

What Prayer Cannot Do

Introduction. Prayer is a wonderful privilege for Christians. We should pray often (1 Thessalonians 5:17; cp. Matthew 6:11; Acts 2:42), pray privately (Matthew 6:5-6), and pray publicly (1 Corinthians 14:15-16).

However, you have probably met religious people who say they pray so much, they expect their prayers to virtually work miracles. James said that effective prayer can accomplish much (James 5:16-18). It has tremendous power and can produce wonderful results. Although it can accomplish so much, prayer is not a substitute for other important parts of God's revelation.

I. It Cannot Be A Substitute For Bible Study

- A. The scriptures give wisdom that will lead us to salvation (2 Timothy 3:14-17; cp. Proverbs 1:1-6; Acts 8:37).
- B. Faith comes by the word of God, not prayer (Romans 10:17; cp. Ezekiel 3:10; Habakkuk 3:2; 1 Timothy 1:5).
- C. Prayer will not develop us doctrinally (1 Timothy 4:16). Only study and meditation can do this (Psalm 1:1-2; Hosea 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:15).

II. It Cannot Be A Substitute For God's Plan Of Salvation

- A. It cannot take the place of faith.
 1. Faith is essential to drawing near to God (Hebrews 11:6).
 2. Faith is essential to acceptable prayer (James 1:5-7).
- B. It cannot take the place of repentance.
 1. Repent or God will not hear (Psalm 66:18).
 2. Repent or perish (Luke 13:3).
 3. Repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38).
 4. Repent and pray for a Christian in sin (Acts 8:22).
- C. It cannot take the place of baptism.
 1. Saul had to be baptized to be saved (Acts 9:9,11; 22:16).
 2. Baptism, not prayer, puts one into Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).

III. It Cannot Be A Substitute For Faithfulness

- A. People want to call on the name of the Lord in prayer, but only doing the will of God will save (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46).
- B. Furthermore, having faith to pray is not enough. True faith compels us to work (James 2:26; cp. Luke 3:8-14; 7:47-50; 2 Peter 1:5-11).
- C. Every Christian is exhorted to "stand fast in the faith" and be faithful unto death (1 Corinthians 16:13; Colossians 2:5; Hebrews 6:11-12; 12:1-2; Revelation 2:10). One way to do this is the faithful attendance of the assemblies of the church (Hebrews 10:25).

Conclusion. Jesus told us that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint" in Luke 18:1. In fact, there is no substitute for prayer, particularly in drawing near to God. But there are limits to prayer — limits established by God. Do not try to make prayer something it was never intended to be.

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