

Subject: Christ's Pattern for Prayer

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-13

Two things are absolutely essential for a healthy spiritual life: God's Word and prayer. There are no substitutes for the Word and prayer in the Christian life. In the Word, God speaks to us. In prayer, we speak to Him. There must be two-way communication. The Bible is our spiritual food and drink, and prayer is the spiritual air we breathe.

As we come to this familiar passage it would be helpful to say a few things by way of introduction.

1. Christ expects us to pray

Notice that he says "When you pray," not "if you pray." As we look at the immediate context of His words we see that Christ speaks about giving alms (vs. 1-4) and then He speaks about fasting (vs. 16-18). He expects His people will give alms (help the poor and needy) and He expects they will fast (abstain from food for the purpose of prayer and meditation).

2. Christ warns us about praying the wrong way

A. Don't pray like the hypocrites

He says that we must not pray like religious hypocrites. We must not pray to be seen by other people. Prayer is not a show to make people think we are pious or devout. Prayer is for an audience of one, God alone.

B. Don't pray like the heathen

He also says that we must not pray like religious pagans who think the more they pray, the better their chances of getting what they want from their god. They often repeated the same words over and over like a chant or magic formula. We have an example of this when the prophet Elijah mocked the false prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel.

1 Kings 18:26-29 *And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.*

This is different than being persistent in prayer. The Bible teaches us to be persistent and keep praying for people and situations, but to do so in a way that honors and pleases God.

3. Christ teaches us about praying the right way

This is commonly called “the Lord’s Prayer” because the Lord gave it as a model for prayer. This is not a substitute for our own prayers, but a guide for our prayers. The Lord did not tell us to pray these words, but to pray in this manner. This is Christ’s pattern for prayer.

A. God’s privilege of prayer (vs. 9)

Christ taught two important things about prayer in this verse: our relationship with God and reverence for God. We acknowledge that God is our Father and we are His children. What a privilege to talk to our Heavenly Father. Through salvation we have a special, spiritual, and secure relationship with God the Father through faith in Christ: **John 1:12** *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.* We should pray with the utmost respect and reverence. We understand His name is holy, set apart. God’s name represents His character or His attributes.

B. God’s purpose in prayer (vs. 10)

Prayer is not persuading God to do something He doesn’t want to do. Prayer is not advising Him as to what He ought to do. Prayer is submission to God and His will, realizing His will is always perfect.

Robert Law: “Prayer is a mighty instrument, not for getting man’s will done in Heaven, but for getting God’s will done on earth.”

The first Adam in effect said, “Not thy will, but my will be done.” But Christ prayed, “Not my will, but thy will be done.” When we pray “Thy will be done” we are praying like Christ. As we pray like this, we should also yield ourselves to do God’s will. How can we sincerely ask that God’s will be done, and then do otherwise? And as we pray this way for others, we are doing the best thing we could ever do. We are asking that God’s kingdom be advanced through them.

C. God’s provision in prayer (vs. 11)

Bread represents the basic needs of life. There is very little mention of our personal needs in this prayer (only seven words) because God already knows our needs (vs. 8). God is our faithful Provider and our Sustainer.

D. God’s pardon in prayer (vs. 12)

This is the request of a saved person, not an unsaved person. Sin is described by various Biblical words. It is missing the mark, crookedness, a trespass, lawlessness, and a debt. Sin is a debt we owe to God, but we cannot pay. God forgives us if we confess our sin and ask for mercy, but then He also expects us to forgive others (vs. 14-15). This is the only area of prayer where Christ adds special comments (vs. 14-15). As we ask God to forgive, we must also ask ourselves if we have forgiven others.

E. God’s protection in prayer (vs. 13)

The Bible says that God will never tempt us to sin.

James 1:13 *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.*

God does allow us to be tested, but He also makes a way to escape the temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:13 *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

This request in Christ's model prayer is an honest confession of weakness and a plea for God's deliverance. John MacArthur says: "This is the expression of the redeemed soul that so despises and fears sin that it wants to escape all prospects of falling into it, choosing to avoid rather than to defeat temptation." We should pray that God will deliver us from (literally) the evil one, that is, from Satan himself. Someone said, "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees."

F. God's praise in prayer (vs. 13)

This model prayer ends on a note of praise. As we pray we can have total confidence that God is able to do anything He wants to do. When we pray, we need not worry. How could we ever doubt God's wisdom, goodness, or power? This prayer begins with the sympathy of our Father (vs. 9) and it ends by praising the sovereignty of our King (vs. 13). Prayer can do anything God can do, and God can do anything. The only thing that lies outside the reach of prayer is that which is outside the will of God.

One of the old Puritans, David Clarkson, said that when we pray we should take hold of two strong truths: God is able and He is willing.

- God's privilege of prayer
- God's purpose in prayer
- God's provision in prayer
- God's pardon in prayer
- God's protection in prayer
- God's praise in prayer