

God's Sovereignty and Prayer

by John Sale

Prayer is a means to accomplish God's will, not to change it, and it is a recognition of our helplessness and dependence on God.

Topics: "Gods Sovereignty", "Effective Prayer"

Description

John Sale emphasizes the importance of grounding our seeking for revival in prayer, recognizing that God is the ultimate source of revival and the sovereign ruler of all things. He highlights that revival is a divine work that only God can provide according to His good pleasure, not by human efforts. Sale delves into the significance of prayer in acknowledging our helplessness and dependence on God, as well as in accomplishing God's will, emphasizing that prayer is not about changing God's mind but about aligning ourselves with His purposes.

Transcript

Our seeking for revival always should be grounded in prayer, because in prayer we acknowledge that God is not only the source of revival, but He also is the sovereign God: He is the One who is in the heavens and does whatever He pleases (Psalm 115:3). Revival is not something that human hands or wills can produce; it is something that only God can provide, according to His own good pleasure.

All Good Things Come From God

When King David led God covenant people in bring together the gift and resources required to build a temple, he praise God with these words:

"Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all" (1 Chr 29:10-12).

If this is true of physical things, how much more it is true of spiritual blessings? When the Christian prays, he is asking and thanking God for things, which are at the disposal of someone else. We pray because we recognize that God is the author and source of everything we have or hope to have. J. I. Packer summarizes it like this:

"The prayer of a Christian is not an attempt to force God's hand, but a humble acknowledgment of helplessness and dependance. When we are on our knees, we know that it is not we who control the world; it is in our own power, therefore, to supply our need by our independent efforts; every good thing that we desire for ourselves and for others must be sought from God, and will come, if it comes at all, as a gift from His hands" (Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, p 11).

God is in Control

When the church asks, "Why should we pray, if God is in control, and knows all things anyway?" it is enough to answer by simply pointing to the explicit and various commands in Scripture for God's people to pray. That alone is sufficient! Yet, there is wonderful provision for the church to understand this great truth, and thereby, be immensely encouraged to pursue God in the great task and privilege of praying, and more specifically, praying for revival. Furthermore, it is important to carefully examine our views concerning prayer and revival to be sure that they are in harmony with the teaching of Scripture.

A common idea seems to be that I come to God and ask Him for something I want, and that I expect Him to give me whatever I ask. If I pray earnestly and in faith, He must answer. Someone has aptly said that this kind of approach "...is most dishonoring and degrading, making God our cosmic bellboy: doing our bidding, performing our pleasure and granting our desires."

Rather, prayer is coming to God, pouring out our hearts in fervent desire and faith, expressing our need, committing our way to Him, and leaving the outcome to the Lord as He most wisely and lovingly sees best. Even Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane being deeply grieved and distressed: "My Father, if it possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39)

There are two primary elements of prayer that will help us appreciate why we pray to the Sovereign God.

Prayer Acknowledges Our Helplessness and Dependence

First, the one who prays focuses upon himself. In a single word, we recognize that we are "important." The true child of God whose eyes have been opened by the Spirit of God to see what the natural man cannot see, begins to understand that as mankind, we are mere creatures, while God is the creator and source of all things. Paul the Apostle reminds the church at Rome of God's word to Jeremiah the prophet, declaring: "He is the potter and we are the clay" (Romans 9:21). Jesus teaches His disciples that, "without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

The one who prays earnestly, therefore, knows, sees and perceives his deficiency. He understands that although he is a Christian, his love is never pure enough, his faith is never whole enough, and his motives are never completely selfless. It is the child of God who perceives that no one can help him but God alone. Even as he comes to God, he is fully aware that he cannot address God on his own, for alone he is unworthy and realizes that he would call the wrath of God upon himself if he would persist in approaching the glory of God by his own merits. This one understands clearly that "our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28-29).

Prayer Accomplishes God's Will

Second, the ones who pray focus upon God, holding before themselves His glory; knowing that no one compares with the qualities of His character, which is laden down with the riches of holiness, wisdom, omnipotence, omniscience, immutability, love, justice, mercy and sovereignty. This one bows in full

submission through the righteousness of another: the Lord Jesus Christ.

Since we are granted the privilege of coming into Almighty God's presence by prayer, it is right and good to humbly ask whether our prayers can bend the mind of God. As Roger Nicole asks: "Do you think that you can really change the mind of God? That is, can prayer make God modify His sovereign plan" (Prayer: Prelude to Revival, Reformation & revival Journal Vol 1, No. 3)

Nicole responds rightly, I believe, by stating: "I do not know what the reader's particular idea on this subject maybe, but I would like to say that if you believe you can change God through your prayers, I hope you are using discretion. If that is the power you have, it is a most dangerous thing. Surely God does not need our counsel in order to set up what is desirable. Surely God, whose knowledge penetrates all minds and hearts, does not need to have us intervene to tell Him what he ought to do. The thought that we are changing the mind of God by our prayers is a terrifying concept." I think you would agree with the author that, if God were in control by our prayers, it would discourage us in our praying rather than encourage.

The question rings in our ears, "if this so, why pray?" Although we must insist that, because of who we are and who God is, our prayers do not change God's mind, it is right for us to understand that God has ordained that prayer, "changes things." The design of prayer is not that the immutable will of God be altered, but that His will may be accomplished in His own good time and way. Our prayers are not intended to change the purpose of God or to move Him to create new purposes. God has not only decreed the end of all things, but He also has decreed the means to reach that end. Thus, it is improper for us to say that, because God is sovereign and is in control of all things, certain things will happen whether we pray or not. That must be absolutely rejected because God has ordained that prayer be the means to accomplish His purpose.

It is God the Holy Spirit who moves upon our hearts to pray. In obedience and confidence, knowing that God will accomplish His own good purposes as He wills, using the means appointed to us, namely prayer, we call earnestly upon God to bring to pass those things that we desire.

Praise be to God for two attributes that are fundamental to His will: (1) God is all wise. In perfect wisdom He determines and executes His will. Someone has said: "If I had the power of God, there are many things that I would change; but if I had the wisdom of God, I would not change a thing." (2) God is perfect love. In unfathomable love God purposed and works on our behalf. The sovereign power of God is not raw power, but power that is exercised under perfect wisdom and love.

Yes, our focus is God. No prayer is pleasing to God unless we pray like Jesus: "not my will but Thine be done." John Gill summarizes well our thoughts:

When God bestows blessings on a praying people, it is not for the sake of their prayers, as if He was inclined and turned by them; but for His own sake, and His own sovereign will and pleasure. Should it be said, "to what purpose then is prayer?" It is answered, "This is the way and means God has appointed, for the communication of the blessing of His goodness to His people. For though He has purposed and provided, and promised them, yet He will be sought unto, to give them, and it is a duty and privilege to ask. When they are blessed with a spirit of prayer, it forebodes well, and looks as if God intended to bestow the good things asked, which should be asked always with submission to the will of God, saying Not my will but Thine be done" (The Sovereignty of God, Pink, page 173).

Although we do not understand completely the full mystery of effectual prayer, this must not hinder us from confidently entering into His presence, as our glorious privilege, in humble obedience to ask for those things we believe matter to Him: "If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (II Chronicles 7:14)

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