

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

58 What Hinders Our Prayers?

Scripture: John 9:29-33'

We know that God has spoken to Moses; but as for this man, we do not know where He is from. The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes." "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if any one is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him. Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that any one opened the eyes of a person born blind." "If this man were not from God, He could do nothing."

A very tender and moving moment in human relationships is when a covenant is recited, a pledge is made, or a promise is given. Think of the promises in your own life, promises made to your parents, to a friend, or a teacher. Many promises come to mind, those given to a brother or sister, husband or wife, promises to yourself, promises to God. Life is laden with promises. Of all the flow of promises touching our lives there are none more important than the promises of God as they are contained in His Word, The Bible. In fact, everything we are and stand to receive as Christians falls within the range of the stated promises of God. If it is not in the promises, it is not for us. It is to our great loss when we are not familiar with these promises so as to apply them to our lives. Now, it is said there are over six thousand such promises recorded. They gleam from every book, sometimes in clusters, sometimes as solitary stars. Many of these promises have to do with prayer. Last week we studied one of the most comprehensive of these as the amazing words came from the lips of Jesus recorded in Matthew's gospel, *"And everything you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive."* (Matthew 21:22)

These promises of God regarding prayer are the very kiss of heaven upon the earth, and the Bible spreads a marvelous array of prayer promises before us. Look where you will, God is pictured as the One who hears and answers prayer. Anyone who has taken the time and made the effort to study the Bible knows this to be true, that is, he knows this is what the Bible teaches about God. The question we have this morning deals with the integrity of what the Bible teaches about God and prayer. If God does hear and answer prayer, why don't our

prayers produce greater results than they do? Why do so many of our prayers appear unanswered or why does God appear to answer in the negative so much of the time? It is a very down to earth question we have before us. What hinders our prayers? If prayer is asking, why don't we receive more than we do. We have already said that prayer has psychological and therapeutic aspects which are helpful. Philippians 4:6-7 speaks of the peace of God which passeth understanding which comes when we make our requests known unto God. But prayer is more than an emotional or mental uplift. God has promised to grant specific requests when they are brought to Him under certain conditions. It is the "under certain conditions" which now leads us further. **The promises of God**, whether they have to do with prayer, or with other benefits such as forgiveness, eternal life, resurrection, the supply of needs, the church, or rewards, are all subject to, an inviolable law. The promises of God are not a bowl of cherries or a box of chocolates from which we make a selection and await immediate satisfaction. **Each promise has a condition stated**, implied or assumed by its context or the law of comparing Scripture with Scripture. When the condition is met, the promise will come true with precision. When it comes to prayer it is understandable that there are no automatic results. The Bible is not a big grab bag of prayer promises for anyone who comes along to dip into at random with success. In fact, that is the reason I have chosen that passage from John, chapter 9, to serve as a foundation for our study concerning hindrances to prayer. The conversation recorded there is between the man born blind and the religious authorities, the Pharisees. We have here the curious example of truth about God coming from the lips of men who are far from making up their minds about Christ. Christianity never teaches that the person who is not a Christian doesn't know anything about God. Quite the opposite, people all over the world know truth about God. The reason we know this to be true is that God has not left Himself without witness. (Acts 14:17) In this passage Jesus said that these men were still in their sin. (John 9:41) Nevertheless, based upon their knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, they leave for us one of the most concise statements about what hinders prayer found anywhere in the Bible. By hindered prayer I mean prayer that doesn't seem to do any good. Prayer, that for all practical intents and purposes, rises no higher than the ceiling or further than the range of our voice, prayer that is ineffective and does not get results. We all meet here. If we are willing to be honest with ourselves, we have to confess that there is much more promised about prayer than we have experienced. We can either quit praying altogether or go on as we have in the past. The only other

alternative is to try and find out why there is this unfulfillment. It is at this point that these Pharisees might be able to counsel us. This is what they said, *"We know that God does not hear sinners; but if any one is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him."* It might be a dangerous thing to say that we are Pharisees when it comes to prayer because we know what Jesus had to say about their prayer habits, but they were very correct at this point. God does not hear sinners, but He does hear (the implication is that He both hears and answers) those who are God fearing and obedient. Prayer may be ineffective because we are not praying in God's way. Do we really pray God's way? What conditions are to be met before we have the right to expect God to answer our prayers? It is at this point in our study that I want us to look at some of the clear and simple terminology God employs in teaching us to pray. It seems clear to me that God has not left any room for uncertainty on our part when it comes to how to pray. I think the following will serve as a serviceable outline in removing hindrances to our prayers.

I. WE SHOULD PRAY AS CHILDREN TO A FATHER:

Promises are an outgrowth of a relationship. Those who receive a promise are in some way related to the one who has made the promise. When it comes to prayer, this is essential. Prayer is only talk, the passing of words, when there is no relationship with God. According to the Bible not everyone can pray. The reason is that the God of the Bible is not like any other so-called God. Other gods are either idols or demons. Our God is the one Who made everything and Who is so holy He cannot admit anyone into His presence who is guilty of committing sin. You have to have your sins taken away before you can talk to God as a member of His family. There is not one prayer promise in the Bible for anyone who does not come to God forgiven of sin through faith in the person and work of Christ upon the cross. That is what Jesus meant when He said, *"No man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* (John 14:6) Jesus taught his listeners to pray with the words, *"Our Father who art in heaven..."* (Matthew 6:9) No one is able to call God by the name of *"Father"* without becoming His child. The Bible instructs us that it is by receiving Christ that God gives us this status in His family. The verse everyone in the whole world ought to know is John 1:12, *"As many as received Him, (Jesus) to them gave He the power to be called the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."* If you have believed in Christ as your Savior, you are a child of God, and then you can pray. I make no apologies in restating this simple and familiar truth. One more thought while we are here, and one which

may not be as well known. People who do not pray to God through the work of Jesus may find themselves praying to another father whose name is Satan. Written for our understanding in John 8:44, we have the incredible statement of Jesus to the Pharisees who came to Him claiming that God was their Father. He corrected them by telling them that Satan was their father. We shall just conclude this by saying that the prayers of some people may be hindered because God doesn't even hear them. Even the Pharisees knew that. They said, *"We know that God does not hear sinners."*

II. WE SHOULD PRAY IN FAITH BELIEVING:

A very important condition in our coming to God in prayer is that of confidence that He will keep His word. The promises which come from the Word about prayer are energized by the Holy Spirit and appropriated to our lives. Effective prayer is not the sound of proper phrases but the attitude within the heart of the person who is praying. That attitude is one of expectancy. The apostle James instructs us to *"ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind."* (James 1:6) Perhaps you have watched the waves of the sea rising and falling, coming forward and spending themselves. Waves are restless and uncertain things. Faithless prayer is like that. It is up and down, a watery trust that emerges and is gone. Prayer that is not optimistic concerning an answer is faith in a god other than that of the Bible. Little wonder such a person somewhat resembles the waves of the sea. What God asks us to do at this point is to ask the right person in the right way. This is one of the reasons why God asks us to stay close to the Bible, and to saturate our minds with what it has to say. It keeps us mindful of who God is and of what He can do. Our faith is enlarged and we are thus equipped to pray as God asks us to. (Romans 10:17)

III. WE SHOULD PRAY WITH A LOVING SPIRIT:

I want you to turn to Mark 11:25. This teaching followed on the heels of the cursing of the fruitless fig tree. Jesus is telling His disciples their lives need not be like the tree. They have the mighty force of prayer to guarantee such a difference. One qualification is that they don't think prayer will work for them as long as they nurse a grudge, and are spiteful and unforgiving. As long as we are filled with malice and revenge we can only offer useless prayers. Interesting, the number of passages there are which have to do with our attitude toward others. (Matthew 6:9-15, 18:21-25; Ephesians 4:26) How we ought to search

our hearts on this matter that our prayers be not blocked. It becomes even more penetrating when we find that discord in the home effects our prayers. Wrong relationships between husbands and wives hurts our prayers, according to I Peter 3:1-7. A husband who does not live with his wife according to the instructions God gives will have his prayers hindered. It is true also of the difficult wife who will not obey the Lord.

IV. WE SHOULD PRAY WITH SINCERITY:

It is at this point that prayer becomes extremely personal. If we are living deliberately in opposition to what God has told us to do in His Word, He refuses to be a party to fellowship with us. This is an offense to God. An interesting passage which deals with the way God is grieved with disobedience in our lives is I Corinthians 10:1-11. It tells about the nation of Israel and their experiences in the wilderness. In verse 11 we read, *"Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."* In other words, there is much for us to learn from the ancient people about the ways of God. One part of their history is particularly illustrative. It tells us directly that there is a time when it is wrong to pray. I am referring to the period in their history when Isaiah, the prophet, denounced the people. Please turn with me to Isaiah 1:10-20. Notice, in particular, verse 15. God said, *"Yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear."* And this is the way with God. He tells us this in many places. (See Psalm 66:18; I Peter 3:12) The prayer He will hear at a time like this is a prayer of contrition and repentance. We ought to ask the lord, as with the Psalmist of old, *"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."* Psalm 139:23-24)

V. WE SHOULD PRAY IN JESUS NAME:

I would imagine there is a great deal of prayer that ascends from the nations of the world in a given day. People of all nations do pray. For one reason or other only a small fraction of these prayers are answered in terms of receiving what was asked. People who know something about the Christian faith understand that they are to pray in the name of Jesus. In John 16:24 we read, *"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."* In using the name of Jesus we are constantly reminded that our audience with God is a privilege which we do not deserve in ourselves. Prayers in the name of humanity or even some noble effort are an affront to God. Invoking the name of

Christ is not some magical formula. What we do is to take our place with Him before God. We acknowledge His claims, rest upon His work, and rely upon His present elevation as an indication of approval toward His work. We therefore pray in the name of and for the sake of Jesus who has already earned the place of glory. We can illustrate this with the signature so very necessary at the bottom of any check we want to cash. Good checks have good signatures on them. Without a worthy name the check is worth no more than a scrap of paper. Prayers in the name of humanity go into God's wastebasket. Prayers in the name of Jesus do a great deal for humanity. (See John 14:13)

VI. WE SHOULD PRAY ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL:

I guess we can just about rule out selfish prayers. James 4:3 tells us, *"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."* I John 5:14-15 reads, *"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desire of Him."* This curbs our dictating to God in matters of sickness, 'suffering, and our prospering in any given way. Prayer answers rest in the loving Father's wisdom and will. In all things He knows best. The servant is never better than His master at this point and Jesus prayed, *"Not My will, but Thine be done."* Sometimes a request may be harmless in itself, but could lead to our spiritual ruin. At this point we are to bow to the Lord's leading and direction in our lives.

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May 9, 1976