

The Centrality of Prayer Part 3

Transitional Thoughts: From Personal Prayer to Canonical Prayer

As has been mentioned, personal or individual prayer has its own virtue in the fact that it engages a person in conversation with God in a particular situation unique to him or her. This strength however, because it stresses “I,” “me,” and “my,” also simultaneously leaves one open to potential problems if not placed within the context of open ears. Remember, God starts the conversation. Consider these Apostolic words: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). If we have ever joined a conversation with which others were engaged before we showed up on the scene, we know that it may take some time to catch up before we can intelligently respond to what’s being said. This period of waiting may be short or long depending on how long the conversation has been going on or perhaps the difficulty of the subject matter being discussed. Since God starts the conversation it behooves us to open our ears first and our mouths last.

Of course, this does not in any way mean that we must always wait *before* we cry out to God in prayer. Certainly, if one is hanging from a cliff by one finger one does not need to “hear” God say “pray.” The situation itself is a communication from above. The point is simply this: the more we listen to God the more we increase the chances that our prayers will be acceptable and on topic, so to say. We want to enter the conversation initiated by God with our ears open as wide as possible. We should be willing to listen “day and night” (Ps. 1:2) and for as long as necessary, even our whole life. What is the subject of God’s conversation? God, creation, and the human being - in this order. Notice what is first and what is last!

Because of the potential danger of prayer being too “individualistic,” with reference *only* to “me” while ignoring the larger world and thinking and speaking wrongly about or to God, we must address the mode of prayer which is more perfect. This mode is Canonical Prayer. Before turning to this mode of prayer let us conclude this section by considering these words of St. John of Damascus “*It is not within our capacity to say anything about God, or even think of him, beyond the things that have been divinely revealed to us, whether by word or by manifestation, by **the divine oracles at once of the Old Testament and of the New.**” (“Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,” book 1 chapter 2). It is important to know who God is and what he wants to converse about. Prayer is a conversation started by God and entered into by us for the purpose of glorifying God and fashioning us into the image of the One who is at the center of our being.*

Please note that all Scripture references here and in future studies are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

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