

The Problem of Prayerlessness

It is time for us to deal with the problem of prayerlessness.
Is it the cause of weakness in your Christian life?

As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you.
[1 Samuel 12:23]

"I don't pray the way that I should, or as much as I should."

We hear that statement, or the same sentiment, wherever we go as we conduct prayer conferences in churches and other settings all over America. God's people know they are not praying as He desires. But do we really want to change?

To admit to prayerlessness is an important first step. But the next step is the hard one. What do we do about it?

What is prayerlessness?

If we are to deal with prayerlessness in our lives at all, we must find the correct answer to this question:

Is prayerlessness a weakness, or is it a sin?

If change is to take place in our lives, we must answer that question correctly. A wrong answer will simply lead us further into self-delusion and greater separation from God.

If we regard prayerlessness as a weakness, we will most likely try to correct the problem by determination--and, probably, in our own strength. We will make daily resolution, somewhat comparable to our annual New Year's resolutions regarding dieting or some other area of self-improvement. And the result of the daily resolution will be the same as that of the annual one.

But if prayerlessness is indeed a sin, our response must be entirely different. It must be the same as our response to any other besetting sin in our lives. You've likely discovered that sin cannot be dealt with by human resolution. The method does not fit the nature and seriousness of the problem.

Only God can deal with sin, and only as we follow His prescribed course of action.

Sin in our lives--any sin--is dealt with through:

- Recognition of the sin -- that it is sin--rebellion, not weakness
- Confession of the sin -- agreeing with God concerning its seriousness
- Forgiveness -- God's response to the confession
- Cleansing -- for a new attitude, leading to...
- Repentance -- turning away from the sin with resolve

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As His disciples, we acknowledge that Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for all our sins--that only in the blood of Christ are we made holy and righteous, and thus reconciled to our Creator God. So we must say with deep concern, "If prayerlessness is a sin, then I must repent of my prayerlessness, confess it to God, ask His forgiveness, and seek to be cleansed of the sin through the power of His Holy Spirit Who lives within me."

The Substance and Evidence of the Sin

The message of the entire Bible is that we demonstrate our love for the Father by our obedience.

Moses commanded Israel to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Jesus repeated the commandment in Matthew 22:37, then told His disciples in John 14: "If you love me, you will obey what I command... Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me..." [John 14:15, 21]

So what has God commanded us about prayer? In Luke 18:1, "Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." Paul's instruction to the Thessalonians was to "pray without ceasing." [1 Thes. 5:17] Because God has commanded us to pray, prayerlessness is disobedience.

What is our standard?

How much prayer is enough? How can we know what qualifies our praying as adequate to meet His expectation? Does "prayerlessness" mean no prayer at all, or just not enough?

As in every other aspect of the Christian life, the model in prayer is the life of Jesus Christ Himself. His life on earth was a life of prayer, and it remains so in heaven [Hebrews 7:25, Romans 8:34]. Every major decision of His ministry was accompanied by regular and usually prolonged seasons of prayer [Mark 1:35-39, Luke 6:12-16, many others].

His very life is the answer to the question of "how much prayer is enough?" We must abandon all concept of *time* as the basis, and recognize *relationship* as the truly significant factor. Prayer is not an activity in which we participate, to meet some arbitrary standard. It is fellowship with the God Who loves us and seeks that fellowship.

No matter how we may deceive ourselves, prayerlessness is sin. And the most tragic aspect of it is that it causes us to miss that most precious gift--the daily, continuing, ennobling celebration of oneness with God.