



The Doctrine of Prayer

What Can Hinder Our Prayers?

I. INTERNAL CONDITIONS

- A. There are essentially two ways in which are prayers are hindered:
 - 1. God not honouring our prayers – Due to the condition of our heart when we pray unto God.
 - 2. Us not making prayer unto God – Due to reasons preventing us from praying.
- B. The first category involves internal conditions stemming from our heart. That is, our hearts not being right with God when we pray.
- C. The second category involves external conditions. That is, our hearts are right but due to other reasons we fail to pray.
- D. God is first concerned with our hearts. He demands obedience and he wants that out of a right heart. It only makes sense then that when we talk to God, we need to do so with a right heart.
- E. Having a right heart does not mean that you can never talk to God when you are struggling, dealing with bitterness, temptation, anger, etc. In fact, we can talk to the Lord in such conditions and seek his help.
- F. Here are some scriptural examples of wrong attitudes of our heart that can hinder our prayers.
 - 1. Pride
 - a. God hates pride. Proverbs 6:16 says “These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him:”.
 - b. The very first thing in this list is “A proud look” (Proverbs 6:17).
 - c. Pride is an abominable sin to the Lord and a condition of the heart that will cause God to resist man. James 4:6 says “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore, he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”
 - d. This applies to the saved and lost alike. God does not accept the pride of the saved but hate the pride of the lost. He hates pride regardless.
 - e. Solomon prayed and dedicated the newly built temple to God (2 Chronicles 6:12-42) and one thing he requested over and over was that God would



listen to the prayers of the people in this temple and particularly after they had sinned.

- f. God responded to Solomon and honoured his request but his first stipulation was “If my people, which are called by name, shall humble themselves”. It would only be after the people humbled themselves and turned from their wicked ways that God said “then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14).
 - g. Furthermore, Jesus warned his disciples not to be as the hypocrites “for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of me.” (Matthew 6:5). These hypocrites were full of pride and wanted the esteem of men. Their prayers were just to be seen of men and God would not hear them. This is what is meant by “Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.” (Matthew 6:5).
 - h. How arrogant we are to think that we can come before the Almighty with pride in our hearts and make request, or praise him, and think that he will receive our prayer when the scripture teaches that, in fact, “God resisteth the proud” (1 Peter 5:5).
2. Lust
- a. James 4:3 identifies another reason why our prayers may go unheeded and we do not receive what we request. This passage says, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”
 - b. Obviously, the Lord has no pleasure in lustful requests. We cannot fool God by feigning our request to be from pure motives. The Lord knows our hearts and there is no hiding from him.
 - c. When Job answered Eliphaz, he said that “Not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure.” (Job 16:17).
 - d. The implication of Job’s statement is that he could understand why the Lord would not hear him if his prayer was impure. Job understood that we must speak to the Lord with pure motives.
 - (1) Purity has to do with the lack of mixture of components. Pure gold is 100% gold without any other metals.
 - (2) James called out those that made requests of God with lustful desires as “Ye adulterers and adulteresses” (James 4:4). That is, they were not pure in their motive regarding their request.
 - e. God will not receive nor grant lustful requests. Consider your heart and motives in your prayers. Are your desires pure? Are they godly and do they line up with the scripture?



3. Insincerity

- a. Insincere words indicate that what we say is empty and without truth. If words spoken are for a pretence, then they are not the words of one's heart.
- b. We are all guilty of insincere speech. Things we just say without actually meaning it or thinking about what we say.
- c. Often, we can fool men with insincere or vain words, for others cannot always perceive the heart but God can always perceive our heart and is never fooled.
- d. Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for their insincere prayer.
 - (1) Matthew 23:14 says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation."
 - (2) Their long prayer was nothing more than a show in order to be seen of men. Their words were not received by God.
 - (3) Their prayer was not from their hearts and was insincere. They would have been better off not praying at all than to utter empty words to an all-knowing God.
 - (4) Job 35:13 states, "Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it."
- e. David spoke to the Lord directly from what was in his heart.
 - (1) After the Lord had told David that his son would build God a temple but not himself, David responded and prayed to God.
 - (2) This communication unto God was full of praise for God and request that God would be glorified.
 - (3) This communication to God was sincere and David even says, "therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee." (2 Samuel 7:27).
 - (4) This was just David talking to God and what he spoke was from his heart. His praise was sincere and heartfelt.
- f. So frequently, we utter insincere prayers up to God. Whether that is praise, request, singing, etc., we all fall victim to empty communications to God.
- g. Maybe, we are caught up in habitual prayer, or we are rushed, or someone is listening, or maybe we just do not desire to talk to the Lord but know we should.



- h. It is better to say a few words that are sincere than to utter many eloquent words but that are insincere. Speak to the Lord from your heart. Do not offer insincere communication unto your Creator. He deserves more.
- 4. Wickedness / Wicked Heart
 - a. Wickedness can hinder our prayer. This is obvious but it certainly bears remark in a list of what can hinder our prayers.
 - b. Proverbs 15:8 says, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.”
 - (1) The surrounding context is dealing with the communication of the mouth.
 - (2) The verse in Proverbs refers to the “sacrifice” of the wicked and likely thoughts go to Old Testament sacrifices according to the law but consider Hebrews 13:15, “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”
 - (3) So, sacrifice, can refer to our communication unto God, specifically praise.
 - (4) This would seem to be the meaning of the word sacrifice in this passage since this verse is contrasting the wicked and the upright and that which the upright is doing is praying.
 - (5) Thus, the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to God but the prayer of the upright is his delight.
 - c. Furthermore, Proverbs 15:29 says, “the LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.”
 - (1) Again, this passage is contrasting the wicked and the righteous where the righteous is praying unto God and God is attentive and listening to that individual’s prayer.
 - (2) But when the wicked prays and makes request of the Lord, the Lord is far from that individual. This is a sad truth.
 - d. So far, these passages have referred to the wicked and the upright or righteous. It would be easy for us to separate ourselves from the wicked since we are saved by the blood of Jesus.
 - e. While this is true and we now have the righteousness of Christ, this pertains to our position in Christ but our daily practice can be every bit wicked.



- f. Consider 1 Peter 3:12, “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.”
 - (1) This passage does not say that the Lord is against the wicked or unsaved. It says those that do evil.
 - (2) Look at the surrounding passages and you will see that Christians have a choice for their daily practice.
 - (3) Saved individuals can choose to do good or they can choose to do evil; they can speak guile or they can refrain their tongue from evil.
 - (4) Just because we are saved does not mean that we no longer can behave wickedly.
 - g. Let us not think that we can act wickedly in our daily practice and that the Lord will receive and have respect unto our prayers based on the fact that our position is in Christ.
 - h. We must make effort to live righteously and when we sin, repent and ask forgiveness and this is how we can have close communion with the Lord.
5. Disobedience to God
- a. Similarly, to wickedness, disobedience to God and his word will also hinder our prayers to him.
 - b. Disobedience typically indicates that an individual has the knowledge needed in order to be obedient but instead is knowingly not adhering.
 - c. Often, we can abuse the mercy of God and knowingly go against his word and expect that God will just overlook our disobedience and still show us his favor. We truly take for granted his mercy.
 - d. Proverbs 28:9 declares, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.”
 - (1) These are incredibly impactful words regarding prayer.
 - (2) The law of God is available and the individual knows it and was even attentive and obedient unto the law but at some point, he “turneth away his ear”.
 - (3) That is, he stopped being attentive and heeding and chose instead to knowingly be disobedient to the word of God.
 - (4) The result of this disobedience and then praying and making request to God as though everything is copacetic is said to be an abomination to God.



- e. Consider also what 1 Peter 3:7 teaches: “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”
 - (1) This passage plainly illustrates the effects of knowingly being disobedient to God’s word.
 - (2) A man has the knowledge that he is to dwell with his wife “according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife”.
 - (3) If a man will be obedient to this instruction, then his “prayers be not hindered”.
 - (4) This inversely means that if a man chooses to be disobedient that his prayers will be hindered.
 - f. We cannot knowingly be disobedient to the Lord and carry on as though it does not matter and expect that the Lord is going to bend his ear and hear our prayers.
 - g. The Lord is not pleased with disobedience and this will greatly hinder our communication unto the Lord.
 - h. If there is something that we know we are being disobedient in, then we need to confess to the Lord and ask forgiveness and start being obedient.
 - i. When we are being obedient to the Lord, then he is ready to listen.
6. Faithlessness
- a. Another hindrance to the efficacy of our prayers is faithlessness.
 - b. Hebrews 11:6 sets a precedent, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”
 - c. Faith is a requirement for coming to the Lord and this applies to our prayers as well.
 - d. James 1:5-7 is a perfect example of this requirement for faith in our communications unto God.
 - (1) James 1:5 “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.
 - (2) The admonition is given to make request of the Lord for that which we need, in this case, wisdom.



- (3) The passage also tells us that the Lord will answer our godly and righteous requests of him.
 - (4) Yet, this is not a promise if we lack faith. In fact, if we lack faith that God can answer our prayer, we should expect not to have what we request.
 - (5) James 1:6-7 makes this known, “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.”
 - (6) If we bring our requests unto the Lord and then waver in our faith and doubt whether God has the ability to answer or request, certainly, “let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.”
- e. Faithlessness is a lack of trust and confidence in the Lord. It indicates that we do not believe God at his word.
 - f. Before talking to the Lord, spend a minute to reflect on who he is. Consider Jeremiah 32:17 “Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:”.
 - g. If your request is godly and aligned with the will of God and his word, have faith that he is the Almighty and that nothing is too hard for him and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Have faith in God.
- G. While all of these conditions of our hearts do hinder our prayers, this does not mean that we are without hope and unable to talk to the Lord.
1. If we will humble ourselves and confess our sin the Lord will hear us.
 2. The Bible reassures that, “The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.” (Psalm 147:11)
 3. The Lord does not cast off those that seek him with a humble heart. This applies to the lost and the saved. If a lost person is humbly seeking the Lord, the Lord will give that individual more light so he can be saved.
 4. Reflect and ask the Lord to show you if there is anything hindering your communication unto him and when he pricks your heart, humble yourself, and be receptive, and get it right so that you can restore fellowship with him.

II. EXTERNAL CONDITIONS

- A. As stated at the beginning of this section’s notes, the second way our communication unto God is ineffective or hindered is simply us not praying.



- B. This is extremely obvious of course but there are very practical lessons we can learn from the scripture.
- C. External factors are going to impact our time in prayer, our focus in prayer, our thoughtfulness in prayer, and even whether we pray or not.
- D. It is worthwhile to consider these external factors and what we can do to better control them for time in prayer.
- E. If we apply the patterns and examples given to us from the word of God, then our prayer time can be much effective and valuable.
 - 1. Distractions
 - a. Distractions draw our attention away from whatever it is that we are presently engaged in.
 - b. Distractions will hinder our focus and attention and this applies to our time in prayer as well.
 - c. Have you ever tried having a conversation with an individual while a child was constantly interrupting or having to be wrangled or watched? The conversation is broken, interrupted, and not effectual. Your mind or the other person's mind is constantly being pulled away and thoughts are lost.
 - d. This is the same way distractions work against us when we are trying to talk to the Lord.
 - e. We allow external circumstances to pull our thoughts away from the Lord and interrupt us.
 - f. Often distractions can be so powerful that they will cause us to abandon our prayer time altogether as we have to give our focus to whatever distraction is at hand.
 - g. The Lord Jesus needed set aside time in prayer where his focus was on the Father and in order for him to have this time, consider what he did to remove distractions.
 - (1) Matthew 14:23 "And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone."
 - (2) Mark 1:35 "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."
 - a) In the first passage, Jesus had to send that which was a distraction to him away. In this case, the distraction was the multitudes.



- b) In the second passage, he had to adjust his schedule to avoid distraction and so in order to do this he rose up “a great while before day”.
 - c) He also, sought out solitary places that would be free of distractions so that he could focus on talking to the Father.
 - d) For his time in prayer, he found “a solitary place” and “was there alone”.
 - e) This means that Jesus had to allow or make extra time to get to this solitary place. He made time for prayer and he made time to get to a place that was free from distractions for the purpose of prayer.
- h. Jesus set aside specific time for prayer and he ensured there were no distractions and this pattern can also be found with Daniel.
- (1) Daniel 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.”
 - a) Certainly, Daniel spoke to the Lord throughout his day and more than just these three times.
 - b) These three times indicate specific times that Daniel set aside in his day solely for the purpose of prayer.
 - c) This was time free from distraction where Daniel focused on the Lord and spoke to him and he had this appointed time three times every day!
 - d) Psalm 55:17 says, “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.”
 - e) Prayer can be quick and can be done whilst we are in the middle of distraction but we should also have a set aside time in our day that is free of distraction and is for the purpose of communion with the Father.
- i. Removing distraction and setting aside specific time for prayer takes effort and planning.
- j. We will put in this effort and planning for a multitude of things but how much more important and valuable is putting in this work to have time with the Lord.
- (1) Maybe you need to wake up before everyone else in your home so that you can have uninterrupted time in prayer.



- (2) Maybe you need to eliminate an activity in yours or your child's life so that you can have time for prayer.
 - (3) Certainly, all of us need to turn off our devices and instead use that wasted time for drawing nearer to the Lord through communion with him.
- k. Do not let distractions be your excuse for having a pitiful relationship with God and not talking to him. Be responsible and do what you need to afford yourself time in prayer that is distraction free.
2. Fatigue
- a. There are times when we have set aside time and removed distractions for the purpose of prayer but when we sit down and begin to pray, our eyelids grow heavy and we begin to falter in praying and instead fall in and out of sleep.
 - b. Though our heart was in the right place, our fatigue hindered our time in prayer.
 - c. Consider the disciples struggle when attempting to pray with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.
 - (1) Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John at a late hour to an isolated place for the purpose of prayer (Matthew 26:37-38)
 - (2) Jesus went away from the others and prayed but when he returned to the disciples, he "findeth them asleep" (Matthew 26:40).
 - (3) He roused the disciples and challenged them to "Watch and pray" (Matthew 26:41) but again he returned and found them asleep "for their eyes were heavy." (Matthew 26:43)
 - (4) The disciples were greatly hindered in their prayer to the Father with Jesus because they were so fatigued
 - d. Being fatigued is not evil or wicked but it may not be the best time to have your set aside time for prayer.
 - e. If this is the only time you have that day for prayer, do all you can to shake off your fatigue.
 - (1) Instead of sitting, rise up and walk while talking to the Lord.
 - (2) Turn on all the lights to help you fight off fatigue.
 - (3) Maybe you need to intake some coffee to give you alertness.