



THREE PRAYER MISTAKES OF WELL-MEANING BELIEVERS

MISTAKE #1

Most of us have been with other believers in a worship service or Bible study and heard a fellow disciple pray, “Lord, be with us today.” Do you recognize the error in this request? Read the following verses and note the emphasized portion to realize the mistake in this prayer.

Hebrews 13:5-6, Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (Emphasis added)

Matthew 28:18-20, And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Emphasis added)

The Lord said that He would always be with believers and would never leave them. Instead of asking the Lord to “show up” when He is already there, has never left, and will never go away, followers of Christ should thank the Lord for His constant, never-failing presence. Perhaps another way to express the desire behind the misleading words of “Lord, be with us today” would be to pray, “Lord, help each of us realize that you are here as we gather to honor You.”

MISTAKE #2

Another misstated prayer can occur when a believer encounters difficulties with another person and asks, “Lord, give me more love for this person.” That request assumes that the Lord has not yet provided sufficient love for a believer to deal with “problem people.” However, the Lord has already given more than an adequate supply of divine love for believers to respond in a Christ-like manner to any person or in any situation. Notice the emphasized portion of the following passage.

Romans 5:1-5, Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Emphasis added)

As the Apostle Paul stated in the opening verses of Romans 5, God has poured His love into our hearts. Our challenge as believers is not to “get more love from God” but, instead, is to rely on His strength and respond to the love that God has already granted us in Christ by loving others.

1 John 4:7-12, Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (Emphasis added)

1 John 4:19, We love because he first loved us.

Matthew 5:43-48, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Ephesians 5:1-2, Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

When we respond to God's love in this manner, we demonstrate that "the love of Christ controls us" (2 Corinthians 5:14) and that we are being rooted and grounded in Christ's love (Ephesians 3:17).

Believers pray mistakenly about "getting more love from God in order to love others" because the definition of God's love is linked to "pleasant emotions" that are personally experienced. God's love, however, is not self-oriented and is, instead, a sacrificial love which desires and will act on what is in the best interest of others, regardless of feelings. The many aspects of divine love are listed in 1 Corinthians 13.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

When a believer understands how God's love can be expressed to others, then a more appropriate prayer could be, "Dear God, I realize I am unworthy of your gracious love provided through the gift of your Son, Jesus. In response to your love for me, I want to demonstrate practical aspects of Christ-honoring love to others. By your grace, allow more of your love to be seen through me."

MISTAKE #3

When a believer sins, especially in a specific area with regularity, hopelessness can rear its ugly head. After repeated failures, it is not surprising for a believer to pray, "Lord, please change me."

Even though a change from sinfulness to practical righteousness is desired and needed, does a believer continue to falter as a result of God's lack of provision or because a believer has not responded to God's abundant provisions? The answer to that question determines how a believer will pray after realizing that personal willpower is insufficient to please God but is more than sufficient to continue pleasing self.

Believers who falter repeatedly can gain hope by realizing that God HAS changed them. As a result, a believer does not need to pray for God to remove the old self-nature and replace it with a new righteous nature, since that exchange already happened at the point of salvation.

2 Corinthians 5:17, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Romans 6:5-13, For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. (Emphasis added)

Galatians 2:20, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Ephesians 4:20-24, But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

When a believer grasps the reality of being a new creation in Christ, then a more appropriate prayer for personal change would be, "Lord, I confess the sins in which I yield to gratifying my own fleshly desires. Help me to please and honor you by obeying your Word and saying 'no' to fleshly desires. Help me to recognize that my weakness gives opportunity for your strength to be displayed in my life. Help me to stay focused on you and to thank you continually for bringing me out of spiritual darkness and into your glorious light. Help me to respond daily to what you have accomplished in my inner being. Thank you for changing me; help me to live in accordance with that Christ-like change."

CONCLUSION

Everyone makes mistakes, even in our prayers. The antidote to misstated prayers is for believers to grow in their understanding and application of biblical truth. While growing in Christ, believers can be assured that God knows the heart motivation behind the words of all prayers, including those that are not stated in a biblically accurate manner.

Romans 8:26-27, Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Continue to pray, continue to grow in Christ by obeying God's Word, continue to mature in expressing biblical truth in your prayers, and continue to expect answers to prayers that are in accordance with God's will.