

The need and answering of Prayer.

Some have questioned the need for prayer. They have reasoned, "God knows all things. Therefore, God knows what we need. God is love. Therefore, God will give us what we need. Therefore, why pray? Such reasoning disregards the specific commands God gives us to pray as well as the fact that the Bible tells us prayer is a great privilege.

We pray because we have a need to be in communion with God. As David wrote, "My heart says of You, 'Seek His face!' Your face, LORD, I will seek. Do not hide Your face from me, do not turn Your servant away in anger," (Ps. 27:8-9). We cannot find peace apart from communion with God. The essence of heaven is that we will have the beatific vision of God, always beholding His face.

We pray because it is God's will that we pray. Paul wrote, "Pray continually," (1 Thess. 5:17). We pray because God invites us to pray. We pray because we have needs to bring before God. David prayed to God when he fled from his son Absalom (Psalm 3). Jesus prayed for strength as He faced the goal of His life, His suffering for the sins of the world (Luke 22:39-46). The tax collector prayed for forgiveness from God (Luke 18:13). We pray because others have needs. Abraham prayed for Lot (Gen. 18:23-32). The centurion prayed for Jesus to help his sick servant Matt. 8:6).

So, will God answer every prayer of a Christian? The psalmist answers, "The LORD is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him; He hears their cry and saves them," (Psalm 145:18-19). James points out that God answered the prayer of Elijah and withheld rain from Israel for three and a half years (James 5:17). Yes, God will hear and answer the prayers of a Christian.

Yet we also need to note that God answers prayers in His own time. Jesus' mother came to Him at the wedding of Cana. She wanted Jesus to help since the hosts had run out of wine. Jesus answered, "My time has not yet come," (John 2:4). Jesus did help, but when the time was right. Jesus did not immediately give the Syrophenician woman an answer to her prayer. He seemed to ignore her pleas at first. He did help, when the time was right (Mark 7:24-30). The Lord did not immediately give Job relief from his misery. He did help when the time was right.

The Lord also helps in His own way. When we ask the Lord to take away a problem, He can help us in one of three ways. He can take the problem away. He can allow the problem to remain but give us the strength to bear the problem, as He did in the case of Paul (2 Cor. 12:9). Finally, the Lord can also take us away from the problem by taking us to himself in heaven. As Isaiah observed, "The righteous perish and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil," (Is. 57:1).

Certainly, we can and must may bring all our requests to God with the assurance that He will hear and answer our prayers in the way that is best for us, when it is best for us.