

Prayer

by Hendrik Joubert

When God candidly asks through James ***are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?*** (James 2:20) and goes on to explain that faith is made alive by acts of obedience; prayer is not one of the first actions which comes up for discussion. The fact that faith has to become alive before it can save may focus the attention on acts of obedience to the gospel; however the letter is addressed to Christians. We have to keep faith alive, after repentance, confession and baptism. Notice the first illustration used to teach this simple truth: ***If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,*** ¹⁶ ***and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?*** James 2:15-16

Each statement in this discourse is meaningful – remember the Source – but one of the most powerful must be: ***But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."*** James 2:18. Faith does not become apparent by what we say, but most certainly by what we *do*. Prayer is the most elementary illustration of the type of relationship we have with God.

When we are told that ***"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*** John 4:24, it seems apparent that we have to become ***obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed...*** (Romans 6:17) Everything we ***do in word or deed***, should not merely be done in a mechanical, emotionless way ***in the name the Lord Jesus*** (Colossians 3:17), we should do it with a ***pure heart***. (Matthew 5:8).

Now consider the statement God made through Paul: ***With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,*** Ephesians 6:18. Although Spirit is capitalized here, one may effectively argue that our prayers should not be meaningless recitals (Matthew 6:5-13) – it should come from the heart, the spirit.

To what degree is our spirit involved when we pray in public? When we are asked to pray in public we *have* to pray. The awareness of leading a group in prayer may cause us to be nervous, resulting in a distraction. We may become more involved with the words people will hear, rather than what God will hear. For this reason it is good to receive prior notice that we would be called upon to pray for the group.

To what degree is our spirit involved when we pray in private? I am convinced that our private prayer life is a personal indicator of spirituality. How often am I in deep conversation with God as Paul describes: ***in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God?*** (Philippians 4:6) Considering that in addition to knowing what we need before we think to ask, God also knows our hearts, it becomes a challenge to pray confidently, with humility.

It is the Lord's invitation which empowers us and gives us the confidence we need. It is His warning given through James which makes us realize that we need to be prudent about what we ask for. (James 4:3) So often what we say (and do) reveals just how materialistic we are. One need not even mention the blasphemous demands some religious leaders make for material riches, and things to be spent on their pleasures. The *wealth and health gospel* is an insult to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as is every false doctrine conceived in the minds of men.

What is your intimate relationship with God like? Do you pray often (***without ceasing*** – 1Thessalonians 5:17), or do you find it difficult to speak to God in this way? Is the fear the result of sins, or the result of humility? Finally, consider the following statement: ***Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*** James 5:16