

## **When is it wrong to pray?**

(by George Battey)

In 1971 the US Supreme Court handed down a decision in the Lemon v. Kurtzman case which effectively made prayer in public schools forbidden. (See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School\\_prayer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_prayer).) So, if we answered our question this week based on the policies and laws of our country, then prayer is wrong in public places.

But the question we are asking on Bible Talk this week is: ***According to the Bible, when is prayer wrong?*** Did you know that there are times when prayer is inappropriate according to the scriptures? Let's examine these passages.

### **1st) *It is wrong for the alien sinner to pray for salvation.***

An “*alien sinner*” is a sinner that has never become a child of God -- one who is lost and has never been saved. It is wrong for this person to pray for salvation because prayer is not what God told this person to do.

In Acts 9 there was a sinner named Saul of Tarsus. He was an “*alien sinner.*” He had never obeyed the Lord Jesus and he had never been a Christian. A preacher was sent to preach to Saul and the Lord described how to find him:

*Acts 9:11 (NKJV)*

*11 So the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.*

Here, then, is Saul. He is praying to God, but he was not forgiven of any of his sins. He believed in Jesus, but he was not forgiven of his sins. He was repenting of his sins and was fasting and praying, but every sin he had ever committed was still being held against him. How did he finally get forgiveness? What did the Lord require of him in order that he might be saved? In Acts 22:16 the preacher told him:

*Acts 22:16 (NKJV)*

*16 ‘And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’*

Do you see the point? “*Alien sinners*” are forgiven of their sins, not when they pray for forgiveness, but when they are finally baptized in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Since baptism is the final act of obedience that washes away sins, it is useless for an “alien sinner” to continue praying for forgiveness.

**2nd) [It is wrong for the persistent sinner to pray.](#)**

*John 9:31* (NKJV)

*31 “Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.*

The “*sinner*” being spoken of in this passage is a persistent sinner -- someone who rejects God continuously and habitually disobeys divine law. The Bible says that God will not listen to the prayers of these sinners. Notice the two qualities required in order for a man’s prayers to be heard; according to John 9:31:

- *A man must be a worshiper of God, and*
- *A man must practice the will of God in order for his prayers to be heard.*

*Proverbs 28:9* (NKJV)

*9 One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.*

This should be a warning to everyone. When men persist in sin and have no intentions of changing their lives, they cannot expect that God will listen to them and help them when tragedy strikes. Eventually we will all have misfortune come our way and we will need God to help, but we must keep on speaking terms with him.

If we want to have the privilege of prayer and we want God to help us in times of tragedy, then we must continuously worship and serve Him when there is no tragedy. If we will serve Him during times of peace, He will be present to help us during times of distress.

**3rd) [It is wrong for men who are unforgiving to pray.](#)**

In Matthew 6 the Lord taught His disciples how to pray and He told them to pray, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). He explained this in verse 15:

*Matthew 6:15* (NKJV)

*15 “But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Do you see this? When we refuse to forgive men who ask for forgiveness and we refuse to show mercy to others, it becomes wrong to pray and ask forgiveness from God. God will not listen and we might as well quit praying if we refuse to forgive men who trespass against us.

**4th) [It is wrong for hypocrites to pray.](#)**

*Matthew 6:5-8* (NKJV)

*5 “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.*

*6 “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

*7 “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.*

*8 “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.*

When men pray just to be seen of men, they are wasting their time. They might as well quit praying because the prayers of the hypocrite goes no higher than the ceiling under which he prays.

5th) [It is wrong to pray for something selfish.](#) Listen to the scripture:

James 4:2-3 (NKJV)

2 *You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.*

3 *You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.*

This is why it's wrong to ask God to help you win the lottery. It wrong to pray that God would give you a million dollars. Asking God for selfish things is wrong.

6th) [It is wrong to pray if the prayer is asking God to remove responsibilities.](#)

For example:

- *It is wrong to pray for food if a person will not work (2 Th 3:10).*
- *It is wrong to pray for strength if a person deliberately puts himself in a tempting situation.*
- *It's wrong to pray for health if a person is deliberately smoking, taking drugs, drinking or doing other things which harm their health.*

Something similar to this occurred in the days of Joshua. A man in the camp had violated the word of God and the entire nation was suffering as a result. Joshua began to pray. God told him to quit praying. Listed to the passage:

Joshua 7:10-13 (NKJV)

10 *So the LORD said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face?"*

11 *Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff.*

12 *Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.*

13 *Get up, sanctify the people, and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for*

*tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: "There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you."*

This passage is teaching us: *There is a time for prayer and there is a time for action. Prayer cannot become a substitute for doing what God instructed us to do.*

Prayer is a wonderful privilege which belongs only to God's people. Not just anyone can pray to God (Jn 9:31). But, as we have seen in this study, there are at least six times when prayer is wrong and inappropriate.

## **GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION**

Five steps in God's plan of salvation:

- 1) **Hear** the word of God (Rom 10:17).
- 2) **Believe** Jesus is the Son of God (Mk 16:16).
- 3) **Repent** of sins (change from living a sinful life) (Acts 2:38).
- 4) **Confess** your faith verbally before men (Rom 10:10).
- 5) **Be baptized** (immersed) in water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

*Mark 16:16 (NKJV)*

*16 He who **believes** and is **baptized** will be saved; ...*

*Acts 2:38 (NKJV)*

*38 Then Peter said to them, "**Repent, and** let every one of you **be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**; ...*

After being baptized, one must continue to be faithful (Acts 2:42; Mt 28:20; Rev 2:10).