***Principles of Prayer

Colossians 1:3-8

COL-029***

Our subject is "Thanksgiving for the Colossians," and this is segment number seven in Colossians 1:3-8.

Prayer to God is the way that he has ordered for the believer to secure guidance and provision for his life. Prayer which is operated on biblical guidelines changes things. The roadblocks to prayer will interfere with that changing of things.

**Roadblocks to Prayer**

In the previous session, we looked at several of these roadblocks. First, there is the lack of faith in the effectiveness of God's prayer technique. If you don't think it's for real, it isn't. Number two was not asking in keeping with the will of God. That means to be in temporal fellowship with God the Holy Spirit of our prayers are properly guided by Him. Number three is the lack of a spirit of compassion for those who are in need. God is not interested in listening to your prayers when you will not help those who have a need, and you have the capacity to do it. It's a very dangerous position to put oneself into. Number four is the spirit of pride and self-righteousness. This is very offensive to God, and as we illustrated in the Pharisee and the publican, the Pharisee got nothing, and the publican and got everything. Though they were both praying, one prayed with the spirit of humility; and, the other with pride and self-righteousness, and God did not hear the prayer of the arrogant one. Number five is the discord in the home between family members – family members that are at odds with one another, and do not settle that before sundown, are people who cannot expect to have their prayers answered. Number six is selfish asking to satisfy the evil desires of the sin nature.

Now, I've taken great time to read scripture with each of these principles so that you know that these are not just grocery lists that we have made up. These are actually the final touch on the technique of prayer. This is the thing that will stand in your way of being effective as a prayer warrior.

There are three more roadblocks.

1. **Mental Attitude Sins**

The first is mental attitude sins. Psalm 66:18 deals with this issue: "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." What this verse means is that if I am aware of wickedness in my heart, and I do nothing about confession and correction, then the Lord will not hear my prayer.

The prophet Isaiah also spoke to us on this problem of mental attitude sins when you're trying to pray. Isaiah 59:2: "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."

The prophet Jeremiah was also quite explicit about this. Jeremiah 5:25 says, "Your inequities have turned these away, and your sins have withheld good from you."

So, it is important to realize that the worst sins with God are those of the mind – those of your attitude, because all overt action of sin begins up here in the head. As Jesus said, "Murderer i first hatred, and adultery is first lust in the mind."

So, sinful acts all begin with the mentality of the soul. Therefore, it is no small thing that the mind has to be in a right relationship with the Spirit of God.

Proverbs 23:7: "For as he thinks within himself, so he is". Here it is describing what a person really is before God: "As he thinks, so he is."

The book of James adds this bit of information. James 1:14:15: "But each one is tempted when he is carried away, and enticed by his own lusts (by his old sin nature). Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin." When what is in the mind comes to its full fruition, it ends up in external expressions of evil. And when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. For the believer, it will bring forth eternal death – the separation from God. For the Christian, it brings the death of broken temporal fellowship.

Now, you and I can put on a good front before people. We all know that. But God is not deceived. Therefore, God will not answer your prayers no matter how good you may manage to make yourself look in the eyes of other people. Mental attitude sins are quite apparent to God.

1 Samuel 16:7 says, "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance, or at the height of his stature, because I rejected him. For God sees not as man sees. For man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." And here is Samuel being guided to select the king of Israel, and the person that Samuel was inclined to look for, because he looked good, God says, "That's not the man," because God sees internally in that man, and he was not suitable to be king. And you and I through society constantly find people who suddenly we discover have done terrible, horrible sins, while they looked like upright pristine characters in the community. God's ear is deaf then to Christians confessing only their outward acts of sin. It is important that you also confess the sins of the mind.

**The Sins of the Mind**

What are the sins of the mind? They include: jealousy; hatred; self-pity; unforgiveness; pride; resentment; greed; covetousness; and, lust. All those are mental attitude sins of the grossest kind. And they pull us away from fellowship with God. And the result is that we have the breakdown of being able to pray. And when we have these mental attitude sins, I guarantee you that you're not interested in putting yourself up in any degree to come out to prayer meeting. And it is interesting to watch a progression of the degeneration of people as you can see them drifting off from their good orientation in the Word of God. They'll come hustling into this auditorium with a Bible under their hand. They'll sit down; they'll glue their eyes up here; they'll pull out a pad; and, they'll start making notes of significant thoughts that are presented. Wednesday comes around, and they show up, and they join up in prayer. And testimony time comes around, and they stand up and say, "Here's what God enabled me to do since last we met."

However, then, gradually, we begin to see the breakdown. Pretty soon they're sitting farther and farther back in the auditorium. The front row gang is always bad. No, I'm just kidding. Loosen up. They begin to sit farther back, as they can, and pretty soon they're not taking notes anymore. Then pretty soon, they're not even bringing a Bible. Then pretty soon, they can't even walk into the church service until half the sermon is over. And I've told you that one of the most instructive things are the announcements. And I think you probably would agree to that, if you stop and think. And not the least instructive thing is the Scripture I read. After that first hymn, you're going to get hit with one of the most important parts of the service – the scripture we read in the morning service.

Then, pretty soon, I notice that they're not in prayer meeting. Then the drift finishes by not being in prayer meeting, giving us evidence that something has happened in the mind and the soul of that person. There is resentment; there is bitterness; and, there is who knows what. This is a very big roadblock. And what I want you to understand is that we are all capable of being guilty of this. I've seen too many people in four decades who were princes among us, who became clowns and clods. It can happen to anybody.

**Confession**

It is the confession of these sins that restores us to praying ground as per 1 John 1:9. And confession means to cease and desist that which caused the fracture.

1. **Filled with the Spirit**

The second roadblock is that we are not praying while filled with the Spirit. I think all of you should understand by now that being "filled with the Spirit" means to be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 6:18 says, "With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit."

Jude 20 also stresses that same concept when Jude, near the end of his book, says: "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith (taking in doctrine is what he means), praying in the Holy Spirit."

The result of sin in our lives that we refuse to confess is to put us out of the position of spirituality, and into the status of carnality. "Carnality" means that the old sin nature is now governing your life: moving you; driving you; and, guiding your thinking.

On the other hand, when we are in a spiritual status of temporal fellowship, then the Spirit of God is in charge. And that's when life is really a lot of fun. Unconfessed sin grieves the Holy Spirit, and it quenches the Holy Spirit, so that He will not act for us in prayer. And I cannot stress this enough to you. I hope that you have learned this, and taken it seriously – that the key feature that makes prayer so effectively successful is that the Spirit of God is doing a job for us behind the scenes.

Romans 8:26-27: "And in the same way, the Spirit also helps our weakness" – our weakness in knowing what we should pray for; how we should time it; and, how we should respond: "For we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." The feelings of the Holy Spirit go deeper than you could even describe in human language: "And he who searches the hearts (that is, the Spirit of God, Who searches our hearts) knows what the mind of the Spirit is." He, God the Father, Who searches the hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. God the Father is listening to our prayers. It is His throne of grace. He is attuned to what you have to say to Him. And He is very much attuned to the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is taking your prayers: He's deleting; He's adding; He's readjusting; and, He's guiding. And that is great to know that what you don't know to pray for, He does it for you. And what you should not be praying for until you have come to that understanding, He takes care of it. So, when you pray in the Spirit, that's when you're praying by the will of God. And you will be a true victory warrior of prayer. Praying only works in the Holy Spirit because He keeps the phone line to the Father trouble-free and open.

1. **Disobedience**

Then, finally, the third and final roadblock is disobedience to the Word of God. This is taught to us in 1 John 3:22: "And whatever we ask, we receive from Him because we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." God answers my prayers because I obey His commandments. And you understand that that is the doctrines of the Word of God: "Whatever we ask, we receive from Him because we keep His commandments, and then we do the things that are pleasing in His sight. This is also stressed in John 15:7: "If you abide in Me." And the word "abide" there means temporal fellowship: "And My Words abide in you." That means that doctrine is functioning in positive volition: "Ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you."

So, you can see why it's important to learn doctrine (the teachings of scripture) in order to be able to pray properly. It is important then to keep the doctrines (the commandments) that you have learned so that you can pray. All of this is built upon being in temporal fellowship, and then responding with positive volition to the instruction that you have.

Now here's the problem. Many Christians begin with good positive volition toward the Word of God, and may even be well-instructed. And the problem of starting off well is to keep on going well. And the breakdowns you must be sensitive to (being aware of the fact) – when you have gradually shifted out of temporal fellowship, you're out of the guidance of the Spirit of God, and you're going to run into the roadblock of no answers to prayer, and then you're going to go on your own. And you will run into a dead-end of trying to make it by your own human wisdom.

**King Saul**

One of the saddest examples of this in the Bible – not living up to what one knows, and not continuing on the high level, and the high ground from which one began, is King Saul of Israel. 1 Samuel chapters 15 and chapter 28 give us the details which we will not read right now. The background of all this is that Saul has come to an extreme degenerate condition spiritually. He has drifted far from God. He has been disobedient. He is completely out of fellowship. And Samuel, when he appointed Saul, wanted him to be a great king who was faithful to God – a king who would be filled with the Holy Spirit.

So, in 1 Samuel 11:6 we read: "Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily when he heard these words, and he became very angry." Now this particular example here is people who were being abused. They were Jews who were being abused by some of the surrounding enemies, the Ammonites. And they told the people of Israel, in this particular place, that if they did not yield their city to them, they would come in, and they would all be killed. But if they would yield their city to them, they would come in, and as a condition for their surrender and survival, they would gouge out the right eye of every man. And the men had just about decided that they'd rather live with one eye than two. So, they were going to yield to this, but the word got to Saul. Saul, who was filled with the Spirit of God, was intensely angry that such a thing should be done to anybody, let alone to the people of God.

So, consequently, here's a man who has what we would call righteousness indignation, but that's the way it was with Saul. And we point this out to show you the high ground from which this man began. However, he soon began undermining the principles of the Word of God (the things he knew). And when he was faced with a battle with the Philistines, he knew that it was essential to have a proper sacrifice before the battle to ensure victory. And this was the way God worked in those times. Therefore, he was concerned to face up to the fact that he needed to have this offering (this sacrifice) before he went into battle.

So, in I Samuel 13:12-14, we read: "Therefore I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the Lord. So, I forced myself, and offered the burned offerings." What he did there, and what Samuel later here in this context is taking him to task for, is: "How dare you walk up there and perform the sacrifice yourself." Only those of the Levitical tribe, and those who constituted the priesthood through the Aaronic descent were allowed to approach God in your behalf. And because Samuel was not available for the offering, Saul decided, and he covers it up by saying, "Gee, I just had to force myself to do this. I forced myself to make the burnt offering myself."

"And Samuel said to Saul, 'You have acted foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God" – the commandment relative to a proper priest presenting a proper offering: "Which He commanded you. For now, the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for himself a man after his own heart. And the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."

Saul has put himself in a position where he is told that his dynasty would not continue. He had a gem of a son, Jonathan. Jonathan was a gem of a man and a godly man. He was a terrific military man. But God said, "Nobody will follow you on the throne." A whole new dynasty will begin with the man that God says is going to be "a man after My own heart." This was very disappointing to Samuel because that's what he wanted Saul to be – a man after God's own heart. And when he failed to be a man after God's own heart, meaning he failed to operate on biblical principles, prayer was useless. He couldn't get to God, and he showed his contempt for what the Bible tells us to do and not to do, as in their case relative to sacrifices. He showed his contempt by just doing it his way.

I get flak pretty regularly from people who think that I don't apply the Bible properly to the local current scene of what we're going through. They think that these are extraneous excursions and fantasies just to make a point that is irrelevant to what the Scripture is saying. That is not true. You don't even get a handout that isn't connected to some part of the Bible. It is all oriented to the Word of God. But when the Word of God is not what you want to do, then you figure out a way to say, "I have a different viewpoint on that."

Saul, now in this condition, makes another bad step. He has lost the dynasty, but he has his life, and he has his tour of the kingdom time. In 1 Samuel 15:13, things get worse: "And Samuel came to Saul and said to him, 'Blessed are you of the Lord. I have carried out the commandment of the Lord.'" Now the commandment of the Lord that Samuel the prophet had given us was that, here in this battle, on this occasion with the Amalekites, he was to utterly destroy this people, and he was to utterly destroy all of their possessions.

Verse 8 said, "He captured Agag, the King of the Amalekites, alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword." So he followed that directive obediently. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep; the ox; the fatlings; the lamb; and, all that was good. They were not willing to destroy them utterly, but everything despised and worthless – that, they utterly destroyed."

So he keeps the king alive as part of the royalty. And then he says, "Keep the best of all of their possessions" – the booty of war. But God had said, "Destroy it all. Kill every animal. Kill everybody who is responsible for the evil that the Amalekites had imposed upon the people of God.

So, now Samuel comes along, and this is the greeting that Saul gives him: "Blessed are you of the Lord, Samuel. I've carried out the commandment of the Lord." Now he has gone to lying. This is the one thing that he did not do. But Samuel said, "What then is the bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" Samuel the prophet says, "Oh yeah? Well, what is that noise I'm hearing out there in the field of all these animals? And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God. But the rest we have utterly destroyed."

Saul says, I'm going to Las Vegas, and I'm going to do some big-time gambling. And everything I win, I'm going to give to the Lord. I'm going to gamble, and I know everything that I win is because I've taken it from somebody else. I'm going to buy a lottery ticket. And when I buy this lottery ticket, I know that thousands of people have lost money when I win."

I've always been worried personally about walking past one of these places that sells the lottery tickets and finding one on the ground that somebody had just bought and lost. And if they lose it, you can pick it up, and it's as good to you as to then – and then, worst of all, that I should win $25 million. Now, who's going to believe when I say, "I was walking down the street, and I saw this lottery ticket on the ground, and I picked it up, and I said, 'Oh, here, somebody lost a lottery ticket,' and I won $25 million." I wouldn't be crushed, but people would take a second look, trying to justify gambling, which is stealing from other people, and to make it look good.

So, here's what he's doing. He says, "I'm going to do this my way, against the will of God, because I think this is a good thing. I'm going to give it to the Lord. Then Samuel said to Saul, "Wait, and let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night." And Saul said, "Oh, speak on." And Samuel said, "Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed you king over Israel? You came from nothing, Saul. At that time, you were humble enough not to consider yourself worthy to be part of the royalty. And the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners (the Amalekites), and fight against them until they're exterminated. The cancer must be removed.' Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord, but rushed upon the spoiled, and did what was evil in the sight of God?"

Oh, Lord, how often greed has undermined the best potential of Christians: "I'm so greedy that I have to be preoccupied with getting more. I get all I can, and I can all I get. And that is my purpose in life all the time – to add, because I never have enough, and I never will let go of it."

Here was Saul, who had everything as the king, and yet his greed could not let go of these valuable animals from the enemy. Then Saul said to Samuel, "I did obey the voice of the Lord, and went on a mission on which the Lord sent me. And I brought back Agag, the King of the Amalekites, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took some of the spoils: sheep; oxen; and, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal."

Oh this guy: "It was the people's fault. It wasn't my idea. The buck doesn't stop with me. It never got here." That's what he's trying to tell us here. And then he says, "But I want to sacrifice it to your God, Samuel." This is a shameless thing when a leader is irresponsible, and does not take responsibility for the fact that the people were not properly guided, because he sought their favor more than he sought the favor of God, and more than he sought the wellbeing of the people. And when he is confronted with the fact that, if he stands firm to what is right before God, he will lose members; he will lose finances; and, he will lose support, and he goes with it. It is so easy to clown people.

I was at a social event this past week. And in the little remarks that the pastor of this very large church had, it was a series of pithy sayings and quips, and it was an inspirational talk. One of the pithy sayings was: "You never know how much Jesus means to you until He's all you have left." Oh boy, the people were saying, "Yeah," and "Amens," and it was very moving: "You never know how much you have in Jesus until He is all you have left." And I got to thinking as I looked around this crowd: what do they really know about what they have in Jesus, such that they would know when they lost something? That is because I know that they are poorly taught doctrinally. And if they are not trained in the Word of God, and at least given a chance to be instructed in the deep things of God, what are they going to know that they have lost? They were playing on these emotions; playing to the crowd; and, playing to what's going to bring them back again.

However, I also saw on the bulletin board of that very same church, as I walked out, a big poster showing a campaign to raise $75,000 to give to the missionary fund. And they'll probably do it: $75,000. They have the capacity to do that, and do everything else that they must do. And we can't raise the $8,000 each month that we need to run the school. And we are right, and they're shortchanging people.

This is Saul. How dare he make a travesty of his responsibility – that what the people did, he had no control over. He had plenty of control over it, and he should at least have stood and exercise authority, and not let that happen.

So, Samuel said, "Does the Lord have as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" Oh boy, what a blow that is. Do you think that God is interested in all your Christian service as much as He is in your obedience to the Word of God: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of the rams? For rebellion is the sin of divination.” Rebellion against the Word of God is like not being in every church service when the doors are open. The book of Hebrews tells us: "Do not neglect the assembling of yourselves together:" "For rebellion is as the sin of divination."

In the King James translation, it uses the word "witchcraft." You're just like being in witchcraft when you rebel against the Word of God that you know. And insubordination is the same as inequity and idolatry. To be insubordinate to spiritual authority and to the Word of God is to have an idol someplace else that you're worshiping that's bigger to you than the authority of God's instructors: "Because you have rejected the Word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being King."

Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I have indeed transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people, and instead, I listened to their voice. Now, therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord." But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you. For you have rejected the Word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel." So, Saul says, "Yes, you're right. I did a terrible thing. Please come and worship with me so that the people will see that all is still well." Samuel says, "All is not well. You're not only not going to be king – your kingdom is going to be taken from you. But later on, this very incident of not having obeyed God upon this military campaign and the destruction of the Amalekites resulted in the sin unto death of Saul. From this point on, he was doomed to die as well as his kingdom in dynasty being brought to an end.

The Holy Spirit had left Saul. Saul's kingdom was canceled to him. And Samuel dies. And things get worse and worse for Saul. And he is desperate because God has no answers for him. He has no contact with God. Samuel died. All of Israel mourns for him. And now Saul is on his own.

In 1 Samuel 28:5-6, a climax arises when Saul is faced with a battle with the Philistines. He, in fear, calls upon God: "When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams, or by the Urim, or by the prophets." Here is a man who is praying, who has been disobedient to the Word of God. And what's our principle that we're talking about? The roadblock of prayer caused by being disobedient to the doctrines you know, and to the principles of the Word of God. This man is shaking in his boots. He doesn't know what to do. He has no contact with God.

Now, at this point, he could have confessed to God, and thrown himself upon the mercy of God, and God would've taken appropriate action. But instead of confession, he took a detour to do something that he himself had instituted law (because this was God's will) that anybody who consulted with a fortune-teller or a medium, to contact the spirit world, was to be executed. That was a capital crime under the theocracy, just as homosexuality and lesbianism was a capital crime under the theocracy.

1 Samuel 28:7: "Then Saul said to his servants, 'Go seek for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.' And his servant said to him, 'Behold, there is a woman who is a medium at Endor.'"

If you would have consult Leviticus 19:31, the Leviticus 20:6, or Deuteronomy 18:10-12, all those Scriptures are explicitly condemning and forbidding contact through a medium with the spirit world. And here Saul has so degenerated that prayer won't work. So, instead of getting right with God, let's go down a detour that's going to end up in a dead-end. And everything will only be worse.

In 1 Samuel 28:15, the woman comes (the medium of Endor). She goes through her hocus-pocus. She gets her crystal ball out. And she starts saying, "Oh, great spirits beyond the grave. Oh, great prophet Samuel. We call upon you for your great wisdom. Your royal highness, King Saul, needs your consultation. Oh, speak to us Samuel." She had a spirit that she worked with. And at a certain point, the spirit would take over the microphone, and he would come on and start speaking, and he would imitate the voice of the person he's speaking. That happens today. So, she expects the spirit now to come on and give a message. And she's still going: "Oh Lord, ..."

Then all of a sudden, she screams. And Saul is scared out of his wits: "What's happened?" Before the witch (before the medium), there arises Samuel. He has not come because of her hocus-pocus. God says, "Samuel, I'm going to send you to give a message to Saul." And the medium has gone bananas, because this is not the way the thing works. Instead of her assistant coming on, here, sure enough, is the real Samuel.

So, Samuel has a message: "Do you want a message from God, Saul, in your negative volition toward the Word of God, and your refusal to admit and confess and get straight? I'll give you a message."

1 Samuel 28:15, "Then Samuel said to Saul, 'Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?' And Saul answered, 'I am greatly distressed for the Philistines are waging war against me, and God has departed from me, and answers me no more, either through prophets, or by dreams. Therefore, I have called you that you may make known to me what I should do.' And Samuel said, 'Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has departed from you, and has become your adversary?" That's a logical question: "Why would you ask me if God will not answer you directly anymore? And the Lord has done accordingly as He spoke through me. For the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand, and given it to your neighbor (to David). As you did not obey the Lord, and did not execute His fierce wrath on Amalek, so the Lord has done this thing to you this day. Moreover, the Lord will also give over Israel, along with you, into the hands of the Philistines. Therefore, tomorrow you and your sons will be with me." Woo: "You'll be with me?" Where is Samuel at this point in time? Where is the living Samuel while his body is rotting in the grave? Where is Samuel?

Samuel said, "You've brought me up." He's down in a compartment of Hades. He's down in the paradise part. He's down in the saved part of Hades awaiting the coming of the savior, when all those people in the saved part of Hades (the paradise part of Hades – Abraham's bosom part of Hades) will be transferred up into heaven. And Samuel's telling him, "You're going to be here with me," which gives us a final note of sadness. Saul was a born-again person. So, you see how close this is – a significant roadblock that all of us can be guilty of: not being willing to be instructed in a Word of God; and, not being willing to be obedient to it when the instruction is given. And it was even worse: "Therefore, tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. Indeed, the Lord will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines." He is told that all of his sons would die, including splendid Jonathan. They would all go down to death with him, and the dynasty will then come to an end. There will be no descendants. Saul's sins remain unconfessed, so his prayers went unanswered. And he did that to his very death.

You can follow this up in greater detail in first Chronicles 10:13-14 and 1 John 5:16. He never got back on track with God. At least observe this: Don't ever substitute the detour of talking to your friends when your prayers are unanswered. Don't go consulting with people when God will not give you guidance through your prayers. Just consider that there's something wrong in your relationship to God, and get it right, because people have nothing to offer you. You will usually get human viewpoint advice. And that's going to lead into a blind alley.

Instead, you should take David's splendid weight way in Psalm 32:5 – this man who is after God's own heart: "I acknowledge my sin to You, and my inequity I did not hide. I said I will confess my transgression to the Lord, and You did forgive me the guilt of my sin." It worked the same way in the Old Testament as in the New Testament. If you confess sins, you're back on track with God, and things start functioning in your prayer life. Acts 13:22: "And after he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king." After he had removed Saul, he raised up David to be their king: concerning whom he also testified and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will." Every one of us here today can be a person after God's own heart. Isn't that great? All you have to do is be obedient to the Word of God, and to obey the principles of prayer.

**Principles of Prayer**

So, here's what we have said over several weeks – the principles of prayer.

1. **A Believer Priest**

Prayer can only be offered to God by a believer priest (John 15:7).

1. **Faith Rest**

Prayer is to comply with the faith rest principle: believe, and trusting God for the results (Matthew 21:22, Mark 11:24, James 1:5-6).

1. **God's Will**

Prayer must conform to God's will to be effective (1 John 5:4). To know the will of God, you must know the Word of God. Effective prayer warriors always know doctrine.

1. **In the Filling of the Holy Spirit**

Prayer must be offered in the filling of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18).

1. **Thanksgiving**

Prayer is to be made with thanksgiving. Ingrates get spiritually confused (Philippians 4:6).

1. **In Carnality**

Prayer offered in the status of carnality cannot be heard (Psalms 66:18, James 4:2-3). Prayer has to flow from that inner circle of temporal fellowship. Any prayer God answers for anyone outside of salvation, or outside of temporal fellowship, is strictly due to the grace of God – to His sovereign decision. I cannot tell you that God will never answer the prayer of an unbeliever, but if He does, it's because of His sovereign grace choice – for His purposes.

1. **Grace**

Prayer is always made on the basis of grace. The believer never deserves anything (Hebrews 4:16).

1. **The Prayer Order**

Number eight: the prayer order is addressed to God the Father (Ephesians 5:20, Matthew 6:9, 1 Peter 1:17). It is in the name of God the Son (John 14:13, John 15:16). It is in the power of God the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18). Prayers which violate this divine order are not heard. Prayers which are addressed to the Holy Spirit, or the Son of God, are not heard. The Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ direct their prayers to the Father. Romans 8:26-27 and John chapter 17 make that very clear.

1. **Confession**

There is a prayer, in fact, involved when we confess our sins. The 1 John 1:9 principle is a principle of prayer. It is addressed to God the Father. We turn the search light of the Word of God on the issues that are breaking our fellowship with God. We confess the sin. We name it. We give thanksgiving for the forgiveness. There's no doubt about that forgiveness once we've admitted it. We pray in Jesus' Name – by His authority, and then we forget the sin, as God forgets it, and we move on. That's how you pray about confession of sins.

**Negative Attitudes toward Prayer**

We close this whole subject with some negative attitudes toward prayer.

1. **A Spiritual Gift**

The first negative attitude toward prayer is that prayer is a spiritual gift. Some people say, "Since I don't have the gift of prayer, I can't pray." Prayer is not a spiritual gift. It is something that every believer priest can do, because it is a family right. Once you're in the family of God, you have the right to pray. And you can be just as effective as anybody else. There is no particular gift of prayer. And every now and then, we hear some famous preacher talk about some godly saint who has the gift of prayer. He doesn't have the gift of prayer. He may have gotten it all together, and is well capable, and does the technique effectively. But so can you.

1. **Prayer is Personal**

Some people say that prayer is personal, so it should not be done in a group with other Christians. But the New Testament church, we know very well, gathered as a group for prayer. Personal matters that may come up in group prayer, indeed should not be publicly spoken. But then we cover those with the unspoken requests. And incidentally, that's a simple thing with us.

**Unspoken Requests**

I had a man one time who was very distressed about prayer meeting. He said, "There's so many things that are really personal that I would like people to pray about." He said, "Then I attended prayer meeting, and I discovered the principle of unspoken requests." He says, "Was that a relief? There was nothing now that I could not get people to pray for." The unspoken request is very important.

1. **Prayer is not Optional**

Some people say that prayer is optional. Prayer is not optional. It is commanded by God to produce divine good results. And if you don't pray, you will not have divine good results.

One of our teachers in the morning prayer meeting attends a church in Dallas. She recently said, "Every time my husband is in the Bible study group, and he brings up the subject of the difference between divine good and human good, he says, 'Everybody looks at him with glazed eyes.' They don't have the foggy notion what he's talking about." Human good is what you produce on your own. Divine good is what the Holy Spirit produces as the result of prayer. That is a very big difference.

1. **God Already Knows my Needs**

Another argument is: "God knows our needs, so why should I pray?" Yeah, he does know that. But He has established prayer as a ground of His dealing with us.

1. **Take Time for Prayer**

The next excuse is: "I don't have time to pray." Well, if this is your situation then the details of life are enslaving you. Much prayer time is lost by wasting time on trivial things. Get your life organized. In fact, get a life.

1. **What to Say**

Next, some people say, "I don't know how or what to say." Well, that's very self-centered. However, you do say it, you know what? Even if you say it very poorly, the world will not stop spinning. I hope that's a great relief to you. So, next time, don't use this as an excuse for not leading in prayer when you're in a group. Start with your obvious needs, and things were flow.

1. **Listening to Others Pray**

The next excuse is: "I can't stand listening to some people pray." If the person praying is doctrinally off, you pray silently that God would correct him. Center your mind on the Lord – not on the individual, and not on the limitations of people. That is a very sorry excuse.

I had a lady say that to me one time: "I just can't stand listening to that man pray – the way he prays." Well, she's now in heaven, so she has learned better.

1. **I never see Results**

The next excuse is: "I never see the results of my prayer." Well, that doesn't make any difference. That is not the issue. God hears, and God deals with our legitimate requests as processed by the Holy Spirit according to His wisdom. He will take care of the situation one way or another. And the answers may not be what you're looking for, or how you're looking for the answer.

1. **My Mind Wanders**

Next: my mind wanders when others pray. The discipline of learning doctrine will help you to focus your mind and concentration on prayer. And when you know that you have a right to pray, and how important it is, it will go a long way to keeping your mind on what's going on.

**False Ideas about Prayer**

There are certain false ideas about prayer that I would be remiss not to mention to you.

1. **Language**

You don't have to use traditional phrases to make prayer acceptable to God. That's the principle of Mark 7:13, about people thinking that if they use certain phrases, and repeat things again and again, or do it in a certain pattern, that then God will hear. There is no such thing as holy language in prayer. And your phrasing doesn't mean a thing. And Shakespearean English with "Thous" and "Thees" is not more acceptable to God than modern English. God has no objection to you addressing Him in any language that is dignified and respectful toward him.

1. **The Intense Pattern of Praying**

The second false idea is that the intense pattern of praying will gain you more with God. That's not true – if you keep saying, "Amen;" "Hallelujah;" "Lord;" "Praise the Lord;" or, "God willing." Or one thing that does burden me when I sit in a group in prayer is people who want to be so intense with God, so they speak slowly: "Our Father Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." And I mean that they just drag it out, so that you want to hurry them up. But then there are other people who speak at supersonic speed, and you can hardly understand what they're saying (like "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious), and you don't know what they've said. And they do that to show how intense they are at prayer. Don't try to con God, and don't try to con the people around you.

1. **Your External Position**

Number three: the external position of prayer does not make it more acceptable to God. Kneeling is thought to be more effective than standing or sitting. You can be in some Christian groups, and every time somebody leads in prayer, they all fall to the floor on their knees. Some churches are great on kneeling at certain parts of the service, and they even have kneeling pads for you.

Also, it is not better to pray in some holy place like a church building or a shrine or a prayer tower. You don't have to pray in your closet on your face. The Dallas seminary man of my generation likes to talk about praying in his closet on his face. I hope he doesn't pick up any allergies from the rug. You don't have to pray with your hands overhead. It just makes you look like a fool, because you think that that's going to make it more effective. All these things are done for one thing – so you can brag the next time you have a testimony meeting: "I got up and I prayed, and I had my hands up there, and, boy, I was swinging, and the spirit was just taking me, and I said this, and Dennis Williams was healed." It is just so that you can brag about what you've achieved through your external position.

1. **A Prayer Schedule**

Number four: you don't have to have a traditional schedule for prayer. The Scripture says, "Pray at all times, without ceasing – when you need it. There's not more merit to get up early and pray. If some of you get up early and pray, you're going to run into somebody on the way to work because you're so tired. Praying all night, or rocking around the clock in prayer – that doesn't make it any more effective. Praying just before going to bed usually acts as a sleeping tablet. All such things are often done by apostate kind of people. And they're also done so that you can have some "bragamonies" at the Lord's Supper meeting.

1. **The Lord's Prayer**

There's the misconception that the Lord's Prayer should be repeated daily in crisis situations or in church services. That is not true. The Lord's Prayer is a sample prayer. The real prayer of the Lord, as I told you, is John 17.

1. **Public vs. Private Prayer**

Also, you should not place public prayer over private prayer, or vice versa. They're both equally important.

You should pray, and it doesn't mean how old you are. Now, those of you who are young here today, learn to pray. Learn to have times of the day when you pray. Learn to be able to be equipped to pray on your own.

I was in a restaurant today. We had several children in our party, and we didn't have enough room at our table, so we sent them off to a different section to sit by themselves. And when their food was served, they appointed one of them to pray. And the kid prayed like a pro. Whether you're young or old, private prayer is important, and public prayer is equally important.

God, our Father, we want to thank You for this study in prayer. The Apostle Paul, upon praying for the Colossian Christians, knew that he was doing the most important thing that he could do for them, especially when he was at a distance from them. We have a lot of things to pray for, and a lot of people who need our prayers, and we pray, God, that we shall never be negligent and that we should, as Samuel said, not be guilty of sin in not praying for those who need our prayers. God bless us in this endeavor. In Christ's name. Amen.

Please sign up for the ski trip on the table at the back. Please stop by the offering boxes. If you can't put something in it, touch it. Greet one another before you leave. Thank you. We're dismissed.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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