

Lord, Teach Us To Pray

Daniel Bailey

On more than one occasion during the life of Christ, the Master Teacher set aside time to teach his disciples how to mold their own prayers. One such instance occurred while Jesus preached on a mountain in the region of Galilee, during an exhortation that is usually referred to as the *Sermon On The Mount* (Matthew 5-7). The apostle Matthew records this model prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. At another time and under different circumstances, Jesus taught a very similar model prayer, not while speaking to a multitude of followers as in Matthew 6, but when His closest disciples approached Him with an earnest request:

"Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1).

Jesus responded to this request with almost the exact same prayer found in Matthew 6, a prayer that many people have committed to memory. One important concept we should gain from this scene in Luke is that prayer is a *learned* part of worship. Just as the disciples of Jesus had to learn to pray, prayer is something that every child of God must learn to do by gaining instruction from God's word.

The Psalmist begins Psalm 19 with a declaration of the evidence of God's power as displayed in the observable universe: *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork."* Many years after this Psalm was written, the apostle Paul instructed the saints of God in Rome that *"since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead"* (Romans 1:20). Passages like these teach that man can reason the existence of God simply by observing the evidence of His power and awesome might displayed in the universe: upon regarding the natural world and its wonders, one might reason that there is a supreme being, an awesome Creator who shaped all things and put all things in motion. And upon that logical reasoning, one might very well desire to communicate with this Creator. However, Luke 11 makes it evident that man cannot learn how to address and communicate with God – that is, how to pray – just by studying nature. Even Psalm 19 goes on to explain that God reveals Himself to man, *not* just through what He has created, but through His word, the Scriptures (see II Timothy 3:16-17). The person who wishes to pray effectively to God must learn to pray by studying God's instructions in His word.

There are other misconceptions about prayer that Luke 11:1 helps to correct. Some people claim that prayer is an inherited ability, a talent that a person is either born with or not: this assumption cannot be true since all disciples of Christ must *learn* to pray. Others think that prayer can be offered to God in any form a person might desire, with any state of mind, any request and any words that seem right: if this were correct, what would be the need for instruction in prayer? Luke 11 necessarily implies that no one is born with the natural ability to pray, nor should men and women pray in just any way that seems or feels best and still expect to be heard by God. To

the contrary, Jesus teaches that His disciples must be *taught* to pray in accordance with God's will.

The question that remains for all people who sincerely wish to communicate with God is how do we learn to pray in such a way that our prayers and petitions are acceptable to God? The first step is to study and understand passages like Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:5-15, where Jesus Himself gives a model for our prayers. Notice from Matthew 6:9 that we are to pray "*in this manner*," molding our petitions by Christ's example, but *not* vainly repeating those exact words. Furthermore, there are other example prayers in the Bible: the books of the Old Testament, especially the Psalms, are filled with prayers offered to God by righteous men and women (e.g. I Samuel 2:1-10; II Chronicles 6:12-42; Jeremiah 32:16-25). Moreover, on many occasions in the New Testament, the inspired writers actually record some of their own prayers (e.g. John 17; Acts 4:24-31; Hebrews 13:20-21) – be on the lookout for such passages while reading the Bible, for these prayers of righteous people can be used as models, as well. Additionally, there are many passages in Scripture that give commands specifically pertaining to how Christian's should pray, as well as what to pray for. Consider, for example, Colossians 4:2-6, James 1:5-8, and I Timothy 2:1-7. We must not be ignorant: effective prayer is at the very heart of our relationship with God. By diligently studying passages like these, and by striving to mold our own prayers by these divine instructions, we can learn to pray in a way that is acceptable and pleasing to God