

Principles of Effective Prayer

The Who, What, When, Why, and How of Prayer

(From Part One of John Bunyan's "Prayer")

1. The Definition of Prayer

- In his book entitled, "Prayer," John Bunyan defines true prayer this way:

"Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God hath promised, or according to the Word, for the good of the church, with submission, in faith, to the will of God."

2. He then further breaks down this definition and explains each of its components individually:

- Sincere:
 - True prayer requires the humility to be honest with oneself and honest with God about the condition of one's heart.
 - True prayer takes into account the finiteness of the human condition and does not try to make or evade it.
 - We can't hide anything from God; trying to is an exercise in futility.
 - Instead, be transparently and comprehensively honest with God.
- Sensible:
 - True prayer is aware of our great need for prayer, our inability to achieve prayer without the enabling of the Holy Spirit, and the great blessing it is to be able to pray.
 - When we pray, we want to be attuned to the realities of the goodness of God and approach our time of communion with God with a heart of gratitude and awe.
- Affectionate:
 - True prayer involves the heart and what it holds dear.
 - When we pray, we need to confess and repent of the affections that do not glorify God and choose instead to place our affections on Him and the things He approves.
- Pouring out of the Soul:
 - True prayer holds nothing back.
 - Bringing everything to God in prayer requires humility, as does the receipt of His grace.
 - When we pray, we bring everything before God without exception.
- To God:
 - True prayer is only true when it is brought before the one true God.
 - God alone is THE way, THE truth, and THE life. Prayers to or hopes in anything or anyone else profit nothing.
 - Only God can hear and answer prayers, and He loves to answer prayers that are in accordance with His will.

- Through Christ:
 - True prayer is only possible because of the Gospel, the work of Christ that enables us to access God, whereas our sin previously prevented it.
 - Sin disqualifies our prayers from reaching God. As such, we must be in the continual practice of confessing and repenting of our sins to God so that our prayers will not be hindered.
- By the Strength or Assistance of the Holy Spirit:
 - True prayer is a work of the Holy Spirit.
 - The Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf and enables us to pray as we ought.
 - We must rely on the Holy Spirit in humility and gratitude in order for our prayers to be effective.
- For Such Things as God Has Promised, or, According to His word:
 - True prayer is grounded in Scripture.
 - Knowing God's will requires reading God's word. When we know who God is and what He wills for us, we are able to pray according to His promises.
 - The best way to ensure your prayers are heard is to pray God's word back to Him.
- For the Good of the Church:
 - True prayer is concerned with the Bride of Christ.
 - God loves His people and calls us to live in community with and in service to them.
 - Praying for God's will to be done automatically requires a desire to equip and bless the saints.
 - Our prayer life should be filled with petitions on behalf of the Church for the glory of God.
- With Submission in Faith to the will of God:
 - True prayer is trained on God's will.
 - God does want to give us the desires of our heart, but only when they are submitted to His will as He has revealed in His word.
 - Know God's word, seek His will, and pray accordingly.

3. In short, effective prayer:

- Humbly relies on the Holy Spirit
- Keeps the gospel at the heart of its focus
- Submits itself to God and His will
- Derives its content and motivations on the Word of God
- Involves one's entire being (mind/intellect, heart/affections, soul/beliefs)
- Focuses its purpose on obeying and glorifying God through building up the Church