

# CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## SEMINAR ON DOCTRINE OF PRAYER (PT 1)

### - HINDRANCES TO PRAYER

23 JULY 2011

**INTRODUCTION** – Prayer is one of the most wonderful gifts given by God to only believers. This is because after they accept Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour, they cease to be enemies of God. They become the children of God with immediate effect. They look the same on the outside but inside, a real transformation invisible to the naked eyes but seen by God alone takes place. This is the mighty work of God. **1 John 3:1-2** (KJV), “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. **2** Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” [emphasis added]

It is a transformation from inside out. This distinctive change in the believer enables him to approach God and ask Him whatsoever his heart desires provided that it is within God’s sovereign will. This is called prayer. It is described as children talking to the heavenly Father. How important is prayer to God? It is so important to God that He commands all believers to pray without ceasing (1Thessalonians 5:17). God does not want His children to ever stop asking Him for help. This is what prayer means . . . to ask God for help. When Christians do not pray, basically they are telling God that they can manage their lives without God’s help. God says they are very wrong. Christians wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers in high places as they face temptations in life. How can they not pray and ask God for help? Believers are impotent against the wiles of the Devil which are spiritual in nature. It is as if believers are given the most powerful weapon against their enemies for the battlefield but they choose to use water pistols instead!

Therefore, it is incumbent that believers take God at His word and pray without ceasing if they are to be victorious against the Devil and not become a casualty by the way side.

#### **I. FOR MAN TO SEE – Matthew 6:5-6**

- a. Truly born again disciples will definitely pray. It is not a question of “if” but “when”.

- b. Christians are expressly forbidden to pray like the hypocrites. One mark of the hypocrites is to pretend to be someone they are not, like an actor on a stage.
- c. A prevalent and constant desire to pray - for others to see. The hypocrites would pray standing in synagogues and in the street corners. These streets are like open and wide boulevards which were prominent and visible for all to see that they were prayerful; unlike the "street" in verse 2 which means narrow alley ways.
- d. When true believers pray, they do so secretly. They enter into a closet which is like a secret chamber. They shut the door of the closet. After the door is shut, then they pray for only God to hear.
- e. For the believer who prays secretly, God will reward openly.
- f. This is not a teaching against corporate prayer or the public prayer of the chairman during worship service. This is a teaching against hypocritical prayer.

## **II. MERE REPITITION – Matthew 6:7-15**

- a. Vain repetitions refer to empty repetitive utterances that are meaningless and thoughtless, like the Baal worshippers in 1Kings 18:26-27. Their "prayers" were fueled by superstition, with the result that nothing happened, even though they "prayed" from morning to noon.
- b. Heathens do this when they pray. They have been taught that this is the way so that the gods will answer. They do this sincerely. They think that by their much talking, their gods will answer. They even cut themselves in their sincere desire to please their gods so that their gods will answer their prayers.
- c. Believers should not even begin to use this form of prayer. Do not confuse being persevering in prayer with vain repetition. Persevering prayer is from the heart and done with needful urgency. The latter is without heart and is meaningless, fueled by superstition.

- d. Christians should not begin to be like the heathens. Prayer is based upon a relationship between the believer and God, between a father and his child. This is seen in the use of “your Father” where “your” is emphasized.
- e. The believer’s Father knows completely what the necessities of His children are. He knows even BEFORE they ask.
- f. Prayer is for the benefit of the believer. One of the main benefits is that of nearness and the ever conscious presence of the Lord in the believer’s life. He is never alone. He need not fend for himself at all. He gives glory to God. He is able to praise the Lord sincerely every day, especially on the Lord’s Day.

### **III. AGAINST THE REVEALED WILL OF GOD – Deuteronomy 3:21-29**

- a. The context is that Moses had publicly shamed the LORD by smiting the rock twice. The LORD specifically told him, in the presence of the people of Israel, to speak to the rock and water would come forth.
- b. Moses committed a public sin. This might seem trivial to us as it was not a major sin like adultery or even murder. However, much was given to Moses and a very, very high standard of holiness was demanded from him. Based upon the many privileges that Moses received from the LORD, this sin was very grievous in the sight of God (see Numbers 20:7-13).
- c. The penalty was that Moses was forbidden to lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land. Moses then prayed that the LORD would let him enter and see the good land. However, the LORD was angry with Moses and would not hear his prayer.
- d. The LORD even said that he had prayed enough on this matter.
- e. God emphatically told Moses to stop praying this prayer. The will of God had been revealed to Moses and it would not change no matter how long he prayed.
- f. Believers must never pray against what God has revealed in Holy Scriptures. It is foolishness to do so. Not even Moses’ prayer was accepted by the LORD!

- g. If the LORD had acceded to Moses' request and had given him another chance, then the LORD would be sending the message that those who serve the LORD much can gain favour with God and get away with sin!

#### **IV. REGARD INIQUITY – Psalm 66:17-20**

- a. The psalmist cried to the LORD with his mouth and with his tongue the LORD was praised. The psalmist praised the LORD with exuberance.
- b. The psalmist knew that if he regarded (i.e. sees or has knowledge of) iniquities in his heart, his praises and prayers would not be heard by the LORD. This rejection by the LORD is emphatic! It does not matter who the believer is or what the believer has done, his prayers being heard is conditioned upon a holy life whereby sin is honestly and sincerely confessed once it is known.
- c. The relationship between the believer and his LORD is not in jeopardy. Once a sinner becomes a saint, i.e. a child of God, he will always remain a child of God. This is THE relationship that has been sealed by the blood of Christ. It can never be vitiated. However, the fellowship with his LORD is gone when the believer regards iniquities in his heart.
- d. But the psalmist was confident that the LORD had heard him. He had repented of his sins. He testified using synonymous parallelism in verse 19 to emphasize the fact that he was very sure the LORD heard his prayer. A believer can know that his sins are forgiven and that his prayer is heard!
- e. The psalmist blessed God who did not turn away his prayer. The LORD did not turn away His mercy as well. Mercy is God withholding the punishment that a believer deserves when he repents of his sins. Do not confuse this with the consequences of sins.
- f. God is no respecter of persons. This is especially true in the prayer life of His children. They must know that this standard of holiness is a non-negotiable truth. When the believer's sins are made known to him, instead of being defensive and justifying his sins, the best and only way is to repent and make right his relationship with God.

## V. PRAYER AS AN EXCUSE – Joshua 7:1-13

- a. Joshua and the people of Israel had a total and complete victory over the people of Jericho. They were full of confidence to conquer the next city called Ai. It was smaller than the city of Jericho. They thought that they only needed to send a mere 3,000 men and the city of Ai would fall. However, the 3,000 men were defeated and 36 of them died.
- b. The people of Israel were devastated, to say the least. Their hearts melted and they became like water! Israel was in the Promised Land. They were surrounded by enormous armies of Canaanites who would hear of Israel's defeat and gain moral strength and courage. Such carnal thinking and doubts filled the hearts and minds of the people of Israel including Joshua their leader.
- c. The first thing that Joshua did was that he rent his clothes and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD. This was an act of humility before the LORD. Joshua did this together with the elders of Israel until evening time. This means that the action was done till the next day as the people of Israel counted their days from evening to evening. They also put dust upon their heads to symbolize the fact that they were lower than dust! Dust was usually found beneath their sandals. They counted themselves lower than dirt. This was a picture of extreme humility. Was this the right thing to do?
- d. Joshua's prayer was recorded for our instruction. **Joshua 7:8-9** (KJV), "*O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! 9 For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?*" This was a wrong prayer made by Joshua. Why was it wrong?
- e. It was wrong because it was against the promise that the LORD made to Joshua when he was called to take over Moses' leadership in Joshua 1. **Joshua 1:1-9** (KJV), "*Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, 2 Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. 4 From the*

wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. **5** There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. **6** Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them. **7** Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. **8** This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. **9** Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

- f. Based upon the above calling from the LORD, Joshua could not fail because the LORD had given him His holy Word that every place that the sole of his feet trod upon would result in success. Joshua could not be defeated! Joshua needed to be strong and courageous in obeying the Word of God in all he did.
- g. Joshua’s prayer was like pointing the finger at the LORD for not doing His part! The LORD was not the One who failed but Joshua!
- h. Having gone under the tutelage of Moses these past 40 odd years of wilderness wandering, Joshua should have known that the only time there was death in the camp of Israel was because of sin. 600,000 plus Israelites perished in the wilderness because of sin including his beloved mentor, Moses!
- i. This understanding is attested by the LORD’s response to Joshua’s prayer. **Joshua 7:10-13** (KJV), “*And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? 11 Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. 12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. 13 Up, sanctify the people,*

*and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you.”*

- j. Joshua needed to sanctify the people of Israel. Joshua should have known that this was the course of action he needed to take. Prayer was good and so was prostrating before the ark and the putting of dust on their heads. However, when these were done not based upon the truth and had become an excuse not to sanctify the camp from sin, then the prayer was a mockery.
- k. Prayer must not become an excuse not to exercise discipline in the church. Pray and discipline must go together even though it is an unpleasant task to exercise discipline.

## **VI. ASKING AMISS – James 4:1-3**

- a. Even members in church quarrel and fight, as James highlighted in his epistle. He says that this is due to their heart condition rather than a lack of prayer. Believers might pray but their prayers are not heard by God because their heart condition is not right with God.
- b. The carnal flesh has taken over. Personal desires dominate and control their actions. It is no longer what God wants that matters. As long as the big “I” wants something, no one is able to stop him. However, he has no power to obtain what he wants. It always eludes him. What exactly does a sinner in such a state actually want out of life?
- c. He fights and even kills to get what he wants. No matter what carnal methods he uses, he fails to get he wants. Yet James says that the member does not get because he does not ask.
- d. When he asks, he does not receive. The reason is that he asks wrongly. His purpose is to satisfy his lusts i.e. his earth bound desires.
- e. Prayer becomes superficial and merely a means to get what one wants.

**CONCLUSION** – These hindrances to prayer are real and sadly common. The best gift made available by the heavenly Father to all His children is negated because they allow these hindrances to remain instead of dealing with them. Amen.