

The Word That Conquers God

Introduction. What word is so mighty that it can conquer God? What is the word that unifies separated souls around one common mercy seat? What is the word that lifts the load of guilt from the conscience-smitten heart? What is the word that puts a sword in our hand when we face temptations? What is the word that gives us strength to bear our daily burdens? What is the word that lifts us up when we have fallen? What is the word that stays with the soul in its hours of loneliness and that comforts it in the day of sorrow? That mighty, all prevailing, God-conquering word is prayer.

When we select illustrations from the Bible which prove our proposition that prayer is the word that conquers God, our only embarrassment is the riches of the Bible in that respect. Abraham prayed for Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18:23-33 and it conquered God. He could have said, "That is what they deserve. They have had plenty of warnings and have not heeded them. Now let them perish." But this noble, magnanimous friend of God prayed for them and conquered God.

One of the greatest blessings enjoyed by Christians in this life is the privilege of prayer, by which we can approach God. Through prayer, the Christian can find forgiveness for sins (1 John 1:9), peace to replace anxiety (Philippians 4:6-7) and strength from God through His Spirit (Ephesians 3:14-16). For such reasons, Paul frequently exhorted Christians to be diligent in their prayers (Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

However, Jesus knew that people would to become slack in their prayers (Luke 18:1). It is for this reason that we study prayer today.

I. ***The Characteristics Of Prayer***

A. Prayer must be offered in faith.

1. Jesus said that if we ask in faith, we will receive (Matthew 21:22).
2. We must have faith in God, and in His ability to answer (Hebrews 11:6).
3. Otherwise, prayer will not be answered (James 1:5-8).
4. Is our faith weak? Then increase it with the help of God's word (Romans 10:17).

B. Prayer must be offered with a spirit of humility.

1. Notice the example of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9-14).
2. Psalm 34:18 says, "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."
3. James 4:6 says, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."

- C. Prayer must be offered in harmony with God's will.
 - 1. God answers prayer that is offered according to His will (1 John 5:14).
 - 2. Jesus provided the example for us in His prayers at Gethsemane (Luke 22:42).
 - 3. Too often, prayers are unanswered because they are more concerned with our will, rather than God's will (James 4:3).
- D. Prayer must be offered by those righteous before God.
 - 1. Peter wrote, "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 Peter 3:12).
 - 2. The prayers of the righteous person are effective (James 5:16-18).
 - 3. But those continuing in sin He will not hear (Proverbs 28:9; Isaiah 59:1-2).
 - 4. To be righteous before God, one must submit to the "righteousness of God" offered in Christ (Romans 10:1-4).
- E. Prayer must be offered in a spirit of thanksgiving.
 - 1. Ephesians 5:20: "Giving thanks always for all things unto God."
 - 2. Philippians 4:6: "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving."
 - 3. Colossians 4:2: "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving."
 - 4. 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18: "Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks." Do we think God will help us with our present burdens if we do not take the time to thank Him for past blessings?
- F. Prayer must be offered with persistence.
 - 1. Jesus illustrated this aspect of prayer through two parables.
 - a) The parable of the persistent friend (Luke 11:5-10).
 - b) The parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8).
 - 2. The virtue of persistence is demonstrated in three instances of prayer.
 - a) Jesus at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:44).
 - b) Paul, pertaining to his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7-8).
 - c) The early church (Acts 2:42).
- G. Prayer must be offered in the name of Jesus.
 - 1. This means much more than simply adding a little phrase "in Jesus' name" at the end of our prayers (Ephesians 5:20)!
 - a) Jesus is the only way by which we can approach God (John 14:6).
 - b) Jesus is our high priest who intercedes for us (Hebrews 7:24-25; John 14:13).

2. Appealing to God in the name of His Son can give us great confidence that God will give us what we need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

II. ***The Practice Of Prayer***

A. When should we pray?

1. Having "set times" to pray can help to create the habit of praying.
 - a) There are two good examples in the Bible.
 - (1) David, whom God described as "a man after mine own heart" (Psalm 55:17).
 - (2) Daniel, whom the angel described as "O man greatly beloved" (Daniel 6:10).
 - b) These great men of God made it a habit to pray at set times throughout the day; we would do well to imitate their example.
 - c) At the very least, you should make a special time each day to be alone with your heavenly Father in prayer.
2. Yet prayers should not be limited to "set times."
 - a) Special needs call for special times of praying.
 - b) There are three good examples in the Bible.
 - (1) Jesus, praying on important occasions (Luke 6:12-13).
 - (2) Paul, praying in trying circumstances (Acts 16:25).
 - (3) Nehemiah, praying on the spur of the moment (Nehemiah 2:4-5).
 - c) The goal is to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
 - a) Having "set times" will help develop the experience in praying.
 - b) Praying spontaneously as needs arise will develop the disposition to pray in every circumstance.

B. With whom should we pray?

1. Jesus exhorted us to pray "in secret" (Matthew 6:5-6).
 - a) Private prayer should occupy the largest portion of our prayers.
 - b) Consider the value of secret prayer.
 - (1) It forms a close union, communion and fellowship with God.
 - (2) It is a true test of your sincerity and devotion for men cannot see you and God can see right through you!
 - c) Your Father will reward you "openly."
2. Jesus also spoke of praying with "two or three" (Matthew 18:19-20).
 - a) The early Christians prayed together often.
 - (1) They prayed in times of trouble (Acts 4:23-24; 12:5, 12; 16:25).
 - (2) They prayed in times of departure (Acts 20:36; 21:5).
 - b) A sweetness of fellowship and sense of strength comes when God's people pray together.

C. How should we pray?

1. Jesus taught how to pray (Luke 11:1-4).
 - a) The "Lord's Prayer," as it is commonly called, is a model or guide for learning how to pray.
 - b) A careful examination of this prayer reveals what proper prayer includes.
 - (1) To "whom" we should pray.
 - (2) Praise to God.
 - (3) Supplication to God for His purposes, our physical needs, our spiritual needs and the spiritual needs of others.
2. Jesus also stressed the importance of simplicity in our prayers (Matthew 6:7-8).
 - a) Therefore, our prayers ought to contain four elements.
 - (1) Adoration for God and His greatness.
 - (2) Confession to God for sins we have committed.
 - (3) Thanksgiving to God for all the blessings we have been given (health, family, friends, guidance, forgiveness, hope, etc.).
 - (4) Supplication to God for what we need and praying on behalf of others.
 - b) By following these, our prayers will be acceptable to Him.

D. For what should we pray?

1. In the scriptures, God indicates for what He wishes us to pray.
 - a) Self and family.
 - b) Community and nation.
 - c) Church and non-Christians.
 - d) Sick, poor and oppressed.
2. As we make our supplications known to God, we should have specific objectives for which to pray.

III. ***The Obstacles To Prayer***

A. Unconfessed sin.

1. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."
2. The basis for prayer rests upon our being in fellowship with Him; such fellowship is broken if we do not confess our sins to Him!

B. Improper treatment of others.

1. How we treat others has a bearing upon whether God will hear our prayers.
 - a) E.g., how we treat the poor (Psalm 41:1-3).
 - b) E.g., how one treats his friend (Matthew 5:23-24).
 - c) E.g., how a husband treats his wife (1 Peter 3:7).

2. We must correct our relationships with others (if possible) before we can expect God to hear our prayers and forgive us of our sins (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-23).

IV. ***The Answers To Prayers***

- A. "Request granted."
 1. God may answer "yes," and grant the petitions we ask of Him.
 2. Such will be the case the more we try to do His will in our lives (1 John 3:22).
- B. "Request granted, but not yet."
 1. God may grant our request, but in His time and according to His purpose.
 2. We think God is saying "no," but He is saying "yes, but wait" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).
- C. "Request granted, but not as you might expect."
 1. Sometimes God says "yes," but answers it in way differently than we anticipated.
 2. God's thoughts and methods are often much different than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9).
 3. For example, think how God might answer a request for strength and perseverance.
 - a) He may give us trials to bear.
 - b) Which in turn develops the virtues we prayed for!
 4. We should be careful and not dictate to God how to answer our prayers.
- D. "Request denied."
 1. Often God says "no."
 2. We must trust that God, who knows all and what is best, would do so only if granting our request would not be for our good (Hebrews 12:5-11).
 3. We may not fully understand, but we can still fully trust Him (Habakkuk 3:17-19), especially in light of the promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Conclusion. The discouragements of the world are all around us. In the silence we long to hear the voice of God. In these moments of discouragement and in the face of these difficulties, remember those who conquered God by their prayers.

Prayer is the key to the problems of our day; it locks the door that keeps out the doubts and dangers of the night. Remember that you wield in your prayer the mightiest power, the power that moves the hand that moves the world.

The ability to pray to God and receive answers in our lives is truly one of the greatest blessings we can have as children of God! Hopefully, understanding and applying the principles discussed in this lesson will assure greater success in having our prayers answered.