

PERSUASIVE ARGUMENTS FOR LEARNING TO PRAY

INTRODUCTION

I am glad of this week of prayer - not only because of opportunities to pray, but because it has made me think about prayer. For many of us our first reaction when we think about prayer is: 'guilty' - because we know we don't pray as we should. I am not sure that should be our first reaction. Prospect of prayer should fill us with delight - we have got to so work at it, that this becomes our experience. I think perhaps part of our difficulty comes from fact we have never learnt to pray. If we do not know what we are doing - it always makes things more difficult. ⇒ DIY & skilled tradesmen. Hence why disciples said to Jesus: 'teach us to pray' - and he did. Bible has great deal to teach us about prayer: much of it is of a very practical nature. There is more to prayer than just praying. If we are going to learn to pray, it will involve preparation, meditation, organisation, lists, discipline & practice - just like any other skill / gift / ability. Aim over next few weeks: short series on 'learning how to pray' - that each of us may acquire & use more effectively the gift of prayer - particularly me! Book: Isaac Watts, "A Guide to Prayer" - published by Banner. Tonight - introduction: **WHY LEARN TO PRAY?** What are the persuasive arguments for us to learn to pray? (from chapter 5 of Watts book). **BECAUSE:**

1. PRAYER IS CORRESPONDENCE WITH HEAVEN

Who would not be ambitious to correspond with heaven? This is what prayer is. Heb 4:16, Matt 6:9. Prayer is language in which God has appointed for human beings, descended from Adam, who are but worms & dust, to address the king of glory, their Maker. Should we refuse this wonderful privilege? This is speech by which the sons of God speak to their Heavenly Father. Should not all the children know how to speak to him? This is the way our souls breath in divine air. We should all be aquatinted with approaching the greatest and the best of beings - God himself. If not, we should learn soon. If prayer was only begging mercy of God, it would still be duty of every man to know how to plead for mercy, and to present them in such a way that they may be heard. But, prayer is a work of much larger extent: when we come before God, we can do far more than just beg. Watts: *"He tells his God what a sense he has of the divine attributes, and what high esteem he pays to his majesty, his wisdom, his power and his mercy. He talks with him about the wonders of creation and stands wrapped up in wonder. He talks about the grace and mystery of redemption and is yet more filled with admiration and joy. He talks of the affairs of nature, grace and glory; he speaks of his works of providence, of love and vengeance, in this and the future world."* The greatest part of the business between us and heaven is transacted in the way of prayer.

2. PRAYER IS FUNDAMENTAL PART OF BEING A CHRISTIAN

Prayer goes to the very heart of what we profess to be as Christians. Said of Saul of Tarsus: Acts 9:11 Word tells us: 1 Thess 5:17. We are invited to bring all our needs & sorrows before Lord: 1 Peter 5:7 A prayer-less Christian is a contradiction in terms. ⇒ A man who cannot read, would not be a scholar. A man who cannot preach, would not be a minister. It is a poor profession of Christianity that we

make, if we are not able, at least in secret, to combine a few meditations or expressions to continue a little in this work of prayer. This is not a gift that is only for pastors & heads of families - who have a constant obligation to pray in public, but for all. Every person who is joined to church should play his or her part in prayer. A Christian is one who has recognised their need of God - prayer is the ongoing expression of that need. "I need Thee every hour, most gracious Lord," Apply: Let us be consistent! Can you not look back on life & see how God has used prayer as an instrument of great blessing in past? Felt Lord drawing near. Seen dramatic answers to prayer. Been cold & indifferent towards God, but then you have come to pray - heart has been stirred & warmed again, as we are lifted up to God.

3. THE HONOUR & REPUTATION OF GOD IS AT STAKE

God is dishonoured when we do not pay him the best worship we are capable of. God's work must not be done negligently. It is for his honour that we be furnished with the best talents for his service and that we employ them in the best manner. It shows to the world the high esteem we have for our God. To only pray with a few sudden thoughts with rude and improper expressions that never cost us anything but the labour of our lips, is not the way to bring glory to his great name. Apply: Question to ask is: 'does my prayer life accurately express what I believe about God?' Mal 1:11-14. We know that we must take care when addressing an important person of the world - to have our thoughts well ordered and words well chosen - and to speak them with a loyal heart. May not our supreme governor in heaven expect a due care in ordering our thoughts & choosing our words to ensure we speak as we should & bring everything before him that we should. The way we pray is a testimony to watching world: 1 Cor 14:40 - also v25. It impacts watching unbeliever! Must learn!

4. THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL HELP US

Watts argues that learning to pray is comparatively easy because we have the Holy Spirit to help us. This does not mean that there is no diligence or difficulties involved with learning & preserving in prayer - but we have everything going for us to see we succeed! If we want to learn any skill we must begin regularly and go on gradually toward perfection with patience and labour - same with prayer. We will look at some of issues & guidelines given in Scripture to help us do this - but we must follow them - but because every Christian has Holy Spirit it is possible for us to learn to pray. Luke 11:13

5. THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT LEARNING TO PRAY

If we do not take the time to learn to pray, we will unavoidably fall into one of three evils (Watts):

- a) **We will drag on heavily in work of prayer all our days.** We will miss out on the benefit & delight of this sweet duty - plus those who hear us pray in public will not benefit as they should.
- b) **Prayer will become little more than formal religious ritual.** We will pray in morning & evening - saying same old words. Power, reality, freshness of doing real business with heaven will be lost.
- c) **We will stop praying altogether.** The final danger. We don't like rituals, or frustration of heavy drag - so we stop it altogether. Which will we choose? None of these I hope - instead let us together learn how to pray! **CONCLUSION:** What a wonderful thing prayer is. Let's learn about it together!