

TURNING THE WORD OF GOD INTO PRAYER
Genesis 32:9-12

Intro: Some of you will remember that I have referred before to an old Chinese saying -- that if you want to learn to talk to men, read the Proverbs; if you want to learn to talk to God, read the Psalms.

Anyone who reads the Bible with any understanding at all knows that there is a most intimate relationship between the Word of God and prayer -- so that the saying of the Chinese could be expanded to include the book of Proverbs and, in fact, all of the Scriptures!

No one will ever learn to pray properly and effectively apart from the Word of God.

I would certainly have to say that this has been the greatest truth I have ever learned concerning prayer.

We saw in our passage this morning (Eph. 6:10-20) that the Word and prayer are closely related, and that that relationship is made and maintained by the Holy Spirit.

See Eph. 6:17, 18. The Holy Spirit's sword is the Word of God, and a vital part of its use is through "praying . . . in the Holy Spirit."

Thus, we would come to the conclusion from Eph. 6 that it is not possible to pray in the Holy Spirit unless we are praying in agreement with the Word of God. The Spirit of God continually brings together the Word of God and prayer for any child of God who desires to know how to pray.

I want to prove this tonight in two ways, and then illustrate what this means from a passage of Scripture.

I. THE TWOFOLD PROOF THAT WE ARE TO USE THE WORD OF GOD IN PRAYER.

A. Examples found in Scripture:

1. Jacob -- in Genesis 32:9-12.

We have it in v. 9, and again in v. 12.

There is no evidence that Jacob was specifically taught to pray this way, but, in a time of extreme danger, he fell back on the only assurances he had -- the command of God, and the promises of God. And these he turned back to the Lord in prayer.

2. David.

If we were to include the Psalms which David wrote, we would find that he is the greatest teacher in the Old Testament of this way to pray!

As an example, note Psa. 27:8,

"When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart
said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek."

But notice in particular David's prayer after he had listened to the Lord's message to him through Nathan the prophet. See 2 Sam. 7:25-29.

And it is obvious from the preceding part of his prayer that he would never have thought to pray such a prayer if it had not been promised first of all by the Lord Himself!

3. Solomon.

David's son and successor prayed the same way. Cf. 2 Chron. 6:12-17. This was at the dedication of the Temple.

4. Daniel.

It was through reading the prophecy of Jeremiah that Daniel was given faith to pray for the deliverance of the Israel from Babylonian captivity. See Dan. 9:1-3.

Let us turn to the New Testament:

5. The highest authority of all for this kind of praying: our Lord Jesus Christ.

a. First by His teaching: John 15:7.

b. Second, by His example: Matt. 26:53, 54.

This shows why He did not pray as He could have prayed -- because it would have been contrary to the scriptures.

6. The Apostle John: 1 John 5:14, 15. How do we determine the will of God with absolute certainty? There is only one way: through the Word!

Many other examples could be cited, but this is enough to show that it has both Old Testament and New Testament authority.

We still have another line of evidence that this is the Biblical way to pray, and that is to be seen in . . .

- B. The example of men of God throughout the history of the Church.

Again -- this list could probably be extended. If any of you come across any quotations from your reading, I would like to hear from you. But here are some that I found in my own reading.

1. John Bunyan -- who wrote Pilgrim's Progress. He was born in 1628; died in 1688.
2. William Law -- who wrote A Serious Call To A Devout And Holy Life.
3. J. Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission.
4. George Muller, founder of the orphanages in Bristol, England, a close friend and supporter of Hudson Taylor. Muller is remembered as a man who trusted the Lord for the support of his orphans.
5. Bishop Westcott -- a Church of England minister, one of the great Greek scholars of all time.
6. Robert Murray M'Cheyne -- who lived only 29 years, and yet left his mark on Scotland and upon Christians all over the world down to the present day.
7. Charles Bridges -- whose book on The Christian Ministry is probably the greatest text for pastors that has ever been written. He lived in the last century.
8. F. E. Marsh, who has written some very outstanding books on Bible study.
9. Alexander Whyte, the great Scottish preacher of the last century.
10. Charles Haddon Spurgeon -- who died in 1892, acclaimed by many as the greatest preacher of the 19th century.

I have quotations from all of these which indicate that it was their practice to go to the Word of God, and then turn the Word into prayer!

I will not burden you with their quotations, but let me

give you two or three as a sample so that you will know how they prayed.

Spurgeon said, "The Lord gives the promise, and that becomes the parent of our prayer."

Bishop Westcott said, "The petitions of believers . . . are echoes, so to speak, of the Master's own words. Their prayer is only some fragment of His teaching transformed into a supplication. It must then be heard, for it is the expression of His will."

Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, "Turn the Bible into prayer. . . This is the best way of knowing the meaning of the Bible and of learning to pray."

George Muller, in his early days, was in the habit of beginning to pray immediately after he got up in the morning -- and then he would read the Scriptures. But this did not satisfy him, and so he reverses the order, reading first (after a brief prayer), and then praying about what he had been reading. Concerning the Bible, he said, "We have here God's promises, precepts, warnings, and counsels, not to speak of all the Spirit-inspired literal prayers therein contained . . . We turn precept and promise, warning and counsel into supplication, with the assurance that we cannot be asking anything that is not according to His will, for are we not turning His own Word into prayer . . . ?" He called the Bible "our God-given . . . divine prayer book." And he also said that, when we pray this way, we are "inverting the process of divine revelation and using the channel of God's approach to" us "as the channel of" our "approach to God." And then he added, "How can such use of God's Word fail to help and strengthen spiritual life?"

And now, let us take . . .

II. A PASSAGE TO ILLUSTRATE WHAT IT MEANS TO TURN THE WORD OF GOD INTO PRAYER.

It might be well for us to remind ourselves here that there are five kinds of prayer found in the Bible:

- 1) Worship, or Adoration.
- 2) Thanksgiving.
- 3) Confession.
- 4) Intercession.
- 5) Petition.

It is always good to use the very words of Scripture where we can; at other times we will adapt the words, or take the suggestion of Scripture, for our own purposes -- ALWAYS DEPENDING UPON THE SPIRIT OF GOD TO LEAD US AS WE PRAY!

Any chapter in the Bible could be used to illustrate this great principle -- but let us turn to Psalm 1.

How would we turn this into prayer?

- 1) By praying that the Lord would make us this kind of a person.
- 2) By praying that He would keep us from the influence of a sinful world -- and by asking Him to show us where we may not be pleasing Him now.
- 3) By praying about our delight (or lack of it) in the Word.
- 4) By praying for stability, and fruitfulness, and blessing.
- 5) By thanking Him for what He has done in our lives.
- 6) By praying for people we know who are without the Lord.
- 7) By praising Him for His sovereign direction in our lives.

Concl: Now, with your confidence in the Lord, do it -- that which the saints of all ages have done, and that which will make the Bible more precious to us than ever before. We listen to the Lord as He speaks to us through His Word, and then we speak to Him about the things that He has been saying to us.