

If We Ask According to His Will

by Andrew Murray

Andrew Murray emphasizes the importance of understanding and aligning with God's will to pray effectively and confidently.

Scripture: 1 John 5:14

Topics: "Prayer", "Understanding God's Will"

Description

Andrew Murray emphasizes the importance of understanding and aligning our prayers with God's will, as expressed in 1 John 5:14-15. He argues that many believers struggle with prayer because they doubt whether their requests align with God's hidden purposes, which hinders their confidence in receiving answers. Murray encourages Christians to seek clarity on God's will through His Word and the Holy Spirit, asserting that knowing God's will empowers bold and effective prayer. He highlights that unanswered prayers often stem from asking amiss rather than from God's unwillingness to respond. Ultimately, Murray calls for believers to trust in God's promises and to pray with the assurance that their requests can be in harmony with His will.

Transcript

'And this is the boldness which we have toward Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us. And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him.'--1 John v. 14, 15.

ONE of the greatest hindrances to believing prayer is with many undoubtedly this: they know not if what they ask is according to the will of God. As long as they are in doubt on this point, they cannot have the boldness to ask in the assurance that they certainly shall receive. And they soon begin to think that, if once they have made known their requests, and receive no answer, it is best to leave it to God to do according to His good pleasure. The words of John, 'If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us,' as they understand them, make certainty as to answer to prayer impossible, because they cannot be sure of what really may be the will of God. They think of God's will as His hidden counsel--how should man be able to fathom what really may be the purpose of the all-wise God.

This is the very opposite of what John aimed at in writing thus. He wished to rouse us to boldness, to confidence, to full assurance of faith in prayer. He says, 'This is the boldness which we have toward Him,' that we can say: Father! Thou knowest and I know that I ask according to Thy will: I know Thou hearest me. 'This is the boldness, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.' On this account He

adds at once: 'If we know that He heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know,' through this faith, that we have,' that we now while we pray receive 'the petition,' the special things, 'we have asked of Him.' John supposes that when we pray, we first find out if our prayers are according to the will of God. They may be according to God's will, and yet not come at once, or without the persevering prayer of faith. It is to give us courage thus to persevere and to be strong in faith, that He tells us: This gives us boldness or confidence in prayer, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us. It is evident that if it be a matter of uncertainty to us whether our petitions be according to His will, we cannot have the comfort of what he says, 'We know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him.'

But just this is the difficulty. More than one believer says: 'I do not know if what I desire be according to the will of God. God's will is the purpose of His infinite wisdom: it is impossible for me to know whether He may not count something else better for me than what I desire, or may not have some reasons for withholding what I ask.' Every one feels how with such thoughts the prayer of faith, of which Jesus said, 'Whosoever shall believe that these things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith,' becomes an impossibility. There may be the prayer of submission, and of trust in God's wisdom; there cannot be the prayer of faith. The great mistake here is that God's children do not really believe that it is possible to know God's will. Or if they believe this, they do not take the time and trouble to find it out. What we need is to see clearly in what way it is that the Father leads His waiting, teachable child to know that his petition is according to His will.¹ It is through God's holy word, taken up and kept in the heart, the life, the will; and through God's Holy Spirit, accepted in His indwelling and leading, that we shall learn to know that our petitions are according to His will.

Through the word. There is a secret will of God, with which we often fear that our prayers may be at variance. It is not with this will of God, but His will as revealed in His word, that we have to do in prayer. Our notions of what the secret will may have decreed, and of how it might render the answers to our prayers impossible, are mostly very erroneous. Childlike faith as to what He is willing to do for His children, simply keeps to the Father's assurance, that it is His will to hear prayer and to do what faith in His word desires and accepts. In the word the Father has revealed in general promises the great principles of His will with His people. The child has to take the promise and apply it to the special circumstances in His life to which it has reference. Whatever he asks within the limits of that revealed will, he can know to be according to the will of God, and he may confidently expect. In His word, God has given us the revelation of His will and plans with us, with His people, and with the world, with the most precious promises of the grace and power with which through His people He will carry out His plans and do His work. As faith becomes strong and bold enough to claim the fulfilment of the general promise in the special case, we may have the assurance that our prayers are heard: they are according to God's will. Take the words of John in the verse following our text as an illustration: 'If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and God will give him life.' Such is the general promise; and the believer who pleads on the ground of this promise, prays according to the will of God, and John would give him boldness to know that he has the petition which he asks.

But this apprehension of God's will is something spiritual, and must be spiritually discerned. It is not as a matter of logic that we can argue it out: God has said it; I must have it. Nor has every Christian the same gift or calling. While the general will revealed in the promise is the same for all, there is for each one a special different will according to God's purpose. And herein is the wisdom of the saints, to know this special will of God for each of us, according to the measure of grace given us, and so to ask in prayer just what God has prepared and made possible for each. It is to communicate this wisdom that the Holy Ghost

dwells in us. The personal application of the general promises of the word to our special personal needs--it is for this that the leading of the Holy Spirit is given us.

It is this union of the teaching of the word and Spirit that many do not understand, and so there is a twofold difficulty in knowing what God's will may be. Some seek the will of God in an inner feeling or conviction, and would have the Spirit lead them without the word. Others seek it in the word, without the living leading of the Holy Spirit. The two must be united: only in the word, only in the Spirit, but in these most surely, can we know the will of God, and learn to pray according to it. In the heart the word and the Spirit must meet: it is only by indwelling that we can experience their teaching. The word must dwell, must abide in us: heart and life must day by day be under its influence. Not from without, but from within, comes the quickening of the word by the Spirit. It is only he who yields himself entirely in his whole life to the supremacy of the word and the will of God, who can expect in special cases to discern what that word and will permit him boldly to ask. And even as with the word, just so with the Spirit: if I would have the leading of the Spirit in prayer to assure me what God's will is, my whole life must be yielded to that leading; so only can mind and heart become spiritual and capable of knowing God's holy will. It is he who, through word and Spirit, lives in the will of God by doing it, who will know to pray according to that will in the confidence that He hears us.

Would that Christians might see what incalculable harm they do themselves by the thought that because possibly their prayer is not according to God's will, they must be content without an answer. God's word tells us that the great reason of unanswered prayer is that we do not pray aright: 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss.' In not granting an answer, the Father tells us that there is something wrong in our praying. He wants to teach us to find it out and confess it, and so to educate us to true believing and prevailing prayer. He can only attain His object when He brings us to see that we are to blame for the withholding of the answer; our aim, or our faith, or our life is not what it should be. But this purpose of God is frustrated as long as we are content to say: It is perhaps because my prayer is not according to His will that He does not hear me. O let us no longer throw the blame of our unanswered prayers on the secret will of God, but on our praying amiss. Let that word, 'Ye receive not because ye ask amiss,' be as the lantern of the Lord, searching heart and life to prove that we are indeed such as those to whom Christ gave His promises of certain answers. Let us believe that we can know if our prayer be according to God's will. Let us yield our heart to have the word of the Father dwell richly there, to have Christ's word abiding in us. Let us live day by day with the anointing which teacheth us all things. Let us yield ourselves unreservedly to the Holy Spirit as He teaches us to abide in Christ, to dwell in the Father's presence, and we shall soon understand how the Father's love longs that the child should know His will, and should, in the confidence that that will includes all that His power and love have promised to do, know too that He hears the petitions which we ask of Him. 'This is the boldness which we have, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.'

'LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY.'

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Blessed Master! With my whole heart I thank Thee for this blessed lesson, that the path to a life full of answers to prayer is through the will of God. Lord! Teach me to know this blessed will by living it, loving it, and always doing it. So shall I learn to offer prayers according to that will, and to find in their harmony with God's blessed will, my boldness in prayer and my confidence in accepting the answer.

Father! it is Thy will that Thy child should enjoy Thy presence and blessing. It is Thy will that everything in the life of Thy child should be in accordance with Thy will, and that the Holy Spirit should work this in Him. It is Thy will that Thy child should live in the daily experience of distinct answers to prayer, so as to enjoy living and direct fellowship with Thyself. It is Thy will that Thy Name should be glorified in and through Thy children, and that it will be in those who trust Thee. O my Father! let this Thy will be my confidence in all I ask.

Blessed Saviour! Teach me to believe in the glory of this will. That will is the eternal love, which with Divine power works out its purpose in each human will that yields itself to it. Lord! Teach me this. Thou canst make me see how every promise and every command of the word is indeed the will of God, and that its fulfilment is secured to me by God Himself. Let thus the will of God become to me the sure rock on which my prayer and my assurance of an answer ever rest. Amen.

NOTE.

There is often great confusion as to the will of God. People think that what God wills must inevitably take place. This is by no means the case. God wills a great deal of blessing to His people, which never comes to them. He wills it most earnestly, but they do not will it, and it cannot come to them. This is the great mystery of man's creation with a free will, and also of the renewal of his will in redemption, that God has made the execution of His will, in many things, dependent on the will of man. Of God's will revealed in His promises, so much will be fulfilled as our faith accepts. Prayer is the power by which that comes to pass which otherwise would not take place. And faith, the power by which it is decided how much of God's will shall be done in us. When once God reveals to a soul what He is willing to do for it, the responsibility for the execution of that will rests with us.

Some are afraid that this is putting too much power into the hands of man. But all power is put into the hands of man in Christ Jesus. The key of all prayer and all power is His, and when we learn to understand that He is just as much with us as with the Father, and that we are also just as much one with Him as He with the Father, we shall see how natural and right and safe it is that to those who abide in Him as He in the Father, such power should be given. It is Christ the Son who has the right to ask what He will: it is through the abiding in Him and His abiding in us (in a Divine reality of which we have too little apprehension) that His Spirit breathes in us what He wants to ask and obtain through us. We pray in His Name: the prayers are really ours and as really His.

Others again fear that to believe that prayer has such power is limiting the liberty and the love of God. O if we only knew how we are limiting His liberty and His love by not allowing Him to act in the only way in which He chooses to act, now that He has taken us up into fellowship with himself--through our prayers and our faith. A brother in the ministry once asked, as we were speaking on this subject, whether there was not a danger of our thinking that our love to souls and our willingness to see them blessed were to move God's love and God's willingness to bless them. We were just passing some large water-pipes, by which water was being carried over hill and dale from a large mountain stream to a town at some distance. Just look at these pipes, was the answer; they did not make the water willing to flow downwards from the hills, nor did they give it its power of blessing and refreshment: this is its very nature. All that they could do is to decide its direction: by it the inhabitants of the town said they want the blessing there. And just so, it is the very nature of God to love and to bless. Downward and ever downward His love longs to come with its quickening and refreshing streams. But He has left it to prayer to say where the blessing is to come. He has committed it to His believing people to bring the living water to the desert places: the will of God to

bles is dependent upon the will of man to say where the blessing must descend. 'Such honour have His saints.' 'And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us. And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him.'

¹See this illustrated in the extracts from George Muller at the end of this volume.

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