

Why are not some our prayers answered? Do we know how to pray? Here we present the facts that we all need to understand that will clarify this subject.

HAS God abandoned us? Why do some prayers seem empty and futile? Why don't they get results?

The fundamental reason why the prayers of most people are not being answered today is that they do not really know the true God. They think of God as a sort of vague, far-off, indefinable something. They do not know the true God who is the active, law-giving Ruler of the universe. They seem to forget that God reveals Himself in His Word, the Bible, and that He shows us the kind of God He is – that God informs us how we should OBEY Him, and what He has promised to do for us.

Believe the Bible

Can we take God's Word literally? Does God mean what He says in it? Jesus thought so. He said, "Thy word is TRUTH" (John 17:7). The apostles constantly taught and acted as if God's Word were literally true.

Who is right? Are we going to follow the differing ideas of men, or do we want to obey Jesus and live by every word of God (Matt. 4:4)?

To get results in our prayers, we should believe in the God of the Bible. We need to believe His Word is truth, and be willing to act on God's Word and His commands. We should free ourselves from the hidebound traditions of this confused world and its "churchianity." Let us to seek the true God in prayer and study God's Word to find out His commandments and His promises. Then, we need to take God at His word!

The Bible reveals seven basic conditions which we should fulfill to be certain of answered prayers. What are they?

Seek God's Will

In James 4:1-4, the apostle showed that the children of this world – fighting and warring as they do – fail to receive help because they often neglect to ask God's help. And when they do, it is only to ask for their own selfish ends. To ask selfishly is to "ask amiss." You can expect no answer to such a prayer.

To get an answer, we need to follow Jesus' example when He said, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30).

But can we know God's will? "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17).

We need to study God's Word. Then we will begin to think more as God thinks. We will come to know what God's will is in every circumstance. If we believe and know that God is love, that His will is for our good, then we will want to pray according to God's will.

We need not always have a specific promise in the Bible to know that something is God's will. Through experience and guidance, we will learn how to apply the principles of God's revealed will to any situation which may arise.

The point is that we must pray according to God's will to receive an answer. "And this is the confidence that we have, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (1 John 5:14-15).

Asking according to God's will is the overall fundamental condition of answered prayer. All other conditions could be grouped under this one because they are the specific points of God's will in regard to prayer.

#### Believe God

Most people do not realize that a lack of faith is simply a disbelief that God will keep His promises or back up His Word. Have you ever thought of it that way?

Real FAITH is not an emotional "feeling" that you generate by thinking certain thoughts over and over. You don't "talk yourself into," or "think yourself into," real, believing faith.

Godly faith is simply your willingness – through God's help – to quietly, patiently trust God to perform His Word. Abraham had that kind of faith. The apostle Paul wrote of him: "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:20-21).

Abraham relied completely on God to perform His promises. Do we?

If we lack real faith, we need to ask God to give it to us. Faith is one of the gifts of God's Holy Spirit.

James was inspired to write that a man must have faith to receive answers to his prayers (James 1:5-7). A man who wavers will not receive an answer. "For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (vs. 7).

God has made hundreds of promises in His Word which we can claim.

#### Be Fervent

It is common in our day for parents to teach their children memorized prayers. The father often mumbles a hurried, routine prayer of thanks at the table. The minister either reads or recites from memory an eloquent prayer which sounds very impressive.

Is God impressed?

The "fruits" show that God rarely hears such prayers, for they are usually not answered.

This is so because people don't put their hearts into their prayers (Hos. 7:14). They don't "cry out" to God with their whole being as the ancient prophets did – and as Christ did when He prayed.

On the evening before His crucifixion, Jesus needed strength from God for the coming ordeal. He needed to get really close to God. He knelt down and began to pray that God's will, not his own, would be done. "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22: 44). He prayed earnestly – with all His heart.

In James 5:16, we read, "The effectual FERVENT prayer of a righteous man availeth much." We have to pray fervently, earnestly, zealously, if we expect God to hear.

We need to put our whole heart into our prayers!

#### Fear and Humility

Modern man has a cocksure, self-sufficient attitude and thinks he can get along fine without God. He neither fears God nor respects God's Word as an authority in his life. He is vain, egotistical, self-important.

Is it a wonder that God fails to answer the prayers of such men?

The very first prerequisite to a knowledge of God is to fear Him and respect His Word. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10).

Man needs to realize that he is only dust and shall return to the dust. He will remain without eternal life unless he receives the Spirit of God, which is the begetting to eternal life. Eternal life is a gift from God (Rom. 6:23), not something we already have. "For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14).

We need to fear God, realizing that our lives are in His hands. We should be humble, realizing that any gifts or talents we may have are ours because God gave them to us.

When we can approach our Creator in that attitude – respecting His power and authority over our lives – then He will hear our prayers.

When Christ was in the human flesh, even He feared God as we should. "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared" (Heb. 5:7). When we fully realize our own helplessness, then we will cry out to God as we should.

Peter wrote "be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

The attitude of humility and godly fear is vital in prayer, and at all times.

#### Be Persistent

In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus spoke a parable to teach us that we should always pray, and never give up hope. He showed that even an unrighteous judge would finally hear the pleas of a widow

who kept coming to him. So we should keep praying to God, even though He doesn't answer right away.

God has made many promises in His Word. But He has nowhere said that He will perform them at the time, or in the way that we choose. Sometimes it is very good for us not to have our prayers answered immediately. God is building patient faith into our character.

James was inspired to write, "the trying of your faith worketh patience" (James 1:3). If God doesn't answer your prayers immediately, exercise patience and keep praying until He does answer.

God has supreme wisdom to know when and how would be best to answer your prayers, so we do not need to "nag" at God, yet God does like it when we are persistent, so it depends on our attitude on how we beseech God for our needs. God always keeps His promises! So be persistent. Keep praying in faith, and God is bound to perform His part.

### Obedience

A sixth condition of answered prayer is one which is neglected and violated consistently by most professing "Christians." This hinges directly on the before-mentioned fact that very few people today really know the true God. People do not look to God as the AUTHORITY in their lives. Instead, they make a "god" out of this world's society and its customs, traditions, and religious practices.

God inspired Paul to write, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey" (Rom. 6:16). If we practice the ways of sin of this world, we are putting this society and its pagan customs in place of the true God! God wants more than "lip service." He requires OBEDIENCE!

If we haven't learned to fear the true God and accept His word as the authority in our lives, then we don't really know God. "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

How can men persistently refuse to keep God's commandments, and then expect Him to answer their prayers? Peter answers, "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 Peter 3:12).

Sin is simply breaking God's Law (1 John 3:4). God will not hear the prayers of those who persist in sin – in evil. If people would obey God, they would get answers when they pray. Then God would not seem so far away, so unreal – as He does to most people.

Does God ever hear the prayers of the unconverted? Yes, He does. God himself has blinded the eyes of many to the truth at this time (Rom. 11:7-8). It is His responsibility that they don't know the truth yet. So God does sometimes hear and answer the prayers of those who obey as far as they know.

The lepers and cripples who came to Jesus to be healed didn't know all of God's truth. But they did realize that Jesus was sent from God and could heal. And they acted on what they knew.

So it is a matter of our heart or attitude. If we come to God in a humble, repentant spirit and are determined to obey Him to the best of our knowledge, He will hear our prayers. But this is no excuse for anyone who knows the truth to disobey God!

True Christians can have a special confidence that God will answer their prayers if they are OBEDIENT. "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3:22).

### Use Christ's Name

The seventh condition of answered prayer is the correct use of Christ's name. This is a greatly misunderstood subject, and the use of Christ's name is often abused.

After Jesus had been with His disciples for over three years, and had taught them God's will and how to obey it, He said, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:23-24). When we pray to God, these verses give us the privilege of employing Christ's name – asking by His authority. But most people misunderstand how we can ask "in Jesus' name."

When our government sends an ambassador to another country, he is given authority to carry out certain business in the government's name. He can act in the name of our government because it has conferred on him the authority as its chosen representative to carry on certain business on its behalf. His authority is limited to do only what the government has specifically authorized him. If he exceeds his delegated authority, his actions are null and void and will not be backed up by this government.

That is the way we are to ask things "in Jesus' name". Christ has given His ministers the duty of performing certain functions in His name – or by His authority. We can rightfully ask for things "in Jesus' name" only when we know that it is His will – that His authority stands back of it.

Those who abide in Christ and are God's children have the privilege of praying in Christ's name. Jesus explained, "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).

Just rattling off the words "in Jesus' name" to a prayer that is contrary to God's will and Christ's will is of no avail whatsoever.

Yes, Jesus' words must abide in us. We must ask according to His Will. We must abide in Him – belong to Him. "Now if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9). And God gives His Holy Spirit to them that OBEY Him (Acts 5:32).

So to pray in Jesus' name, we must at the same time be yielding to His will to the best of our knowledge. "In Jesus' name" means by His authority. We are praying through Him as our High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16).

Christ – our High Priest – was tempted in all points like we are (vs. 15). He understands our weaknesses. It is His revealed will to give us of His Spirit (Luke 11:13) and to help us live a more abundant life (John 10:10).

We need to study God's Word to know the principles of His will, that we may ask by His authority.

Praying in Jesus' name is a great privilege. Use Jesus' name correctly, and your prayers will be answered because of the authority conferred through Him.

#### Action Will Follow

If we faithfully conform to these seven conditions of answered prayer – with God's help, we may then have absolute confidence that God will hear and answer our prayers. We will be changing, growing closer to God each day. We will be actively seeking and doing His will.

This intimate contact with the Creator of Heaven and Earth will give us a peace of mind and quiet confidence that nothing can destroy. But our confidence will not be in ourselves, but in the greatest POWER there is.

God has inspired an example of how He heard and answered even the prayers of an unconverted man because that man was in a right spirit, and had obeyed what he knew. In 2 Kings 20:1-11, we read the account of how king Hezekiah was about to die and sought God's deliverance.

God's own prophet, Isaiah, had told Hezekiah that he would die. But Hezekiah knew that God was an all-merciful God, and that he had obeyed God the best he knew how and could.

So Hezekiah "wept sore" and besought God's intervention (vs. 3). He put his heart in his prayer!

In spite of the fact that He had previously told Isaiah that Hezekiah would die, God heard and answered Hezekiah's fervent prayer! He added fifteen years to Hezekiah's life!

What a result of prayer!

But was that all?

No indeed. Hezekiah did not doubt God's power to intervene and act as this world does. He made a further request that God would give him a special sign that he would be healed (vs. 8).

God's servant, Isaiah, gave Hezekiah the choice of the sign – the shadow would either go forward ten degrees, or backward ten degrees. Hezekiah said it would be harder for the shadow to go backward ten degrees. "And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward" (vs. 11).

Because of Hezekiah's faith, obedience, and fervent prayers, God Almighty not only healed him and added fifteen years to his life, but He actually caused the sun (from Hezekiah's point of reference) to reverse itself in the heavens!

This was not an "optical illusion" God's miracles are real! "For with God NOTHING SHALL BE IMPOSSIBLE" (Luke 1:37).

If we believe that God's Word is truth, this should inspire us to pray as never before! We need to pray for God's work, for God's servants, for His people everywhere. We need to ask in faith for our own needs. We need to rely on God in every trouble. He is a God of all power!