

2016

“I Feel No Need to Pray!”

by Bill Lockwood

Few of us put it as crassly as the title above. However, what happens is this. I may affirm generally the importance of prayer in my life but treat it as non-important by passing over the practice of it.

What is God’s response? If Christians who shelter beneath such self-assurance do not learn better ways by listening to the Scriptures, God may address them in the terrible language of tragedy. We serve a God who delights to disclose himself to the contrite, to the lowly of heart, to the meek. When God finds us so puffed up that we do not feel our need for him, it is an act of kindness on his part to take us down a peg or two; it would be an act of judgment to leave us in our vaulting self-esteem.

This lesson is found in many passages. Consider the Gibeonite deception recorded in Joshua 9. At this point the people of God have witnessed God’s power in the crossing of the Jordan and in the destruction of Jericho. After a setback occasioned by Achan’s sin, they have by God’s power and wisdom overpowered Ai (Joshua 7-8). At that point in Israel’s history, the people of Gibeon approach, wearing old clothes and dilapidated sandals, and carrying moldy bread to generate the illusion they have come from a great distance. They pretend they are not part of the corrupt tribes of the land whom the Israelites have been ordered to drive out, but foreigners who simply want to secure a peace treaty with Israel because Israel is perceived to be a rising power.

What was Israel’s response? “The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord. Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath” (9:14-15).

D.A. Carson remonstrates, “What a damning indictment! Yet could not the text be paraphrased somewhat and applied to many of us? ‘John Smith weighed the alternative employment opportunities before him, but did not inquire of the Lord.’ ‘Jane Smith sought a lot of advice before she made her decision, but did not inquire of the Lord.’” Or, how about this one? The Iowa Park church of Christ formed a committee to explore the approaches to evangelizing their community, but it did not inquire of the Lord.

We all come to critical points in our lives, in our ministry, service, family development, vocation, and places to live. “[B]ecause we have enjoyed spiritual victories in the past,” we may “approach these matters with sophisticated criteria but without prayer. ...As a result we may repeatedly stumble and fall, because although we have exercised all our intellectual ingenuity we have not sought God’s face, we have not begged him for his wisdom.”