

# **“I Will Pray with the Understanding”**

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction: (Conclusion) Previously:

- Jesus' instructions for prayer apply to public prayers
- All prayer must be offered to God with great reverence
- We're told to go to God with boldness, but boldness is not arrogance
- All prayer is an act of worship and must exalt God
- All prayer, public or private, must be an expression of faith, not a ritual
- The one who words the prayer leads the congregation. The prayer he leads must represent those being lead.
- The one who leads in public prayer must consider how it affects the hearers.
- You are not leading if no one is following. No one can follow if they cannot hear what is being said.
- Those who ask others to lead prayer must recognize the importance of what they are asking of them.
- Call on them with notice so they can prepare what they will say.
- The audience has a mandated responsibility to pray with the leader.

## **III. PUBLIC PRAYER IS ALWAYS ADDRESSED TO GOD**

- A. One must never lead a prayer to draw attention to himself; he is servant who should have checked his ego at the door
  1. Even though the audience must be considered, prayer is always directed to God - Matt. 6:5
  2. Do not use an approach the hearers will find distracting.
  3. Like a good sermon, do not make the prayer exceptionally long or short.
- B. Every word in the prayer must be addressed from the speaker's heart to God.
  1. Prayer is not the way to communicate with anyone in the audience.
  2. Don't preach, admonish, or rebuke in your prayer.
- C. The repetitious use of memorized phrases is not prayer; it is performance.
  1. Most of the memorized phrases used by brethren in the Lord's church were coined by Daniel Sommer over 100 years ago in opposition to denominational prayers. The irony is that it has become the catechism of churches of Christ. Talk to God; don't recite a memorized prayer nor use clichéd prayer phrases
  2. Often new Christians pray more from the heart than the seasoned leaders. Prayer must be a sincere expression of the heart of a servant to his Master.

## **IV. PUBLIC PRAYER IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE OCCASION**

- A. It will never be true that one prayer fits all occasions
  1. At a funeral, it is inappropriate to pray for national leaders. At the Lord's Table, it is inappropriate to pray for the sick. A closing prayer closes; a communion prayer blesses the bread and the disciples, a prayer of thanksgiving thanks and praises the Lord.

2. Prayers must express the heart of that group for that specific purpose. When a congregation is grieving, grief and comfort is in their prayers.
- B. When someone responds to the invitation, prayers are about their needs.
  1. The prayer for the penitent disciple must be specific and appropriate to the need, personal to the respondent, and brief. Don't use it to double as the dismissal prayer too
  2. The prayer must focus on God's role on the occasion and consider the effect it will have on the respondent and all who hear.
- C. Christians are often asked to lead public prayers outside the assembly.
  1. When we eat at a restaurant, we give thanks for our food. And if you don't, shame on you. "I don't want to put on a show." Translates literally to "I am embarrassed for strangers to discover I am a Christian."
    - a. Jesus gave thanks for the food before feeding the 5,000; how many of them were Christians? - Luke 9:16
  2. When called on in a civic gathering, remember that you are still praying to God and leading the hearers. Pray sincerely, unashamedly, faithfully, and appropriate to the occasion
  3. When praying in a religious gathering outside of the Lord's Church, please understand that a refusal communicates just as much as the words you would say in the prayer
    - a. Be faithful to the truth, but avoid being judgmental or condescending - Col. 4:5-6
    - b. What is the need of the group? Pray for it.

#### Conclusion:

- A. When we are called on to lead a prayer, remember it is an honor, privilege, and a grave responsibility
- B. A public prayer is unlike anything else we do in the assembly. It is often difficult to keep one's spirit directed toward God, pray from the heart, and consider the audience.
  1. We must give our responsibility serious thought.
  2. We must bring our hearts as well as those of the audience before God.
  3. We must prepare ourselves to do well.
  4. Frequent private prayer is the best preparation for public prayer.
  5. We develop our comfort zone for prayer in the closet on our knees.
- C. You prepare to lead other Christians in prayer by being a Christian whose life is a light for others to follow.
  1. "You can speak with spiritual eloquence and a holy appearance when you pray publically, but it is your behavior that will reveal your true character." (Steve Maraboli)