blood has been shed (Heb. 10:19, 20), and who has been vitally joined to Christ in the New Creation. It is not unreasonable that one who is a living part of Christ (Eph. 5:30) should share both in His service and in His glory.

It should be noted that it is in connection with this announcement of the new office of prayer as a co-partnership in achievement that Christ stated, "Greater works than these shall he [the believer] do" (John 14:12), which word is immediately followed by the assurance that He alone undertakes to do in response to this ministry of prayer. So vital is this blending of endeavor between prayer and that which is divinely wrought in its answer that the believer is said by Christ to be the doer of the "greater works."

2. As to Its Appeal.

The privilege of praying in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, which under grace is extended to every child of God, lends to prayer a characteristic which lifts it to an infinite degree above every other form of prayer that ever was or ever will be. Likewise, the present form of prayer supersedes all preceding privileges; for when Christ said, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name" (John 16:24), He dismissed every other ground of prayer that had ever been. We may be sure that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ commands the attention of the Father, and that the Father will not only listen when that name is used, but will be inclined to do whatsoever is asked to be done for the sake of His beloved Son. The name of Christ is equivalent to the Person of Christ, and the name is not given to believers merely as something with which to conjure. Praying in the name of Christ means recognition of one's self as a living part of Christ in the New Creation and therefore limits the subjects of prayer to those projects which are in direct line with the purposes and glory of Christ. It is praying a prayer which Christ might pray. Since prayer in the name of Christ is like signing His name to our petition, it is reasonable that prayer in His name should be thus limited.

Having pointed out that sometimes spiritual poverty is due to the fact that we "ask not," James goes on to state that, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (Jas. 4:2, 3). Prayer thus may become either an appeal for the things of self, or for the things of Christ. The believer having been saved from self and vitally united to Christ (2 Cor. 5:17, 18; Col. 3:3), is no longer concerned with self. This is not to say that the believer's best interests are abandoned; but it is to say that these interests are now looked upon as belonging to the new sphere wherein "Christ is all in all." Being in Christ, it is normal to pray in His name, and abnormal to pray for the mere desires of self which are apart from the glory of Christ.

Since prayer is possible only on the ground of the shed blood and by virtue of the believer's vital union with Christ, the prayer of the unsaved cannot be accepted of God.

3. As to Its Scope.

The scope of prayer under grace is stated in the one word "whatsoever"; but not without its reasonable limitations. It is whatsoever ye ask in the name, according to the purposes and glory, of Christ. Before true prayer can be offered, the heart must be conformed to the mind of Christ. Thus it is said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will" (John 15:7), and this is true; for under such heart adjustment, the child of God will ask only for those things which are in the sphere of God's will. Under grace, there is perfect liberty of action given to the one in whom God is working both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Likewise, there is unlimited freedom of petition to the one who prays in the will of God. To the

Spirit-filled believer it is said: "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" (Rom. 8:26, 27). The scope of prayer under grace is not narrow: it is as infinite as the eternal interests of the One in whose name we are privileged to pray.

4. As to Its Practise.

It is well for believers to listen to their own manner of prayer that they may correct irreverent phrases, useless repetitions, and be conformed to the divine order. There is a divine order prescribed for prayer under grace. This is stated in the words, "In that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you" (John 16:23), and prayer is to be "in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 1:20).

This order is not arbitrarily imposed. However, to pray to Christ is to abandon His mediation by praying to Him, rather than through Him; thereby sacrificing the most vital feature of prayer under grace -- prayer in His name. To pray to the Spirit of God is to pray to Him, rather than by Him; and implies that we are, to that degree, depending on our own sufficiency.

It may be concluded then, that prayer under grace is to be offered to the Father, in the name of the Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTIONS

1. Name the four-fold classification of prayer.
2. Before the first advent of Christ by whom was prayer offered?
3. "What was the ground of prayer in the Old Testament?"
4. State the essential character of prayer for and in the kingdom.
5. a. Indicate the peculiar character of the prayer of Christ.
b. Could any prayer of Christ be unanswered?
6. Was His prayer as recorded in Luke 22:42 answered?
7. To what level is prayer under grace lifted?
8. Describe the office of prayer and the extent of its possibilities.
9. What is the new appeal or ground of prayer under grace?

10. Indicate the vital fact of union which underlies the Christian's privilege of prayer in the name of Christ.

11. Why cannot the unsaved pray as the believer prays under grace?

12. Point out the scope of prayer and the extent of its liberty under grace.

13. a. What is implied when prayer is made to the Second Person of the Trinity?

b. What is implied when prayer is made to the Third Person of the Trinity?

14. What is the true order of prayer under grace?