



Boundaries and Limitations of Prayer

Although prayer is powerful, important, makes a difference, and does things that nothing else can, it must be noted and understood that prayer has boundaries. Believe it or not, there are certain things that prayer CANNOT do:

A. Can't override another Person's will.

- a) It can't override another person's will. God respects man's free will, and prayer cannot be used to control the actions of another person any more than God exerts His power to control people.
- b) If a person doesn't want to be healed, your prayer can't make them be healed against their own will. If someone doesn't want to be born- again, your prayer cannot make that happen.
- c) Deuteronomy 30:19 "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:"

B. Can't save people

- a) Prayer cannot force or make someone to be saved. What it can do is that it can influence, and it can work in a way that God could send someone across their path, and they can be saved. Just praying will not make it. You can't just pray someone into a relationship with God. If that is true, then we should all just stay indoors and pray and never mention Jesus to anyone. Romans 10:9-10 says clearly that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Faith doesn't come by prayer.
- b) 1 Peter 1:23 "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."

As much as prayer is important, we aren't born again by prayer but by the Word.

C. Doesn't always work instantly

Prayer cannot change every situation instantly or fix every problem regardless of what it is. Prayer is not a magic wand that we wave to change things. Many things after prayer begin to happen gradually.

- a) Mark 11:23-24 "For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore, I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."
 - i) The word "Shall" denotes the future. It could be a minute, an hour, a day from now but it has a future connotation to it. Not everything is instantaneous.
- b) Mark 16:18 "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."
- c) James 5:14-16 "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (Emphasis mine)
- d) Luke 17:14 "And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed." (Ten lepers)

D. Doesn't change God's will

- a) Prayer does not change God's will or make Him more willing to do something that is not His will. He changes not (Hebrews 13:8 and Malachi 3:6).
- b) Prayer is not manipulating God or twisting His arm but releasing God to do His will in the earth.
- c) As powerful as prayer is, it doesn't and cannot change God's will. You can't just pray to marry someone else's spouse because it is not God's will for you. Healing

is God's will (Matthew 8:1-3), prayer can't make it not so.

E. You've already got it.

- a) It's a waste of time to pray for things you already have. You already have righteousness if you're a Christian. You don't have to pray for it. You have victory, healing, authority, and so forth. Asking God to do something He's already done is either ignorance or unbelief.
- b) As powerful as prayer is, it can't bring you what you already have because you already have it.
- c) The truth is, God has already provided everything we need through redemption. If everyone on earth always acted on the Word of God instantly when they heard it, there would be very little need to pray for other people.
- d) 2 Peter 1:3 "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:"

F. Prayer can't accomplish what God has told you to do

- a) It's a lot easier to pray and tell God to do what He told us to do. However, prayer will not make God do what He has instructed or commanded us to do in His Word.
- b) If God has told you to pray for the sick, you can't turn around and tell Him to pray for them. If He told you to preach the gospel, you can't turn around and tell Him to save the lost.
- c) James 4:7 tells us to "resist the devil." You should not pray to ask God to resist the devil for you when He told you and equipped you to do it. That kind of prayer will not be effective. He has given you power and authority over Satan—you do it.

G. Faithless prayers do not work.

When we pray, we have to pray in faith nothing wavering. If we pray in doubt, we will be without. We have to believe that we receive when we pray.

- i) James 1:5-8 "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the

wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”

- ii) Mark 11:22-24 “And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore, I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.”

H. Prayer does not suddenly fill you with the knowledge of God’s Word.

- a) Prayer is not a short cut to doing what you should.
- b) We should not substitute prayer for knowing the Word. What does the Word say? Many times, people pray about instructions that are clear in the Word of God.
- c) You should not be praying whether you should be doing something ungodly. It’s clear in the Word and you should not be praying about it. Just follow the instructions of the Word.
- d) Romans 12:2 “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”
- e) Psalm 119:130 “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” Psalm 19:7 “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.”

I. Prayer does not override disobedience.

- a) Sometimes people are praying for a financial miracle and the reason they are in trouble is that they are not doing what they’re supposed to do.
 - i) If God told you to work, praying for provision while refusing to work will only get you so far.
- b) 1 Samuel 15:22 “And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”

- c) We have to learn to obey the voice of God and the Word of God. It's a lot better to obey the Lord and fail than succeeding and attaining your goals without obeying the Lord.
 - i) Anyone who has not obeyed the Lord has failed even though they may have some results to show. The end doesn't justify the means, but the means justify the end.
 - ii) Some people will just go against the instruction of the Lord thinking, I will offer such and such to the Lord or I will repent after I mess up. News flash: We should never forget that obedience is much more important to the Lord than repentance and sacrifice once we have sinned.