

THE PRAYING CHRISTIAN: GOD'S WARRIOR

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Introduction

This booklet's purpose is to make available a concise piece of literature, which sets forth the basic principles of prayer. Many Christians are living a powerless and ineffective life because of a poor prayer life. They have feeble expectations because they have a feeble concept of a sovereign God, who eagerly waits to pour out His blessings to a people, who are bold enough to pray as they are commanded in Scripture.

Prayer is a blessed means whereby we fellowship with an almighty and loving Father, who eagerly awaits such communion with His children. Biblical praying is the channel through which the very power of God is unleashed in our lives and in the world. The reason so few of us pray as we ought is because we do not fully understand what prayer is all about, because we are so weak in our faith, because we are not sold out to His plan for the world, and because we do not pursue after that which we are commanded.

Prayer and God's Perfections

The importance of sound doctrine as a basis for a sound prayer life cannot be overstated. Faulty views of God will inevitably cause us to pray wrongly and experience unanswered prayers, leaving us frustrated. If we are going to pray well, we must first learn correct theology. In this sense, all Christians are to strive to be theologians.

What are the important doctrinal truths, which enable a Christian to experience powerful and effective praying? Prayer must be rooted in our accurate concept of God's perfections or characteristics. Though this is not an exhaustive list, some of God's perfections, which are vitally important, are: His sovereignty, His holiness, His goodness, His faithfulness, and His love.

God's sovereignty

When the Bible speaks of God's sovereignty, it pictures God as one who not only plans but one who directs the affairs of mankind to a predetermined goal - the glory of His name. God's will is ultimately achieved, and His plans cannot be thwarted (Job 23:13, 14; Ps. 115:3; Dan. 4:35; Isa. 46:10, 11; Eph. 1:11). Though God has created man with certain freedom (he is able to make legitimate moral decisions which bear consequences) God, nevertheless, controls all of man's free or moral decisions, and they never catch God by surprise but always conform with His predetermined plan. This truth is most vividly portrayed in the death of Jesus Christ. Acts 2:23 states that Jesus was crucified according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. Who were the culprits? They were wicked men making "free" moral decisions who decided to crucify him; yet, these free moral decisions were in conformity with God's eternal plan all along. Without a sovereign God who rules absolutely over the affairs of men, our prayers would be to no avail. Prayers to a God, who is unable to accomplish certain things or who chooses not to interfere in the affairs of men in some situations, are destined to failure. The fact that we can pray to our God about anything certainly implies a sovereign God.

God's holiness

God's holiness can be defined as that perfection whereby God is absolutely distinct from all His creatures, and He is exalted above them in infinite majesty. From an ethical perspective, God's holiness means He is separated from any and all moral evil. God cannot sin. He is light and in Him there is absolutely no darkness at all (I John 1:5). Because God is holy He calls His children to be holy (I Peter 1:15). Without holiness in our lives we shall not see our prayers answered. There is no power in prayer without holiness of life!

God's goodness

This perfection of God concerns God's kind and bounteous dealings with His children (Ps. 145:8, 9, 16; Acts 14:17; James 1:17). God is ever ready to abundantly bless His children with "good" things. How sad the conception that some have of God - one who likes to rob us of joy and happiness. On the contrary, God wants to give good things to those who are His (Matt. 7:9-11). Praying to God for the desires of our heart and for good things is not only legitimate, but it is what God wants us to do. Of course, we must be sure that what we call "good" is what God considers as good.

God's faithfulness

Another wonderful perfection of God is His faithfulness, meaning that God will never lie but He will always keep His promises (Ps. 89:1-8; 119:89, 90; Num. 23:19). We cannot overemphasize how important it is to understand this perfection in the practice of prayer. Unless God is faithful we cannot have **boldness** and **certainty** when we pray.

God's love

In actuality, this perfection of God encompasses all His other perfections; for, they are the extension of God's love to His children. God's love is seen in His grace to us, whereby He gives us that which we do not deserve as unworthy sinners (Eph. 1:6, 7; 2:7-9; Titus 3:4-7). God shows His love to us by answering prayers in the way we desire, and He shows us His love by not answering some of our prayers, which are not in keeping with His divine will. It is not showing love to someone to allow them to misuse Scripture and to fulfill self-centered desires.

Fundamental Elements of Prayer

Confession of sin

The confession of our sins is absolutely vital to the Christian's prayer life. Without it, God cannot and will not hear nor answer our prayers, as we desire. First, God does not hear nor respond to the prayers of unbelievers, contrary to some popular opinion. This is a good example of how faulty theology leads to faulty praying, which was mentioned earlier. To think that God listens to and grants the requests of unbelievers is totally unbiblical. The Scripture is, clear in this regard (Isa. 1:10-17; 59:1, 2; Hab. 1:13). Second, unconfessed sin even in the life of the believer blocks our fellowship with God. It is an inhibitor to answered prayer. David said in Ps. 66:18-20, *"If I had cherished sin in my heart the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!"* For our prayers to be effective and powerful, it is paramount that we are not harboring any sin in our lives.

Praise

As we commune with our God we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge His majesty. Biblical prayer involves praise, but exactly what is praise? Praise is the confession or acknowledging before God who He is in all of His perfections. Some of the clearest expressions of the nature of praise in prayer are found in I Chronicles 16:7-36 and in I Chronicles 29:10-13. The prayers of godly persons in Scripture contained praises to God; how many of our prayers are characterized by praise?

Thanksgiving

Closely tied with praise is the attitude of thanksgiving. Where you find praise mentioned you often will find thanksgiving along with it (I Chron. 16:8, 9, 34, 36; Ps. 100:4). When we thank God, we are acknowledging His ownership over all creation and that He is the only source of all good things. If we are blessed, God is the only one who is to be given credit, not we ourselves. When we thank someone, we are recognizing and are grateful for their benevolence toward us. It is a remembering of God's wondrous deeds toward us (I Chron. 16:12).

How dare we attempt to engage in prayer without thanking God for all He has done for us? When we pray, we should thank Him for His grace and mercy for we know that salvation is a gift, not earned but given. We know that unless the Holy Spirit opened our eyes to see the glorious Gospel we would still be in darkness, enslaved to Satan and to sin. J. I. Packer states it so beautifully in his book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, "Your thanksgiving is itself an acknowledgment that your conversion was not your own work, but His work" (p. 12). Thanksgiving for all that God has done for His children must be an integral part of

every Christian's prayer life, if he ever hopes to have power in prayer.

Petitioning or Supplication

When we think of praying, it is this element that is usually thought of. We may neglect the elements of confession of sin, praise, and thanksgiving, but how often do we neglect the element of supplication? We are quick to petition God for our heart's desires. Now, there is nothing wrong in doing so, nor should we view this area of supplication as a lesser element in prayer. The bulk of so many prayers in the Bible are petitions to God. In fact, the bulk of this booklet is given to how we can boldly petition and confidently expect to receive our heart's desires with regard to our prayers.

Prayer – A Means in Achieving the Dominion Mandate

For prayer to be effective and powerful, it must be in accordance with God's purposes for mankind. It must align itself with the clear revealed will of God. The Scripture teaches that it is God's desire and purpose to subdue the world to Himself. The kingdom of God is to pervade all of life.

When God created man, He gave man the mandate to exercise dominion over all the earth (Gen. 1:28). In his fall into sin, mankind's ability to achieve this mandate has been marred and perverted; however, by virtue of Christ's redemption, Christians are enabled to exercise dominion to God's glory. This mandate to exercise dominion is seen in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20). The command is - to disciple the nations. This discipling is given meaning in v. 20 when Jesus said that this discipling takes form in the obedience to all that He has said. Thus, all that Jesus

has in mind for mankind comes into focus here. As man's salvation affects his behavior in this world, a Christian's goals are now different; his desires are different, and the way he approaches his work and all of life is different. Man is saved to bring glory to God's name.

Understanding the dominion mandate necessitates that we understand the implications of Christ's ascension. Jesus figuratively sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty (Matt. 22:44; 26:64; Mk. 16:19; Acts 7:55; Heb. 1:13). Sitting at one's right hand denotes a position of power and authority. Prior to His giving of the Great Commission, Jesus said that all power had been given Him in Heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). Jesus is presently exercising His kingship from the right hand of God the Father. In fact, He is presently subduing the earth to His Lordship from that position (I Cor. 15:20-28). Jesus remains in this position until His enemies are made His footstool (Heb. 1:1-13).

How does Jesus exercise this kingship in this world? He exercises His dominion through His agent. The church, which is His body, is the visible representation of Christ on earth (Acts 9:4, 5; Eph. 1:23). Through His church, Christ's power and influence is exerted on earth. We must not miss the thrust of Jesus' teaching in Matt. 16:18. The church is not a defensive army but an offensive one! Gates are defensive structures. Whose gates cannot prevail or hold up during attack? It is the gates of Hell. What a glorious truth! The church, when it obeys her head, destroys the strongholds of Satan.

II Corinthians 10:4, 5 illustrates for us that the church's task is to demolish all strongholds, arguments, etc. that are contrary to the truth. We are to take captive all thoughts to Christ's obedience.

What a glorious call to exercise godly dominion over all the earth! This is the implementation of a biblical world and life view. This passage is the discipling of the nations as seen in the Great Commission.

The Church has been given all the power necessary to accomplish its task because it has direct access to the source of that power - its head, Jesus Christ. The power for the church to exercise dominion and the success in this task isn't automatically dispensed to her. A primary means by which this is accomplished is by PRAYER. We petition our King Jesus to grant us the victory in discipling the nations. We pray that our efforts (if in accord with Scripture) will be successful. We pray that His Spirit softens the hearts of unbelievers, bringing them to repentance and saving faith. We pray that the Holy Spirit will convict wayward Christians of their disobedience, restoring them to a life of godliness. We pray that God's law will prevail in our culture as revival takes place.

Matthew 9:36-38 is very instructive for us. The passage reads, *"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few, ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.' "* An intriguing question that we ask ourselves is seeing that the Lord is well aware of the need and that He is more than capable as the sovereign Lord of meeting that need, why does He call upon His church to pray for the need to be met? In many ways the answer is shrouded in mystery for we are brought face to face with a sovereign God who carries out His foreordained plans, yet, those plans are not divorced from His people's obedience. We must come to grips with the fact that our

prayers are a power, which does affect the gathering of the harvest. The progress of the kingdom is related to our prayers! This means that when we fail to pray for laborers to be sent, God will not send them. This brings us to a sobering thought that our disobedience or lack of compassion is hindering the advance of the Gospel. Our lethargy is hindering godly dominion. In a real sense, the number of laborers and the measure of the harvest does depend upon our prayers. Yes, Jesus is the Lord of the harvest. Yes, Jesus is the dispenser of spiritual gifts. But, His supply and the distribution of the gifts often are related to the faithful prayers of His church.

The title to this booklet has been chosen for a particular purpose. Christians, who are constantly praying and availing themselves of the unlimited promises of God through believing prayer, are indeed the warriors of God. It is through such persons that our God works a marvelous way in this world. It is through such persons that the Great Commission is fulfilled. It is through such persons that the strongholds of Satan come crashing down before the advancing onslaught of the church of Jesus Christ.

Humanism is the world's system of thought, which sees man and not God as the center of all knowledge and truth. This system has pervaded our families, our civil government, our education, our view of science, etc. As the warriors of God, we diligently strive to expose and bring down Humanism's influence in this world. We seek to demonstrate that the wisdom of this world is but foolishness. We seek to demonstrate that God has spoken in all areas of life, and that His way is the only right way - the way that leads to fruitfulness and happiness. As 11 Corinthians 10:3-5 exhorts us we do seek to bring captive all thoughts to the obedience of Christ.

We must come to realize that prayer is a means by which we call upon our King Jesus to subdue the world to Himself. We must realize that without constant and believing prayer this dominion task is hindered. As we endeavor to carry out the task of world dominion, we must keep in focus several key factors. Jesus is king right now. Jesus presently reigns. The task of subduing the earth is given to the church. The power to achieve success in this task is totally from Christ. The means by which we appropriate the power is through believing prayer. Therefore, let us start praying! So we must ask, "where are the warriors of God?" Are you one?

Prayer – What is It's Chief End?

We must ask, "What is the primary reason we are commanded to pray?" The chief reason is to glorify God (I Cor. 10:31). John 14:12-14 exhorts us, *"I tell you the truth; anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."*

As we study the Scriptures we learn that Jesus' sole purpose during His earthly life was to do His Father's will (John 8:29). If we are going to be effective and powerful in our prayers, we must have God's glory as our sole purpose as well. Can it be said that God's glory is the first object of our prayers? Or, are self-interest and self-will our basic motives in prayer? Is there any wonder why we have so many unanswered prayers? God cannot be glorified except when His glory is the sole aim of our prayers. The Christian who seeks God's glory is the one who will see his prayers answered. Oh, Christian, is this your hunger and thirst - the glory of God? If not, you need not go further to see why your

prayers are unanswered. God will not bestow that which is contrary to His expressed purposes for this world.

Prayer – The Channel to Unlimited Promises

We have already emphasized that prayer is rooted in a correct understanding of the perfections of God. As a refresher, it would not hurt to recall that God in His very nature is omnipotent (all powerful). There is no limit to the extent and nature of God's power. Job confessed that God can do all things (Job 42:2). Jeremiah acknowledged, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you" (Jer. 32:17). Jesus in His discussion with His disciples declared that with God nothing is impossible (Matt. 19:23-26). Paul declared that God's power is "incomparably great for us who believe" (Eph. 1:19). Thus, we can see that God lacks no ability to execute His Divine purposes.

Not only is God omnipotent, but He is faithful. The Bible does speak of certain things, which are impossible for God, and this is not contradictory to His omnipotence, when properly understood. The Scripture affirms that God cannot lie, sin, change His being, nor deny Himself (Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29; II Tim. 2:13; Heb. 6:18; James 1:13, 17). In view of this, God will always remain faithful to His promises. If God says it, the issue is settled! We should now be able to see what great value these two perfections of God have for our prayer life. As we pray we reflect upon and affirm that God is all-powerful and that He will always keep His promises.

What kind of promises has He made to His people with regard to prayer? God has made **unlimited** promises. In later sections we shall see that these unlimited promises do have certain

qualifications; however, as long as we adhere to these qualifications, the promises remain boundless. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is the one who boldly asserted that prayer is a means to grasp the immeasurable promises and resources of God. The following passages reveal the unlimited promises of God: John 14:12-14; John 15:7; John 16:23, 24; Matthew 7:7-11; Matthew 17:18-20; Matthew 21:21, 22; Mark 11:23, 24; Matthew 18:1; I John 3:21, 22; I John 5:14, 15; and Psalm 37:4.

The human tendency is to look at these passages and say, "Surely they really don't mean what they appear to mean." But why can't they? Are there any contextual reasons why the words "whatsoever," and "anything" in these passages cannot mean literally what they imply? Why can't we allow God's Word to come to us with its vibrant power and energy, challenging us to receive all that He desires to give to His children?

Our human reason, even as Christians, is to add to these passages certain qualifiers such as "if expedient" or "if according to God's will" in order to safeguard against a negligent use of Scripture for our own selfish purposes. It is true that there are certain conditions, which must be met in order for these unlimited promises to be unleashed in our experience. However, these conditions simply provide the guidelines through which these promises become a reality. The Scriptural conditions for prayer in no way minimize the forcefulness of the limitless promises. In other words, as long as we faithfully meet these conditions, we can still ask for **anything** and it will be granted. We must guard against limiting a limitless God! We must not shy away from the boldness to avail ourselves of God's immense resources. We must allow God's promises, which are granted through prayer, to grip our very soul! Oh, Christian, are you ready to pray the way God

desires you to pray? Are you ready to lay hold of the heavenly storehouse?

Conditions for Effective and Powerful Praying

Now that we have been excited and challenged with the prospects of God's boundless promises, let us look at those guidelines, which will insure us the freedom to pray, and expect to receive anything that we ask.

We must ask, seek and knock

James 4:2 states, “ . . . *You do not have, because you do not ask God.*” Some Christians have the notion that some of their requests are so mundane that it is a waste of God's precious time even to ask. Of course, this attitude reflects a faulty theological view. The person who doesn't ask doesn't receive; it is as simple as that.

In Matthew 7:7-11 and in Luke 11:9-13 we see Jesus giving three **commands**: ask! seek! and knock! Jesus exhorts us to do these three things. It is important to note that in the original Greek these three commands are in the present tense, which infers a **continual** performance. We can see the quality of persistence taught in these passages. The petitioner is **constantly** asking, seeking, and knocking. The Greek grammar indicates that those who continually do these things will be continually receiving, finding, and having the door opened.

We must pray in Jesus' name

Sad to say, many Christians who pray ending their prayers with the phrase, "in Jesus name," don't understand its meaning and are often guilty of violating it, even though they say it. In John 14:13 and 16:23, 24 we see Jesus saying He will grant **whatever** we ask in prayer if we ask in His name. It should be apparent that simply

mouthed the words "in Jesus name" has no magical significance. To appreciate the meaning of this phrase, we must first appreciate the significance of the concept of "name." Throughout the Bible, names indicate nature, character, mission, and ministry. For example, the names of God in Scripture denote God Himself as He is revealed to us and as He desires to be known by us. God has revealed His nature and character to His people through His names. The names of God are associated with God's honor and glory (Psalm 8:1; 132:2). Sometimes God's name is used as synonym for His various perfections, namely His faithfulness (Isa. 48:9), His grace (Ps. 23:3), and His honor (Ps. 79:9).

Praying in Jesus' name means that we recognize all that His name implies. First, it implies His deity and His Lordship. Praying in Jesus' name means we are in union with His purpose for this world. Many a Christian has read the unlimited promises in these passages and has attempted to use them for his own selfish desires. The result is disappointment and discouragement. The problem is that they have separated the promise from its context. The promise is the free use of His name in conjunction with **doing His works**. It is the Christian who lives only for Jesus' work and kingdom that has the right to appropriate the promise of receiving whatever he asks. We cannot use Jesus' name to make Jesus the servant of our own pleasures or comfort. Effective and powerful prayer is characteristic of every Christian who prays for that which is needed in the service of the Lord's interests, not his own. Thus, praying in Jesus' name is aligning us with His nature, character, and mission. Yes, the promises are limitless, but are we truly praying in His name?

Second, we are acknowledging His mediatorship, meaning that it is only through Jesus Christ that we can approach a Holy God.

Jesus is the only way to fellowship with God (John 14:6). As our great high priest, He enables us to boldly approach the throne of grace (Heb. 4:14-16). We should carefully note that it is **only** through Jesus Christ that God the Father can hear and answer prayer. Be gone with the unscriptural idea that God hears the prayers of anybody, as long as they are sincere. Vague prayers to some notion of God are indeed in vain.

We must have faith

If there were one area of the Christian life that is woefully inadequate it would be in exercising true biblical **faith**. So many Christians sin by having a lack of faith. One of the saddest things is that we often spiritualize away the necessity of having faith. We unbiblically qualify our petitions to such a degree that there is no need for real faith as a necessity in receiving whatever we pray.

The nature of faith

Hebrews 11:6 exhorts us, *"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."* If we are to have a dynamic prayer life we must have faith. What is the real nature of faith? Hebrews 11:1 states, *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."* Faith is a channel that links the unseen reality with the seen reality. Faith allows us to rest with confidence that we possess a reality yet unseen. When we pray, we must learn to be assured that our prayers will be answered as we desire. Of course, this assumes that other conditions for powerful praying are being exercised simultaneously.

Faith is a mental conviction arising from a heart that yearns after Christ. However, faith has an objective element in that faith is not

so much a conjuring of desired hope independent of anything else. Genuine biblical faith is not in us but in the one who is able to do great and mighty things. What counts is not so much faith itself as it is the object of faith. Of course biblical faith never divorces the proper object of faith from the one exercising it. Who is the proper object of our faith? It is the Lord Jesus Christ!

We can see how reliance upon the source of faith is vital by observing the incident of Peter's walking on water recorded in Matt. 14:22-31. Peter could not have walked on water by his own ability. He was granted power to perform a supernatural act based upon his faith in Jesus. Who is the sole dispenser of that power? Peter demonstrated dependency upon the authority and power of Jesus when he said, *"tell me to come to you on the water"* (v. 28). Peter's faith was not in his own ability but in the object of his faith. Where did Peter go wrong when he began to sink? It was when he took his eyes off Jesus, the source of his power. The problem is that Peter began to look at the circumstances. Verse 30 says that he began to sink when he saw the wind and became afraid. The circumstances should have made no difference, seeing that Jesus is Lord over all. By looking at the wind Peter forgot whose power was enabling him to walk on water. What did Jesus say to Peter when He saved him? He said, *"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"* (v. 31). Unbelief or doubt is essentially the failure to recognize and constantly rely upon the object of our faith - a God who is faithful to His Word.

The above incident raises the question as to the meaning of Jesus' statement, *"You of little faith."* There is another incident whereby Jesus rebuked his disciples. In Matthew 8:23-26 the disciples were in a boat with Jesus when a great storm arose, seemingly threatening their lives. What is disturbing to the disciples is that

Jesus was sleeping through the storm. When they woke Jesus, accusing Him of not caring, Jesus replied, *"You of little faith, why are you so afraid?"* (v. 26). One lesson we learn is that fear and faith cannot coexist. Where one is, the other is absent. Thus, whenever we are afraid, it demonstrates that we lack faith. The solution is to confess the sin and to trust in the source of our deliverance. Does the phrase, "littleness of faith" mean that we need to have more faith or to have it increased? Littleness of faith should not be interpreted in a quantitative way (of how much) but in a qualitative way (the very nature of it). Unbelief is never because we don't have enough faith, necessitating the increase of it, but it is the failure to exercise the nature of faith. Jesus clarifies this in the episode concerning the forgiving of a brother in Luke 17:3-6. Jesus exhorts us that we are obligated to repeatedly forgive a man who sins against us and who keeps asking for forgiveness. The disciples responded by saying "increase our faith!" (v. 5). Jesus replied, *"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'be uprooted and planted in the sea' and it will obey you"* (v. 6). The point is - the disciples didn't need more faith; they simply needed to exercise faith regardless of its size.

In Matthew 17:18-20 we see Jesus rebuking His disciples for the littleness of faith in their inability to cast out the demon from a boy. Again, Jesus said that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed mountains could move at their command and that **nothing** would be **impossible** for them (vs. 20,21).

It is noteworthy that Jesus uses the mustard seed as His illustration because the mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds, but it grows into one of the largest trees. The point is this - even a little faith in the divine promise, when genuine in quality, will

accomplish great things just as a mustard seed grows into a great tree. If we but have a grain of true faith nothing is impossible. It doesn't take much when it is genuine. Thus, the littleness of faith means the failure to exercise what faith we have, not that we need to have it increased.

The faith that was required in Matthew 17:18-20 was a confidence in divine revelation, namely, that in Jesus' name the disciples were to cast out demons. It was a lack of faith in this direct command where they fell short. Jesus had promised them the power to cast out demons earlier (Matt. 10:8). The great tragedy in "littleness of faith" or "doubt" is that it refuses to heed to the clear promises of God. When we act upon Jesus' commands, that is, when we exercise faith in the promises, the apparently impossible becomes a reality.

We must, however, keep in proper focus the relationship between the one who exercises faith and the one who supplies the power and brings to reality what faith clings to. "Nothing will be impossible to you" must be seen in this light. No task assigned, such as casting out demons, is impossible when the person receiving the command is and remains in trustful contact with God. Biblical faith is the recognition that God is the source of all power and blessing. When we have any faith at all, we have all the ingredients intact to do the seemingly impossible.

Who moves the mountain? Is it God or us? In the ultimate sense, it is God because it is His power, but in another sense we do through the exercise of our faith. Perhaps the best way to see it is that God works out His divine purposes in the world through the agency of His people. We can see this in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Who does the saving? It is God alone. But who preaches that Gospel which saves? It is human beings (Rom. 10:13-15).

Matthew Henry has stated it well when he said, *"an active faith can remove mountains, not of itself, but in the virtue of a divine power engaged in a divine promise, both which faith fastens upon"* (Matthew Henry's Commentary on Matt. 17:20).

The power of believing

Great power in prayer comes from exercising faith. Jesus made this clear in several passages. In Matthew 21:21,22 Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but you say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. **If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer**"* (emphasis mine). In Mark 11:22-24 Jesus said, *"Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, if anyone says to the mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea', and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, **whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours**"* (emphasis mine). Where there is true faith it is impossible for the answer not to come. We must remember Jesus' words, "believe that you have received." Jesus will fulfill the promise that is given. Faith knows this and thereby it prays great things. It lays hold of God's boundless promises and says they are mine! Faith is the pledge or forerunner of the coming answer.

In Mark 11:24 the Greek grammar is clear in revealing that the asking and praying is to be a **constant** practice. As we are continually engaged in prayer, we are **commanded** to believe. In fact the grammar says we are to keep on believing. The thrust of the passage is that as we keep on praying and believing, we **have received** our requests. The verb "have received" conveys the thought of completed action. Isn't this wonderful - we are to keep

on believing that we have received what we are asking while we are praying. We may not actually see it for the time being, but we are assured that our Heavenly Father has already given the request. The actual manifestation of the prayer request is yet to come, which is according to God's timetable, not ours. This answers why certain requests are seemingly delayed. It isn't because God has not heard nor has not already granted the request; it is because He always works to His glory according to His plan. God wants to build godly character in our lives. By delaying the actual realization of the prayer, God often determines the real nature of our faith. Are we patient? Are we willing to persevere in prayer? Also, God often has granted one of our desires not according to our timetable but according to His, and we realize that it was more glorifying to God through an apparent delay. Genuine faith doesn't despair when God delays the bringing to fruition the request; faith continues to believe and thanks God that the request has already been granted. Faith says, "I know God will bring to pass, in due time, my request according to His glory."

Doubt is the great robber of powerful praying. Doubt blocks the channel to the unlimited blessings of God, while faith allows the free flowing of those blessings. We need to begin to see the seriousness of doubt; it is a grievous sin. James 1:6, 7 says that the man who doubts and who doesn't believe in his prayer is double-minded and unstable in all his ways. The picture that James portrays is a mind so filled with uncertainty and indecision that it cannot properly choose. The grievousness of doubt is that it insults the living God. Doubt assaults the very glory of God's perfections! Doubt refuses to accept God's readiness to make good all His promises to those who ask; therefore, it assaults the **faithfulness** of God. We must remember that the essence of

prayer is the laying hold of God's promises made to us. Believing prayer is a means by which these promises are realized. James 1:7 assures us that the one who doubts **will not receive anything** from the Lord. Doubting is the sin of unbelief!

Faith is Specific

The prayer of faith is not a vague and pointless request. It is not general petitions for grace, mercy, needs, etc. Take for example Bartimaeus, the blind man in Jericho, as recorded in Mark 10:46-52. When he heard that Jesus was passing by, he shouted for Jesus to have mercy on him. Jesus stopped and asked the man what he wanted done to him. Are we so naive to think that Jesus didn't realize that the man was blind? Jesus wanted the man to verbalize **exactly** what he wanted. Jesus declared that the man's faith had healed him. Though not all of Jesus' miracles required faith on the part of the recipient, many of them did. Who healed the man? Jesus did, but the man's faith was the means through which this miracle was realized. Is this not what Jesus has said about the power of believing prayer?

Our prayers must be the petitions of a definite need, not vague allusions to generalities. Jesus desires definite prayers in order to teach us to know better our own needs and desires. It takes time and careful reflection to determine what our earnest desires really are. Our desires are put to the test to see if they are in conformity with God's will. This forces us to go to God in prayer expecting to receive an answer to a specific prayer. We have often prayed in generalities because we were afraid to ask specifically and because we feared that we wouldn't receive our request. Such praying is a mask for the sin of unbelief.

Is the qualification, "Thy will be done," the pattern for praying?

We now come to a very sensitive area and one with which we must be very careful. How often have we heard that when we pray we must always end the prayer by saying, "if it is your will?" There is much confusion in this regard as to what constitutes God's will and how much faith we can exercise in praying specific prayers. We will boldly state that many a Christian has spiritualized away a dynamic prayer life under the pretense of - "if it is according to Your will." For many, it is the great cop out. It is the refusal to pray with faith. It is a cover up for a lack of desire, a lack of persistence, and a lack of a godly life.

When we look at the passages concerning prayer, do we find the exhortations to powerful praying qualified with the phrase, "if it is Thy will?" Did Jesus qualify His statements this way? Someone might ask if it wouldn't be better to make our desires known to God, and allow Him to decide what is best for us without our seeking to assert our wills. The answer is - NO! Such praying is not how our Lord taught us to pray. What people usually mean when they say this phrase is that they do not know God's secret will with which they fear they may be at variance. God's secret will is not what we are to concern ourselves with when we pray. Many a sincere believer has said, "I don't know if what I desire is in God's will because His will is the purpose of His infinite wisdom; it is impossible to know if God has something better than my request." As long as we pray like this, the prayer of faith cannot come to pass! The great unlimited promises such as we will receive "anything," "whatsoever," and "all things" that we ask in prayer would lose their forcefulness. When we pray, we are to pray in conformity with God's **revealed will** not with regard to

His secret will. This means that we are normally to know His will before we pray so that we can pray in faith for specifics and expect to receive them.

One might object to this author's commentary by citing Jesus' prayer in Matthew 26:39, *"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."* Some have said that this is to be the norm for all Christian prayers. This author disagrees for several reasons. First, it would lessen the forcefulness of Jesus' exhortation on prayer. Second, this passage is not an exhortation on how Christians should pray as much as it relates a specific instance in the life of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Anytime we are dealing with Jesus Christ we are dealing with extraordinary circumstances. Jesus is agonizing in His human nature with the prospects of bearing the sins of His people. None of us can fully understand this. We do not have a perfect human nature void of any sin as Jesus possessed. We cannot imagine the mental torment of a perfect man, realizing that He must bear the penalty of sin on our behalf. With such horrible torment in view, Jesus agonized in His perfect human nature, inquiring if such a death could be avoided. Jesus' prayer wasn't so much an uncertainty with respect to God's will as one of submission to what He already knew was God's will. On numerous occasions Jesus indicated that His whole purpose in coming into this world was to die for man's sins. Actually, Jesus' statement, "Yet not as I will, but as You will," is an immediate submission to His Father's intentions. We totally misuse Jesus' statement when we relegate it to some secret will of God that we cannot know.

Feelings and faith

It should be apparent that feelings and faith are not always companions. Faith is not contingent upon how we feel. In fact, if

we let our feelings govern us; we will soon have no faith. Feelings are often the great antagonists to biblical faith. Feelings often urge us to look at the circumstances rather than looking at the source of all power and comfort through the eyes of faith.

How often have we heard Christians say, "I don't **feel** as though my prayers are rising higher than the ceiling?" They don't feel that they are getting through, that God is hearing their prayers. Earlier we said that faulty theology leads to faulty praying. Here is another good example. Where in the Bible does it say that in prayer we are to **feel** that we are contacting God? No where! Such notions are characteristic of an age where people live and make decisions based on their subjective feelings rather than on the objective truths of God's Word.

In one sense, feelings should play no part in our prayer life. What we mean is that emotions should play no role in determining whether we have our prayers heard. Such persons should be challenged to quit using their feelings as the thermometer of their prayer life. Our being heard is based upon our obedience to God's Word (I John 5:14, 15), not upon our feelings. Faith lays hold of God's promises as its confidence, not upon some "feelings" that we have been heard. If we are manifesting a godly life, if we have faith, if we persevere in faith, and if we have the glory of God foremost in our mind, we ought to realize that our prayers are heard and will be answered despite whether we "feel" anything.

Could it be, Christian that your feelings of ineffective prayer are due to some sin on your part? Is there unconfessed sin (Ps. 66:18)? Are you hungering and thirsting after righteousness (Matt. 5:6)? Do you seek God's glory above all else (I Cor. 10:31)? Are you conforming to the world (Rom. 12:1)? Are you seeking to have your mind transformed by God's Word (Rom. 12:2)?

So many of us shrink back in unbelief. God is the same; He hasn't changed. God is still proclaiming that there is nothing too hard for Him (Jer. 32:17, 27). The seemingly impossible is possible to us through the agency of faith. Do we limit our prayers? Do we hesitate to pray for the apparently impossible? To do so is saying that God is impotent in the affairs of mankind! The warrior of God is the praying Christian who BELIEVES!

We must ask according to God's will

There is a difference in praying in conformity with God's will as opposed to praying that God's will be done, which may override our request. When we pray, we are to pray in light of God's revealed will, which is not only accessible to us but commanded that we know. We are to discern God's will as best as we can **before** we pray, so that when we do pray, we can in faith receive exactly what we asked. As we pray there should be no doubt as to the legitimacy of our prayer; otherwise, we should not be praying for that request.

It is discouraging to see Christians say they will pray for God's will about a matter in which God has already revealed His will. I John 5:14, 15 is highly instructive for us, *"This is the assurance we have in approaching God; that if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us. And if we know what he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him."*

One cannot separate this passage from the preceding verses, which deal with the assurance of our salvation. Verse 13 affirms that all who genuinely believe in Christ can absolutely know they have eternal life. This same assurance in absolutely knowing that we have eternal life is also true of approaching God in prayer.

The Greek grammar is very helpful, again. The verbs "ask" and "hear" are in the present tense, inferring a continual asking and hearing. The Greek work for "know" is highly significant. There are in John's epistle two words for "know." "*Ginosko*" is used to refer to knowledge gained through personal experience, and "*oida*" is an absolute knowledge of certainty. The word which was used in v. 13 for knowing that we have eternal life is the word "*oida*" It is the same word that is used in v. 14 which means that we can know with absolute certainty that God hears our prayers. Moreover, in v. 15 the grammar reveals that we **keep on knowing with certainty** that God **keeps on hearing**; therefore, we keep on having **whatever** we have asked. The verb "asked" in v. 15 is in another Greek tense, which demonstrates an action which has been completed in the past but whose result remains in the present. We can see that God never forgets what we have prayed for and is continually bringing to pass, in the present, whatever we have prayed for in the past, if we persist in the asking.

The prevailing condition for our certainty in receiving whatever we ask is that we continually ask in accordance with God's will. It should be obvious that God's will cannot refer to God's hidden counsel. It has to refer to God's revealed will. We see this taught in the following passages: Psalm 40:8, 143:10; Matthew 12:50; John 7:17; Romans 12:2. If it doesn't mean this, then how can we know with certainty? How can we know that we will receive exactly what we prayed for? To interpret the meaning of "according to His will" to infer an uncertainty and a yielding to some hidden plan of God severely distorts the passage, actually making it self-contradictory. God's continual hearing of our prayers is contingent upon asking in conformity with God's will. Also, the realization of our prayers is directly contingent upon God's hearing. Not knowing God's revealed will breaks the

necessary chain of events. John's purpose is to stir in us boldness and confidence. He is saying that we should have the boldness to say to the Father that we know we are asking according to His will, and we know that He hears us. We are confident that He hears us no matter what we request. It is by faith that we know we have the desired answer. John also wants us to persevere in prayer because knowing with certainty gives us the courage to continue despite the apparent circumstances. If we are uncertain as to whether our petitions are in accordance with God's will, we cannot be comforted with the promise, "we know that we have what we asked of him."

One of the greatest hindrances to powerful prayer is the mistaken notion that we can rarely know with certainty what God's will is. This is false. God's will is revealed in the pages of Holy Scripture. This truth is brought out in the *Westminster Confession Of Faith* in 1:6 "*The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequences may be deduced from Scripture...*" The trouble is that so few Christians take the time to be saturated with the Word of God. The result is that their prayer life is thwarted. Again, faulty theology leads to faulty praying. In God's Word, God has revealed His precious promises to us. The Christian must claim by faith these promises through prayer. Thus, whatever he asks within the limits of God's revealed will, he may confidently expect to receive. The prayer of faith does not proclaim its desire to God, leaving the decision to God. This is a submission to God for cases only where we cannot know God's will. The prayer of faith that we are called to exercise is finding God's promises in His Word and pleading for those promises until they come to pass. Faith is the exertion of the will, resting on God's promises

and saying, "I must have it." We must realize that such a will is not arrogance; it is not self-centeredness; nor is it failure to submit to God. On the contrary, such a will is true submission, honoring God. It is only when the Christian has surrendered to Christ's Lordship that he receives the freedom to will what he desires. Once the Christian has yielded to God's revealed purpose, as his own purpose and desire, God wants him to exercise his will for His glory. The Christian lives only for his heavenly Father's interests. He seeks his Father's will above his own. Thus, God entrusts His kingdom work to those children by saying, "what do you desire?" It is often only slothfulness in the guise of humility that we profess to have no will. No, true humility is always accompanied by strong faith. In knowing God's will, faith boldly claims the fulfillment of the promise, "You shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you."

We are normally to expect an answer to our every prayer in the way we pray it. If there is no answer to our request, it is because we haven't prayed correctly. We are then to diligently look for what sin is inhibiting or blocking that channel of blessing. We must confess it and repent of it.

Before we leave this section concerning the nature of praying in accordance with God's will, we said that this qualification is not normally found in exhortations for powerful prayer. We must ask whether it is explicitly wrong to pray as such. The answer is, no, only as long as we are unable to discern beforehand from Scripture what is most glorifying to God. For example, an unemployed man needs to provide for his family. The man wonders if a certain job prospect can be claimed by faith. It would be difficult to pray the prayer of faith, seeing that this particular job may not be the most glorifying to God or the best job to

provide for his family's needs. We must be careful in limiting God in the precise way He is to be glorified. Perhaps the best prayer in this situation is to say to God that you do not know if this is the best job, but you do know for sure that God will provide some means to satisfy your family's needs. The whole point is that the godly Christian, who is living in conformity with God's law, will be careful in how and for what he prays. He normally restricts his prayers to the areas where he knows the will of God.

We must be obedient

Several passages which lay out this condition for powerful prayer are John 15:7, James 5:16, and I John 3:21, 22. We read in John 15:7, *"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."* Verse 7 must be understood in light of the immediate context, especially verses 1-6: Jesus has taught the necessity of vital communion with the source of vitality - that of abiding in Him as the vine. Actually, He has taught that only those who abide in Him are genuine Christians.

What does it mean to abide in Him? It means we recognize that we are inseparably connected with Christ, who is the vine. The vine is the source of nourishment for its branches. How do we maintain a close relationship with Him? It means that we are to be saturated with His Word. This leads to a godly life as we hunger and thirst for His Word and are obedient to His law. Unless we are submissive to the Word we don't abide in Christ. Christ's words must be the dynamic of a person's life.

If we are remaining in Christ, we will be praying in Jesus' name and we will be able to discern God's will. Such a person consistently has his life in conformity with God's desires. Such a

person will avail himself of God's promises through prayer. To such people Jesus promises to give what they desire.

James 5:16 says, "...the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." Righteousness is the prerequisite for powerful praying. A godly person's prayer would never be contrary to God's revealed will. Because God can trust that the righteous man's will desires nothing but God's will, God is more than desirous to give His unlimited promises to him.

I John 3:21, 22 states, "Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him." Obedience to Christ is the proof that we love him (I John 15:15). This obedience has foremost in our mind our complete surrender to His preeminence, His glory, His will, and His pleasure. As we are obedient, we will serve Him as we ought. His desires and goals become ours. An uncondemning heart indicates a heart, which is not harboring any unconfessed sin, has no block between itself and God, and has yielded habitually to Christ. The grammar indicates a continual or habitual keeping of God's commands. It literally reads that we **continually receive whatever we continually ask because we continually obey His commands.** A lifestyle of godliness is an absolute condition necessary for powerful praying. Daily answer to prayer is the proof of our spiritual maturity. It demonstrates that we have attained true abiding in Christ's words. We must realize that when prayer is what it should be, the answer must be expected. We often excuse our unanswered prayers with some kind of contrived submission to God's wisdom and will. The real reason for our feeble progress is due to our feeble Christian lives. Let's quit blaming God for our ineffectual praying. It is still true that God is

looking for those whose hearts are totally His (I Sam. 16:7). God is looking for those people through whom He can give the power to be co-rulers of the world under His Lordship. It is through their request that the kingdom of darkness is assaulted.

We must have godly motives

James 4:3 reveals that many do not receive what they ask because they do not ask with right motives *"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."* Psalm 37:4 says, *"Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart."*

The promises of God are still unlimited -"He will give you the desires of your heart!" The condition, however, is that one is to delight in the Lord and ask with godly motives. What is delighting in the Lord? It is having foremost in our mind what God is most concerned about. God wants to disciple the nations; do we? God wants us as holy vessels for His service; is this our desire God wants His Word cherished; do we cherish it as David (Ps. 119:111,112)? God is seeking to vindicate the glory of His Name; do we take offense in the slandering of His Name? The reason why God grants the desires of the righteous is because their desires agree with His will. God is simply doing what pleases Him by answering their prayers.

We can see a vast difference in the desires of those in James 4:3 with those of Psalm 37:4 and 145:19. Thus, when we say that we can pray for the desires of our heart and confidently expect to receive them, we must be careful to note that those desires must be regulated by God's law.

How can we define right motives? They are those which supply legitimate personal needs in our life, those which enable us to grow in holiness, those which seek holiness in other's lives, and those which advance the cause of Christ's kingdom in our world. They are motives exalting Christ and His Word.

We must persevere in believing prayer

Some Christians think or are tempted to think that persistence in a prayer request is contrary to faith. The common pitfall of so many of us is that we think that one prayer is sufficient and we forget all about it. We think, "after all, if we have faith, why keep on asking, for God already knows what we want." Nothing could be so wrong. Again, faulty theology leads to faulty praying. If the absence of faith ruins countless Christians' prayers, then the failure of persevering in prayer ruins countless others.

Jesus taught the need for perseverance in prayer if we are going to see our prayers answered. There are two great parables, which teach this - Luke 11:5-13 and Luke 18:1-8. The point of the parable in Luke 11 is that persistence wins out over friendship. One would think the friend would give help despite the lateness of the hour (midnight), but the friend doesn't. However, the friend yields only when the man persisted. Luke 18:1-8 teaches the same principle. The woman persists in requesting justice from an unjust judge, who because of her persistence finally yields. The whole purpose of the contrast is to demonstrate that if an unjust judge will grant the persistent requests of a petitioner, will not our heavenly Father do likewise, who is, without question, concerned about our justice.

Perseverance in prayer does not negate faith as some might think; it actually demonstrates the preciousness of that faith. Persistence

is faith in action. Persistence indicates a continual recognition that our heavenly Father is the source of all blessings. To persist in prayer really glorifies God because we are constantly recognizing Him as our sustainer and redeemer. Remember, we shouldn't be praying for that which doesn't have His glory in mind. Thus, when we persist in prayer, we are continually pleading with God to do that which He already desires. What could be more pleasing to Him?

We must learn that persistence in prayer means that God doesn't always **immediately** give us what we desire. When there is a delay, God has a particular purpose for doing so. For one, God knows the best timing to bring to pass what we pray for. God knows best when our soul is ripened to receive with most joy what we have prayed. God wants to build **patience** in our lives. He wants us to learn that God's timetable is what is most glorifying to Him. It is through persevering, confident, and praising prayer that our souls grow into full union with our Lord. Through delay, God actually strengthens the already present faith. The longer we wait, faith has an opportunity to reaffirm what it knows is right. Faith knows it will succeed. In persistence, faith moves us to continue in praise and thanksgiving. Each believing prayer is one step closer to the realization of our petitions. God doesn't delay longer than necessary; we must remain steadfast to the end so that we can reap the harvest of our prayers.

What prevents us from persevering in prayer? For one, it is because we are spiritual sluggards. Persistence in prayer requires effort, and we usually opt for the easy way out. Second, there is the element of unbelief. We give up because our faith had no abiding quality. We assume our request was invalid. If we are in

communion with God, we have no right to give up; for, our prayer should have been in accordance with God's will in the first place.

Oh, Christian, please seek your Lord's face continually. Please have the faith, which can lay hold of God's immense promises. Please persevere with your prayer of faith. The dominion of the earth is at stake!

Prayer and the Decree of God

God's decree is His eternal plan whereby God has predetermined or foreordained everything which shall happen (Eph. 1:4-6, 11). His plan includes various particulars; thus, we often refer to God's decrees in the plural when actually there is but one decree. As absolute ruler, God brings to pass all that happens for an appointed purpose. We could say that God's sovereignty is the means by which His eternal decree is realized. There are some important considerations of God's decree with regard to how it relates to prayer. First, we need to recognize that God's decree is **eternal**. We must keep in mind that God doesn't have a past to which He is irrevocably bound. The distinction of time has no meaning to God who inhabits eternity. Eternity is an **everlasting present** where the past never passes and the future is always present. In order to meet man's comprehension of time, since he is a finite creature, the Bible speaks of past decrees and a coming future.

Second, we need to recognize that God's decree is **unchanging** (Heb. 6:17). We must be careful so that we do not deny human responsibility as it relates to God's decree. God's plan is unchangeable in the sense that His plan cannot be thwarted. In the final analysis God's ultimate purpose will be achieved.

Third, God's decree is **all-comprehensive**. This means that it encompasses the good deeds of believers (Eph. 2:10), the wicked deeds of unbelievers (Prov. 16:4; Luke 22:20-22; Acts 2:23; 4:27, 28; Gen. 45:8; 50:20; Prov. 16:33), the means as well as the end (Eph. 1:4; 11 Thess. 2:13), and the span of one's life (Job 14:5; Ps. 39:4).

Fourth, God decree with regard to man's sin is a **permissive** decree. God's eternal, unchanging decree makes certain that man's sinful actions will take place; however, this does not mean that God, by His own act, brings those sinful actions to fruition. God allows men the freedom of moral choices, which carry certain consequences. God regulates these moral actions, which can be sinful, and the results of those actions are always in conformity with His predetermined plan.

In light of the previous characteristics concerning God's decree, how can we reconcile the power of prayer with this decree? How can God's sovereignty be reconciled with man's will? How can our prayers influence God? How can God be moved by prayer to do what He otherwise would not do?

There is no conflict with God's unchanging decree and His liberty to do whatever He wills. The prayers of Christ and those of Christians are not included in God's Decree in an arbitrary way. God does allow Himself to be moved by our prayers to do what He otherwise would not have done. Does this mean that God's decree is nullified? Does it mean God's decree is not based solely in the mind of God alone? The answers are - NO! God's decree is not an obstacle against which man's moral freedom struggles in vain. Christianity is not Greek fatalism which says, "what will be is inevitable, regardless of our actions." In a way, we cannot fathom how God is able to utilize man's moral actions,

incorporating them into His eternal decree. Nevertheless, we cannot divorce God's decree from human agency.

How are we to understand the incident with Israel's idolatry (worshipping the golden calf) and God's determination to destroy them? We learn that Moses' intercessory prayer over a period of forty days did persuade God to change His mind (Ex. 32:7-14; Deut. 9:7-20). Was God's immutable decree changed? No. Did Moses' prayer alter what would have been otherwise? Yes. Ex. 32:10 is the key verse – “**Now then let Me alone**, that My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them...” (emphasis mine). The emphasized phrase of the verse implies that God would respond favorably to Moses' intercessory request if Moses were interceding on Israel's behalf. This passage should excite us about the nature of **intercessory** prayer. If Moses had chosen not to intercede for Israel, we must believe that God's intention to destroy Israel would have been carried out. However, if Moses had chosen to intercede, God would be merciful to Israel. Moses obviously interceded for Israel, having pleaded for God to remember His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses pleads for the glory of God's name.

This passage should stir us up in interceding for one another in prayer. We might be amazed how much danger we avoided because of the intercessory prayers of a godly person.

King Hezekiah interceded on behalf of Jerusalem in view of an impending, sure defeat at the hands of the Assyrian army. God heard this prayer and delivered Jerusalem in a miraculous way (II Kings 18 and 19). We are immediately drawn to an unfathomable mystery - how divine sovereignty and human responsibility interact and are reconciled. We must be content with a God who transcends all our thoughts (Isa. 55:8).

Do our prayers affect the course of human events? You can rest assured that they do. Do our prayers violate God's decree? No, they do not. The marvelous thing is how man can exercise true moral freedom, and yet his actions always fit into and are a part of God's eternal decree. As noted earlier, we can see this demonstrated through Jesus' death (Acts 2:23; 4:27, 28; Luke 22:20-22).

The truth that our prayers are a vital part in God's eternal decree is both a great challenge and warning. We are challenged to pray so that the Great Commission can be realized. Our prayers do bring down the gates of Hell. Our prayers do alter the destinies of men. Oh, Christian, then why don't you pray constantly? However, there remains a warning to us. Our failure to pray means that we forfeit blessings that could have been ours, if we had prayed. We are accountable. Elder of the church, don't be remiss in failing to pray for the flock of God put in your charge. How sad to hear God say, "You could have realized marvelous things, if you had only prayed."

The Nature of Intercessory Prayer

Praying for Christians

When we think of intercessory prayer, which is petitioning God to work in other people's lives, we are faced with the difficulty of praying for men who are morally accountable to God for their actions. In other words, the answers to our prayers cannot be divorced from men who can either obey or reject the Word of God. When we pray for other people, we are asking God to affect their thinking and actions.

We need to recognize that the legitimacy of intercessory prayer inherently infers that God is sovereign in the lives of people. The

belief that God cannot act in a person's life because he doesn't will it is not correct biblical theology. This is but another example how faulty theology leads to faulty praying. The Scripture clearly affirms that salvation and growth in grace are gifts and works of God and that no one can be regenerated or born again apart from the effectual working of the Holy Spirit. What usually happens is that people are inconsistent with their theology when they engage in intercessory prayer. If God doesn't have the right, if He doesn't choose to exercise the right, and if He doesn't choose to supersede a person's will, then we cannot engage in intercessory prayer. Those of an Arminian theological persuasion ought to ponder carefully this dilemma in their prayer life.

I Thessalonians 5:17, 18 exhorts us to be constantly in prayer for this is God's will for us. This means that when we fail to be in continual prayer we are in sin. Prayer is not an option; it is a command! If we know of the power of believing prayer we should regularly be pleading with God to do His work of grace in the lives of our fellow Christians, and if we have learned anything about the great promises in prayer, we will expect God to do mighty things in their lives because of our prayers. Pastor, are you frustrated with the spiritual impoverishment of your flock? Are you praying constantly for them? If not, is there any wonder they are remaining in such a condition? Husband, do you wish that your wife would be more submissive to your leadership? Are you praying that God will do this work of grace in her life? Wife, do you wish your husband would exercise his leadership more and love you as Christ loved the church (assuming he is a Christian)? Are you praying regularly for this? Of course, do we all believe that God **can** and **will** answer our prayers, assuming we have met the conditions for powerful praying? We can moan about how

other people's lives are not what they should be, but are we failing to even ask God to change them?

Paul's prayers are extremely helpful in instructing us how to pray for Christians. We are to pray for spiritual power to be vibrant in other's lives (Eph. 3:16), for believers to be rooted in Christian love (Eph. 3:17), for our brethren to know the depth of Christ's love for them (Eph. 3:18), for Christians to experience the fullness of God so that they can be mature in Christ (Eph. 3:19), for Christians to be constantly filled with the knowledge to discern God's will (Col. 1:9), for believers to live exemplary lives bearing the fruit of good works (Col. 1:10), for Christians to be equipped with power so that they can have great endurance and patience (Col. 1:11), for God to open doors for the Gospel to be preached clearly (Col. 4:2-4), and for others that they can boldly proclaim the Gospel (Eph. 6:18-20).

If we are not regularly praying for these things with regard to our brethren, we ought to hang our heads in shame! We are thereby demonstrating that we don't care for them, nor do we care about the progress of the kingdom of Christ. Surely we can see how the failure to pray for others is itself a reason why we don't experience answers to our own prayers. Remember, with the desires of God; God desires His people to grow; He desires the Gospel to be boldly proclaimed.

Oh, Christian, let's be about our Father's business. Let's intercede for our brethren. Let's be thankful to God, as well, for the fact that the faithful and diligent prayers of a fellow believer may have aided our own spiritual growth.

Praying for the unsaved

This can be a very difficult matter to accurately grasp. We are not sure whether there is an adequate explanation in praying for the unsaved. On one hand, we know that God is the primary agent in bringing a person to saving faith. Because God is sovereign in salvation, we can legitimately pray to God for an unsaved person's salvation. If Arminian theology is correct, we cannot pray to God for a person's salvation, simply because in this system, man is the primary agent in salvation, not God. In other words, unless man wills to be saved, God is or chooses to be impotent in affecting that man's will. However, when we pray for the unsaved, we are either consciously or unconsciously affirming the sovereignty of God in salvation.

Whose fault is it that men do not come to repentance? Is it God's fault, seeing that He is sovereign in their salvation? The answer is - no. Failure to repent is the free moral choice of a man who chooses the way of death rather than the way of life through Jesus Christ (Matt. 23:37; Rom. 10:21; II Cor. 5:20; Prov. 1:24; Isa. 1:18-20; 55:1-3; Ezek. 18:31, 32).

We have learned that if we pray in accordance with God's will we can receive anything, if we believe. Hence, one might be led to conclude that if we pray for an unsaved loved one, then we are to expect to see him saved. Taking this to its logical conclusion, one could pray and expect the whole world to be saved. Are such prayers legitimate? For one, we know that many will be eternally lost; thus, the prayer for the whole world to be saved is contrary to God's revealed truth in Scripture. But what about prayer for a few loved ones to be saved? This isn't easy to answer, if an answer is to be found. We must affirm, in some way, that intercessory prayer for the unsaved is valid and **that it can affect** the eternal

destinies of men. The same God, who has eternally decreed (election) some people to be saved, has provided the appointed means to this end. We know that one of the appointed means for men's salvation is the faithful preaching of the Gospel (Rom. 10:14, 15). Who is to say that intercessory prayer for the unsaved is not, as well, a means by which God's eternal decree is realized? How many seemingly hardhearted men have eventually come to saving faith, and we discover that some Christian was faithfully praying for their salvation?

We cannot assert that Scripture **guarantees** the salvation of an unsaved person because of our prayers, but we can safely say that our prayers cannot hurt. The question is - how often do we intercede for an unsaved loved one? By failing to persevere in such prayers, we surely are not encouraging a sovereign God to show His grace and mercy.

A summary of hindrances to prayer

The following is a checklist for one to determine why some of his prayers are not granted, or why they are delayed. Before we pray, we should check this list so that we can boldly approach God's throne of grace.

- A. Being a non-Christian; failing to repent and accept the appointed means of salvation (Isa. 59:1, 2)
- B. Harboring sin in our lives (Ps. 66:18)
- C. Living a life of disobedience (Isa. 1:15)
- D. Refusing to obey God's law (Zech. 7:8-13)
- E. Despising God's law (Prov. 28:9)
- F. Harboring an unforgiving spirit (Matt. 6:14,15)
- G. Indulging self (James 4:3)

- H. Failing to simply ask (James 4:2)
- I. Failing to discern God's revealed will in His word (I John 5:14)
- J. Doubting the promises of God (Mark 11:22-24)
- K. Failing to persevere in prayer (Luke 18:1-8)
- L. Failing to pray in Jesus' name (John 14:13)
- M. Failing to pursue God's glory as our chief desire (I Cor. 10:31)

The Lord's Prayer as our Guide

In Matthew 6:9-13 Jesus gives His disciples a guide as to how they should pray. We can view this prayer, which has come to be known as the "Lord's Prayer," as a model prayer with regard to its essential content. Though this prayer is normally prayed verbatim, we must acknowledge that the prayer simply serves as a pattern for our praying. We must guard against allowing this prayer to degenerate into mere formalism, which Jesus condemned in the very context. How often have we prayed this prayer, never fully realizing its essential teaching?

The thrust of the prayer is that God is to be glorified in all things. To hallow His name is to see God as He is revealed to us in the Bible. We have noted that the names of God reveal His perfections. Hence, we are praising God when we hallow His name. We are holding Him in reverence and honor.

When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we are petitioning God to invade the hearts of all peoples so that His reign will be experienced in their hearts. We are praying for the establishing of Christ's kingship in human hearts. We are praying for the progress of the Gospel, that Christ's reign will regenerate souls, thereby

transforming cultures to God's glory. Knowing that God is sovereign in men's hearts, we are led to pray for the unsaved person's salvation.

The third petition, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," refers to God's revealed will, namely God's law. We are called upon to pray for the earth's inhabitants, both in an individual and in a corporate sense, to be obedient. It is vital that we pray for Christians' growth in grace, for the salvation of the lost, for sinning Christians to be restored, and for the church universal to be the dynamic force it is called to be. We must pray for revival in our nation so that we can glorify God in all areas of our culture. The desire to see a pluralistic society, which accepts humanistic principles as valid alongside of Christian principles, is not biblical teaching in any way, and it nullifies the thrust of this petition. Matthew 28:19,20 and 11 Corinthians 10:3-5 shatter the idea of pluralism. The Christian goal is nothing short of world conquest. This is what the Great Commission is all about. There is no realm in life independent of Christ's Lordship; hence, we must pray for Christ to triumph in our culture!

The fourth petition, "Give us today our daily bread," deals with our physical needs. We are called upon to pray that God supply our basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. If anything, Jesus is teaching us moderation in our desires. Paul echoes such a sentiment, when he exhorted us to be content with our basic human needs (I Tim. 6:8). Not only does this petition teach us moderation, it exhorts us to exercise a wholehearted trust in our heavenly Father, as the sole sustainer of our lives. We can rest assured that God will **always** meet our needs (Matt. 6:33; Ps. 37:25).

The fifth petition, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors," is an admonition to us to rely upon God's grace to forgive us our sins. The petition recognizes that the petitioner is a sinner, daily needing God's cleansing. We need to heed I John 1:9. The petition assumes we have forgiven others. We have seen that unconfessed sin is a block to prayer. In fact, unconfessed sin prevents God from forgiving us our daily sins (Matt. 6:14, 15; 18:21-35).

"Debts" is used because when people sin against us, they owe us, and they will suffer God's discipline unless payment is made or satisfaction rendered by ourselves or by others. When we forgive those "debts" we no longer consider these charges against their account. Of course, this petition does not negate other Scriptural passages, which teach restitution. The important thing is that our **attitude** must be right, and we should never dare ask God to forgive us our debts to Him (which are infinitely greater), if we haven't forgiven our fellow men their debts against us.

The sixth petition, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one," asks God not to allow us to be in situations whereby our sinful natures are prone to sin, and that by God's grace we may overcome the evil one - namely Satan. Many are perplexed that the petition asks for God not to lead them into temptation, when James 1:13 says that God tempts no one. How do we reconcile this? We know Scripture cannot contradict itself, and allowing Scriptures, to interpret Scripture, the probable meaning is that we ask God not to permit us to be in a position of temptation, such as establishing dangerous relationships with the world (II Cor. 6:14-16), which would lure us to compromise the faith and cause us harm. We would pray that God would grant us wisdom to discern and then to avoid dangerous areas where our

flesh would be enticed. This is why we are called to be alert to the evil one's tactics.

The "Lord's Prayer" concludes with a doxology focusing upon the Father's **right** to grant requests as King over all and His **power** to do so. When we pray, we must have an accurate view of who God is. A proper concept of God's nature is paramount for effective praying.

Conclusion

One of the greatest needs in Christ's church is for Christians to grasp the immense importance of maintaining a vital prayer life. We must become the warriors of God in this sense. The success of the Great Commission cannot be divorced from the prayers of God's people. Is not the lethargic state of Christianity in many areas due in part to a poor prayer life? Are we losing out on multitudes of God's blessings because we don't bother to pray in faith with perseverance?

We have seen that effective and powerful prayer is dependent upon an accurate understanding of God's perfections and a diligent adherence to the conditions for powerful praying.

Having read this booklet, the author trusts that you have been enlightened to the true nature of powerful praying and that you have been convicted of your own shoddy prayer life, if that were the case. But most important, what are you going to do about it? Now that you understand, you have no excuse at all. "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17).