

False Prayer

Written by K B Napier
Wednesday, 15 September 2010 19:10

Those who have read our publications on prayer meetings will know what I mean by 'false prayer'. Perhaps, though, there is a need to summarise what is meant in a shorter format:

A working definition of 'false prayer' could be as follows:

'False prayer is a prayer uttered by a saved person without being prompted to pray; or, it can be a perceived prayer uttered by an unsaved person, whose prayers are not listened to by God anyway'.

Really, that single statement says it all, but let us expand on it...

Christians, even when sincere, can utter false prayers. I have heard countless numbers of them and I have even uttered them myself. This especially occurs in 'prayer meetings' that are attended regularly (in a church building or in small, informal groups), whether or not the Holy Spirit has convened the meeting. In other words – the *majority* of prayer meetings.

True prayer is giving-back to God what He has already given to us to pray, by way of definite prompting. Anything that is not prompted (when our spirit concurs with the Holy Spirit) is false. Why call it 'false'? Well, what else do you call something, when you pretend it is what it is not? It is a form of a lie. It is not what it claims to be. Therefore, it is 'false'.

If we attend a doctor's surgery and say we have symptoms when we actually have nothing wrong with us, that is a 'false' claim. If a man comes to your door claiming to be collecting for a charity, but uses the money for himself, then his claim is false. He has lied. So, if we claim to pray to God when He has not prompted us to do so, we are making a false claim. It is, then, false prayer. Can you see this as a serious problem? I hope so.

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Sincerity has nothing to do with it. Our many false prayers are the result of a misunderstanding of what true prayer is. If we do not know what true prayer is, then we will continue making false ones. False prayers can be accompanied by feeling good, because we have been emotionally satisfied, and they seem to 'work'. But, this 'feel good' factor should not be accepted as being necessarily equal to the joy of offering true prayer back to God.

This latter kind is referred to in James 5 as the *"effectual prayer of a righteous man (which) availeth much."*

It is 'effectual' because it is God-given, not man-made. How often have you been asked to pray, out of the blue, by a well-meaning leader? How often have you been caught in one of those feeble 'prayer rounds'? How often have you prayed because you know others expect you to do so? How often do you attend because it makes you 'feel better'? How often do you think that telling others of a prayer need given to *you*, is the same as each individual being told what to pray by God personally? All of these are ineffectual and false.

We find false prayer implied in 1 Timothy 2:8, *"I will then therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."*

We may infer from this that true prayer is holy (e.g. from God and to God), and that prayer is nullified or made false by wrath and doubt. You will notice that the call to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5:17) is hedged about with instructions that help define the *quality*

of that prayer... rejoicing evermore (16), giving perpetual thanks (17), always doing what is good (15), not quenching the Spirit (19), accepting prophecy (either foretelling or expounding the word: 20), testing the spirits and maintaining a pure life (21), not doing anything sinful, and shunning even those things that

appear

to be evil (22), coupled with a proper attitude towards those who act wrongly (14).

There is much more to this entire passage, so beware of using the text on its own, outside its context! (A slightly more oblique reference to unacceptable prayer is found in 1 Corinthians 14:13-15). And what of prayers uttered by a woman who is 'uncovered' (1 Corinthians 11:13)? Does this not mean that the prayer is voided by her impropriety? (The matter of what 'covered' means is outside the scope of this article). That, then, means it is false. And what of the false prayer of the Pharisee, in Luke 18:10-14?

Christians need to understand what is meant by Christ's words, that we 'ought always to pray'. To pray always means to continually be in a state of humility and holiness before God. It

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involves being in a suitable spiritual condition, and praying what God has given us to pray. The plea by the disciples, to 'teach us to pray' (Luke 11:1) carries with it the unsaid principle that prayer can be wrong, false, or without real reason. Yes, we can pray anywhere and any time, but such prayers must be truthful and given only when God prompts us to pray. Joint prayer is only genuine if each individual has been personally prompted by *God* (not by someone else) to pray together.

God warns His people in Isaiah 1:15 that He 'will not hear' prayers tainted by blood and He damns those who pretend to pray aright when they have mistreated others (Mark 12:40), because their prayers are false. In 1 Peter 3:7 we see that prayers can be hindered by husbands who do not protect and honour their wives. It stands to reason that their prayers would be false, otherwise how else can they be 'hindered'? (The word 'hindered' means to 'cut off'; why should God cut off prayers unless they are wrongly uttered?).

David tells us indirectly in Psalm 66:20 that some prayers are ineffectual and not listened to by God. This kind of statement is repeated in Psalm 80:4, where we are told that God can be angry against certain prayers. As God's anger is kindled against falsity and sin, we may safely assume that He rejects prayers that are not of His prompting. The prayers of men who act wickedly 'become sin' (Psalm 109:7) and are thus false, as are the prayers of men who ignore God's commands (Proverbs 28:9).

God told Jeremiah (7:16 and 11:14) that prayers on behalf of his kinsmen would be useless and that he would not even listen to them, because of their sin. Lamentations also refers to times when God refuses to listen to prayers. It should be repeated that God will not bear sin in His presence, so it is logical to assume that prayers wrongly uttered must, by definition, be sinful, and sin is always falsity.

Prayers deemed vain will not be listened to by God (Job 35:13). Note that long prayers for their own sake (found much in prayer meetings) without God's prompting, are called 'vain'. The Israelites were warned by God they would not be heeded when they prayed to God for comfort after choosing their own king (1 Samuel 8:18). He refuses to hear prayers of those who sin inwardly (Psalm 66:18). In Isaiah 59:2 we see why this happens: sinfulness separates us from God. We find this repeated in Micah 3:4, and God's warning is extended to include a curse if such sin continues (Malachi 2:2).

The above texts adequately prove that God does not listen to everything we tend to call

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'prayer'. As with all else, God's goodness toward us requires a full acknowledgement of our own sin. This sin must be repented of before we may come to Him in prayer. To do this, we must firstly be *convicted* of our sin and of our need to repent, an activity of the Holy Spirit alone. And if such requirement is found in every other aspect of our lives, we need not think it is suddenly not required when we pray!

True prayer, then, is always that prayer given to us by God, through the Holy Spirit. Because it is not borne of our sinfulness, it is pure and holy, and therefore, He will – and is bound to, by His promise – listen and give an answer. We cannot escape the conclusion, then, that false prayers exist, uttered by us because we *think* we ought to utter them, and not because we are prompted to do so by the Holy Spirit. Those prayers uttered by unsaved men, who are still in their sin, are *automatically* not heeded by God, because they have no holy link with God whatever.

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