

**Discipleship:
An
Introduction to
Systematic Theology and
Apologetics**

Protestant Reformation Doctrines of Salvation

The Heights Church October 6, 2019

Prayer: Two Reasons to Pray*

- *With respect to God, prayer is but a sensible acknowledgement of our dependence on him to his glory. As he hath made all things for his own glory, so he will be glorified and acknowledged by his creatures; and it is fit that he should require this of those who would be subjects of his mercy . . . [it] is a suitable acknowledgement of our dependence on the power and mercy of God for that which we need, and but a suitable honor paid to the great Author and Fountain of all good.*

*The Most High, a Prayer-Hearing God,” A sermon by Jonathan Edwards

Based upon Psalm 65:2 O you who hear prayer, to you shall all flesh come.

Prayer: Two Reasons to Pray*

- *With respect to ourselves, God requires prayer of us . . . Fervent prayer many ways tends to prepare the heart. Hereby is excited a sense of our need . . . whereby the mind is more prepared to prize [his mercy] . . . Our prayer to God may excite in us a suitable sense and consideration of our dependence on God for the mercy we ask, and a suitable exercise of faith in God's sufficiency, so that we may be prepared to glorify his name when the mercy is received.*
- *The Most High, a Prayer-Hearing God," A sermon by Jonathan Edwards

Prayer: Two Reasons to Pray

- Summary of Edward's reasons to pray.
 - All that God does is for His glory first and for our benefit second.
 - We pray because God commands us to pray, because it glorifies Him, and because it benefits us.

Prayer: Does Prayer Change God's Mind?

- NO!

“The Bible says there are certain things God has decreed from all eternity. Those things will inevitably come to pass. If all the Christians of the world were to pray collectively, it “would not change what God, in His hidden counsel, has determined to do.”

R.C. Sproul's Crucial Questions booklet *Does Prayer Change Things?*

Prayer: Does Prayer Change Things?

- YES!

“When God hangs His sword of judgment over people’s heads, and they repent and He then withholds His judgment, has He really changed His mind? The mind of God does not change for God does not change. Things change, and they change according to His sovereign will, which He exercises through secondary means and secondary activities. The prayer of His people is one of the means He uses to bring things to pass in this world. So if you ask me whether prayer changes things, I answer with an unhesitating “Yes!”

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Prayer: Does Prayer Change Things?

[Wayne Grudem says](#), This is why prayer is so important to effective evangelism. Unless God works in peoples' hearts to make the proclamation of the gospel effective, there will be no genuine saving response. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). ([Systematic Theology page 693](#))

Prayer: God's immediate intervention versus God working through human agents?

- Calvin's favorite example of this was the book of Job.

The Sabeans and the Chaldeans had taken Job's donkeys and camels. Why? Because Satan had stirred their hearts to do so. But why? Because Satan had received permission from God to test Job's faithfulness in any way he so desired, short of taking Job's life. Why had God agreed to such a thing? For three reasons: (1) to silence the slander of Satan; (2) to vindicate Himself; and (3) to vindicate Job from the slander of Satan. All of these reasons are perfectly righteous justifications for God's actions.

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Prayer: God's immediate intervention versus God working through human agents?

- Calvin's favorite example of this was the book of Job.
- Satan's purpose in stirring up these two groups was to cause Job to blaspheme God—an altogether wicked motive.
- Satan did not do something supernatural to accomplish his ends. He chose human agents—the Sabeans and Chaldeans, who were evil by nature—to steal Job's animals. The Sabeans and Chaldeans were known for their thievery and murderous way of life. Their will was involved, but there was no coercion; God's purpose was accomplished through their wicked actions.

Prayer: God's immediate intervention versus God working through human agents?

- Calvin's favorite example of this was the book of Job.
- The Sabeans and Chaldeans were free to choose, but for them, as for us, freedom always means freedom within limits.
- We must not confuse human freedom and human autonomy.
- There will always be a conflict between divine sovereignty and human autonomy.
- There is never a conflict between divine sovereignty and human freedom. The Bible says that man is free, but he is not an autonomous law unto himself.

Prayer: God's immediate intervention versus God working through human agents?

- Calvin's favorite example of this was the book of Job.
- Suppose the Sabeans and Chaldeans had prayed, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Job's animals still would have been stolen, but not necessarily by the Sabeans and Chaldeans.
- God might have chosen to answer their prayer, but He would have used some other agent to steal Job's animals. There is freedom within limits, and within those limits, our prayers can change things. The Scriptures tell us that Elijah, through prayer, kept the rain from falling. He was not dissuaded from praying by his understanding of divine sovereignty.

Prayer: God's immediate intervention versus God working through human agents?

- The very reason we pray is because of God's sovereignty, because we believe that God has it within His power to order things according to His purpose.
- The promise of the Scriptures is that "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." (James 5:16)
- The problem is that we are not all that righteous. What prayer most often changes is the wickedness and the hardness of our own hearts.

R.C. Sproul's Crucial Questions booklet *Does Prayer Change Things?*

Prayer: If God Is sovereign, why does God want us to pray?

- Augustine said that nothing happens in this universe apart from the will of God and that, in a certain sense, God ordains everything that happens.
- Augustine was not attempting to absolve men of responsibility for their actions, but his teaching raises a question: If God is sovereign over the actions and intents of men, why pray at all?
- God commands by His holy Word that we pray. Prayer is not optional for the Christian; it is required.

Prayer: If God Is sovereign, why does God want us to pray?

- God commands by His holy Word that we pray. Prayer is not optional for the Christian; it is required.

"**And when you pray**, you must not be like the hypocrites... But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. **Pray then like this**: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. (Matthew 6:5 - 9)

Prayer: If God Is sovereign, why does God want us to pray?

- God commands by His holy Word that we pray. Prayer is not optional for the Christian; it is required.

Rejoice always, **pray without ceasing**, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:17 – 19)

Prayer: If God Is sovereign, why does God want us to pray?

- John Calvin answers this in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3, chapter 20, section 3.

But, someone will say, does God not know, even without being reminded, both in what respect we are troubled and what is expedient for us, so that it may seem in a sense superfluous that “he should be stirred up by our prayers—as if he were drowsily blinking or even sleeping until he is aroused by our voice? But they who thus reason do not observe to what end the Lord instructed his people to pray, for he ordained it not so much for his own sake as for ours.

Prayer: If God Is sovereign, why does God want us to pray?

Now he wills—as is right—that his due be rendered to him, in the recognition that everything men desire and account conducive to their own profit comes from him, and in the attestation of this by prayers. But the profit of this sacrifice also, by which he is worshiped, returns to us. Accordingly, the holy fathers, the more confidently they extolled God's benefits among themselves and others, were the more keenly aroused to pray . . .

Prayer: If God Is sovereign, why does God want us to pray?

*Still it is very important for us to call upon him: **First**, that our hearts may be fired with a zealous and burning desire ever to seek, love, and serve him, while we become accustomed in every need to flee to him as to a sacred anchor.*

***Secondly**, that there may enter our hearts no desire and no “wish at all of which we should be ashamed to make him a witness, while we learn to set all our wishes before his eyes, and even to pour out our whole hearts. **Thirdly**, that we be prepared to receive his benefits with true gratitude of heart and thanksgiving, benefits that our prayer reminds us come from his hand.*