

“SUPPLICATION”

Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications.
(Psalms 130:2 NKJV)

Supplication is related to the word supple. It refers to bending of the knees. When I was in England I attended a group called Young Life. In the middle of the week there was a prayer meeting and Bible study. When they prayed the men got down on their knees beside their chair. In no time at all my knees would start hurting. They were not supple at all. Sometimes the prayer time lasted almost an hour!

The word supplication has had several meanings. Its basic meaning is the request by a lesser person in an unequal relationship. At Oxford University supplication is the final stage of submitting a thesis. When I had completed my studies for Doctor of Ministry, I took my dissertation to Erskine Theological Seminary to have my oral exams and defend my dissertation. The dissertation was “The Use of Prayer In Pastoral Ministry.” One of my advisors was leafing through the dissertation, looked up and said, “What is supplication?” “I’m not sure I know.” “You had better know before you go into that room for your oral exam.”

A good argument could be made for saying that intercession and supplication are the same thing. The acronym A.C.T.S. stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. On the other hand Paul seems to make a distinction between intercession and supplication in this instruction:

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, (1 Timothy 2:1 NKJV)

When I began writing this sermon I thought supplications were prayers for ourselves, but I learned it is our attitude in prayer.

1.) The use of the word supplication in the Bible.

The word supplication or supplications is used 60 times in the Bible in 58 verses. The words pray or prayers are used together with it in 31 of those verses. Seven times supplication is used with the words crying out to the Lord and three times it used together with weeping.

One person can make supplication to another person. A man kneeling before a woman to propose marriage is supplicating. Three times in the Bible it is used of someone petitioning the king, another time a delegation brings supplication to Jeremiah, and there is a prophecy of the heathen nations making supplication to Israel.

The word means that literally or figuratively a person falls down on their knees in prayer before God. We have an example of this in a prayer in which Solomon uses the word supplication ten times:

And so it was, when Solomon had finished praying all this prayer and supplication to the LORD, that he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven. (1 Kings 8:54 NKJV)

I wonder what effect it would have on our prayers if we kneeled when we pray. Some churches still have kneelers and I think the Episcopalians and Catholics kneel for some of their prayers. I have always asked elders and deacons who were being ordained to kneel, and adults who were being baptized.

I'll never forget those prayer meetings in York, England. My knees cried out in pain, but never have I participated in prayer meetings nor prayed alone when I felt so close to God's throne, so confident that my prayers were heard by God, so real the presence of God's Holy Spirit. We bow our heads when we pray to show our inferior position before God's majesty. Why not bow our whole bodies before Him?

2.) The obstacles to sincere supplication in our prayers.

There are at least three aspects of the religious role and the secular role in our lives that are in conflict. Remember Paul's words:

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. (Galatians 5:17 NKJV)

In the flesh we are ambitious. We dream, plan, and strive with all our might to achieve our dreams whether it is a lovely home with a white picket fence, two cars in the garage, and children playing. Or the dreams may be to rise in our vocation or profession and achieve things we can be proud of. In our spirit too many of us think that we have to pour out our hearts in prayer. Being humble before God doesn't mean asking Him to help you be satisfied with being a loser. Share your grandest dreams with God. Tell Him the things that you really want, not what you think sounds pious. Don't go to God with a lie in your mouth. Tell Him the dreams that really get you excited. Ask Him to help you.

In the flesh we demand instant gratification. More often than not we have to wait on the Lord. He doesn't want you to run into His throne room, excitedly tell Him what you want to do, and run back out without hearing what He wants you to do. The purpose of prayer is to allow God to revise and reform and turn your plans until they are in conformity with God's plans.

In the flesh we saddle ourselves with debt before we are sure what God's will is for our lives. We do not know what God would have provided, because we have already got what we wanted on credit. Although the times of easy credit seem to be fading away, easy credit made it all too easy for Christians to run ahead of God.

3.) Solomon's prayer shows situations when only supplication avails.

1 Kings 8

28 "Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today:

29 "that Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, 'My name shall be there,' that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place.

30 "And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive.

31 "When anyone sins against his neighbor, and is forced to take an oath, and comes and takes an oath before Your altar in this temple,

32 "then hear in heaven, and act, and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked, bringing his way on his head, and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness.

33 "When Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and when they turn back to You and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication to You in this temple,

34 "then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to their fathers.

35 "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place and confess Your name, and turn from their sin because You afflict them,

36 "then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, that You may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance.

37 "When there is famine in the land, pestilence or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers; when their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness there is;

38 "whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows the plague of his own heart, and spreads out his hands toward this temple:

39 "then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men),

40 "that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You gave to our fathers.

The economic crisis of this present day is in need of Christians who will go to the Lord with supplications and prayers for all the people.

