

When Is Prayer Heard?

by Christopher Love

A man must be brought into a state of friendship or reconciliation with God before any prayer he makes can be accepted.

Scripture: Hebrews 11:5

Topics: "Effective Prayer", "Divine Acceptance"

Description

Christopher Love preaches on the doctrine that a man must be brought into a state of friendship or reconciliation with God before any prayer he makes can be accepted. He supports this doctrine with three reasons: God accepts the person before the prayer, prayers are accepted through the intercession of Jesus Christ, and the assistance of God's Spirit is needed for acceptance. Love emphasizes the importance of being in a state of favor with God for prayers to be heard and accepted.

Transcript

DOCTRINE: A man must be brought into a state of friendship or reconciliation with God before any prayer he makes can be accepted.

I will prove this doctrine by three reasons and then apply it.

1. God does not accept the person for the prayer's sake, but the prayer for the person's sake. We read in Genesis 4:4: "God had respect unto Abel, and unto his offering." It was first to Abel and then his sacrifice. God accepted his service because his person was in a state of favor with Him. God is first pleased with the worker before He can accept the work. This is also laid down in Hebrews 11:5: "By faith Enoch was translated, that he should not see death, for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." Now without faith in Christ to justify your person, you cannot please God. Here lies the great difference between the papists and us. The papists say that works justify the person; we say the person justifies the works, for make the tree good and the fruit must be good.

2. Until we are brought into that state of reconciliation, we have no share in the intercession, satisfaction, and righteousness of Jesus Christ. And till we have a share in them, our prayers cannot be accepted. Jacob could not receive the blessing from the father but in the garments of his elder brother; nor can we receive anything from the hands of God but in the robes of Christ. No prayer can be accepted by God but in and through the intercession of Jesus Christ. If Christ is not an intercessor in heaven, no prayer will be heard on earth. In Revelation 8:3, it is written that there was "an angel that came and stood at the altar,

having a golden censer, and there was given to him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne." The word in Greek has this purpose: that He should add in prayers to the prayers of the saints. It is as if the prayer of Christ and a believer were all one. In Isaiah 56:7 God promises, "I will bring My people to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer." Our prayers are but as so many ciphers that signify nothing till the intercession of Christ is added to them. Without that they cannot be accepted.

3. Till we are in a state of friendship and reconciliation, we do not have the assistance of God's Spirit to help us; and if we do not have the assistance of the Spirit, we shall never find acceptance with Him. All requests that are not dictated by the Spirit are but the breathings of the flesh, which God does not regard. Now, till we are reconciled to God, we cannot have the Spirit. Galatians 4:6: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying, Abba, Father." So that till you are sons, you cannot have the Spirit. So much for the reasons; I come now to the application.

Application

1. If this is so, that a man must be in a state of friendship before his prayers can be accepted, hence learn that all that you ever do before that state is odious to God. Not only your sinful actions, but even your civil, your natural, yea, your religious actions. Not that they are so in themselves, or in regard of God, but in regard of the doer of them. Psalm 109:7: "Let his prayer be turned into sin." You make a prayer against sin; God will turn your prayers into sin. Many prayers cannot turn one sin into a grace, but one sin willfully and resolutely continued in can turn all your prayers into sin. Proverbs 21:27: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?"

A diseased body turns food into corrupt humours which a healthy body turns into sound nourishment. I have read of a precious stone that had excellent virtue in it but lost all its efficacy if it was put into a dead man's mouth. Prayer is an ordinance of great excellency, of great efficacy, but if it is in a dead man's mouth, if it comes out of the heart of one who is dead in trespasses and sins, it loses all its virtue. Water that is pure in the fountain is corrupted in the channel.

2. This doctrine overthrows one main pillar of the Romish religion, justification by works. If God accepts the person before He accepts the works, how can any person be justified by works? Unless your person is justified, unless you are reconciled, your works are wicked works, and can wicked works justify? Good works do not make a man good, but a good man makes a work good. And shall a work that a man made good return again and make the man good? If we had no other reason against justification by works (said William Perkins) but this, it would be sufficient.

3. Let this teach you not only to look to the fitness and disposedness of your heart in prayer, but also to make inquiry what you are who prays. It is our duty, and it is very good to look to the qualification of the heart in prayer, to look to the qualification of the duty. But the main work is to look after the qualification of the person, and to see whether you are in a state of favor and reconciliation with God. For if the person is not in favor with God, you may be confident your petitions will not be heard nor accepted; but God looks upon it as the corrupt breathings of your sinful and corrupt heart. You are to look therefore in the performance of a duty whether you can go to God in prayer as a Father.

There are many who look after the qualification of their duty, but few look after the qualification of the person to see whether they are justified or not, whether God is their Friend or not. But we should look mainly to this, for let the heart of a man be never so well disposed, yet if your person is not justified, your

prayer cannot be accepted. God does not care for the rhetoric of prayers (how eloquent they are), nor for the arithmetic of prayers (how many they are), nor for the logic of them (how rational and methodical they are), nor for the music of them (what a harmony and melody of words you have); but God looks at the divinity of prayers, which is from the qualification of a person, from a justified person and in a sanctified manner. It is good to inquire, "Is my heart right? Is my mind composed? Are my affections raised and kindled in prayer?" Rather, chiefly inquire, "Is my person accepted by God?"

4. Let me give a caution here. Take heed that you do not mistake this doctrine. Let no man think that because God accepts no prayer unless the person is justified, therefore wicked men are excused from prayer. For though God does not accept every man's prayer, yet every man in the world ought to pray, and that for these reasons:

1.) They must pray as creatures who stand in need of their Creator. The ravens cry and God gives them meat.

2.) The Lord blames wicked men for not praying to Him. Jeremiah 10:25: "Pour out Thy wrath upon the heathens, that know Thee not, and upon the families that call not upon Thy name." Romans 3:11: "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God."

3.) They are commanded to pray, Acts 8:22-23. Peter said to Simon Magus, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee; for I perceive thou art in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity."

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