**What a Privilege to Pray**

*by Donnie V. Rader*

When we realize what a privilege prayer is, we like the disciples of old will plead, *“Lord, teach us to pray”* (Luke 11:1). I am afraid that many of us take prayer for granted. We are not as prayerful as we ought to be simply because we have forgotten what a grand liberty it is.

**What is Prayer?**

Prayer is not merely wishing for something. Nor is it simply thinking about something or reciting some lines. Prayer is our means of speaking to God (Luke 18:10-14). It is the act of communicating the thoughts of man to the infinite mind of God. From Romans 10:1 we learn that it is the heart’s desire expressed to God. It is making our request and thanksgiving known unto God.

Consider the following quotes that I have gathered from various sources that help us better understand and appreciate prayer. “Prayer is the avenue through which one approaches the Almighty.” It is “making personal contact with power that transcends time, space and matter”, and the “reach of man after the Absolute Reality.” “Prayer is the voice of faith” (Thomas Home). “Prayer is a correspondence fixed in heaven” (Robert Burns). And then my favorite, “Prayer is so simple; It is like quietly opening a door and slipping into the very presence of God.”

May I say what a privilege that is? What a privilege to have access to our God (cf. 1 John 3:1). Can you imagine what it would be like to be invited into the oval office for a private discussion with the president? If I could tell you that I could go in and talk with the president at any time, you would think that was a special favor unlike any other. You might even ask how I got such a privilege. Yet, we are invited to open up our hearts to the Creator and Ruler of the universe! Oh, what a privilege that is.

**The Need For Praying**

We can better appreciate the privilege of prayer when we consider its necessity. Yes, we need to pray. It is not just a liberty. Several reasons can be given for this need.

**1. It is a command** (1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:8; Luke18:1; Matt. 6:9-13).

**2. Children want to talk with their Father**; a natural desire. Can you imagine never talking to your father? Can you imagine your children never or very seldom talking to you?

**3. God is concerned with our wants and needs** (Matt. 7:9-11; Luke 12:7).

**4. We need to find grace to help** (Heb. 4:16). Because we as humans are weak and frail we are dependent upon the assistance of Divine power. I realize more and more every day my need for the help of God. I continually stand in need of God’s care and protection. We simply cannot make it without God’s help (John 15:5; Phil. 4:13).

**5. God is the Almighty** (Matt. 19:26; Eph. 3:20-21; Rev. 4:8). He has the power to grant and do something about matters. He is in control. The reason I pray for world problems, peace and rulers is that God is able to do something about those things. The reason I pray for those with cancer, heart problems and other diseases is that God is in control.

**6. God is willing to grant us good things** (Matt. 7:7-8). God gives us what is best for us, even when his answer is “no”.

**7. We need to express our love and adoration** (Matt. 6:9; 1 Tim. 2:1). Prayer is an opportunity to express our appreciation to God. It is an act of worship, a time to praise God.

**8. We need forgiveness** (Acts 8:22:24). What a privilege to be able to turn to God and start your life over. What if you couldn’t do that?

**9. We must pray to follow the example of Christ** (1 Pet. 2:21).

**10. Prayer does good** (Jas. 5:16). It is effective. We pray because we need to pray, not because that is our routine or it satisfies our conscience.

**Who Should Pray?**

Not everyone has that grand privilege to approach the Almighty, for God does not hear the prayer of sinners. When the man whom Jesus had healed of his blindness was questioned he replied, *“Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth”* (John 9:31). Though this man was not inspired, he stated a truth. Note that he did not say “I think” or “we think” or even “I know,” rather he said “we know.” It wasn’t denied. His statement was based upon some Old Testament passages (cf. Isa. 59:1-2; Psa. 34:15-16; 66:18; Prov. 28:9).

The children of God have that privilege. Notice again John 9:31. God hears one that is *“a worshipper of God, and doeth his will.”* This is descriptive of a Christian. Prayer must be offered in faith (Jas. 1:16) and addressed to *“our Father”* (Matt. 6:9-13) by a righteous man (Jas. 5:16). We are assured that God hears our prayers when we *“keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight”* (1 John 3:22). Peter said, “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 Pet. 3:12, emphasis mine DVR). Consider other passages such as Prov. 15:29; Rom. 8:14-15 and 1 Tim. 2:8.

**What About Cornelius and Saul and Other Alien Sinners?**

Did not God hear and answer the prayers of Cornelius and Saul (Acts 10:31; 9:11)? The argument is sometimes made from John 9:31 that this text is not dealing with alien sinners. It is true that it deals with rebellious covenant people (as it is based upon Old Testament passages). However, why would this principle not also apply to the alien? Would you say that God will not hear a covenant sinner, but will hear an alien sinner?

God may “hear” the prayer. That we wouldn’t argue. I’m sure that God is aware of what the alien says. God may even respond somehow as he did in the case of Cornelius and Saul. But that is not answering the prayer. His ears are not open unto their prayers (1 Pet. 3:12). If a sinner (alien or otherwise) has the privilege to pray, it seems that all of the passages mentioned earlier are meaningless.

Certainly the alien could not pray for salvation and obtain it by prayer (e.g. at the mourner’s bench). In the case of Saul he was told to quit praying and arise and be baptized (Acts 9:11; 22:16). Cornelius was to hear words that instructed him in things he must do to be saved (Acts 10:6; 11:14).

There is not a passage telling the alien sinner to pray. For what could he pray? Who ever heard of a convicted sinner praying for anything but pardon anyway?

Indeed, as we sing, “what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.”