



THE PASTOR'S PEN

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Concerning the Matter of Prayer (part one)

It may come as a bit of a surprise to hear that the General Church's website does not list any teachings, guidelines or official positions concerning prayer in the Christian Church (DoC). However, the Bible contains a great deal of teaching about prayer and it is important that we include that teaching in our study of Church doctrines and beliefs.

Why is it important you ask? Because prayer is one of the cornerstones of the Christian life that we need to help us build up and exercise our faith. To do this, we need to have a more Biblical understanding of what prayer is and how it works in order to be able to use it effectively. Have you ever had one of those days when you know you needed to talk to God or just wanted to pray and you felt like your prayers got as far as the ceiling before they fell flat on the ground? Perhaps you prayed about a matter in the past and it seemed to you that God never heard you or never answered your prayer. Maybe you were in a crisis and you knew you needed to pray, but you just did not know what to pray for, or how to pray in a way that you felt God would understand what you needed and wanted at that moment. The fact is, all of these prayer situations are addressed in the scriptures and a little study here can solve a lot of the issues that seem to arise in our prayer lives and affect our prayer results.

First things first though. Before you can be effective in your prayers, you need to understand what prayer really is. One of the most common problems that people seem to have with their prayer life is that they view prayer the same way they see a letter to Santa Clause. They put together a list of wants, present them and then sit back in expectation of delivery, hoping that if they are good enough, God will come through for them. It does not work that way. It never has and it never will. Prayer is not a letter. Prayer is communication. Prayer is talking to God and having a conversation with God. In a conversation you talk and then you listen to the response before you continue talking. The same is true with prayer.

So, how do we have a conversation with God? How does God respond in talking to us after we have spoken to Him? God can answer us in several ways. He can answer us by His intervention in a situation. Have you ever prayed and then things just suddenly fell into place? It was not a coincident,

it was an answer. God can answer us through His Spirit communicating with our spirit on a non-verbal level. One such response that God can provide is to have the Spirit convict us of a course of actions that we need to take. Ever ask Him for direction or help and then felt like you really needed to do something in particular right then and there? Have you ever acted on the spur of the moment and spoke to a stranger only to find out they needed help and you had the answer they needed or that in reaching out to someone else they had the answer to your problem? Do not simply discount this to happenstance. It happens far too often in the life of a Christian to only be chance. Oftentimes God uses other people to communicate with us. Most of the time however, God uses His word (the Scriptures) to teach us and tell

us His side of the conversation. That of course means that for your prayers to accomplish their purpose, you need to be studying your Bible. Talking to God without studying your Bible is like talking to your friend across town without a telephone. You can talk to them you just can't hear their response.

Now you may be beginning to see why sometimes your prayers seem to fall flat or they seem to be ignored when you talk to God. It is not because God did not hear them or because He is ignoring them. It is because we have not been "listening" in the correct way for His response. To have a conversation, you must listen, otherwise there is no conversation at all, there are just words being used. It is important that we talk **with** God in our prayers and not just **to** Him.

Of course, there are other valid reasons that seem like God may not be hearing us or answering us when we pray. Sometimes we are so fixed on the reply that we want to hear that we miss the reply that is given. We ask God for a miracle, or we ask for Him to affect someone's life and then we look for the successful conclusion we expected. If nothing happens, or if it happens in way we did not want, then people often times blame God for His refusal to help or accuse Him of turning His back on them. Nothing could be further from the truth. You see, God does not have to give us a positive answer in His reply. He can choose to tell us "No" or even tell us "Be patient and wait." These are not the answers we wanted, so we overlook them and feel like God has let us down. The reality is, He may very well have just performed the very best action that was needed in that moment for the good of everyone involved or He may have even protected us from an unseen, adverse consequence that we did not expect. However, that was not what we wanted and so we feel neglected or rejected.

To help put such negative responses to our prayers in perspective, we have to understand that God is a loving parent. He is trying to see to it that we are being guided and directed into being the best we can be and caring for us, without spoiling us. Now if a two-year old saw his mom put some bright, shiny, sharp butcher knives into a drawer and the two-year old then goes to the same drawer to pull them out to play with them, what will a loving and protective mom do? She will take away the knives and say "No." The child will most likely pitch a fit, feel unloved and feel neglected at this point. Is that what is really happening to the child? Of course not, but then we are seeing things from the outside. For the child who does not see and understand everything going on, he only knows the rejection. The same thing happens in our prayer life as well. We need to understand that God always hears and that He always answers, we just do not always get what we want. This is especially true if it is not in our best interests.

Yes, prayer is a very important part of the Christian life. It is important that we know what it is and how to use it. In talking with God and listening to God we learn and we receive the assistance we need to help us make our way in the world. Next month, we will continue this topic with more of the scriptural instructions on prayer and praying. In the mean time though, take the opportunity to talk with God and listen to Him. You may be surprised at the answers you receive and the ways in which they come.

In prayer with you all, James

James