

Prayer

Dr. David Shaw (Notes from Tim Keller)

One of the most basic things that the gospel does is change prayer from mere petition to fellowship and the praise of his glory. Galatians 4:6, 7 teaches us that when we believe the gospel, we not only become God's children legally, but we receive the Spirit in order to experience our son ship.

Prayer Pathologies

1. Our prayers can have light without heat. We can have long lists on things we pray for and yet have no fire. Why? If we lose focus on the glory of God in the gospel as the solution to all our problems, then we devolve into a set of "grocery list" prayer robots. Our "issues" should be placed in proper perspective. "Lord, I ask this thing because I think it will bring you glory."
2. On the other hand, our prayers can have heat without light. Heat without light prayer always begins with and contains people trying by their own effort to inject drama and emotion into their praying. People who pray this way use a lot of warfare imagery and claim things right and left. Ironically, while attempting to avoid the problems associated with "legalistic list prayer people," heat without light prayer people suffer from a similar problem – they have a serious misunderstanding of the gospel. There is a sense that all prayer is answered because of the faith of the person praying.

The Cure

How can we practically move toward a gospel-centered prayer life that aims primarily at knowing God? MEDITATION AND COMMUNION. The closest analogy to meditating is the way a person reads a love letter. In this case, the love letter is the Bible. You tear it open and you weigh every word. Augustine saw this as having three parts:

1. Distill the truths of Scripture and hold them centrally in your mind.
2. Gazing at God through the truths you hold centrally in your mind.
 - What does this tell me about God?
 - How can I praise Him for and through this?
 - How can I humble myself before Him for and through this?
 - If He is really like this, what difference does this particular truth make to how I live today?
 - What wrong behavior, harmful emotions, false attitudes result in me when I forget He is like this?
 - How should my neighborhood, my family, my church, my friends be different if they saw it deeply?
 - Does my life demonstrate that I am remembering and acting out of this?
 - Lord, what are you trying to tell me about you, and why do you want me to know it now – today?
3. Delighting and relishing in God

You begin to actually praise and confess and aspire toward Him on the basis of the digested and meditated truth.