

Prayer According to the Will of God

By Harry Allen Ironside

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By H.A. Ironside

We would now dwell upon the prayer that God delights to answer. We might, of course, simply refer again to the hindrances previously looked at, and learn from them what must be avoided in order to insure direct answers. But it will be more profitable to dwell upon positive statements, of which there are so many in the Word of God.

And first of all we have the clear, unequivocal declaration of 1 John 5:14-15: “And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, He hears us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.”

What words are these: “If we ask anything,” and “Whatsoever we ask!” But let us not fail to observe the all-important condition, “According to His will,”

Now God has been pleased, in wonderful grace, to make known His will in a book. We rightly call the Scriptures by the sublime title our Lord Himself used, “The Word of God” (John 10:35). If I would know His will, I must study this book. Ignorance of the revealed Word accounts for many unanswered prayers. In regard to prayer, as in other matters, we err through not knowing the Scriptures. He who would pray aright must be taught of the Spirit through the written Word. Learning thus the mind of God, prayer becomes, not the whimsical expression of our own poor minds, but it takes on a high and holy character: it is asking of God what He delights to give, yea, what He has declared is His desire and purpose. Here again we have to meet the natural objection of our unbelieving hearts:--If it is God’s will to do a certain thing, why need I pray about it? But Daniel may well teach us a lesson here. When (as told in his ninth chapter) he “understood by books” what God was about to do, he immediately set himself to pray in accordance with the prophetic message And as he thus asked “according to His will,” God answered in a way marvelously confirming the faith of His servant.

It is therefore all-important that we search the Scriptures in a self-judged and teachable spirit, in order that we enter into the current of the divine counsels. Then as we learn anything that is in accordance with the will of God, we can bear it up before Him in confidence.

“I prayed for years,” said an almost distracted woman to the writer on one occasion, “that God would sanctify me wholly by rooting-out all inbred sin and making me absolutely pure within, and He has not heard my cry.” I could only reply, “But you had no title to pray for anything of the kind. God has expressed His mind too clearly for any subject soul to be mistaken. His will is not that inbred sin should be rooted-out of you, but that through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, sin shall not reign in your mortal body.”

As with thousands of similar cases, the new view-point changed completely the character of her prayers. Israel desired a short-cut through the land of Edom—and Edom is typical of the flesh. But God’s will was that they should compass the land of Edom, even though the way was long and trying. In the desert they proved how well able He was to care for them.

Go through your Bible and learn, particularly from the Epistles of the New Testament, what the will of God really is; and as His counsels are opened up to your soul, pray accordingly, and He will do for you exceeding abundantly above all you ask or think.

It is most blessed when one is exercised about unsaved friends, relatives, or causal acquaintances, to know that prayer for their conviction and conversion is indeed in accordance with His will. “He is not willing that any should perish.” “He will have (that is, desires to have) all men to be saved.” To those who refused His grace our Savior said sorrowfully, “I would, but ye would not.”

“From heaven His eye is downward bent,
Still glancing to and fro,
Where’er in this wide wilderness
There roams a child of woe.

And as the rebel chooses wrath,
God wails his hapless lot,
Deep-breathing from His heart of love
‘I would, but ye would not.’”

With what assurance can one pray for needy ones, when he knows it is the will of God to save! Someone has well said, “Prayer does not change the will of God. it allows God to work upon man’s will, and change it.” The last sentence is perhaps capable of serious misunderstanding. But the meaning surely is that God is waiting on our prayers, in order to work in such a way that we may know He is revealing Himself in wondrous grace. Whenever He is about to work, He first stirs hearts to pray.

Abraham prayed, and God delivered Lot.

Jacob prayed, and God caused Esau to meet him in peace.

Moses prayed, and Amalek was defeated, and Israel was victorious.

Hannah prayed definitely for a son, and God heard, and she called her little one Samuel.

Daniel prayed, and the whole prophetic panorama was opened up to him.

Nehemiah prayed, and the king’s heart was turned toward the remnant of Israel and the holy city.

But why multiply cases? These all prayed according to *the will of God*, and He heard and answered. And since the canon of Scripture was closed, the history of the Church abounds in similar instances, which furnish one of the most irrefutable evidences of the supernatural character of

Christianity, and should ever be an encouragement to each believer to seek to learn the will of God, and to ask largely in accordance with it, knowing that “He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself.”

If we would pray more, we might worry less, for we would understand better what I means to rest in His love, who has said, “Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thy heart.” Well has one of our Christian poets sung:

“Lord, what a change within us one short hour
Spent in Thy presence will prevail to make,
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take,
What parched grounds refresh as with shower!
We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;
We rise, and all—the distant and the near—
Stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear:
We kneel, how weak; we rise, how full of power.
Why therefore should we do ourselves this wrong
Or others—that we are not always strong?
That we are ever overborn with care,
That we should ever weak or heartless be
Anxious to troubled, when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with Thee?”

Well may we cry with earnest hearts, “Teach me Thy will;” and then, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

And observe, the last petition is not merely, “Teach us *how* to pray,” but “Teach us *to* pray,” for it is not enough to know the proper way in which to approach God, but we need to learn to pray without ceasing.

Onward to the Heavenly Land

“For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land—a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills.”

Deuteronomy 8:7.

O blessed Lord, Thy love to us so great
Has reached my heart;
Now teach me ev’ry form of sin to hate,
They strength impart.
Shine forth, O Lord, in all Thy glorious light
Within my soul, and lead me through the night.

I would be like Thee, O my blessed Lord,
Through all the way,
And joy in Thee, and trust Thy faithful Word
From day to day.
Strengthen Thou me that I may love Thee more,
And live for Thee, and praise Thee and adore.

Thy goodness, Lord, will lead us by the hand
Through this dark night,
Until I reach that blessed, heav’nly land
Where all is bright—
Where Thee I’ll see as Thou art there above,
And praise Thee for the fullness of Thy love.

W.E. Rowden

(Tune, “Lead, Kindly Light.”)