



God's Sovereignty and Prayer

Your Purpose in God's Plan



Memory Verse

"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the request which we have asked from Him."

1 JOHN 5:14-15



Discussion starter:

- Why should the Christian pray if God ordains all that comes to pass?
- Can our prayers change God's mind?
- Do our prayers have any possible benefit for God?
- Why does God *command* us to pray if, in fact, He has already *determined* what He's going to do?

"Nobody ever got anything from God on the grounds that he deserved it. Haven't fallen, man deserves only punishment and death. So if God answers prayer it's because God is good. From His goodness, His lovingkindness, His good-natured benevolence, God does it! That's the source of everything."— **A.W. TOZER**

The issue of prayer and God's sovereignty is critical to the believer's understanding because if improperly understood, it could lead to the absence of spiritual growth and power.

Two Facts to Guide Your Thinking

To think properly about this important subject, two things must be remembered:

- A. God has decreed all that will happen.** God's constancy, truth, and faithfulness appear in His decrees. Every decree of God is eternal, *"but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory"* (1 Corinthians 2:7).
- **Isaiah 46:9-11**—*"Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it."*
- B. All things are working for the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose.**
- **Romans 8:28**—*"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."*

Notice that all things are not working for "our good," but "for good." What good? The eternal purpose that He has in mind—His eternal plan; His will.

- **Romans 12:2b**—*"...the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."*

The working together of all things is called **God's providence**. Earlier, we discovered that there are *four aspects to God's providence*. See if you can recall the four ways in which God's providence can be viewed:

1. _____ Providence—This is when God prevents man from the sin he intends to do.
2. _____ Providence—This is when, instead of actively restraining evil, God permits it to take its course.
3. _____ Providence—This is when God allows evil, but directs its course.
4. _____ Providence—This is when God determines the limits to which evil and its effects may go.

Here is another aspect in God's providence that must be understood properly, as it relates to prayer: God's providence not only extends to the end result or the goal in mind, but also to the means used to meet that goal. A means is a vehicle through which something is accomplished.

Read John 3:16-17 and answer these questions:

- a. What is God's end for the world? _____
- b. What is the means to that end? _____
- c. Who provided the means? _____

Simply stated, *God ordains the means as well as every end result*. He uses the means as a *secondary cause* under the supervision and government of His primary purpose.

What Are the Means of Grace?

In the life of the church, we speak of "means of grace." What is a "means" again? Write it here:

Grace speaks of undeserved favor or enabling power. Means of grace are those vehicles that God has given to us for the accomplishment of our sanctification or holiness. There are three means of grace in the Bible. Read the verses below and try to discover what they are:

A. The first means of grace is _____.

- **John 17:17**—"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." (See also Ephesians 5:26-27)

B. The second means of grace is _____.

We humble ourselves when we confess and repent of our sins (*1 John 1:9*). We humble ourselves when we partake of the Lord's Supper, which is the place where God calls His people to gather for reflection, repentance, restoration, and renewal (*1 Corinthians 11:23-33*).

- **James 4:6**—*"But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, 'GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.'"*

C. The third means of grace is _____.

On this subject, R.C. Sproul said, "Prayer is a vital vehicle, or tool, that God has given to His church so that we may become sanctified."

- **Hebrews 4:16**—*"Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

Some Important Questions Relating to God's Sovereignty and Prayer

A. Do our prayers benefit God in any way? _____

- **Psalm 50:10-12**—*"For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains."*

God is self-sufficient, which means that He has no need of anyone or anything in order to exist or be fulfilled. He does not need water or air to exist. He does not need praise or adoration to be fulfilled. When God wants fulfillment, He gets it all from His own being. His plans cannot be augmented or diminished by the works of His creatures. The Psalmist said, *"Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven"* (*Psalm 119:89*). He got along just fine before we were created, and He can get along without us now.

B. Can our prayers add to God's knowledge? _____

- **Romans 11:34-35**—*"For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN?"*

God is omniscient. He gleans no new information from us that He didn't already have. As it relates to prayer, He even knows what we need and what we are about to tell Him before we speak a word.

- **Matthew 6:8b**—*"...for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."*
- **Psalm 139:2b, 4**—*"...You understand my thought from afar...Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, You know it all."*

C. Can prayer change God's mind? _____

To find the answer to this question, let us ask and answer a series of questions:

Discussion:

1. Is God's plan perfect or imperfect?
2. Does God have a Plan A, Plan B, and Plan C, just in case we don't do what we ought to do?
3. Does God establish the end, and then allow us to determine the means to His end?

Prayer does not change God's mind or plan, because God's mind and plan are both perfect. God has prescribed prayer as a means of accomplishing His plan. When a man prays, not only does he carry out what God knew he would do, but he also fulfills what God sent him to do. When a man does not pray, it doesn't change the plan of God; God still works to fulfill His purposes apart from prayer. Prayer does not change God's mind; it changes us.

D. Why should we pray? What responsibility do we have to pray?

1. Prayer is a powerful force for change.

- **James 5:16-18**—*"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit."*

These verses tell us several key things about prayer:

- a. Effective prayer is prayer that accomplishes much.
- b. Prayer accomplishes much in us and for others. (*Acts 10:5ff*)
- c. The prayers of the righteous are the prayers that God will hear. (*2 Corinthians 5:21*)
- d. God not only listens to the prayers of prophets, but He listens to ours as well.

2. God is eager to listen and respond to the prayers of His children when they are in line with His will.

- **Luke 18:1-7**—*"Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, 'In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, "Give me legal protection from my opponent." For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, "Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out."' And the Lord said, 'Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?'"*

The reason why Jesus told this parable was not to convince us that God can be persuaded to change His mind as the unjust judge's mind was changed by the annoying pleas of the widow. It is a parable of *contrast* more than *comparison*. Jesus wanted to teach us to *always pray and not to lose heart*. If an unjust judge will listen to the persistent pleas of a woman, then how much more will the Just Judge of heaven listen to His children's prayers?

- **Jeremiah 33:3**—“Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”



Application

Skillful application of divine truth for the glory of God

- What is the most awesome prayer that God has answered on your behalf?
- How did this answer to prayer line up with His purposes?
- What have you been facing recently that warrants the enabling power of God?
- Have you sought God’s grace in prayer about it?
- Have you been searching for an alternative to God’s perfect plan for your life? Marriage? Finances? Ministry?
- Since prayer is the means to God’s end, how much have you committed that area to prayer? Why or why not?
- Will you commit to praying about that area more today?



Serving Under the Sovereignty of God

What shall I do if I am not sure of what God wants me to do?

Principle to practice: Don’t merely listen to the Word and deceive yourself; do what it says. (*James 1:22*)



Singing Under the Sovereignty of God in Our Prayers

Hymns to help you worship

Profile: JOSEPH M. SCRIVEN (1819-1886)

- Irish poet, born into a wealthy family
- Graduated from Trinity College at age 23
- Fiancee' drowned the day before their wedding
- Wrote a poem titled "Pray Without Ceasing" when he learned that his mother was deathly ill
- This poem later became the hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

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WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!



In light of this stanza, what ways should your life change?

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful,
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our Refuge
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
In His arms He'll take and shield thee;
Thou wilt find a solace there.



After reading this stanza, what blessings can you recognize?

TAKEAWAY FOR TODAY:

The second stanza starts with the two rhetorical questions, "Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?". The answer is conclusively yes! While God does not tempt us, He sovereignly allows us to experience temptation. Trials and trouble are also regular experiences that are uniquely designed by God for us that we might grow in grace, dependence, and the knowledge of our Savior. Ask God now to help you in whatever circumstances you are in.

Answer Key

Two Facts to Guide Your Thinking

1. Preventative
2. Permissive
3. Directive
4. Restrictive

Read John 3:16-17 and answer these questions:

- a. salvation
- b. Jesus
- c. God

What Are the Means of Grace?

In the life of the church, we speak of “means of grace.” What is a “means” again? Write it here:

a vehicle through which God’s purposes are accomplished

- A. the Word
- B. humility
- C. prayer

Some Important Questions Relating to God’s Sovereignty and Prayer

- A. no
- B. no
- C. no

Discussion:

1. perfect
2. no
3. no

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