



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

TRANSCRIPT

“Prayer and the Attributes, part I (Why Bother and Infinite, Omnipotent God of Love?)”

[Prayer] ...Through it we have conversation with the eternal God. And we thank Thee Lord for the instructions that are given concerning prayer. And we thank Thee that the problems are there too because it is through the problems that we sometimes come to understand things about prayer that we might not otherwise understand. And we commit our meeting to Thee tonight and pray again that we may be instructed by the Spirit and the things that concern Thee and Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And we would ask too Lord particularly that as a result of our studies, our own prayer lives may deepen. That each one of us may know in a deeper way what it is to bring our petitions to Thee, to bring our words of praise and thanksgiving to Thee. And we pray that through these experiences that we may learn how to get things from Thee in the true and biblical sense. And so Lord may there be a practical result from our study together. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight our subject is Why Bother and Infinite, Omnipotent God of Love? And this is the first of the series of two studies in prayer and the attributes. And for Scripture reading I want you to turn with me to the eighth Psalm. And let's read together. I'll read, you follow along in your text. Psalm 8, verse 1 through verse 9. Psalm 8, verse 1 through verse 9.

“LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens! From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength Because of Your adversaries, To make the enemy and the revengeful cease. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained; What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field, The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth!”

Why bother an infinite, omniscient God of love or prayer and the attributes? And first a few words of introduction. The Bible affirms without question the duty of prayer. Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 8 says, “I will therefore that men pray everywhere,” in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 17 he says, “Pray without ceasing.” A text that does mean that we are never to be interrupted in our prayers but that we are to pray in frequent intervals.

As you probably have heard that verb was used in the early days of a person who had a hacking cough. And so to pray without ceasing means to pray in frequent intervals. And then in Ephesians chapter 6 verse 18 the apostle also says, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.”

It may seem superfluous to consider objections to prayer in the light of these plain exhortations from Scripture to pray. And it may seem superfluous to consider any objections that anyone might raise against prayer because surely if God commands it that settles the question. The obligation to pray rests upon its own affirmative evidence, one might say. Undisturbed by any difficulties like the mist, which may obscure but which cannot extinguish the light of the sun. And so the difficulties may be there but they really

do not have any significance, one might say. You cannot, after all, dislodge positive duty until the evidence on which it rests is swept away. And it is impossible to sweep away the evidence of the Bible that God commands us to pray. And I think it is fair to speak as a theologian and say that it is necessary for us to sweep away the evidence for prayer before we can entertain seriously and finally the objections that may be lodged against prayer.

On the other hand, I think that it is unfortunate that both in popular treatises and in theologies the problem of prayer has been neglected because it does come to our minds. And even if we were Christians who never were troubled by the questions of the attributes and prayer, someone else would be troubled by it. And would introduce the objections into our conversation and then we would be required to give some answer with regard to them. And so it is unfortunate that often in our theologies the question of the justification for prayer in the light of the nature of God is never considered.

If you will turn to the theology of Charles Hodge -- which may be the best of the theologies -- you will find only relatively few pages about the problems of prayer. If you turn to the theology of Shedd, you will find much the same thing. On the spur of the moment I’m not sure that Shedd has any section on prayer so that only incidentally is there reference to it.

The same is true of the Baptist theologian Strong, and the Arminian Watson, and even in Lewis Sperry Chafer. There is no consideration of the problems of prayer. Isn’t it an interesting thing that Jesus never taught his disciples how to preach? He taught them, however, how to pray. He did not speak much of what was needed to preach well but a great deal of what was needed to pray well. He did not tell us how to speak before men, but he did tell us how to speak to God. In other words, it is not power with men that is the most important thing but power with God.

Now if you were to go to the Dallas Theological Seminary -- which is the greatest of the theological seminaries in my opinion today still -- you will find that there are

course on homiletics, in fact many courses on homiletics -- something that there should be, of course. But you will not find, so far as I remember, any course on proseuchology. Now proseuchology is the technical term for the doctrine of prayer. Remember last week we looked at the word *proseuchmai*, and *proseuche* is the noun which means prayer. So isn't it interesting?

Now one of our faculty members did a few years ago write his doctoral dissertation on prayer and I do think there is one course there now, which is an elective on it, a practical course on prayer. But it would seem to me that that subject is so big in the word of God that we would have devoted to it a section of required theology so that we would consider the nature of prayer, the method of prayer, the difficulties of prayer, the difficulties of unanswered prayer. But ordinarily in theological seminary and rarely in Bible institutes do we have such study.

Now I think that a great deal is gained by just considering these objections. One of the outstanding Presbyterian theologians of the nineteenth century was a man by the name of B. M. Palmer. Dr. Palmer was the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of the city of New Orleans and he has written a little book on the theology of prayer. And it's an excellent little book, a good introduction to the subject. And in the course of it, he speaks about these objections and he speaks about the fact that often -- while we might not pay a great deal of attention to the objections that men raise when we get down on our knees and lift our voices to God -- often those objections that people have raise enter into our minds and hinder our fellowship with God.

I don't know whether you've ever felt that way or not, but I have gotten down upon my knees to pray to God and thought about some of these problems in years past and wondered even while I was in the position of prayer and was offering words to God, I was thinking about these problems that one might have. So whether we like it or not we are faced with them. And often it helps us to consider the precise objections that men raise to the doctrines to the word of God

because it is in these considerations of the precise objections that we come to understand the truth in a much clearer way.

Dr. Palmer says in addition to all of this, “truth gains by being canvassed especially on the side from which it is attacked like a torch the more its shook the more it shines.” And so when we take the truth and shake it a little bit, seek to consider it in the light of the objections that are raised to it, often the result is that we see the truth itself in a clearer light. The more its shook the more it shines.

Now we don’t appreciate that because we use the electric light now, but nevertheless, it does express the truth about things. The problems in prayer arise out of apparent contradictions in biblical teachings. And these contradictions are of two kinds. First, theological and out of the theological contradictions or out of the theological teaching there arises the problem of the attributes. Why should we pray to an omniscient God when he knows all of the things that we possibly could ask and also what we are going to ask as we get down upon our knees to pray? And then there is the problem of the decrees, why pray to a God who has already determined all things that are going to come to pass in spite of what the futuristics professors tell us.

Why pray? And why pray in the light of the doctrine of man for man is a sinner, man is weak and fallible and even his own nature hinders and produces problems for God and for us in prayer. So there is one kind of problem that we must consider which we will call theological. And then there is a second kind of problem which is practical and that arises out of unanswered prayer because often we pray and we don’t get what we ask for. And so God, it is said, answers prayer but he does not seem to answer our prayers. And that’s the other side from which the difficulties come. Now in this lecture we are only going to consider the problem of the attributes and we will conclude it next time then we will move on to the other problems we have. And first of all tonight, Roman I: The problem of the infinity of God. And what I would like to do as you can see the outline is very simple and is structured identically under each of the

headings. What I would like to do is to state the problem and then seek to give the answer from reason and the answer from revelation. So the problem of the infinity of God, first of all then, how can we state this problem. Well I would state it this way. How can an infinite being concern himself with an insignificant finite creature? [Repeat] How can an infinite being concern himself with an insignificant finite creature? Why should God be concerned with you? Why I don’t even want to be concerned with you myself, naturally. You don’t want to be concerned with me, naturally. It’s thoroughly contrary to human nature to be concerned with anyone but oneself. I read today about one politician who said -- it was Robert Kerr of Oklahoma --who said that his concern was, first of all, for himself. And then I think, secondly, for the state of Oklahoma and third, for the United States of America. Mr. Pryor would agree with that, but most of us wouldn’t. Why be concerned with something so insignificant as me?

Now the Psalmist felt the same way. He said, “What is man that thou art mindful of him? Or the Son of man that thou dost take thought of him? Oh Lord our Lord how majestic is thy name in all the earth!” Is not prayer an unwarranted intrusion into the infinite counsels? If God is doing all these great big things that he’s doing in the earth, he doesn’t want to be interrupted by me. So let’s try to answer that for a moment.

First, the answer of reason, Capital A in our outline. Now I think we could say a couple of things in answer to this. After having stated that, I want to go home and don’t want to pray anymore. It sounds very convincing. Well I think we could say a couple of things. First of all, I think we could say if prayer contradicts his perfections why does he urge it? If it is true to get down upon my knees it is a contradiction of his infinity, why is it God himself is the one who ask me to pray?

Now while my reasoning may seem very plain and clear it apparently is not acceptable to God. How can an infinite God enjoy in that which endangers his own perfections? It’s obvious if we could say nothing more we would have to admit that the

difficulty must lie in our ignorance and not in our knowledge. If we had the needed knowledge, the discrepancy would melt away like snow under the sun. So if all we knew was that this infinite God commanded us to pray, we would have to sweep aside the objections and say, “I don’t understand why he would be concerned with me but he has plainly exhorted me to pray and urged me to pray. There must be something in the mind of God that I don’t understand,” which by the way is true. [Laughter]

Now I think we can also say something else. The necessity of prayer is embedded in man’s moral constitution. Now I have a little chapter which Mr. Palmer wrote. And I have it with me and I’m going to take the liberty of reading this because it goes against a great deal of the theory of today and I’m not wise enough to know whether he is right or wrong. But I think there are some things that are expressed here that seem to be true to the little experience that I’ve had with this situation.

So I want to read you a few words that Dr. Palmer has said about prayer being embedded in the moral constitution of man. He says, “This view of prayer is a natural instinct was perhaps sufficiently presented in urging its universal obligations.” He’s speaking about here about something he has written previously. “It comes to the front again in rebuttal of the objection before us, affording the opportunity for other and fresh forms of illustrations. It fell to the writer’s lot to act for a number of years as one of a board of regents in an insane asylum. With no little astonishment, he discovered at least three fourths of the unhappy inmates unhinged upon the subject of religion.”

Now as you know often today in counseling, one of the first things that a psychiatrist does is to take your Bible away from you. He approached the intelligent and experienced superintendent with the question, “Is there anything in religion to unsettle man’s reason? If not, how come these crazy people to harp incessantly on religious themes.” His reply is quoted as happily illustrating the matter now in hand, “No sir. Man not withstanding his obstinate rejection of the divine authority is by the innermost law of his nature a religious being. One reason is upon the throne his doubts and fears his

anxieties and misgivings are under control. And his religious exercises are no further disclosed than it pleases him to reveal.

In other words, when we are in our own senses, we use our senses to hide the truth of our own being. But when reason is unshipped and the rect intellect drifts at the mercy of the waves, the great secret leaks out because the power of concealment is gone. Discovery is made that throughout his whole career the man’s religious nature has always secretly asserted itself. So far from religion having a tendency to unsettle human reason, its agency is employed in every regulated asylum in soothing those paroxysms of distress and fear with which these poor unfortunates are so often agitated.” That was the reply of the superintendent of the asylum. Now whether

that is true or not according to modern theory, I don’t know, but I do think there is a great deal in it. At least, we can say this; that prayer is embedded in man’s moral constitution. I think this is evident too when we consider a simple little exercise that everybody engages in before they are saved. You know what it is? Swearing. Very few people have not sworn. And the more the stress the more likely you are to swear.

Now I know some of you nice ladies do not swear and perhaps you have never swore. But most of these men have sworn. And I can remember when that was a great deal of the language of some. And I know in my own case, it was a significant part of my language before I was converted. I knew a man one time who was a lawyer. He was wonderfully converted. And he became an outstanding Christian man. He was known as Lawyer Bennett. He lived in New York City. I don’t know whether he’s still alive or not. I think he died a few years ago, but he had a tremendous testimony. He used to get up and say before I was saved I was a terrible character. And I want to tell you all parts of my life were bad. And my language was one of those things. He said, “After I was converted I didn’t have enough language left to order ham and eggs in a restaurant,” was one of his favorite statements he used to like to make. [Laughter]

Now you know here is an interesting thing. Why should a man who does not believe in God, who does not care about God, why should he in moments of stress fall into the language of prayer, for that really is what swearing is? When we say, “Go to hell,” what are we saying? Why we’re expressing a petition that we hope that God will carry out. It’s one of the ways by which ungodly men pray, swear. That’s right they pray. Their language is not quite the language of the prayers of the Bible. But then turn around, wait a minute perhaps it is. It’s almost like the language of the imprecatory prayers. In fact, there is very little difference between the swearing of the ungodly man and the imprecatory prayers of David in such Psalms as 69 and 109. If you don’t believe that read Psalm 109 tonight when you go home. Isn’t that an interesting thing? And furthermore, isn’t interesting that they invoke the attributes of God? They say, “Go to hell.”

Now I won’t say any worse petitions than that, worse prayers, but you know we frequently use the word, damn. Now, what is damn? Well it’s an expression of the attribute of retributive justice. That’s what it is. So what we are doing is we’re praying in the harmony with the retributive justice of God. And so when a man -- when all of the things that are about him which prevent him from expressing himself as he really is, when all of these are abiding he speaks sweetly, but when trials come and when difficulty come and when the angers come, then all of those things fall away and he prays in the language of the oath. Testimony to the fact that basic to the nature of man is prayer. The saints pray and the sinners pray. They pray different prayers but they both pray. No man can ever complain about the illogic of prayer who has ever sworn once because he’s already prayed. And he knows that deep down in his heart, he has prayed.

Well I think we can say one other thing. I won’t labor that point anymore. You just go home and think about it a little bit. Is size the test of significance? Our question is -- our problem is -- how can an infinite being concern himself with an insignificant finite creature? But is size the test of significance. If this were so, then when our Lord says, “Of

how much more value is man than a sheep?” The answer to that question would find its answer in the difference of the weight of the two animals. But we know, of course, that that is not true. The sheep may weigh a great deal more than man but God is concerned with men. Dan Crawford said the god of the infinite is the god of the infinitesimal. And so size is not a measure of significance. So I think that we can answer the question from the standpoint of reason. And point out that this objection of prayer just does not hold water. The answer of revelation is very plain.

Now let me just look at a couple of passages real quickly. Matthew chapter 6, verse 25 through verse 34. Why don’t you turn there, too. Matthew chapter 6, verse 25 through verse 34. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, “For this reason I say to you,” well I’ll wait for you to find it. Matthew chapter 6, verse 25. Verse 25. A couple of the deacons haven’t found it yet, but I’m going ahead,

“For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you

need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Well the answer is clear, that this infinite God does care for this insignificant little creature. As a matter of fact, he not only cares for me but he even cares for the lilies of the field and the birds and the other parts of his creation. And isn't it striking the way the Book of Jonah closes, because if there is one thing that strikes you as you finish that book it is not only the love of God for those who dwelt in the city of Nineveh but there is also expressed so vividly the affection that God has for all parts of his creation. “Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?” And that's the way the book ends.

Thompson has said, “If he numbers your hairs, will he not also your tears?” So the idea then that God is so infinite that he is not concerned with this little finite insignificant person is just not true to his revelation. So if we do not fully understand how this question should be answered, we know that it is an illegitimate question in the light of the direct revelation of the word of God. In the New Testament we read that Jesus puts forth his own and he calls his own sheep by name. So he knows me and he knows my name. He knows its S. Lewis Johnson Jr. and he knows what the “S” stands for too. And probably he has some special name for me according to the Book of Revelation. He has some special name that only he and I will know perhaps throughout all eternity like some of the things that I call my wife. Well let's go on. The second problem is the problem of the love of God.

Now, this one, I must confess, I have a little bit of a difficulty with and I'm going to state the problem again and seek briefly to answer it reasonably and from the

standpoint of revelation. The problem is similar -- as you can see we're still talking about attributes -- and so the problem is a similar one. Since God is loving, may we not rely on his love without petitioning him? Why do we have to ask him for things when we know that he loves us? And will he not do what his love demands? So if God is loving and we know he is loving, why don't we just rely on his love and do not bother him with petitions?

The answer of reason, of course, it is the glory of love to go to the needs of his own. And so in the meeting of the needs of the saints, God is, of course, expressing his love, but what about the petitions? Well now I only have one answer for this logically. This is one of those things -- when I get to heaven I'll get some further light on -- point to when I get heaven. But you know there cannot really exist love between people if there is no fellowship, no intercourse, no interchange, no interplay of personality. There is no such thing as a person who loves another but who does not have any relationship, any mutual relationship.

Now

we could think of a God who loved us and to whom we need not speak of anything, but who would always meet all of our needs. And we just considered him as a kind of a third party objectively over there. But that really is not love. Who can love someone else truly or how can two people love one another in that way? It cannot be done. So in the very nature of love, it seems to me there must be this relationship back and forth and it is true he does meet all of my needs but at the same time, I express to him my praise, my thanksgiving, my worship, my petitions.

Well if I cannot completely answer

that by reason, I think we could answer it by the word of God because there is no question again about the revelation. The God of love has urged petitions. He has urged us to ask specifically. Notice James chapter 4, verses 2 and 3. James 4, verses 2 and 3. "You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your

pleasures.” ‘You do not have because you do not ask; not asking means not receiving. You do not have because you do not ask.’ Those are the word of God. So I must say I may be ignorant of all of the aspects of this but the Bible is clear. I must ask a God of love in my petitions.

Now, third, the problem of the omniscience of God. This problem is again a similar problem because we’re dealing with the attributes. Now let me phrase the problem this way. Since God is omniscient, since he knows everything, why inform him of matters, which have already had his attention? Since God is omniscient why tell him about things that he already has full information on?

Now let me turn to Matthew chapter 6, verse 8, and you will see that this question is a question rises naturally out of the Bible itself. Chapter 6, verse 8 of the Book of Matthew, again our Lord’s sermon on the mount, “therefore so do not be like them -- the heathen, the Gentiles -- for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him,” look at verse 5,

“When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues -- and in the church services and round the Lord’s table -- and on the street corners.” (I’ve added a few phrases there [Laughter]) “So that they may be seen by men -- and in order to be heard by men and in order to have your theology approved by the brethren who listen -- Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”

Now then, why pray? It’s obvious Jesus would not accept my reasoning. Do you know why? If Lord -- if I were there -- if Lord, I speak for Peter, if Lord the Father knows everything that we’re going to ask for before we ask, why pray? Did you notice the very next word of our Lord, verse 9? Pray then in this way. So it’s obvious that he may say your Father knows what you have need of before you ask but at the same time urge us to pray. So in the mind of our Lord, there’s no objections.

Well let me try to answer this by reason. One may deduce in a feeble attempt to explain, that, which lies deep in the inscrutability of the person of God, these things. First, the fact that God knows our petitions before we offer them does not mean that it is impossible for him to take pleasure in our use of them before him. As a matter of fact, even though he may know what I ask him when I come to him with my petitions, that is a sign of my confidence in him. It is an express of my confidence in him. And though he may know what I’m going to ask, he surely does, my goodness he knew what I was going to ask before I was born, and as we have studied in the attributes, those of you that were here, you know that God not only knows everything that is coming to pass but the reason he knows it is because he has predetermined it the futuristics experts notwithstanding. He has determined it. And yet he calls upon us to pray. And so when I respond to him it is the mark of confidence in him. He gets a great deal of pleasure out of it for that reason. Another thing I think I can say, the asking is still moral evidence of fitness to receive for it indicates submission to his will. It’s not only that I have confidence in him that I bring these things to him but I am also submitting myself to him when I get down upon my knees and say, “Oh Lord, do this or do that.” I’m acknowledging I cannot do it. And I’m acknowledging that I think he can.

Peter Wolf, who has written a book on prayer, has said, “You may know a neighbor is in want and be most anxious to help him and yet he may in his present state of mind be so indifferent to his poverty as to make it quite as much worth your while to

throw your help away.” So it is important that our attitude to God be right. Let me say another thing too.

Third, and answer reasonably, the denial of prayer and praise would cancel all of the religious life. If he is infinitely perfect and we are his creature, is it not common upon us to reverence him? Well how do I reverence him? By saying nothing to him? By never praising him? By never worshipping him? Shall I just put him in my mind as the infinite eternal God and again just think of him impersonally in what Bacon terms “the dry light of the understanding?” Is that the way in which a man is respond to the infinite God or do in my acknowledgement of him as the infinite eternal omniscient God who not only knows everything but has predetermined it, is it the proper response to keep him off in some objective beyond or is it my responsibility and is it my natural response to lean upon him and to worship him and to praise him and to thank him personally. What’s natural? Why our creatureship and our redemption surely demand that we respond in praise, worship, thanksgiving, communion, all of the things that make up prayer. A God who gave all of these wonderful blessings but gave no corresponding object to whom we were to respond. No outlet for worship or praise, why that would frustrate man. If he’s given us all these wonderful things and we couldn’t say anything about it, how ridiculous can you be? So I think it’s rather reasonable that I should return worship, praise, thanksgiving to God.

Now on a much lower level you know, I think, as I’ve often said people are sick who do not praise. Now just to get down on the lowest possible level. Think about the Dallas Cowboys. [Laughter] And you’re out in the football stadium and Staubach hands off to Duane Thomas. And he cuts through a hole, cuts out toward the sidelines, breaks down the sidelines and runs sixty-five yards for a touchdown. And so I look over to the friend with whom I have gone out to the game and I just say -- and he looks at me and we wait for the kickoff. Why you know something’s enough. [Laughter]

I’m either sick or he’s sick or have no understanding of football totally, totally no understanding. You know exactly what we say. We jump up into the air, we shout and then we tell each other what we’ve just seen. [Laughter] “Hey did you see that? Did you see that cocky man? Did you see that?” In other words, praise is the sign of health. And praise of God is the sign of health. And to imagine a God who blesses us with all these wonderful blessings that he has blessed us with and then we have no opportunity whatsoever to say anything to him, no way to respond. Why we would be sick and totally frustrated. So the denial of prayer and praise would cancel all of the spiritual life. There could be no spiritual life. Finally, in answer to that, the denial of prayer is based on a misconception of its office. Prayer is not a suggestion that I, an independent person, make to God as if we are people on equal terms.

Now, Lord -- I speak as S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. -- I’d like to make a suggestion to you that you do so and so. [Laughter] It is an empty creature who leans upon a bountiful creator. It does not contradict or contravene. It does not conflict with a single attribute of God. As a matter of fact, all of my prayer builds upon the attributes of God, because he is omniscient I can come and pray, because he is loving, I pray, because he is the infinite God, I pray. All of the things that the man who doesn’t understand the truth poses as problem to prayer, I say are the basis of prayer. That’s the very reason I go to God. I don’t go to Howard Pryor. I don’t go to Harry Huntsinger. I go to an omniscient God. I go to an infinite God. I go to a loving God. For the very reason that he is this kind of God. So the things that they think hinder prayer, those are the things that encourage prayer for me.

As a matter of fact, if it were true that these objections contravene prayer, then the same objection can be lodged against every act of the human nature and will. We could do nothing because God knows everything. You couldn’t do anything. You not only could not pray. You couldn’t do anything else. Linski, the Lutheran commentator, has said on a passage in John, “He who would say to God only what God does not yet know

would never have anything to say.” [Laughter] And the same would be true of the farmer who tilled the soil. He might say God is a loving God. He cares for me why should I bother to till the soil. He’ll bring the fruit up. He’ll enable me to make my crop. Why should I bother to work? God’s a loving God. He will provide. The answer of revelation is simple.

I want you to turn with me for just a moment. I was reading Psalm 139 this afternoon and by the way, are you reading the Bible? I’m on page 778 now. I’m enjoying it. This is not a bad translation. Psalm 139, and I want you to notice now these statements about the omniscience of God and then I want you to notice what the psalmist does in the light of the omniscience of God. If God is an omniscient God and knows everything, why should we bother him with things he already knows about?

Well let’s listen to the psalmist, verse 1, Psalm 139, “LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all.” Look it there. Every word thou hast enclosed me behind and before and layed thy hand upon me such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it’s too high I cannot obtain to it; I’m never going to pray again. [Laughter]

And I notice right here verse 23, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.” And not only that but we have also an expression of a desire for judgment, verse 14, “I will give thanks to You -- this is praise -- for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.” He couldn’t help but express his praise because he’s healthy, verse 17, “How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!” Then notice verse 19, “O that You would slay the wicked, O God,” so you see then the psalmist who believed

in the omniscience of God and the omnipresence of God, he prays. He sees no contradiction.

Now I think there are a couple of things we can learn from prayer and the omniscience of God. Since he knows everything that means that our prayer ought to be brief. No need to labor the point. That’s what our Lord was speaking about when he said don’t pray as the heathen do. Be repetitious about it. Go ahead and say it once. And since he knows all, our prayers ought to be humble, offered in the spirit of submission to a wiser mind. We don’t come dictating things to God. We pray like Jesus prayed. Not as I will but as God will.

Well let me conclude. So we’ll have five minutes for questions. I do not want to minimize in any way the greatness of God. Isaiah says concerning him that he is the high lofty one that inhabited eternity. But let’s remember the geometry of prayer. The directions, the distance, the dimensions and the measurements of it differ from the material world. One breath of prayer may span the spaces.

Augustine said, “Wouldst thou pray in this temple then pray within thyself for thou thyself art the true temple of the living God.” And are greater than Augustine said, “Believe me the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this realm and yet at Jerusalem worship Father. The hour cometh and there he is when the true worshipper shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. It is the most amazing privilege that I with one breath may span all the space that exist between man and God. And have my own petitions, petitions of insignificant me, enter a court of the eternal one and have them get his ear.” Now what a tremendous incentive to pray. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for these promises. And Lord let not the practical significance of these things escape us. May we pray because of what Thou art, not merely in spite of it, for Jesus sake. Amen.

[Questions] Now, I have a just a few minutes. Does someone have a question or so? They close the meeting at 8:31. Yes, sir.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Can I hold that question off because I think that is going to come up and I don’t want to anticipate too much. The question is, “Does God hear the prayer of a Christian who is out of fellowship with the Lord?” We’ll also seek to consider to some extent, “Does God hear the prayer of an unsaved person,” because there are some indications in the Bible of a few of those prayers that do seem to be heard by God. We will consider that too. But that will come up when we talk about answers to prayer. Any other questions?

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Statement is if we said that God could not answer such a prayer, we would be limiting God? No, it’s not wrong. It’s not wrong at all. There may be a time when a parking place is the difference between life and death. I’m not thinking about the Cowboy games either when I said that. [Laughter] No, there may be petitions even more insignificant than that. Yes sir.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Of course, I’m not going to speak about the specific illustration that you have brought up because it is not God’s will that all men be saved to start with. But assuming something that we know is his will there is more to it than that and again this is another thing that we will take up but let me answer it just briefly. It is not only God’s will that certain things come to pass. But it is also his will that they come to pass through certain means. And so not only is the end ordained by God, but the means and thus often our prayer is the link by which those things are accomplished. So to pray for something that is God’s will, of course, is the greatest incentive of prayer. But it is also within the wisdom of God that prayer be the means of the accomplishment of it. We will consider that further. Last question, yes?

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] No, I don’t think. No, well that’s a difficult question you’ve raised.

One that’s very difficult for me too. And I don’t know that there’s any -- I’ve never ran across a satisfactory answer that distinguishes those parables that Jesus tells in which there is apparently exhortation to continuing earnestly in prayer. For example, the man that came and knocked on the house and asked for loaves of bread as one commentator said, “Til the dogs started barking at him for staying there so long,” but in the context of that passage, I think, in Matthew chapter 6 the point is, at one point in your prayer, on one occasion don’t repeat over and over and over the same petition.

Now there may be occasions on which it is necessary to pray more than once for things that God puts on your heart. I don’t think that it’s necessarily wrong. But that prayer must be guided by the Holy Spirit.

All right our meeting is over. It’s time to go. Next Tuesday we will consider the question, does prayer change an unchanging God, and we will finish our study of prayer and the attributes.