

P R A Y E R Examined in the Light of God's Word

Are You Talking to GOD or Are You Talking to YOURSELF ?

You've probably heard the beer advertisement "Drink responsibly," well, tonight's message we want to learn about how to "Pray responsibly."

Because prayer is so personal and vital in our lives, many people are really defensive about it, and due to their Biblical ignorance on the subject they get offended when you try to discuss it with them.

Unfortunately, most people learn to pray by listening to others pray. But THAT is NOT a good source.

Personally, I am helped by looking at contrasting scriptures that show the distinctions between the programs of Israel and the Church. When the contrasts are carefully examined, it is beneficial because it lets us compare what God did THEN with His favored nation and what God is doing NOW with us, the Body of Christ. It helps us understand when we see the differences.

The word "PRAY" is defined in Webster's dictionary. It belongs to the same family of words as "preach" and "reproach."

The primary sense of the word "PRAY" is "to throw or to pour forth sounds or words."

In a general sense, prayer is "talking to God."

There are several aspects of prayer. They are:

*worship and adoration of God's glorious perfections,
confession of our sins,
supplication, or asking that is to petition, request, entreat, or urge
intercession on behalf of others,
and thanksgiving as an expression of gratitude for God's mercies and benefits.*

The main question concerning prayer is "How Should We Pray --- Today in the Dispensation of Grace?" Prayer will always function in accord with God's program that is in effect at the time.

Prayer is a DISPENSATIONAL doctrine

Prayer is also a TRANSITIONAL issue

We'll see the explanation of that as we go along. Let's begin with

Our Basic Purpose in:

1 Cor. 14:15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and

I will pray with the understanding also:

I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

To "pray with the understanding" means "to have the same ideas and meanings" as God does. We have a "common connection" with God, based on an "intelligent knowing" of His will.

So we should "pray with the understanding" of WHAT?

We should "pray with the understanding" of the new program which is NOW in effect. That is the 'dispensation of grace' which God ushered in through Paul, explained in Eph. 3:1-12.

You can observe things about prayer in "Times Past," but you shouldn't go there to find out how to pray today.

So, as a means of comparison, let's look at some PRAYERS throughout the scriptures, to find out how people used to pray and what they could expect God to do in response to their prayers. Later we'll establish how we should "pray with the understanding" TODAY. For now, let's consider

Prayer Under the Old Testament Economy

Under the LAW, Israel could expect either PHYSICAL blessing or cursing from God, depending on their behavior.

Deut. 11:26-28 Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse;

27 A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day:

28 And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known.

The whole chapter of Deut. 28 lists the details of those physical blessings and cursings. Therefore, it is quite understandable, when we read the next verses, where God specifically told them He would "RESTRICT HIS RESPONSE" to their prayers:

Isa. 59:1-2 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear:

2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that **he will not hear**.

It was NOT that God could not hear but the fact was that He WOULD not hear. He was unwilling to listen to them pray because of their sins. They had violated His law, and He --- on purpose --- chose to ignore their prayers. Their sins had hindered their prayer life, and God rejected them.

Today, we know that there is NO sin holds back the blessing of God from us. We have a solid "standing in grace" that assures us "total acceptance" with God because we are "in Christ" A few of the verses that guarantee that are:

Rom. 8:35, 38-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Eph. 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

Going back now to the Old Testament Economy, that same principal of the law (called the "IF THEN" principal) is basically explained also in the Psalms:

Psa. 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord **will not hear** me:

.... and again in the Proverbs:

Prov. 15:29 The LORD is far from the wicked:
but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.

.... It will also pick up again in the "Ages to Come", as we find in:

Micah 3:4 Then shall they cry unto the LORD, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings.

*But God, in His great mercy, gave them opportunity to restore their fellowship with Him. They had to **CONFESS their sins**, and God would reverse His judgment:*

Lev. 26:40-42 **IF** they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me;

41 And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity:

42 **THEN** will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land.

.... Again, that is the same way for the “Ages to Come” as we see in:

1 John 1:9 **IF** we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Now, let's go back again to the Old Testament. The “famous revival verse” is in this same category. Remember that it is under the LAW, not under grace:

2 Chron. 7:14-15 **IF** my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; **THEN** will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

15 Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.

Just a chapter earlier, is a long passage, which we will take the time to read, for you to notice some important things.

Watch as we read how that they had to pray toward God's house (even though God was also still in heaven). That place, or house, was where God's presence on earth was on the mercy seat in the tabernacle, and later the temple in Jerusalem. They were supposed to pray facing toward it.

2 Chron. 6:19-31 Have respect therefore to the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee:

20 That thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldest put thy name there; to hearken unto the prayer which thy servant prayeth toward this place.

21 Hearken therefore unto the supplications of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, which they shall make toward this place: hear thou from thy dwelling place, even from heaven; and when thou hearest, forgive.

22 If a man sin against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to make him swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house;

23 Then hear thou from heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, by requiting the wicked, by recompensing his way upon his own head; and by justifying the righteous, by giving him according to his righteousness.

24 And if thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; and shall return and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication before thee in this house;

25 Then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them and to their fathers.

(These next 2 verses show how God would CONTROL the WEATHER based upon their sins and confession). It's awful today, when parts of America experience a drought during the summer months, some preachers start saying that God is judging us because of our sin, by not sending RAIN. They use these verses or actually, they MIS-USE them, by trying to apply them to us, in the dispensation of grace):

26 When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; yet **IF** they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them;

27 **THEN** hear thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, when thou hast taught them the good way, wherein they should walk; and send rain upon thy land, which thou hast given unto thy people for an inheritance.

(These next verses also include many other PHYSICAL problems, both on their land by insects, mold, or death and on their persons by illnesses and diseases):

28 **IF** there be dearth in the land, if there be pestilence, if there be blasting, or mildew, locusts, or caterpillers; if their enemies besiege them in the cities of their land; whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness there be:

29 **THEN** what prayer or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house:

30 Then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men:)

31 That they may fear thee, to walk in thy ways, so long as they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers.

Surely you can see the confusion caused by people who do not "rightly divide" the word of truth. It is WRONG for them to try to put those verses on you today!

That “position” of praying toward God’s house was also a common practice that was evident in Daniel’s life. Sometimes on the television news, you see people down on the ground, positioned in a certain direction, praying. But, hopefully, you know that WE do not need to do that today:

Dan. 6:10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

While we’re back here in “Times Past” let’s look at some

SPECIFIC PRAYERS & IMMEDIATE RESULTS :

Remember, these EXAMPLES are NOT in the dispensation of grace.

Abraham PRAYED and asked God to restore physical health to the King of Gerar and his harem so they would not die, after God has stricken them with barrenness because the King had taken Sarah away from Abraham, with intentions to lay with her, since Abraham had deceived him, and told him Sarah was his sister, instead of telling him she was his wife:

Gen. 20:3-7, and then verse 20 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.

4 But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?

5 Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this.

6 And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.

7 Now therefore restore the man his wife; for **he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live:** and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine.

Gen. 20:17 So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children.

.....

God immediately responded to Moses’ prayer by putting out a fire that was burning up the people who were murmuring and gripe-ing. You know that ‘simple solution of just asking’ won’t work today, when you see the fires ablaze in California, huh?:

Elijah's prayer controlled the weather. He stopped the rain with his prayer:

1 Kings 17:1 And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

James 5:17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

.....

Then, Elijah prayed and brought the rain back:

1 Kings 18:41 And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.

James 5:18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

.....

God's prophet Elisha prayed for a dead boy to be raised back to life:

2 Kings 4:32-35 And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed.

33 He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD.

34 And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.

35 Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

.....

Another time, Elisha prayed for God to allow his servant to see the invisible, Divine, miraculous protection when they had been surrounded by an army.

And again, he prayed that the enemy would be blinded. And God did it for him:

2 Kings 6:17-18 And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

18 And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

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King Hezekiah prayed and begged God for his life, after God's prophet Isaiah had told him that he was going to die. God granted his prayer for physical healing, and gave him 15 years more to live:

2 Kings 20:1-6 In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.

2 Then he turned his face to the wall, and **prayed unto the LORD**, saying,

3 I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

4 And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying,

5 Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, **I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee:** on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD.

6 **And I will add unto thy days fifteen years;** and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.



God restored Manasseh's kingdom to him in answer to his prayer:

2 Chron. 33:11-13 Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.

12 And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,

13 And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.



Job prayed, and God changed his financial situation for him:

Job 42:10 And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.



God moved the whale to spit Jonah out, in response to Jonah's prayer:

Jonah 2:1-2 and verse 10 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, 2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.

....10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

16 Confess your faults one to another, and **pray one for another, that ye may be healed.** The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

*With the nation Israel, under the Old Testament in “Times Past”
and with Israel in the future “Ages to Come”*

***they could measure the favor of God
by looking at their OUTWARD circumstances.***

*They noticed the way their crops were growing if they yeilded a good harvest.
They noticed their military operations if they won their battles.
They noticed their physical health if they had diseases.*

*Israel could tell by outward SIGNS whether or not God was mad at them
because He would not answer their prayers. When Israel was living in disobedience
to God’s law, God DETESTED their prayers.*

Prov. 28:9 He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.

God instructed His prophet Jeremiah NOT to even pray for them, because He refused to hear it:

Jer 7:11-16 Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD.

12 But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel.

13 And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not;

14 Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.

15 And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim.

16 **Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee.**

The prophet Hosea received a similar word from God, not to waste his time on them:

Hosea 4:17 Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.

God rejected Israel because of their sins. He refused their prayers:

Lam. 3:42-44 We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned.
43 Thou hast covered with anger, and persecuted us: thou hast slain, thou hast not pitied.

44 Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through.

*Aren't you glad that **prayer is a dispensational issue**?*

We can rest assured that God does not respond to us that way today.

God used to answer prayer by SIGNS.

That's exactly how Abraham's servant found a bride for Isaac:

Gen. 24:12-14 And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham.

13 Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water:

14 And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.

Do you know anyone who ever tried to find out God's will like Gideon did?:

Judges 6:36-40 And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said,

37 Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.

38 And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.

39 And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.

40 And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

To close this section on Prayer Under the Old Testament, let's end with a prayer that has become very popular among 'so-called' evangelical Christians, which is filling most all of their bookstores today the Prayer of Jabez. Surely, you can see that it FITS right here with these other prayers we've looked at so far:

1 Chron. 4:10 And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.

Let's address each point:

- 1. We have already been blessed completely, being 'in Christ' (Eph. 1:3).*
- 2. We don't need our national boundaries expanded. America has enough land, and God is not dealing in 'real estate,' nor building up shore-lines today.*
- 3. Why ask for just God's hand to be with us, when we have His entire Holy Spirit inside of us? Now, WE are God's temple (1 Cor. 3:16).*
- 4. God tells us to "Abstain from all appearance of evil" in 1 Thess. 5:22. That makes staying away from evil OUR responsibility, not God's.*
- 5. So we won't have grief? Who wants grief? No one, of course. But OUR grief is not really the issue we are told in Eph. 4:30 for US not to grieve God's Holy Spirit. That's just the opposite!*

Anybody who understands dispensational truth should automatically NOT buy that.

Another 'favorite prayer' from the Old Testament is set in the context of the "Ages to Come" when the tribes of the Lord go up to Jerusalem to worship there before the thrones of judgment of the house of David. Yet this verse is used to give false hope to people who do it, thinking that success will come their way. In reality, it is a prayer for a 'future time' and its promises will not happen in this day in which we live:

Psa. 122: 6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.

Have you ever tried to move a mountain by your prayers?:

Mark 11:23 For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

You don't have to have 'giant' faith. It doesn't even take much faith at all:

Matt 17:20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

The reason those verses don't work today is that they were NOT given, nor intended to work in the 'dispensation of grace.'

Probably the 'most famous' of all prayers, is the so-called "Lord's Prayer." Some people prefer to call it the "Model Prayer." But whatever you choose to call it, the fact is that it does NOT apply TO us, nor FOR us today. Jesus was teaching his 12 disciples how THEY ought to pray:

Luke 11:1-4 And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

2 And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

(Remember, they were anticipating a prophesied KINGDOM to be established right down here on Planet Earth. You and I are looking for a 'rapture' we're going to be taken UP into heavenly places. You can't have it BOTH ways.)

Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

(We know through Paul's writings that in this PRESENT evil age in which WE live the Devil is the one who is controlling the earth.

In Eph. 2:2, he is called the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

In 2 Cor. 4:4, he is said to be the 'god of this world' that blinds the minds of unbelievers.)

3 Give us day by day our daily bread.

(We are told by God in 2 Thess. 3:10, that if we won't work, we shouldn't eat.

And in 1 Tim. 5:8, God tells us to provide for our own family.

Eph. 4:28 instructs us to work so we'll have means to help others in need.)

We do not and can not expect God to provide our meals every day.

The answer for us today is 'GET A JOB!'

4 And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.

(Under grace today, when we are saved, we are completely forgiven right then!

We never have to pray and ASK God to forgive us again.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

(Keeping them from evil, is like the Prayer of Jabez we just read.)

Then drop down a few verses to verse 9:

Luke 11:9-10 And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

10 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Did you ever try to get your prayers answered by getting a 'prayer partner'? If you ever read this next verse, without knowing 'right division' ... I'll bet you've tried it:

Matt 18:19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

Here's the 'catch-all' prayer. You don't even need a prayer partner for it. This one covers it all:

John 14:13-14 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

So regarding physical healing, every person that wanted it got it!

And it happened IMMEDIATELY NOT after medical treatments or surgery.

When Jesus and his disciples were healing, no one was sent away sick:

Matt 8:16 When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick:

Matt 12:15 But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all;

And in early Acts, the same thing was happening, because it was a SIGN of the Kingdom. The apostles were healing every person. No one was refused:

Acts 5:16 There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

Next week, we'll look at "Prayer in the Dispensation of Grace" and consider "HOW WE Should Pray." We will examine the prayers of Paul, our example and our apostle, to see what should be the focus of our prayers. Until then think about it!