

Dear Friend,

We are currently in a series considering biblical teaching regarding the theology and practice of prayer. We began where every Christian teacher for the past 2000 years has begun when considering prayer and that is with Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 6, which is where the main form of "The Lord's Prayer" is recorded for us. At the end of my previous article I said we would move on to some of the prayers that the apostle Paul records for us in his letters to the churches. However, on further reflection I think we should consider several important passages in the gospels where Jesus gives further instructions concerning prayer before we look at some of Paul's examples of prayer.

Luke 11:1 says, "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'" The gospels regularly report that Jesus was engaging in prayer both privately and, as here, in the presence of his disciples. As one of my favorite Bible teachers, Dr. Howard Hendricks said, "If it was so necessary for the Son of God to regularly pray, how much more important is it for us to pray." The main thing to observe here is that one of the disciples recognizes in Jesus' practice that he is deficient in his understanding and practice of prayer and so he asks Jesus to teach all of the disciples how to pray. This is an excellent prayer for us to pray as well: Lord, teach us to pray.

In response, Jesus tells them first not how to pray but what to pray, by giving them an abbreviated form of the Lord's Prayer. The fact that this is not identical to the prayer in Matthew 6 shows two things. First, Jesus often repeated himself, just like every good teacher does. When asked how to pray he doesn't tell them anything different from what he has already said. Second, this shows that the primary purpose of this prayer is not so that we pray it verbatim all the time. Rather, this proves that the prayer is a description of the kinds of things that God the Father wants to do for us. We are to use it to form our prayers, not to be our prayer all the time.

Immediately after giving them this abbreviated form he continues to give them further direction on how to pray. He tells them a parable about a man who had a hungry friend arrive at his house late at night. The man had no food in the house and so he went to his next neighbor and began to pound on the door to wake him up so he could get a loaf of bread to feed his visitor. The neighbor was irritated at being awakened in the middle of the night and told him he would not get up and give him bread. However, the needy neighbor would not take no for any answer and kept pounding on the door until finally, not being able to sleep with all the racket the neighbor got up and gave him food for his hungry friend. Jesus applies the parable by drawing attention to the fact that the neighbor did not get up and give him bread because he is his friend but because he wouldn't stop knocking on the door.

The word he uses to describe the needy neighbor is translated "impudence" in the ESV, "persistence" in the NAS, NKJ, NLT, RSV and "boldness" in the NIV. This is the only place it is used in the New Testament. It is used 8 times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (OT). In the OT it refers to action without any consideration for the opinions of God or other people. It is the shameless, aggressive behavior of a prostitute or the single-minded pursuit of food by a hungry dog or the shameless idolatry of Israel in the face of God's revelation of himself to them. This is why it is translated "impudence" by the ESV. It is a good word to

describe the man's behavior: banging on his neighbor's door in the middle of the night even after being told he would not help him.

What was it that motivated the man to act with such impudence? He had a need which he deeply felt: he needed food to give to his hungry friend. He also knew that his neighbor had what he needed. Why is it that you and I are not impudent in our praying? We don't need anything that we cannot provide for ourselves and/or we don't believe that God is able to give us what we need. The point of this prayer is not that God will only listen to us if we beg and plead. Rather the point is this: Do I need anything that I cannot get for myself? Do I believe that my heavenly Father is able to give me what I need?

It is absolutely critical that we read this parable in its context, which is it immediately follows the Lord's Prayer. Thus, if we are going to be impudent in our prayers then we must desperately desire those things that Jesus tells us to pray in the Lord's Prayer and we must be convinced that our heavenly Father wants to and is able to give us those things. Do I long for God's name to be glorified? Do I yearn for God's kingdom to come? Do I crave God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven? Do I want daily bread for myself and for other believers? Do I desire to have my sins forgiven and the sins of my brothers and sisters in Christ forgiven? Do I want to be kept from all sin and all evil, together with the rest of Christ's church? If these are the things you long for, that you cannot be happy without, then you will be impudent in your prayer life. You will keep on asking, seeking and knocking so that God will give you these things because he has told us that these are the things that our Father in heaven wants to give us. May our Lord Jesus teach us to pray with impudence.

Learning with you,