

**THE IMPERFECT PRAYER LIFE AND THE DESIRE FOR COMMUNION WITH GOD - Part ten - Sunday, December 1st 2024 - 5:30 p.m.
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A STRATEGY FOR PREVAILING PRAYER

Prevailing prayer is nourished by God's promise. And God has not promised to answer **any** kind of prayer we choose to offer. There are people who do not prevail in prayer because they have **no right** to prevail in prayer. They do not comply with the conditions God has promised to honor. In fact, their prayers are just the kind of prayers that God has promised **not** to honor. To continue to pray in this fashion is to **pray oneself into skepticism** about the value and power of prayer all together.

Today we will summarize the important lessons of this series:

1) **TO PREVAIL IN PRAYER WE MUST PRAY IN THE WILL OF GOD**

To pray according to God's will means at least **two things**:

- a) ***It means asking for the things God delights to do - 1 John 5:14 - "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."***

True, this is sometimes easier said than done. Being both finite and fallen we can't **always** lay claim to an absolute knowledge of God's mind. But there are still **some** things about which we are certain.

We know our **spiritual growth** is always God's will - even if we don't always know His **means** in producing it. We know **reaching the lost** is always His will - even if we sometimes struggle with His timing. We know glorifying His Son, Jesus Christ, is always His will - even if He does it through our own personal persecution, demonstrating our ultimate loyalty to Christ over all else. We know abstaining from an idolatrous love for pleasure and material goods is always His will - even if we don't always embrace the kind of **unanswered prayers** that bring this about in our self-centered hearts.

The point here is fruitful prayer must be **aware** of God's will as it is revealed in **God's Word** and by the **Holy Spirit**. And prevailing prayer must seat this divine will far above the seeker's own agenda.

- b) ***Praying according to the will of God also means asking for God's will with the right mind and heart - Charles Finney - "Praying according to the will of God means not only asking for such things as God is willing to grant, but also asking in such a state of mind as God can accept."***

For all his theological quirks, surely Finney makes an important point here. Consider the following example of what he means from the words of Jesus on prayer - **Matthew 6:9-10** - **"Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. [10] Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'"**

Here is how Jesus ***begins*** when He tells us how to think of prayer. Prayer anchors down in ***hallowing God's name*** and ***entreating God will***. Start praying with these two things in the front of your mind because it is certain these two requests are close to God's heart.

Yet even this explanation of the Lord's prayer doesn't quite say it all. Saying these opening words of Jesus' prayer doesn't mean I'm praying according to the will of God. ***To pray this prayer with the right mind and heart means I am giving myself, with all I am and have, to the implementing of God's reign and rule in my life here and now.*** Otherwise, my prayer does not come from a pure heart - ***"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"***(Matthew 5:8).

Again, hear these sharp words from Charles Finney: ***"Take the next petition - 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven' - God has not promised to answer this petition unless it is sincerely offered. But to offer it sincerely implies a state of mind that is totally submitted to the revealed will of God as it bears upon all areas of my life - that as far as I understand it, I accept it as they do in heaven."***

Only a ***fully consecrated heart*** can pray those opening words of the Lord's Prayer without falling into what Jesus called ***"vain repetition."*** All of this is involved in praying ***according*** to the will of God. We are not merely told to pray ***knowing*** the will of God, but to pray ***according*** to the will of God.

- 2) **TO PREVAIL IN PRAYER WE MUST PRAY WITH A CONSCIENCE VOID OF ANY OFFENCE - 1 John 3:20-22** - "...for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. [21] Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; [22] and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him."

Of course, none of us lives life with an unblemished moral score card. Our own hearts can be relentless task masters. That is why John lovingly tells us "***God is greater than our heart***"(20). But, while there will rarely be ***perfection***, God does require ***purity***, and this in ***two areas***. They are nailed down in these verses:

- a) ***Our conscience is clean and clear relationally*** - The context frames John's remarks about the importance of having an ***uncondemning heart***:

1 John 3:16-20 - “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. [17] But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? [18] Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. [19] By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; [20] for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”

Clearly I cannot pray effectively if I have wronged my brother or sister. But there's more. I cannot pray effectively if I am *responding* unscripturally to genuine wrongs others have committed against me - **“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, [15] but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15).**

On to John's second condition to prevailing prayer:

- b) ***I am obeying the law of God in all known areas of my life - 1 John 3:22 - “...and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.”*** Again, the requirement here isn't absolute moral perfection. It is ***spiritual attentiveness***. I am obeying the will of God as it is made aware to me by the Word and the Spirit. I am not ***bluffing*** in any area of my walk with Jesus. As much as it is in me I am ***“doing what pleases Him.”***
- 3) **TO PREVAIL IN PRAYER IS TO PRAY WITH TRUTH GOVERNING THE INWARD LIFE - Psalm 51:6 - "Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart."**

Notice the link with our previous point. John says prayer is fuelled by ***“doing what pleases Him.”*** Now the Psalmist tells us in no uncertain terms that ***“truth in the inward being” delights*** God. This is why the Psalmist consistently stressed the importance of the ***inner life***. This is where you and I have the ***greatest potential*** to please our heavenly Father. And this greatly fortifies prayer.

One more thing. Notice that all of the activities of the outward religious life (*including* prayer) mean nothing without this truly clean inner sanctuary - **“For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. [17] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise”**(Psalm 51:16-17).

The sacrifices were the road of **access** to God in the Old Testament. That’s what makes the Psalmist’s words so telling. He says there is no real **pathway** to God apart from the purity of inward devotion and willing. There is nothing more important to prevailing prayer than this.