

Exposing How Christians Can Pervert Prayer

A Renovation Challenge

My husband had initiated a large remodeling project in 2003 to update our church building. It was desperately needed as our facility had received little attention since the 1950s. We had terrible, dim lighting; gold-colored theater-style chairs (that smelled!); old musty, green carpet; a huge pipe organ system; metallic-gold wallpaper on the sanctuary's largest wall; and other memorabilia from that long gone era.

Also worth mentioning was the cracked exterior paint, the slippery cement lobby floor, the stair wells that led to nowhere and the missing foundations on parts of the building. It all had to go! As a church, we managed to successfully complete our renovation to a more functional, high-tech and visually aesthetic facility with many families making deep sacrifices to make this happen.

Our biggest issue during the remodel was our city's building department. They approved our construction plans and then reneged on their approval *after* we began construction. Our entire sanctuary had been gutted and now they wanted more safety features to the tune of several hundred thousand dollars. If we didn't comply, they threatened to inspect our extensive building for even more code violations. It felt like extortion and put us in a terrible financial bind. By the grace of God we got through it, but as a new prayer community, we began to pray a simple prayer not realizing the ramifications.

All we asked the Lord to do was to "change the building department." We were not their first victims and so we felt justified in this prayer. For myself personally, I was in a

state of unforgiveness, angry and wanted some type of justice. We kept that prayer before the Lord continuously and didn't let it go. About a year later, we heard the news: The entire building department, including tenured members, had been laid off. That seemed totally impossible given the culture of our city government.

Think About What You Pray

I learned a very valuable lesson during that season. We need to think about what we pray before we pray it. We actually prayed a prayer out of our own heart without bothering to seek the Lord's heart, and yet that prayer still materialized.

Is it possible to pray a prayer that doesn't align to the heart of God and still have it come to pass? The answer is yes! We are more powerful than we think and we've been authorized by God Himself to govern the affairs of earth through our prayers (Is. 56:7; Matt. 6:10).

Does God personally answer our prayers if they don't originate in Him? He does! Many things we pray for really have to do with our own preferences, but don't necessarily cause a negative chain reaction. For example, you might pray for a closer parking spot at the local mall for safety reasons or you simply don't want to walk the distance. Or you might pray for better weather on a day you have something important going on such as a ministry outreach or an outdoor wedding. These are prayers that we ask based on personal preferences and God graciously answers many of these with His favor.

Then there are prayers that we ask out of our own "selfishness, anger or trying to bend the will of another." For example, the Israelites began to complain and weep for meat to eat saying, "We remember ... we ate freely in Egypt" (Num. 11:5). The Lord was very displeased with their complaining, but still answered them with 30 straight days of meat raining in their camps.

With the endless supply of meat, the Bible says He also sent them “leanness of soul” (Ps. 106:15). In other words, their souls diminished in the knowledge of God instead of growing in knowledge of Him because they prayed with a despising heart. This tells us the importance of having a right heart in prayer. Our “reasons” for asking things are just as important as what we are asking for.

Don't Command the Wrong Kingdom

I heard someone pray one time, “Lord, if this person keeps drinking, just make them sick!” There was a day I wouldn't have thought much about that, but my experience with the building department taught me better.

What does “sick” look like? If that person takes a drink, do they get cancer or something? Do they throw up? Get ulcers? Does God answer a prayer like that? Or, does it bargain unaware with the demonic kingdom to try and manipulate someone's behavior? Jesus did something quite unusual in John 13. Satan had just taken possession of Judas and then Jesus says to him, “What you do, do quickly” (John 13:27).

In other words, Jesus commands Satan to now proceed with the plan of the cross, knowing Satan couldn't execute Him unless He permitted it. Jesus only did that once, but scenes like this instruct us about the spiritual realm. When we don't know the written Word, when we don't carry our Father's heart, we can slip into prayers of anger and manipulation. These prayers have the potential to move the wrong kingdom into motion.

Jesus' disciples experienced rejection by a certain Samaritan village and reported it to Jesus. They asked if they should command fire to come and consume the village like Elijah did (see Luke 9:51-54). I'm amazed at their level of faith—they believed they could actually command fire, but instead of praise they got a swift rebuke: “You don't know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy

men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:55-56). Notice that Jesus didn't say their "command" couldn't happen. What He addressed, however, was their wrong heart and their wicked desire to kill off an entire village.

Have you ever felt like the disciples did after being rejected by someone? Did you even suggest to God they should be punished for what they did to you? These are normal feelings, and we've all experienced them. We struggle to balance our feelings with the redemptive heart of Christ when we are mad, disgusted, appalled or experience injustice.

Regardless, we are exhorted to pray and intercede "for all people" (1 Tim. 2:1). Praying "for all people" is not praying just for the people you like. It's praying for the people you don't like, believing they will turn from darkness to light and live victoriously for Jesus Christ.

Become Agents of Redemption

I sat in a conference one day next to a middle-aged woman who began to share her story with me. She had been a children's pastor at a church and felt she had discerned her pastor's wife as operating in a Jezebel spirit. It's a very involved teaching, but in short, a Jezebel spirit can be characterized by manipulation, control, sexual sin and a counterfeit prophetic gifting. It's a very serious accusation.

This children's pastor began to pray and ask others to pray with her about the Jezebel spirit controlling her pastor's wife. She believed that she had also found proof that her pastor's wife had this evil spirit and gave her evidence to the church board and a denominational oversight committee. Sadly, the board and the denominational committee agreed and removed the pastor and the pastor's wife from their pulpit.

My mouth fell open as she described this, because it was obvious what had really happened. She had become offended at

her pastor and his wife. She chose to use prayer, accusation and even “prophetic” words to remove them from their pulpit. How did she succeed? In anger and ignorance, she commanded the wrong kingdom and actually succeeded in getting her will accomplished.

Hearts that are aligned with Jesus and His unfailing love will not pray to wound, sicken or destroy another person ever. Remember that there is no justifiable offense in the kingdom of God. This doesn’t mean we don’t exercise wisdom in our natural relationships and have good boundaries with evil people.

When it comes to prayer, however, we consider the spirit of the matter and become agents of redemption instead. We pray for resurrection life to flow into their dead places. We pray for the blood of Jesus to cleanse their hearts of every evil tendency. We bind demonic spirits from using them as hosts for evil. We ask Holy Spirit to hover over them and birth His kingdom into their hearts. We pray passionately, but we pray wisely. We bless and do not curse.

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