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PRAYER SEMINAR PART 2

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THE BASICS OF PRAYER

INTRODUCTION – Prayer is the privilege given by God to all believers. It is a direct access to God with permission from Him. To meet the president of a country requires much protocol and no end of red tape. Even after all the procedures have been carried out, there is no guarantee that an audience will be able granted. If access to the president is granted, the president might not be able to help as he is not omnipotent. No matter how powerful he is, there are many things he cannot do. It is not that he does not want to do them; he is helpless to do them. The most powerful person on earth today is undeniably the President of America because America is the most powerful nation of our time. His power is gross limited. He has no power to change and transform the economy of his own country, not to mention the economy of the world. He cannot control the minds and hearts of his own people and that is why he spent millions of dollars to win votes in the last election. If he were to run again, he would have to spend again to win votes. Should he be stricken with a critical illness like Alzheimer’s disease, he will eventually lose his memory and forget many things and recede into a world of his own, void of reality. There is nothing he can do but wait for death to release him from that fearful disease.

However, God is almighty. There is nothing that He cannot do. All things that require power to be done, God has the power to do them all. How much power is required to compress time and rejuvenate dead cells and heal eyes that have been blind since birth? God alone has the power to do it and He did it many times. Christ has the power to instantaneously heal legs that have never walked before. The lame man did not have to go for physiotherapy to learn how to walk but was able to pick up his mat and walk immediately. How much power is required to multiply five loaves and two fishes to feed five thousand men and more? God did it. How much power is needed to calm the storm or open up the earth to swallow evil men and then close the earth again? God did them. How much power is required to raise the dead? God has the power to raise the dead as well and He did it many times.

Prayer avails the child of God to God almighty who has all power at His disposal. Therefore, it is important that we understand the basics of prayer in order that we may not pray awry.

I. ADDRESSING GOD – How should we address one another? We should do so in a manner in which is entitled to us and according to how we introduce ourselves. I cannot introduce myself as a knight and expect to be called “Sir” . . . if in reality I have not been knighted. Conversely, I cannot ask to be called “Mister” if I am really a king sitting on the throne and conducting my kingly duties. There are certain protocols that must be adhered to in the day to day circumstances. In the courtroom, the Judge is called “your honour.” He might be my uncle in actuality but I cannot call him “uncle” inside the courtroom. I must follow proper protocol. If my son were to chair a meeting in church, it is not appropriate for him to say, “My dad will now bring God’s Word.” He should address me as “Rev Quek”. There are those who are very strange in that they give themselves strange names. If I want people to keep calling me “Mister” I might just adopt “Mister” as my Christian name. If I have a PhD, then people will have to call me Doctor Mister. The point is that there is a right way and a wrong way to address someone and not any way we like.

In the case of Almighty God and in relation to our prayers to Him, we cannot address Him any way we like. It is important that we address God in the manner in which He has revealed Himself to us or rather the manner in which He has introduced Himself to His children in occasions of prayer. The LORD Jesus Christ, when He was on earth in incarnate form, taught the disciples how to pray. Jesus said, “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven” (cf Matthew 5:9a) The phrase, “after this manner” means “in this way” with a reference to what follows. In this instance it is the prayer taught by the Lord. The word “pray” means “to supplicate or make prayers.” It is in the imperative which is a command to pray in this manner. It is written in the middle voice which means that the pray-er must do it himself. No one can do it for him. In summary, Jesus is telling us that this is the way He wants us to pray whenever we want to make supplications to God. It is a command, not an option, and is not to be taken lightly.

Jesus began by saying, “Our Father.” To call God “Father” was something very unusual even though God has introduced Himself as a father to Israel in Old Testament times. Below are some examples where God introduced Himself as a father to Israel.

- **Deuteronomy 32:6** (KJV) “Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? *Is* not he thy father *that* hath bought thee? Hath he not made thee, and established thee?”
- **Psalms 89:26** (KJV) “He shall cry unto me, Thou *art* my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.”
- **Isaiah 63:16** (KJV) “Doubtless thou *art* our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, *art* our father, our redeemer; thy name *is* from everlasting.”

- **Isaiah 64:8** (KJV) “But now, O LORD, thou *art* our father; we *are* the clay, and thou our potter; and we all *are* the work of thy hand.”
- **Jeremiah 3:4** (KJV) “Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou *art* the guide of my youth?”
- **Jeremiah 3:19** (KJV) “But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? And I said, Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me.”

However, Matthew 6:9 was the first time that God’s people were expressly taught to address God as “Our Father” in prayer! The intimate relationship is reflected in the personal pronoun which is in the plural tense, emphasizing the fact that just as Christ calls Him Father, so can we as God’s children. Christ will forever be God’s only begotten Son. But every believer is God’s adopted child. As God’s adopted children, we are given the privilege to address Him as our Father. Jesus added the phrase “which art in heaven” to emphasize that He is in heaven; we therefore must not approach Him callously or without the proper respect that will always be due to Him as God. Therefore, we can call Him “heavenly Father” or “our Father who is in heaven.”

The father-son relationship that God has redeemed for us through Jesus Christ His only begotten Son must never be reduced to contempt. We do not call God “dad” even though we use this term of endearment to address our earthly father. Terms like “pops” and “old man” are disrespectful. We must not use them even though our earthly fathers do not mind. The awe and respect that a believer has for God must be present and observed at all times, and more so when we approach Him in prayer, i.e. make supplications. It is not correct to say “dear God” because he is not our dear or darling. It is true that the word for “dear” is used to translate the Greek word “agape” in Colossians 1:13. The word means “precious” or “beloved” in the biblical usage. However, the problem is that today the word “dear” has evolved into a different meaning and usage. It has become a conventional form of address that precedes a title or the name of a person. This change of usage has rendered it inappropriate for believers to pray “dear God” . Similarly, words like “conversation” and “bastard” have evolved throughout the ages and they have taken on different meanings in our era. The significance of the word “dear” is now lost . For the sake of not being misunderstood, it is best not to begin our prayers with “Dear God” but rather “Our heavenly Father” or “Our loving Heavenly Father.” The reverence must be maintained whenever we address God. We ought to bear in mind that during corporate prayer, the babes in Christ, especially the children, will observe and emulate how we pray. Thus, it is of utmost importance that parents and Sunday School teachers address God correctly, i.e. with reverence and proper endearment for the children ,ight imitate them when they pray. .

Generally, we do not pray to Jesus Christ except when we cry out to Him in times of great distress. By and large, prayers are to be made to God the Father and not to the Son or to the Holy Spirit. We cannot argue and reason that since they are all the same in essence, power and glory and are equal in the Godhead, why can't we pray to God the Son or the Holy Spirit as well? The reason we cannot is not because God the Son is a lesser God compared to God the Father. This is wrong thinking. The Godhead has different economy of functions in salvation as well as prayer. The Bible's teaching is that we pray to God the Father in the Name of the Son and with the help of the Holy Spirit. In salvation it was the Father who sent the Son and the Son who sent the Holy Spirit. It was Christ who died on the cross, and not the Father or the Holy Spirit. This economy of function must also be maintained in our prayers to God. There is no difference in the essence and glory of the Three Persons within the Godhead even though they have different economy of function since eternity began.

Even as God is our heavenly Father, we must never allow ourselves to commit presumptuous sin. God almighty must forever be reverentially approached by God's people. Whether on earth or in heaven, God as the Supreme personal Being is awesome and glorious. There are not enough adjectives to describe who He is. Thus, the respect and reverential fear that must be found in our relationship with him can be seen in the way we address Him even as we pray without ceasing. We should just address God the Father in the manner Christ has revealed to us in Matthew 6:9.

II. PRAYING IN JESUS' NAME – Now that we know the proper manner to address God, it is important that we know the proper manner to approach God. We do not approach Him based upon who we are as His adopted children or what we have done in our service to Him. These are not sufficient justifications for us to approach God and to bring our supplications to Him. Some may even cry to God desperately for help because their loved ones are grievously ill and they think that their intense sorrowing is sufficient to move God into action. But God's answers to prayer are based entirely upon a covenantal relationship and nothing else. For example, when Israel cried to the LORD in Exodus 2:23 because of the Egyptian bondage, the LORD heard them. Three different words were used to describe the cry of the Israelites, ranging from a general cry to a specific cry for help (cf Exodus 2:23) to an intense cry of distress (Exodus 3:7). The LORD's response was, "their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob (2:23b-24)." The LORD made it abundantly clear in this revelation that He remembered Israel because of the covenantal relationship and immediately He did something to relieve them of their sorrows. He sent Moses to be their deliverer. This was not the case with the Egyptians. After the LORD killed all their firstborn sons as recorded in Exodus 12:30, the Egyptians cried with a "great cry" of distress but the

LORD neither comforted them nor attended to their cry for help. Compared with the Israelites' cry, theirs was "great". However, there was only complete silence.

The covenantal relationship also holds true in New Testament times. This same covenantal relationship can move the arm of almighty God to help His children and is sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ when He died on the cross for our sins. Jesus Christ died for all the believers in both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament believers' faith was based upon what Jesus Christ would do in the future whereas the faith of New Testament believers was based upon what Christ had already done and fulfilled on the cross of Calvary. God's covenant from the moment Adam sinned against God has always been a covenant of salvation based upon Jesus Christ alone. There is no covenant of salvation based upon any other alternate way of salvation. God the Father forbore, i.e. tolerated, the sins of the Old Testament saints and accepted the external efficacy of the Levitical system of animal sacrifice until the day of Christ's work on Calvary. This is revealed in **Romans 3:25**, "Whom God hath set forth *to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.*" [Emphasis added] God the Father knew and saw the work of Christ on Calvary as a fact and certainty that will surely take place and based upon this, He exercised forbearance as He awaited the death and crucifixion of Christ to become a reality. In Old Testament time, God accepted the repentance of all sincere sinners who by faith believed in God's perfect Word (progressively given) and obeyed as the Word of God commanded through the sacrificial system.

In New Testament time, after the finished work of Christ on Calvary, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that it is only through Christ that we can approach God and no one else. These two passages from the Gospel of John teach this truth very clearly. **John 15:16** "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*" **John 16:23-24** "And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. **24** Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." [Emphasis added] Therefore, every prayer must be made only in Jesus' Name, including the prayer of salvation which must also be addressed to God the Father.

"In Jesus' Name" is not a magic formula that anyone can say and be answered by God. It is not to be understood like the fable of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. Ali Baba was hiding when the leader of the forty thieves shouted the phrase "Open Sesame" which caused the huge stone to move from the mouth of the cave wherein lay their treasure

throve. When he shouted “Close Sesame”, the stone moved again to close the entrance of the cave. Ali Baba did likewise and helped himself to the treasures. The Name of Jesus Christ is not like “Open Sesame” to be used to move God in Heaven to answer prayer.

When a believer prays and ends his prayers in “Jesus’ Name” he is saying to God that his prayers were uttered based entirely upon what Christ has done for him on the cross of Calvary. It is not just about what Christ has done on the cross for the whole world; but for him because he has accepted Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour. Praying in Jesus’ name means that the believer prays for God to hear him not for his sake or because of what he has done, but only based upon what His only begotten Son has done for him. Can there be a stronger motivation to move the arm of almighty God than the obedient finished work of Jesus Christ who came to do the Father’s will? There can never be a better basis for a believer to approach God with his petitions or supplications.

We must not utter the phrase “in Jesus’ Name” perfunctorily like a full stop. It must be meaningfully said by every believer. Sometimes we hear people pray and then end with just an “Amen.” To do that is to be presumptuous with God. Every believer, even the pastor, must never think to approach God on his own merits but only on the merit of Christ. To do so is foolishness. No merit on this earth can be compared with the finished work of Christ! The Name of Jesus Christ must not be uttered without thinking or mechanically. Furthermore, there is a difference between praying and saying prayers. When a child of God prays, it is like a child crying to his father whereby sincerity and intimacy are present. To say a prayer that might be theologically correct but not from the heart but done as a duty and end “in Jesus Name” will not be accepted by God. . How sad it is when the most potent and intimate access to our heavenly Father is turned into a meaningless mechanical exercise without heart and soul.

III. INTERCESSORY PRAYERS – We can understand that God answers the prayers of His children when they pray for themselves because they are His children. There is a relationship that has been established through Christ Jesus. However, why would God answer their prayers for others who might be enemies of God, i.e. not born again? On what basis does God intervene in the lives of unbelievers who are dead against Him because God’s children pray?

The basis is the absolute and immutable sovereignty of God. The absolute immutable sovereignty of God means that all things on earth and in heaven that require power to do, God can do all of them without His power being diminished even in the slightest. He does not grow weak when He uses His power regardless of the amount of power He

exercises. The scope of His power is the whole universe. In order for Him to answer all the prayers of His children, this truth must stand for all time. Nothing can happen on this earth and to anyone without His permission. This truth must not be misunderstood as fatalism. Fatalism is a cold hearted figment of man's imagination to replace the sovereignty of our personal Almighty God. Those who believe in fatalism are resigned to the fact that what will be, will be and there is nothing they can do about it. There is no human responsibility. If he is to die, he dies. If he is to lose his job, he will lose his job regardless of how hardworking he is; it does not make any difference. Such fatalistic thinking is deadly because it makes a person stoic, devoid of any feelings or emotions. He does not even weep if his loved one is taken from him because he thinks that it is fate that has determined his destiny. He shuts down and denies all feelings and emotions and may even turn into a cold-hearted evil person hurting others in the process. However, the absolute sovereignty of God is based upon God's character which is one of love, compassion, holiness and justice. God's sovereignty does not vitiate the responsibility of man. The dynamic will of God is the key to this understanding as opposed to the static will of man.

God is not only immutably omnipotent, He is also immutably omniscient and omnipresent. This means that every being and every thing, whether past, present or future is under His sovereign control at the same time. God does not gain or lose knowledge. Based upon the doctrine of our heavenly Father's absolute immutable sovereignty, we know that He has the power and ability to determine and control every event and person on the earth all at the same time. The question is: will He answer the intercessory prayers of His children? The answer is a resounding yes!

In times of persecution sent by God because of disobedience, God will hear their cries and will send relief when they repent. This was true in the days of the Judges. Time and again, the LORD sent oppressors upon Israel. When the people repented of their sins and cried to the LORD for mercy, the LORD sent judges to deliver them. If the persecution is for the maturing of the faith of believers, then the LORD will send deliverance, as was the case when He destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night because Hezekiah and the people trusted in and prayed to the LORD. God heard the prayers of His people and according to His sovereign will destroyed the heathen.

When God's children pray for the salvation of loved ones, the LORD will, according to His sovereign will, hear them and save them unto Himself. This knowledge is in God's hand alone. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all believers to pray for their loved ones' salvation by appealing to God's mercy. Salvation is only of the LORD. We can also pray for God's protection over our loved ones who are not His children. God will protect and keep them from harm's way because of us who are God's children. However, we must

not pray for their physical protection just because we love them and cannot bear to see any hurt come upon them. Our prayers must have a spiritual purpose which is their salvation. This is what it means to pray in accordance to God's holy will. The Bible text to support this is **1 John 5:14-15**, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: **15** And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." Is it not true that God is not willing that any should perish but that all repentance? (see also 2Peter 3:9).

IV. THE SPIRIT HELPS OUR INFIRMITIES – There are times we do not know how to pray because of the difficulty of the circumstances or the helplessness of our situation. The context of Romans 8:26-28 is of groaning for deliverance in the face of sufferings. Believers are stressed beyond measure and pressed to the point of giving in to temptation and to sin against God. The trials become so hard to bear. We know that we must pray but it is a great effort to pray as words are insufficient. In times like this, the Holy Spirit will help us. The word "help" is a compound word which means "to take hold and come along side." The Holy Spirit takes hold of us and comes alongside of us personally in times of our infirmities (i.e. weaknesses).

The Holy Spirit Himself will make intercession for us (on our behalf) continuously! This is not to imply that we can pray without thinking, or un-biblically, or in any way we like! This is a wrong understanding and a misapplication of God's Word. It is imperative that we understand all the pitfalls of prayer as taught in Holy Scriptures and avoid praying wrong and sinful prayers! The knowledge of the Holy Spirit helping us by praying for us when we find it hard to pray (at a loss for words) should encourage us to pray even more carefully, and not flippantly. We do not need to struggle in our prayers. The third person of the Holy Spirit will help us, especially during the most critical times of our life!

The Holy Spirit does so with groanings that cannot be uttered (words cannot express). It is not anything audible. It is definitely NOT the gibberish of the Charismatics today. The Charismatics speak nonsense, possibly from a delusion of the mind or because it is self induced. It could even be demonic!

Verse 27 – "He that searcheth the hearts" has to refer to God. The word "search" refers to an investigation or examination. It is not a cursory search. It includes the search of the heart, but does not exclude the mind and the soul. The emphasis on the heart is to focus on the motive of the believer whose soul is in turmoil as he struggles with what he ought to pray. God alone can make this kind of search. The present tense indicates a perpetual and continuous search. This is a perfect description of God almighty comforting us in our weakness.

The word “know” is a cognitive and complete knowledge and it is in the perfect tense which focuses on the fact that God knows already and continues to know. This knowledge has an impact of action on His part. It is not passive but active knowledge. The emphasis here is not **us**, but the Holy Spirit and the mind of the Spirit. The mind of the Holy Spirit and God is always in total and absolute agreement. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit intercedes on behalf of believers, He never makes any mistakes. All His intercessory prayers are always answered. The Holy Spirit continually makes intercessory prayers for the saints. He always does so in accordance with the will of God. All believers can be assured that they are in very good hands with the Holy Spirit praying for them as they go through all sorts of adversities on earth.

Verse 28 -- Based upon the fact that the Holy Spirit intercedes for all the saints continuously, God’s children can say that all things will surely work together for good to all of them who love God and are doing God’s holy and precious will. Thus the Apostle Paul says that “we” know; not he alone but every Christian knows. The emphasis here is not experiential knowledge but cognitive knowledge that is based upon God’s truth rather than the believer’s own experience. Sometimes, the trial can be so painful and great that it is very difficult to recall and draw comfort from past experiences that God cares and all things will work out for our good. God’s perfect Word is a more sure anchor for our soul and our unshakeable foundation in times of severe trials.

Paul did not say most things or some things but ALL things will work together for good. All things include blessings and adversities. We do not mind blessings. No one likes adversities and we try to avoid them. We know that trials are painful and not desirable. Paul did not say that trials alone will work out for good. All things “work together” for good, but together with what? It has to be together with God’s grace and mercies. Trials alone do not bring about good to the saints. If mere trials bring about good, then this would also be true for unbelievers. Then all should just live a life of trials and avoid luxury and the comfortable life. We know that the external circumstances of the believer are independent on the spiritual well being of his soul. A rich person can be very spiritual and close to God such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Joseph, Daniel, etc. Poor believers can also be very godly such as Paul himself. This goodness that the Bible speaks of is spiritual. The believer grows to trust God and his faith in Christ deepens because of the trials he faces. This was the case with Job who said that before his trials he thought he knew God; but after the trials he testified that he had seen God (cf Job 42:5-6). The believer’s experiential knowledge of God deepens and he walks closer to God. His prayer life becomes more consistent and intense. This is the goodness that the Bible speaks of.

The Bible describes the recipient of this goodness as one who loves God. The Greek word for love is “a-ga-pa-o” (i.e. unconditional and sacrificial love given only to believers

by God – cf. Romans 5:5). Every believer has this love from God at the time of his salvation. To not have this love is to NOT be a believer. Every believer, therefore, loves God with this love. This love for God will enable the believer to see the hand of his loving heavenly Father during the most painful trial. This love enables the child of God to endure great suffering for Christ. There is no motivation greater than love. He will not doubt his loving heavenly Father whom he knows will always give him the best, even if it is painful and difficult and might even cost him his life!

The Bible does not stop at the believer loving God. He is also called according to God's purpose. God directs the life of every believer. There is no exception. There is not one moment in the believer's life that does not fall into God's purpose! The child of God is constantly being directed by God. For the child who is doing the will of God in his life, all things could include being burned at the stake for Christ's sake, which would also come into the category of goodness. If this is the purpose of God for his life, then so be it! There are no accidents in the believer's life. Every virus, bacteria or trial that afflicts him has been allowed by the purposeful will of God. If the believer lives in the light of God's purpose for him, then his life will always turn out for good.

CONCLUSION –

- Prayer is a spiritual and holy endeavour that must not be downgraded to a mere dialogue between two persons. Believers are speaking with Almighty God who has given them the privilege to call Him "Abba, Father". However, we must never forget that our heavenly father is in heaven and we are on earth, crying to Him for help. Addressing God reverentially and correctly is essential to demonstrate genuine respect and awe.
- We must remember that the only basis for believers to approach God and be heard by Him is because of Jesus Christ and what He has done for them on the cross of Calvary. It is Christ's justification and sanctification that have made believers holy and righteous before God so that they can approach Him boldly and not be ashamed and be a cast away.
- Our heavenly Father will not only answer our supplications for our needs but also hear and answer our intercessory supplications for others including unbelievers, as long as what we pray for are within His sovereign will. The sovereign will of God is based upon God's character as the Almighty God of the whole heaven and earth. Everything and everyone are under His sovereign control and nothing happens by "chance" or accident but with His permission. It is because God is all powerful, all knowing and all present that we know He answers prayers for ourselves and others.

- In times of great sufferings and when we are not able to pray as we ought, the Holy Spirit is always there to make intercession for us as believers. This does not mean that we do not pray carefully and biblically but we must be reassured that we never travel alone on this earth. We have no need to fear, for all things will work together for good to those who love God and have been called according to His purpose. Bad things can never happen to God's children! Amen.