

Why is it Necessary to Pray?

Matthew 8:1-13, Ezekiel 36:21-38, Jeremiah 29:10-14

In relation to salvation and all the benefits that flow from and are a part of the redemption purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ, prayer is shown by God in His word to be absolutely necessary for a range of related reasons.

Christ communicates the benefits of redemption through the means of grace, prayer being one of those blessed means of grace. Further, God will give His benefits of redemption only to those who ask Him for them. For we know that all those who come to God must believe that He is and that He is the rewarder of all those who diligently seek Him. We also know that none can come to Christ except the Father draw, and that all who truly come to Christ will in no wise be cast out.

Prayer is necessary in the life of believers for a number of important reasons. The one reason that we now look at is directly related to God's Almighty power and control over all things (which we will refer to as God's sovereignty).

The idea that prayer is necessary because God is sovereign, is shown in Ezekiel 36:36-38 where God lays out a whole list of blessings to be bestowed upon the Israelites for the alone reason that He would have His name hallowed and glorified in the undeserving nation of Israel who had heretofore profaned it. It is clear that God is saying 'I am going to do this because it is my pleasure to do it, I will it to be and so it will be.' But there is something at the end of God's declaration of His intent that warrants our careful attention,

Thus says the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock.

When looking at the necessity of prayer because of God's sovereignty over us, objections are often raised that need to be considered. Some might say, indeed all of us at times would ask; 'If God is sovereign over all things why should I pray?'

This 'damned if I do, damned if I don't' sort of attitude often stems from a heart of pride that demands its prayer must have the power to change God's mind or God's will in order for prayer to be worthwhile or desirable. This sort of attitude is needless to say sinful. It is astoundingly arrogant and self-willed to think this way of ourselves in relation to God. It shows that we need to hear the exhortation of Jesus Christ to become like little children, dependent, helpless and submissive to the will of the Father. The Lord's prayer teaches us to submit to God's will in prayer 'Your will be done on earth as in heaven.'

It seems like a mystery to us to pray for something, knowing that God already has something laid up in store that will inevitably come to pass. However it is God's sovereignty that establishes the necessity of prayer, because there is a connection made by God between the prayers of His people and His providence (the outworking of His eternal purpose in time). God reveals His plan and says 'I will do it', and when God says that, we know that whatever He has spoken will come to pass, nothing withstanding, including man's will. What God Has Willed, He Will Do... God Is God.

He will accomplish His purpose unfalteringly and without hindrance in time and in our lives. This is His providence. The unfolding of Divine providence is vitally connected to the prayers of God's people. In our prayers we are to pray according to God's revealed will. We are to pray for what God has spoken and said that He will do, and to know that this prayer of faith will always be answered. In this way, God accomplishes his purposes absolutely and perfectly in providence through the faithful prayers of His people.

Prayer is a work of grace in the heart of the saints. God leads His people to pray for that which He has promised and will necessarily accomplish. God will do it, yet He will first be enquired of by his people. We can see this in Psalm 32:5&6. God states clearly in this Psalm that His people will pray to Him when He can be found, and that He will deliver them from their sins and the sense of their condemnation, in answer to the prayer that He has placed within them. This prayer is placed in their hearts by God's Spirit and Word, and through the experience of struggling with the conviction, guilt and misery of their sin. We see this also in Zechariah 12:10 where God promises: 'I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications.' God is at work, by His special providence in the life of believers, to lead his people to pray for the very things He sovereignly purposes to bring to pass.

In this way, sovereignty is met by prayer and providence is unfolded. Our Sovereign God is a prayer answering God. Jeremiah 29:11&12 illustrates this truth. In his prophesy to the captive Israelites, God declares His sovereign plan and the end for those captives. He promises their deliverance after a set period of time, but he doesn't leave them to take this for granted and forget God for seventy years. Israel may not live in carnal presumption. No, God tells them plainly that He will deliver them from their captivity only when they call upon Him, and pray to Him, and search for Him with all their hearts. It is important to note that God is actually saying that His people will do this, no question about it. This is not a

condition that subjects God's will to man's, it is a fact, as is clear from the following extracts: ... shall go to me,

... ye shall seek me,

...ye shall search for me with all your heart (v:12-13)

God's people are responsible to ask for what He has promised and God is powerful to move them to fulfil their obligation. God realises his saving purposes through the prayers of His people!

The prayers of the church are necessary, by Divine appointment, for the unfolding of providence. We don't change God's plan by praying. No, we pray because the God of infinite wisdom to whom we pray, has everything worked out and planned perfectly in its most minute detail, so that we can be encouraged to call on His unshakeable promises and pray: "thy will be done." What If People In Church Are Not Praying? Is God's Plan Frustrated?

No, because it is never true that the church is not praying. The church in heaven and earth is always praying. God's people pray. If we are not praying then that is our own sin and backsliding. God puts a prayer in the hearts of His people, according to His revealed will and precious promises, and they pray. In Revelation 8:4&5 the saints are encouraged to persevere in faith and prayer in the face of severe persecution and trial. They are to realise that Christ's return, the final judgement, and their ultimate deliverance will come in answer to their prayers. It is God's plan to deliver his saints through judgement, they know this. And they must pray for it. Now the angels who must blow their trumpets to unfold God's providence, stand forth to blow, but they wait. Why? Because another angel must first bring the prayers of the saints before God through the intercession of Jesus Christ. Then, when the prayers ascend up to God in answer to prayer, God's power is revealed in the earth, the angels blow their trumpets, and God's sovereign, unchangeable, eternal plan is brought to pass. God wisely places His children just where He wants them, and in those circumstances that are perfectly suited to bring forth the prayers that are in harmony with the unfolding of His providence and will.

God would have His people totally dependent on Him and ask Him for the things He has promised, like little children. So that there is no possibility of His plan not including the prayers of His people, He calls forth the prayers from our hearts, through our mouths, by convicting us of His Word, encouraging us through His promises and confronting us in His providence in our daily lives.

Are we truly communing with the eternal unchangeable and all powerful God of the Bible in this way, or are we happy to settle for prayer that is self willed and focused on how we would like to change our circumstances, or how we would like things to happen to us and others regardless of God's revealed will and His eternal purpose? Let us learn of Jesus when he says, "Father if it is your will, remove this cup from me: Nevertheless not My will but Your will be done."

Finally a statement to think about.

If I thought I could change God or His will by praying, I would stop praying.

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