

What Prayer Cannot Do

Some Christians err when considering the power of prayer. Some fail to recognize the great power that is at their disposal while others view prayer as a substitute for doing what they ought to be doing, thinking that prayer will solve all their problems and take care of all their needs and responsibilities. Today we will consider the power of prayer as it is revealed in the Bible and will demonstrate the reality of that power by setting forth the blessings it provides.

We need to look at the power prayer does not have. Prayer does not have the power to save the “alien” sinner apart from obedience. The one outside of Christ cannot be saved by prayer. We see the example of this in Acts 9:9-12 and 22:12-16. This is the conversion of Paul. In Acts 22:12-16, Paul recounts, “A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very time I looked up at him. And he said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness from Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.’” We also see in Acts 10:1-6, 33-35; 11:13-14 the example of Cornelius and his household. Faith and obedience save the sinner who is outside of Christ — not prayer. In both of the above examples, salvation came at baptism. In Galatians 3:26-27, Paul says, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Other Scriptures also show the need for faith and obedience (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 5:8-9).

Prayer does not have the power to work miracles today. There was a time when prayer had such power, but miracles ceased when the New Testament was completed as we see in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, which says, “Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophecy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.” Today, though, some brethren act as though they believe prayer can still work miracles. They pray for the sick to recover, but do nothing to help them as though they will miraculously recover. They pray for the needy and then do nothing to relieve their need. They pray for the lost and do nothing to reach nor teach them. We do need to pray for such things, but we must do our part as well.

The prayers of those who will not do the Lord’s will are powerless prayers. In 1 John 3:22, John says, “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.” We should pray for daily bread (Matthew 6:11), then work for it. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, Paul states, “For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such

persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.” We should pray for the needy and then help them according to our abilities and opportunities. In James 2:15-16, the Scriptures say, “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” We should furthermore pray for the lost and then go save them. Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-16 tells us to go out into the world to spread the gospel. We then have to do it!

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