

[How to Distinguish Between the Prayers of the Godly and the Prayers of the Wicked](#)

Written by Thomas Brooks (1608–1680).

(edited for thought and flow by Mike Pursley¹)

You may judge what prayer that is, which accompanies salvation by considering the difference that is between the prayers of the godly and the wicked.

Now the difference between the prayers of the one and the other I shall show you in the following particulars,

The first difference.



First, Gracious souls do trade and deal with God in prayer, only upon the account and credit of Christ. They beg mercy to pardon them, and grace to purify them, and balm to heal them, and divine favor to comfort them, and power to support them, and wisdom to counsel them, and goodness to satisfy them—but all upon the account of Christ’s blood, of Christ’s righteousness; of Christ’s satisfaction, and of Christ’s intercession at the right hand of the Father; Rev 4:10-11. They seek the Father in the Son, they present their suits always in Christ’s name, for so is the will of Christ: John 14:13-14, “And whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.” John 15:16, “Whatever you shall ask of the Father in my name, he will give you.” John 16:23, “Truly I say unto you, whatever you shall ask the Father in my name, he will give you.” The Greek is pregnant, and may be read not only “Whatever,” but also “How many things soever you shall ask or beg of the Father in my name, he will give them to you.”

There is no admission into heaven, except we bring Christ in our arms: Eph 2:18, “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” The Greek word signifies “a leading by the hand.” It is an allusion to the custom of princes, to whom there is no admission, unless we be brought in by one of the favorites. As no access, so no acceptance without Christ, Eph 1:6, “wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved.”

Plutarch reports, “That it used to be the practice of some of the heathens, the Molossians, when they would seek the favor of their prince, they took up the king’s son in their arms, and so went and kneeled before the king.”

Ah Christians, Christ is near and dear unto the Father; the Father has determined to give out all his loves and favors through his Son; if you bring Christ in the arms of your faith, you gain the Father’s heart, and in

¹ <http://regenerationandrepentance.wordpress.com/2014/01/08/how-to-distinguish-between-the-prayers-of-the-godly-and-the-prayers-of-the-wicked/>

gaining his heart you gain all. The father's mercies melt, his affections move, his heart turns; his compassions are kindled upon the sight of his Son's merits and mediation. As Joseph said to his brethren, "You shall not see my face unless you bring your brother Benjamin," so says God, "you shall not see my face unless you bring the Lord Jesus with you."

Now gracious souls; in all their prayers, they present Jesus Christ before the Father, and upon his account they desire those things that make for their external, internal, and eternal good.

Ah! but vain unbelievers treat and trade with God in prayer upon the account of their own worth, righteousness, worthiness, and services: Isa 58:2-3, "Why have we fasted and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?" Here you see they stand upon their own practices and services, and expostulate the case with God in an angry manner, because God did not answer their hypocritical performances. So the proud pharisee stands in prayer upon his own worthiness and righteousness: Luke 18:11-12, "The pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank you, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." This pharisee was like the Egyptian temple—painted without—and vile within; varnished without—and vermin within. So did those hypocrites in Matt 6:23 stand very much upon their outward services and performances, though they were but shining sins—but filthy rags.

The second difference.



Secondly, Souls truly gracious pray more to get off their sins, than they do to get off their chains. Though bonds did await Paul in every place, Acts 20:23, as himself speaks, yet he never cries out, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from my bonds; but, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from my sins, from this body of death?" Rom 7:23. David cries not, 'I am undone' but 'I have done foolishly,' Psalm 51:4. But wicked men strive in prayer more to get off their chains than to get off their sins; more to be delivered from enemies without than lusts within; more to get out of the furnace than to be delivered from their spiritual bondage, as these scriptures evidence. [Psalm 78:34; Zech 7:5-7; Isa 26:16-17]

The third difference.



Thirdly, The stream and cream of a gracious man's spirit runs most out in prayer after spiritual and heavenly things, as is abundantly evident by those prayers of the saints that are upon record throughout the Scripture, Psalm 4:6-7, and Psalm 27:4; but the stream and cream of vain men's spirits in prayer runs most out after poor, low, carnal things, as you may see in comparing the following scriptures together, Hos 7:14; Zech 7:5-7; James 4:3, etc.

The fourth difference.

Fourthly, A gracious soul looks and lives more upon God in prayer, than upon his prayer. He knows, though prayer be his chariot, yet Christ is his food. Prayer may be a staff to support him—but Christ is that manna that must nourish him, and upon him he looks, and lives: Psalm 5:3, "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto you" (or marshal and set in order my prayer, as it is in the Hebrew), "and will look up" (or "look out," as it is in the Hebrew) "as a watchman looks out to discover the approaches of an enemy." But vain men, they live and look more upon their prayers than they do upon God.



More—usually they never observe what returns they have from heaven. They are like those who shoot arrows—but do not mind where they fall. Wicked men think it is religion enough for them to pray; and to look after their prayers, to see how their prayers speed, is no part of their faith; but a gracious soul is of a more noble spirit; when he has prayed he will stand upon his watchtower, and observe what God will speak: Psalm 85:8, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak; [I will listen, and lay my obedient ear to what the Lord shall speak,] for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not return to folly;" or, as the Hebrew may be read, "And they shall not return to

folly.” Wicked men would have God to be all ear to hear what they desire, when themselves have never an ear to hear what he speaks. But deaf ears shall always be attended with dumb answers. God’s justice always makes mercy dumb, when sin has made the sinner deaf.

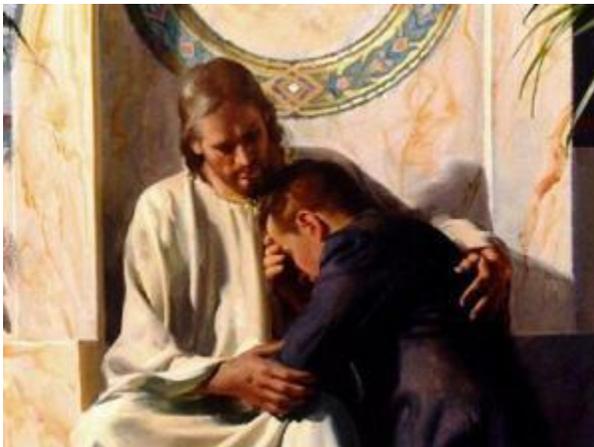
The fifth difference.



Fifthly, No discouragements can take gracious souls off from prayer—but the least discouragements will take off carnal hearts from prayer, as you may see in the following scriptures compared together: Psalm 40:1-2, and Psalm 44:10-23; Matt 15:21-29; Mal 3:14; Isa 58:1-3; Amos 8:3-5, etc.

When one of the ancient martyrs was severely threatened by his persecutors, he replied, “There is nothing,” says he, “of things visible, nothing of things invisible, which I fear; I will stand to my profession of the name of Christ, and contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, come on it what will.” It is neither the hope of life, nor the fear of death, that can take a real Christian off from prayer. He is rather raised than dejected, he is rather quickened than discouraged by delays or denials; he will hold up and hold on in a way and course of prayer, though men should rage and lions roar, and the furnace be heat seven times hotter, etc. But it is not so with carnal hearts, Job 27:9-10.

The sixth difference.



Sixthly, When a gracious man prays, he has his heart in his prayer; when he falls upon the work, he makes heart work of it. In his course his heart is in his prayer; he finds by experience that the heart is the great wheel that moves all other wheels. It is the chief monarch in the life of man. So David, Psalm 42:4, “When I remember these things, I pour out my heart.” So Hannah, 1 Sam 1:15, “I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit,” said she, “and have poured out my soul before the Lord.”

So the Israelites in 1 Sam 7:6, “pour out their souls like water before the Lord.” So the church in Isa 26:8-9, “The desire of our soul is to your name, and to the remembrance of you. With my soul have I desired you in the night; yes, with my spirit within me will I seek you early.” The heart, as a prince, gives laws to all other members. The heart is Christ’s bed of spices; it is his presence-chamber; it is his royal throne; it is one of those four keys which God keeps under his own belt.

Gracious souls know that no prayer is acknowledged, accepted, and rewarded by God—but that wherein the heart is sincere and whole. It is not a piece, it is not a corner of the heart, which will satisfy the maker of the heart. The true mother would not have the child divided. As God loves a broken and a contrite heart, so he loathes a divided heart. God neither loves halting nor halving, he will be served truly and totally. The royal law is, “You shall love and serve the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,” Deut 10:12. Among the heathens, when the beasts were cut up for sacrifice, the first thing the priest looked upon was the heart, and if the heart was bad the sacrifice was rejected. Truly, God rejects all those sacrifices wherein the heart is bad.

Now wicked men are heartless in all their services, in all their prayers, as you may see in comparing the following scriptures together; I shall not transcribe the words, because I must cut short the work: Isa 29:13; Matt 15:7-9; Ezek 33:30-32; Zech 7:4-6; 2 Chron 25:1-2. ***As the body without the soul is dead, so prayer, without the heart in it, is but dead prayer in the eye and account of God.*** Prayer without the heart is but an empty ring, a tinkling cymbal. Prayer is only lovely and weighty, as the heart is in it—and not otherwise. It is not the lifting up of the voice, nor the wringing of the hands, nor the beating of the breasts—but the stirrings of the heart, which God looks at in prayer. God hears no more than the heart speaks; if the heart is dumb, God will certainly be deaf. No prayer is accepted by God, but that which is the travail of the heart.

The seventh difference.



Seventhly, Gracious souls usually come off from prayer, with hearts more disengaged from sin, and more vehemently set against it. The precious communion that they have with God in prayer, the sweet breathings of God into their hearts, while they are a-breathing out their requests in his ears, and the secret assistance, stirrings, and movings of the Spirit upon their souls in prayer—arm them more against sin, and makes them stand upon the highest terms of defiance with sin.

'How shall I do this or that wickedness against God?' says the praying soul, 'Oh I cannot, I will not do anything unworthy of him who has caused his glory to pass before me in prayer.'

Ah! but wicked men come off from prayer with hearts more encouraged to sin, and more resolved to walk in ways of sin: Prov 7:14-24, "I have peace-offerings with me," says the harlot; "this day have I paid my vows: therefore came I forth to meet you, diligently to seek your face, and I have found you. Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love." That is, "let us be drunken with love," which shows her insatiable lusts. So in Jer 7:9-10, "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"—safe to do all these detestable things?"

Wicked men are like Lewis, king of France, who would swear and then kiss the cross, and then swear more bitterly and then kiss the cross. So they sin and pray, and pray and sin; and the more they pray, the more easily, resolutely, impudently do they sin. They make use of prayer to quiet their consciences, so that they may sin with more pleasure and less regret. Ah! what pains do such sinners take to go to hell, and to arm their consciences against themselves in that day, wherein they shall say, 'There is no help, there is no hope!' This age is full of such monsters, who have no pity upon themselves.

The eighth difference.



Eighthly and lastly, Gracious souls do more eye and observe how their own hearts are wrought upon in prayer, than how others' hearts are wrought upon. When they pray, they look with a curious eye upon their own spirits, they look with a narrow eye upon their own hearts, and observe how they are affected, melted, humbled, quickened, raised, spiritualized, and bettered by prayer. But vain men, as they pray to "be seen of men," so they eye most how others like their prayers, and are affected and taken with their prayers. They are most critical in observing what operations their prayers have upon others' hearts—but never mind, to any purpose, how they operate upon their own hearts. A worse plague cannot befall them!

And thus I have endeavored to show you what a wide difference there is between the prayers of the godly and the ungodly; and by this, as by the former particulars laid down, you may see what prayer that is, which accompanies salvation.

Source material taken from ***The Protestant Pulpit***.



Meet the author and part of your Christian heritage: Thomas

Brooks (1608–1680) was an English non-conformist Puritan preacher and author. Much of what is known about Thomas Brooks has been ascertained from his writings. Born, likely to well-to-do parents, in 1608, Brooks entered Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 1625, where he was preceded by such men as Thomas Hooker, John Cotton, and Thomas Shepard. He was licensed as a preacher of the Gospel by 1640. Before that date, he appears to have spent a number of years at sea, probably as a chaplain with the fleet.

After the conclusion of the First English Civil War, Thomas Brooks became minister at Thomas Apostle's, London, and was sufficiently renowned to be chosen as preacher before the House of Commons on December 26, 1648. His sermon was afterwards published under the title, 'God's Delight in the Progress of the Upright', the text being Psalm 44:18: 'Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from Thy way'. Three or four years afterwards, he transferred to St. Margaret's, Fish-street Hill, London.

As a writer C. H. Spurgeon said of him, 'Brooks scatters stars with both hands, with an eagle eye of faith as well as the eagle eye of imagination'. In 1662, he fell victim to the notorious Act of Uniformity, but he appears to have remained in his parish and to have preached as opportunity arose. Treatises continued to flow from his pen.