

Prayer is Powerful and Effective

By Senior Pastor Prince Guneratnam

James says, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).

There are three kinds of righteousness. The first is self-righteousness. A self-righteous person depends on his works. He does not need to believe in God, he has good principles and he could even be religious and generous. But the Bible tells us in Isaiah 64:6, that “all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” This kind of righteousness cannot stand in the presence of God. An example of this is Cain, who believed in his own good works and was rejected by God.

The second of righteousness also depends on works. It is a righteousness in which a person tries to justify himself by being religious. He buffets himself by putting hooks or piecing his body and does all kinds of things as a penance for his sins. Jesus describes this type of righteousness as being religious. The Scribes and the Pharisees were like this for they were very concerned about keeping the letter of the law. Religiosity cannot make us righteous before God. Romans 3:10 tells us, “There is no one righteous, not even one.” Romans 3:23 says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

There is a third kind of righteousness and this is the only kind that is acceptable to God. We cannot boast about it because it is not something we can produce by ourselves. It is the righteousness that comes by faith as we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We simply accept the finished work of Jesus who died on the cross. There is no other way we can be saved except by accepting the Son of God as our Sin-bearer or Saviour. The Bible says, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Righteousness begins in your heart. In Abraham’s time, there was no law to qualify him as righteous. He only had a believing heart. Because of his faith, he was considered righteous before God.

Romans 10:9 and 10 say, “if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believed in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” If we believe in our hearts and confess our faith in the Lord Jesus, He will cleanse us from our sins. Therefore, there is nothing we can do to merit righteousness. It begins with the heart of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We continue to be righteous by being filled with the Holy Spirit daily and living in obedience of the Word of God. The Bible says, “Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit” (Zechariah 4:6).

What makes a person unclean? Jesus had an answer to this question. He said that it was not what entered a man from outside that made him ‘unclean’ but what came out of him (Mark 7:18, 20). “For from within, out of man’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean” (Mark 7:21-23). Therefore, doing good deeds does not necessarily make a person righteous, for “the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

What defiles a man does not come from the outside but from inside. Righteousness begins with the heart. Is your heart right with God? If you want prayers to be powerful and effective, you need to be righteous before God. How can you be righteous? David gives us the answer – it is a clean heart. His secret is found in Psalms 139:23, 24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts, see if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.” David understood that righteousness had to start from the heart. He was known as the man after God’s own heart. We can note five things in the prayer. Firstly, he asked God to search his heart. Secondly, he allowed God to test him. Thirdly, he demonstrated humility and courage in praying this prayer. Fourthly, he had a real hunger and thirst for God. Finally, this is a personal prayer. Each of us needs to come personally before God. No one can do this on our behalf.

(All the above quotations are from the New International Version.)