

The Science of Prayer

Its ABC's

By Glenn and Ethel Coon

Name: _____

Date: _____

LESSON 8:

How to Avoid Presumptuous Prayers

Introduction

Two of my devoted brothers were gravely concerned for us in our "Gethsemane" experience. They frankly thought we were guilty of presumption in prayer. But they had never really studied the meaning of the word. You may gain a fuller understanding of the word as we enter upon this study.

The Psalmist cried out to God: "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." Psalm 19:13.

Dr. Robert Young, in his Analytical Concordance to the Holy Scriptures gives the meaning of the word "presumptuous" as used in Psalm 19:13, and as it is used in other texts of Scripture. Briefly it is "to act proudly" or "with a high hand" or "to lift up self."

Therefore, the prayer of the Psalmist was as if he were saying, "Dear Lord, keep me from acting proudly in prayer, or moving with a high hand or lifting up myself. Then I will be upright, and I will be innocent of the great transgression."

To keep from lifting up self in prayer we should observe the following:

1. Instead of presuming to tell God exactly how to answer our prayers, we should completely surrender our plans to His infinite judgment and love.

Here is an example of a presumptuous prayer. A little girl, whom we shall call Mary, was moving with her parents from one city to another, perhaps 1,000 miles away. Mary had a pet dog named "Troubles." Her parents decided it was better not to take Troubles with them to the next city. But Mary was rebellious. In order to secure what her little heart wanted, she began to pray. But she did not ask God to work it out His way. Said she, "Dear Jesus, when we arrive at the new city have Troubles there." But there is no promise in the Bible that a dog will go by some magic UFO air transport to a distant city even though a little girl does love its companionship. God does promise to supply our need. Philippians 4:19. But Mary had "need of patience" (Hebrews 10:36) to develop her character. When Mary arrived at the new city she went to school the next day. There she formed the acquaintance of another girl about her age and they fell into conversation. Mary unburdened her heart, her rebellion, and her self-will. Said she to her newly-made friend, "I have prayed to Jesus. I told him that when we arrived in this city to have Troubles here." Then she concluded her rebellious story with these words, "But Jesus disobeyed me."

Now for an example of one who was kept away from a presumptuous prayer. It was Job who was perfect. (See Job 1:8.) In the midst of great frustration, including the misunderstanding of close friends, he revealed the opposite of a presumptuous spirit: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. ..." Job 13:15.

2. Avoid claiming that an answered prayer is proof that we are right even though we continue in deliberate transgressions.

We need to submit to God's sanctification. God's mercy is not extended merely to righteous people. ". . . for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good ..." Matthew 5:45.

God gave Judas power ". . . against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease." (See Matthew 10:1-4.)

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we, not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ; And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matthew 7:22, 23.

Paul learned how to refrain from committing this sin of presumption.

"But I keep under my body, and bring it, into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away." 1 Corinthians 9:27.

We should also avoid praying a prayer that asks God to overlook transgression. For instance, Satan tempted our Lord to cast Himself down, even quoting a promise in the Bible. But Satan cleverly omitted part of the promise which shows the promise is conditioned upon our following God's ways. (See Matthew 4:6.) Jesus rejected this temptation with a firm statement of Scripture that left nothing out. (See verse 7.) To expect God to answer our prayers for deliverance when we presumptuously transgress is a sin we must avoid.

3. We should avoid the prayer that expects God to compromise with us so that we can hold the lustful world in one hand and the hand of Jesus in the other.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." 1 John 2:15, 16.

To avoid this prayer of presumption we may have the experience of the Psalmist who cried out, ". . . in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at try right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Psalm 16:11.

"I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Psalm 16:8.

4. We should avoid asking God to heal us physically without asking Him to heal us spiritually also.

"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye and consume it upon your lusts." James 4:3

"Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." John 5:14.

A person requesting healing should earnestly ask himself the question: Do I expect God to heal me that I may uplift self in sensual indulgence? To expect God to heal under such circumstances is presumption.

"Beloved, I wish above all things that the mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."
3 John 2.

Physical affliction was a big part of our bitter "Gethsemane" so many years ago. As we asked God to heal our bodies, we added in our hearts: "Dear God, we are not asking You to heal our bodies that our souls may be lost. But rather we ask you to heal our souls with our bodies. We do not ask Thee, dear Lord, to heal our bodies and then let us forget Thee and lose eternal life. Therefore, dear Lord, we request the physical healing to blend with spiritual restoration."

In our early ministry we had learned a sad lesson. We asked only for physical healing for a man who had suffered a stroke. He was healed through the miracle of prayer. But his first journey after healing was to the very woman with whom he was living in sin.

Let us pray to God to forgive all our iniquity as well as heal all our diseases. Psalm 103:3.

5. When we pray for victory over sin, we should ask God to give us strength to resist going on the field of temptation.

"Abstain from all appearance of evil." 1 Thessalonians 5:22.

"And lead us not into temptation. ..." Matthew 6:13.

"Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away... Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee... Turn not; to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil." Proverbs 4:14, 15, 25, 27.

A minister of the gospel preached a sermon entitled, "The Second Look." In this message he pointed out that "evil" walks down our streets almost in the nude. We see it in our newspapers, magazines, on the television, and we hear it on the radio. He showed that the first look, which we cannot escape, does not defile the soul. It is, rather, that second look, which knows when it looks, that it is opening the chambers of the soul to evil, to lust, to sin. Let the prayer of the Psalmist be ours; "Keep back thy; servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." Psalm 19:13.

6. Presumption at its worst: the "holier-than-thou" attitude.

A people "which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thee. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day." Isaiah 65:5.

God tells how we may avoid this presumption. It is to "take away from . . . thee . . . the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity." Isaiah 58:9.

Capture the picture of a person putting forth his finger as he points to what he judges as an unworthy motive in another. When we point a finger at another we are actually pointing three fingers at ourselves. Go through the gesture and see for yourself. Maybe God made us this way to teach us the dangers of the "holier-than-thou" attitude.

(1) We point a finger of condemnation at ourselves when we judge the motives of another: ". . . for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things." Romans 2:1.

(2) We point to ourselves as hypocrites. "Judge not, that ye be not judged.... Thou hypocrite. ..." Matthew 7:1, 5.

(3) We point to ourselves as associate anti-Christ. "The Father . . . hath committed all judgment unto the Son." John 5:22. Therefore, when we try to take Christ's chair of judgment we are doing what Anti-Christ does. (See 2 Thessalonians 2:2-4.) There are many anti-Christ. (See 1 John 2:18.)

7. Though we may have been guilty of presumptuous sin, if we repent, God promises fabulous answers.

"Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; ... And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." Isaiah 58: 9, 11.

A PERSONAL MESSAGE:

Dear Student:

The "holier-than-thou" attitude has no part in true soul winning. To be shocked when John Doe tells us of some of his sins, is to create a gap. Many professed Christians think this shocked appearance is the way to bring John Doe to conviction. But these people have a false conception of conviction.

Jesus made clear that conviction for sin comes from the Holy Spirit. (See John 16:8.) It is not for us to try to belittle John Doe, thinking that by doing so we can bring him to repentance. No! Our work is to uplift Jesus. Our part is to witness to what Jesus has done for our unworthy lives. And let us not forget that word "unworthy."

To state that we are unworthy does not mean that we are to relate sordid sins of which we are guilty. It only means that we are simply in the position of witnessing to the power of Jesus Christ.

Assuming an unshockable attitude at the knowledge of John Doe's sins, without giving the slightest impression that sin is not sin, is an art. This is one reason why we should claim the promise for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13) as we visit John Doe. And this is why we should claim the promise for wisdom. (See James 1:5.)

It may take much prayer on our part to be kept from exhorting John Doe, to be kept from preaching at him, to be kept from telling him. Instead of trying to instruct John Doe who has not asked for instruction, we are to express confidence in him, hope, and selfless love.

Cordially yours,

Glenn Coon, Sr.

Glenn Coon, Jr.

QUIZ ON LESSON 8:

1. When we start making demands of God we should remember we have need of _____ Hebrews 10:36.
2. To many people who claim to have wrought many miracles Jesus will say, "I _____ knew you." Matthew 7:23.
3. Can we hold on to the sensuous pleasures of the world and Jesus at the same time? _____ 1 John 2:15, 16.
4. Jesus told a healed man to _____ no more. John 5:14.

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5. We should abstain from _____ appearance of evil. 1 Thessalonians 5:22.
6. When we point the finger of judgment at others, how many do we point at ourselves? _____
7. If we stop judging and condemning others and are unselfish, God will guide us. _____ Isaiah 58:9, 11.

Correct Answers on Answer Sheet.