

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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CONDITIONS OF ACCEPTABLE PRAYER

The privilege of prayer is one of the blessings enjoyed by children of God. God encourages His children to pray. The scriptures furnish ample assurance that God hears and answers prayers. This fact should encourage us to "pray without ceasing." (1 Thess. 5:17).

Let none suppose that the fact God hears and answers prayers means that there is some sort of "magic" in the mere saying of words. "Saying prayers" is not necessarily praying. Even though one may display a pious look, assume a lowly attitude of body, and utter flowery expressions (even in "holy tones"), it does not necessarily mean he is praying acceptably. Nor does it mean that his petitions will be granted. God's granting of our petitions, like the salvation He offers, is conditional. God offers salvation to all men, but not unconditionally. In order to enjoy the salvation He provides men must comply with the conditions upon which the offer is made. Just so it is in the matter of praying, we must comply with the conditions God has given if we expect our requests to be granted. What are the conditions of praying acceptably? Here are some of them:

One must *be righteous*. "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 Pet. 3:12). What does it mean for one to be "righteous"? John answers, "he that doeth righteousness is righteous..." (1 John 3:7). "Doing righteousness" involves keeping the commandments of God. (See Ps. 119:171; 1 John 3:22). Let not one who rejects the word of God and refuses to obey Him expect God to heed his praying. The wise man wrote: "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." (Prov. 28:9). The psalmist wrote: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." (Ps 66:18). Jesus stated it thus: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John 15:7).

We must pray In faith. In exhorting men to pray for wisdom, James said, "but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." Of one who "wavereth" he said, "Let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord." (James 1:5-7). See also Jesus' statement in Matt. 21:22.

We must pray according to His will. "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, If we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us." (1 John 5:14). In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:42). This involves asking in harmony with His word. When Miriam became leprous, Moses overlooked this

principle, and besought God, "Heal her *now*." This request was not granted. (See Numbers 12).

We are to pray In the name of Christ. (Col. 3:17; John 14:13, 14; 15:16). This involves praying by His authority and as He teaches, approaching the Father through Him, not merely some magical formula in repeating His name.

We must forgive. "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." (Mark 11:25).

We must be unselfish and sincere. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." (James 4:3). Our praying should not be for show, but sincere utterances of our heart's desires to God, (Matt. 6:5,6). And, James teaches, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (Jas. 5:16).

Yes, "men ought always to pray." (Luke 18:1). Blessings that otherwise could be ours do not come because we do not ask, ...ye have not, because he ask not." (James 4:2). Let us comply with God's stated conditions for our praying, and let us "pray without ceasing." (1 Thess. 5:17).

— Paul C. Keller

Understanding Prophecy

Men without some assistance have never been very good at understanding prophecy. The fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies is clearly shown in the Old Testament, and the fulfillment of other Old Testament prophecies is clearly shown in the New Testament. From the Old Testament it is obvious that even Jewish scribes and rabbis did not understand many of the prophecies about the Messiah (Christ) and His kingdom. It is also obvious that some resorted to twisting and perverting Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:16). Here are some things to keep in mind that will help us not to be taken in by the speculators in prophecy today:

1. Most of the prophecies in the Old Testament found their fulfillment in the histories of Israel and other nations who came in contact with Israel. The bondage in Egypt, the conquest and settlement of Canaan, the Assyrian captivity, the Babylonian captivity, the restoration of the Israelites to their land, and the historical period between the testaments are all dealt with in Old Testament prophecies.

2. Many other Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist, the ministry of Christ, and the beginning and early history of the church (which is the kingdom of Christ).

3. The 24th chapter of Matthew concerns primarily the destruction of Jerusalem (which came to a climax A.D. 70) and secondarily the second coming of Christ. Nearly all present-day speculators misapply the things spoken by Jesus about the destruction of Jerusalem to the second coming of Christ.

4. The revelation of Jesus to John was written to the seven churches of Asia and is to be understood from their viewpoint.

They were under severe persecution; their suffering would worsen. They needed encouragement; they needed to know that God was aware, cared and would deal with their tormentors. To view the book as either a preview of history from the first century down to the end of time or as primarily a depiction of events that would transpire right before the end of time is to miss the whole purpose of the book.

Some common mistakes made by so-called experts in Bible prophecy:

1. To take fulfilled prophecy (either fulfilled in the historical period of the Old Testament, the period between the testaments, or the New Testament) and treat it as unfulfilled.
2. To apply prophecies in the Old Testament about the first coming of Christ to the second coming.
3. To make the kingdom and kingship of Christ material; to insist that old national Israel was to be brought back into existence and that the Messiah would reign from Jerusalem.
4. To maintain that some prophecies were not fulfilled when they were supposed to be fulfilled (such as the establishment of Messiah's kingdom in the days of the Kings of the fourth--Roman--kingdom, Dan. 2).
5. To engage in speculation and showmanship by declaring that current events are always the subject of Bible prophecy.
6. To insist that the end is near, that Christ is about to come, that we are definitely living in "the end times."

- Bill Crews

Spiritual Safety Belts

It is so important to wear your seat belts. Nearly 43,000 people died in automobile accidents in America in 2002. Of those fatalities, 17,419 were alcohol related. Auto accidents are the leading cause of death for people under the age of 34. Every thirteen minutes there is a death caused by a motor vehicle accident.¹ These are among the reasons government has mandated wearing safety belts in cars and trucks. They save lives. So, “click it or ticket.”

God’s word speaks of another type of “safety belt.” The Bible teaches the importance of being secure and safe in Christ. The most important thing we can do to insure our spiritual safety is to obey God’s word in faith (Gal. 3:26-27; Heb. 5:8-9). Jesus said we must obey the will of His Father to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 7:21). It is vital that we apply our faith by doing what He says (Lk. 6:46; Heb. 11:6; Jas. 1:21-25; 2:14-26). When we obey Jesus in every area of our lives we are putting on our “spiritual safety belts.” We must not allow anyone or anything to hinder us from “*obeying the truth*,” otherwise we are exposed to spiritual danger and death (Gal. 5:6; Rom. 6:23).

Car accidents harm and kill the body; sin harms and kills the soul. “*Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren*” (Jas. 1:15-16). All of us are tempted to sin against God. When temptation occurs we have a choice to make: obey Jesus and be spiritually secure, or sin and bring death to our souls. We wouldn’t dream of intentionally causing an automobile accident, yet when we choose to sin we cause a far worse outcome. By choosing to obey Jesus we will be safe from harm: “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand*” (Jno. 10:27-28). There is safety in always obeying Jesus; there is danger and death in

sin. We must put on our spiritual safety belt of obedient faith so our souls will always be secure in Christ.

- Joe R. Price

¹ Auto Accident Statistics – Online Lawyer Source

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *“Features of the Church!”* (text: Luke 13:18-21); Sunday evening: *“2 KINGS: The Last Days of the Kingdom!”*