

22. Confidence in Prayer and Our Conscience

Contributed by LG Parkhurst Jr
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Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. -- 1 John 3:21,22

Dr. Schaeffer taught that for Christians prayer in its simplest form was asking, "Up, Daddy, up." Through faith in Jesus Christ, God becomes our Heavenly Father, and since Jesus said "Abba, Father" when He prayed, so can His brothers and sisters (Mark 14:36). The Apostle Paul confirmed this when he wrote: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father'" (Romans 8:15).

"Abba" means "Daddy," and is a child's name for father. Christians must come to God as His little children, humbly seeking God's will for their lives and expecting their Heavenly Father to meet their real needs. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encouraged His disciples to seek only the best from God and assured them that God would give them only good and perfect gifts (Matthew 7:9-11).

Daily prayer, and especially days of fasting, give us the opportunity to show God or discover for ourselves whether God or what He gives is most important to us. Do we fast and pray only for God's gifts and our daily bread? Or do we fast and pray because we love God and delight in being with Him? Do we always go to our Heavenly Father with our hands out for the things He can give? Or do we most often go with our hands up, asking just to sit in His presence and enjoy His fellowship? Times of fasting and prayer enable God to show us the true state of hearts: do we love God for who He is, or just for what He gives?

In true prayer, we must lift up holy hands to God. Just as an earthly father wearing a white, starched shirt would prefer not to pick up his child when his hands are muddy, and would ask him to go wash them first, so our Heavenly Father wants us to come to Him with hands that have been cleansed from all sin. And He has provided the One who will do the cleansing, even His own Son, Jesus Christ. In our prayers, we need to ask Jesus to create a clean heart within us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, so we are fit to come into our Heavenly Father's presence (Psalm 51:10). However, this is not a magic act. Jesus expects us to repent of our sins, to forsake all known sins, and to ask Him to free us from bondage to any sins. Jesus expects us to ask Him to fill us with the Holy Spirit so we are empowered to overcome all temptations moment by moment.

When we obey God and do what pleases Him, our hearts will not condemn us and we will have confidence in prayer. Long times spent in prayer will enable God to reveal to us the true state of our hearts. In 1 John 3:21,22, the word "heart" means "conscience." If our conscience does not condemn us, then we can come to God in prayer with the confidence that He will hear us and give us our requests. A clear conscience will give us confidence when we pray.

God taught the Schaeffers and others through L'Abri that they needed to obey Him and pray much each day to keep a clean conscience and always have clean hands when they prayed. This meant they needed to pray moment by moment for the knowledge of God's will and the power to do it. One of the best ways to maintain a clean conscience is to keep reminding ourselves, "The only thing I want is to please God and bring Him happiness;" and then to ask God, "Show me what you want me to do, and I will do it without hesitation. Empower me, so you will be glorified by my actions." To maintain a good conscience, we need to dedicate ourselves each day to doing all the will of God we know without a hint of rebellion, and do all that we have committed ourselves to do before the Lord.

Francis and Edith Schaeffer were not legalistic. Because they truly loved God, they were determined to keep a clean conscience even in the little things. In this way, they knew they would also always have access to God, especially in times of need or with special concerns for others. Because they loved God and sought to please Him, they wanted to fulfill all the conditions that God has set forth in the Bible as reasons for answering prayer. For example, even now, if Edith writes a letter and says that she will pray for someone, she stops at that moment so she and her secretary can pray for that person. In this way, times of simply dictating letters become little prayer meetings. God taught the Schaeffers to be faithful in the small things so they would be prepared for the awesome responsibilities of L'Abri. Jesus said, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much" (Luke 16:10). In founding L'Abri, God knew Francis and Edith Schaeffer could be trusted with much, because over the years they had proved faithful in the little things and were willing to always have a "little" work if that were God's will for them.

The Apostle Paul had power in prayer because he too kept a good conscience. When on trial, "Paul looked straight at the

Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day" (Acts 23:1). And later he declared, "I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man" (Acts 24:16). When he wrote to the Christians in Rome, he said that he depended on his conscience and the Holy Spirit to commend or condemn his behavior: "I speak the truth in Christ--I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 9:1). To maintain an open communication with God, we must seek to do His will not because we fear punishment but because we love Him and want to keep a clear conscience (Romans 13:5). And yet, the Bible teaches that our conscience will not be our final judge, for Paul wrote, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Corinthians 4:4).

Our prayers must include asking God to give us a tender conscience--even in the small things--so we will not disobey Him in anything or commit any sins of omission. We cannot rely only on our conscience, but need to ask the Lord to show us His estimation of our character so we can make needed changes. To have power in prayer, we need to believe that neither the Lord nor our conscience condemns us, and that we have clean hands and pure motives when asking "Up, Daddy, up." Spending real time in prayer will enable God to show us if we have any impure or mixed motives, so we can make unselfish requests that He will honor.

We will miss the lessons God wants us to learn if we do not take this seriously: "Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 1:12; 4:2). Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, help me spend time in self-evaluation so I can see myself as you see me. Help me live each day so my conscience will be a more reliable guide. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

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