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THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD AND PRAYER

There are things in the Scriptures which puzzle and baffle the mind of the believer from time to time, this must inevitably 'be the case to some degree because we are creatures of time dealing with things which are eternal, finite beings coming face to face with the infinite, mortals of limitation confronted with the truths of the Almighty Omnipotent God.

Nevertheless, as the Christian grows in grace and in knowledge, he begins to see and to understand more fully the great plan and workings of the Eternal.

Perhaps one of the great problems in our minds (although we might never have mentioned it) is that of the title of this article, and we find ourselves secretly asking the question "If God has fore-ordained before the foundation of the world everything which is to happen in time, then what is the use of prayer seeing that God is immutable?" This is a very genuine question which needs clarifying from the Word of God.

These pages will not be dealing comprehensively with the great subject of prayer, but rather are they written in an endeavour to clear away some of the muddled thoughts which may be in our minds with regard to this aspect of prayer.

First let us re-affirm our belief in the absolute Sovereignty of God, - He is immutable, He worketh ALL THINGS after the counsel of HIS OWN WILL. (EPH.1.V.11.) MY counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure. (IS.46.V 10) HE is in one mind. (JOB.23.V.13.) HIS counsel is immutable (HEB 6.V.I7.) I CHANGE NOT (MAL 3.V.6.)

He is subject to none, and indeed influenced by none. Divine Sovereignty means that God is God, He is never swayed by sentiment, but is actuated by principal. Now if we have in our minds the thought that Gods designs are continually being thwarted by Satan, or that His plans are constantly needing amendment, or that because man who has a will is involved, and so much depends upon how he will act or re-act in a given situation, this must necessarily somewhat restrict God in His actions; if such a thought should linger in our minds then our God no more resembles the SUPREME SOVEREIGN of scripture than does a flickering candle the glory of the mid-day sun; for such a God whose will can be resisted, whose designs can be frustrated, whose purpose checkmated has no claim to deity,-

such thoughts are of the adversary. Our God is immutable and sovereign. "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord (PROV 21.V.30) all that He has decreed HE WILL PERFORM.

We have all heard many sermons and read many books on the subject of prayer, but is it not true to say that in the great majority of cases one's thoughts are almost entirely focused upon the human aspect; it is the conditions we must fulfil, the things we must do, the promises we must claim in order to get our prayers answered; there is much truth in all this but it is not in balance. What of God's claims, God's rights, God's glory? How many homes have we entered and seen the motto - "PRAYER CHANGES THINGS". In the strictest sense, this is just not true. One writing some little while ago stated - "God's policy is shaped by the prayers of His people", such a statement is a denial, indeed a defiance of the teaching of Holy Scripture which tells us that God has an eternal purpose. (EPH 3 V. 11) If God's purpose is an eternal one then His policy is not being shaped to-day, and if "He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (EPH. 1 V. 11) then neither is His policy shaped by man's prayers.

One goes further to say that there is no need whatsoever for God to alter His purposes or change His design, for the great purposes of God issued from the mind of the Eternal, therefore it is characterized by infinite wisdom and perfection, and the very perfection of the plan demands that it be regulated and controlled by the Immutable God who never will alter, amend, or change His mind. Why then does God demand of us constant and continual prayer? First and foremost, that He Himself shall be honoured; God delights in our recognition of His Sovereignty. What glory we bring to Him when with reverence, we approach His Holy Throne in prayer, acknowledging that He is the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity whose name is Holy, when we own His universal dominion and power, this is worship, and primarily that is what prayer is. It is in prayer that we own before Him His goodness, His power, His immutability, His grace, we humbly acknowledge our dependence upon Him, in seeking blessings we own that He is the author the fountain of every good and perfect gift, this is the most God honouring exercise in which the soul can engage as we manifest to Him the complete confidence of our hearts. This in turn stimulates faith and calls it into exercise, and this is so essential to our growth in grace, for "The just shall live by faith" (ROM.1.V.17. GAL. 3.V.11. HEB.10.V.38.) and "Without faith it

is impossible to please God" (HEB.11.V.6.) Prayer is designed by God for our very growth, it not only energises faith but it is also a means of humbling, for real prayer brings a sense of the awful majesty of God, it produces reverence and Godly fear, it too, stimulates our love. Is it not a wonderful experience to return from prayer knowing that we have been in vital living touch with the Great God of Heaven? in full assurance of faith that the Eternal One has bowed down His ear to our cry, how such a thought causes the soul to thrill and the heart to go out in love to our God, and so the words of the Psalmist become true of us, "I love the Lord because He hath heard my voice and my supplications, because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live" (PS. 116.V.1-2).

God too requires that in our praying we ask of Him the things which we are in need of; but in view of our Saviour's words "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him" (MATT. 6.V.8.) there can linger in the mind "What is the point of coming to God in order to tell Him what He already knows" and "What is the use of praying for anything, when everything has been ordained of God beforehand". Prayer is not required of us in order to furnish God with the knowledge of what we need, but rather as a confession of our absolute dependence upon Him. Further, God decrees that certain events shall come to pass, but He also decrees that these events shall come to pass through the means which He has ordained for their accomplishment. The teaching of Scripture also is that God has chosen to salvation an innumerable company of people, but it is not true to say that those predestined by the Sovereign Will of God will be saved haphazard regardless as to whether they believe or not. The God who ordains the end, appoints the means. With regard to this - the salvation of God's elect, one of the means appointed is the preaching of the gospel, another is prayer. Prayer, true spirit-taught prayer, is never in vain; it is a thing included in God's Sovereign purpose, but prayer does not move God to alter, or amend His purpose, but rather is it one of the means by which God brings His decrees to fruition, in the same way as does the preaching of the gospel.

The fact that it is not meaningless to pray for that which God has already decreed is clearly taught throughout the Word of God. God gave absolute assurance to Elijah that he would break the terrible drought which had lasted for three and a half years. "I WILL SEND RAIN UPON THE EARTH" said the Almighty (1.KINGS 18.V.1.) With this word ringing in his ears

the man of God went to the top of Carmel and there prostrated himself upon the ground in earnest fervent prayer, by faith he heard "The sound of abundance of rain", nevertheless he agonized in prayer that this might be so.

In Ezekiel ch.36.V.24-28 God, - (the God who is immutable remember) makes wonderful promises to His earthly people, but having given them such assurances, He says in verse 37 of that chapter "Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them".

In Daniel ch 9 V.2-3. we are told that Daniel clearly understood from the writings of Jeremiah that His people would be in captivity for 70 years, but as those years expired, he fasted in sackcloth and ashes, and prayed to the God of heaven. It was not because of unbelief that these men thus acted, but rather had they a deep appreciation of the mind and purposes of God.

Our Lord Himself set wonderful precedent on the same issue. He knew perfectly well that after His death and resurrection He would be exalted by the Father, yet we hear Him pray for this very thing "Now O Father glorify Thou me with Thine Own Self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (JN.17.V.5.) He also fully knew that none of His sheep could ever perish, yet He prayed to His Father to "Keep them" (JN. 17.V.11) Far from the promises and predictions of the Almighty exempting us from prayer, rather do they furnish us with instruction as to what things to pray for, and as we pray, we enter into the very thoughts and decrees of God and so become part of the means in the accomplishing of His Sovereign purpose. When we have grasped this, we shall fully understand the meaning of the words we oftentimes use in prayer (and correctly so) "Not for our sakes - but for His sake". We ask these things for the accomplishment of His Sovereign Will, it is for His sake. This leads us further still, that no prayer is, or ever can be, pleasing to God unless it is motivated by a spirit of "Not my will but Thine be done". Submission is the hallmark of true prayer, submission to the DIVINE WILL. Anything which savours of dictating to God is not true prayer, for real prayer is communion with God, and communion means sharing or having in common, so when our thoughts are common to, or in keeping with the eternal thoughts and purposes of God, then we have communion, we pray aright and the words of John become true of us "If we ask anything according to HIS WILL He heareth us" (1.JN.5.V.14.) But there may be in our minds the words of our Lord when He said "Verily, Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask

the Father in my name, He will give it you" (JN 16.V.23.) This is perfectly true, but one can only say again, how wrong is the practice of divorcing one verse from the teaching of the aggregate of scripture. This verse in Johns gospel is not a prayer formula, it is very much more than this. When we ask in the name of Christ we are actually applying to God in the very name of His Son, we can therefore only ask of God the things which the Son would ask of the Father, and He always prayed according to the WILL OF GOD, therefore to truly ask in Christ's name is to completely set aside our will and thoughts, and to accept Gods. Prayer is not a means whereby His policy is shaped, or our ideas introduced into the Divine plan, nor will the cryings of His people alter the mind of the IMMUTABLE GOD as He stated in the Old Testament "Then said the Lord unto me Though Moses and Samuel stood before me yet my mind could not be toward this people, cast them out of my sight and let them go forth" (JER.15.V.1.)

We must grasp, that this high and holy exercise is to enter into the very thoughts of the Eternal God and then to earnestly pray according to HIS WILL; thus we become an effectual means in the accomplishment of the Sovereign purposes of our God, and to this ministry we are all called. Do we not all feel that our very first petition needs to be that of one of His disciples who said "Lord teach us to pray" (LK.11.V.1.) Here then is the point of reconciliation between the Immutability of God and the prayers of the Christian - If we ask according to HIS WILL, He heareth us. If we do not thus ask, He heareth us not, "Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss" (JAMES 4 V.3). Small wonder that the great burden of Scripture is that God's people might know HIS WILL. Paul prayed that the Christians might be filled with the knowledge of HIS WILL (COL.1.V.9.) Epaphras prayed that they might stand perfect and complete in all THE WILL OF GOD (COL.4.V.12.) Peter prayed that we should live to THE WILL OF GOD (1.PET.4.V.2.) The Ephesians were instructed "To understand what the WILL OF THE LORD IS" (EPH.5.V.17.)

So let us ever seek the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit of God who indwells us, for His intercession is always according to THE WILL OF GOD (ROM.8.V.26-27) This alone will be effectual prayer.

W.H.M.

Announcements & Information

It is with thanksgiving and gratitude to God that we look back over the season with the "Drive-in" Church. At the time of writing there are three more services to be held. The weather has been superb for such work, but more than this, we have known in a very real way the help and power of the Holy Spirit. Many cars of non-church-going people have been present nearly every Sunday. We continue to pray that their coming may result in eternal blessing for them. It has been a tremendous joy and privilege to witness in our town in this way, a privilege which has been shared by the fellowship in a wonderful way, as so many have been present every Sunday, and practically all our brethren rallying around every week to assist in many and varied ways. We can be fully assured that in this work we are completely in line with the great commission MARK 16.V.15-16.

Our brother Mr Bridge continues his door-to-door work with gospel literature, this is a very big coverage over 1,500 homes to date, great subject matter for prayer.

At the time of going to print arrangements are being made for a Baptismal service at which our brother & sister Mr & Mrs Round are being baptized. We thank God for them both, and pray that this occasion may be a real spiritual landmark to them, and a time of real blessing both to them and the church.

November will bring our annual meeting of the Trinitarian Bible Society, with the visit of Mr Dix once again. One understands that the funds of the society have been particularly strained this year. We should bear this in mind in our giving at the T.B.S. offering this season.

Mr Bush will be with us for a series on the 3rd missionary journey of the apostle Paul and Mr Lemon for three Thursdays toward the end of the quarter. The studies on "The Holy Spirit" continue on Sunday mornings.

Through it all may God's name be glorified & we His people edified and strengthened.

ISAIAH 53.

HE shall grow up before Him as a tender plant.
He hath no form nor comeliness.
HE is despised and rejected of men.
HE was despised, and we esteemed Him not.
HE hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.
HE was wounded for our transgressions,
HE was bruised for our iniquities,
HE was oppressed.
HE was afflicted.
HE opened not His mouth.
HE was brought as a lamb to the slaughter.
HE was taken from prison and from judgement.
HE was cut off out of the land of the living.
HE was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
HE made His grave with the wicked.
HE had done no violence.
HE shall see His seed.
HE shall prolong His days.
HE shall see of the travail of His soul.
HE shall bear their iniquities.
HE shall divide the spoil with the strong.
HE hath poured out His soul unto death.
HE was numbered with the transgressors.
HE bore the sin of many.
HE made intercession for the transgressors.

"Of whom speaketh the prophet? JESUS" (ACTS 8.V.34-35).

Someday the clouds will roll aside like Jordan's tide of old,
And there in bold relief shall stand my Saviour to behold.

I cannot tell how soon 'twill be, the day, nor yet the hour,
For God Himself holds endless time within His Sovereign power.

But "in like manner shall He come as ye have seen Him go",
Thus do the scriptures testify, and I believe it so.

Would I be ready if He chose to come, perhaps today?
I wonder? Would He find me true, or stumbling in the way?

I know His coming draweth nigh, so earnestly I pray -
O Lord, help me to live always as if it were today!