

THE NATURE AND PRESUPPOSITIONS OF PRAYER

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INTRODUCTION

Jeremiah 32:17 Ah Lord GOD. behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, *and* there is nothing too hard for thee...

Matthew 6:5–8 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do*: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

Mark 11:24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*.

John 14:14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do *it*.

James 4:1–4 ...yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume *it* upon your lusts.

1 John 5:14–15 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

Prayer is essential to the Christian life and experience. This study is concerned with the nature of prayer and what we must assume or presuppose before we can truly (i.e., scripturally, and therefore correctly) pray.

THE NATURE OF PRAYER

I

WHAT IS PRAYER?

It is quite possible that few Christians ever adequately comprehend the Scriptural significance of true prayer. Most are content to simply attempt to pray without seeking to understand its great and awesome significance. Some simply mouth the words and phrases they have been taught or learned from others; some experience difficulty in attempting to pray because of a consciousness of sin or an uncertainty of their standing before God; still others attempt to pray in the simplicity of their faith, yet in error because they are ignorant of the Scriptures; a few seek to pray scripturally and try to frame their prayers on biblical truth and principles. Only if the subject of prayer is understood from the Scriptures, does it assume its proper place and perspective in the believer's life and experience.

A DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION

The Eng. word "prayer" means an earnest request, entreaty, supplication. It derives from the Lat. *precor*, "to ask, beg, entreat, supplicate, request."

This definition of Christian prayer is too narrow; true prayer is inclusive of the believer's life and relationship to God. It is not merely asking or petitioning God; it includes praise, thanksgiving, confession of sin, intercession for others, and communion or fellowship with the triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To adequately define and describe prayer, it should be approached in a three-fold manner: theologically, comprehensively and practically:

THEOLOGICALLY

Prayer must take into account the following:

- The transcendent glory of God as manifest in his absolute holiness and moral character or righteousness.
- The triune nature of the self-disclosing God of Scripture.
- The redemptive relationship of the believer to God through the Lord Jesus Christ as Mediator, Lord, Savior and Great High Priest.
- The ministry of the Holy Spirit, who preeminently indwells the believer and enables him to pray aright.
- The holy, righteous, wise and eternal purpose and will of God, which form the only proper context for true prayer.

Such a theological description of prayer is given by Dr. Gill, an eighteenth-century Baptist theologian:

Prayer is an address to God in the name of Christ, and through Him as the Mediator, under the influence and by the assistance of the Spirit of God, in faith, and in the sincerity of our souls, for such things we stand in need of, and which are consistent with the will of God, and are for His glory to bestow, and therefore to be asked with submission.¹

COMPREHENSIVELY

True Scriptural prayer is inclusive of the believer's experience and relationship with God. It necessarily includes praise, thanksgiving, confession of sin, petition, supplication, intercession, and communion or fellowship with God. Such a comprehensive description is attempted by Matthew Henry, an eighteenth century Puritan commentator:

Prayer is the solemn and religious offering up of devout acknowledgements and desires to God, or a sincere representation of holy affections, with a design to give unto God the glory due unto His name thereby, and to obtain from Him promised favors, and both through the Mediator. Our English word *prayer* is too strait, for that properly signifies petition or request; whereas humble adorations of God, and thanksgivings to Him, are as necessary in prayer, as any other part of it...the believer lives a life of communion with God, and so is praying always...The Scripture describes prayer to be our drawing near to God, lifting up our souls to Him, pouring out our hearts before Him.²

PRACTICALLY

Prayer is "talking with God." This simple definition presupposes that the believer is scripturally aware of the nature and character of God, his relationship to God through the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the context in which such conversing with God must take place. Talking with God is a constant, daily fellowship or communion. It has been termed "ejaculatory prayer," "sentence prayers," and "the practice of the presence of God."

II

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PRAYER?

Prayer is communication between the believer and his God. As such prayer becomes the great focal-point of doctrine, experience and hope.

¹ John Gill, *Body of Divinity*, p. 940.

² Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, p. vi.

IT IS ESSENTIAL

Prayer is inherent in the very essence of true Christianity. A “prayerless Christian” would be a contradiction in terms. God reveals the conversion of Saul of Tarsus in terms of prayer.

And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for *one* called Saul, of Tarsus: **for, behold, he prayeth**, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting *his* hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. (Acts 9:11–16)

IT IS PRIMARY

There is nothing more important than prayer. There is a time to pray and there is a time to act, but prayer is to undergird all Christian service and every Christian activity. Prayer was primary, and the ministry was carried forth in this context. Note the statement of the Apostle Peter concerning the Gospel ministry and its relation to prayer:

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:4)³

IT IS INTIMATE

The redeemed sinner, conscious of all the implications of his redemption, can enter the presence of the sovereign, infinite God by faith and call him “Father” in the most intimate terms. The Lord Jesus has opened the way of access to the Father through his Person and work, and we are encouraged in the strongest terms to come to God in prayer and make our requests known.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1–2)⁴

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit [him]self beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together. (Romans 8:14–17)⁵

³ ἡμεῖς δὲ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ διακονίᾳ τοῦ λόγου προσκατερήσομεν. “But we, to [the stated times of] prayer and the ministry of the Word [with tenacity] will give ourselves.

⁴ ...τὴν προσαγωγὴν ἐσχίκαμεν... “[the] access we had and continue to have.” The perfect tense denotes a past action or event that continues with full force. The way of access to God has been opened through the Lord Jesus Christ and remains open to the believer. ...ἐν ᾧ ἐστήκαμεν... “in which we have taken up our stand and continue to stand.”

⁵ The believe does not cower before God in an attitude of slavish fear and trembling, but with the boldness of a child before a loving parent. “Abba” is Aramaic for “Father” in a most intimate sense.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are, yet* without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14–16)

IT IS A REVELATION

Prayer is the highest spiritual activity in the believer's experience. In prayer more than at any other point, the doctrinal and experiential meet. A person's true theology, faith, and relation to Scripture should be revealed when he prays. This, however, is not always true. Some pray far below the level of Scripture and faith, and others pray well beyond or in contradiction to their theology.

IT IS TRANSCENDENT

Prayer transcends space and time. It lifts the believer up consciously into the presence of the eternal God. Prayer lays hold of timeless promises, transverses the world in a moment,⁶ and may send requests far into the future. By the grace of God, we must pave the future with our prayers.

III

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF GRACE, FAITH AND PRAYER?

There are two realities that are closely related to prayer: faith and grace. The believer's life is characterized by faith. Faith is the activity of the Christian life. The Christians in the New Testament are usually referred to as "believers," i.e., those whose lives are characterized by the exercise of faith, literally, "the believing ones."⁷

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. (Romans 1:17)⁸

The believer's life is motivated and sustained by grace. It is the dynamic or power of the Christian life. Prayer is a personal act of faith through the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit.⁹

⁶ Mark Acts 12 and the prayers of believers for the deliverance of Peter from prison. They prayed at a distance from the prison, yet God answered their prayers in and through the prison with Peter's supernatural release.

⁷ ὁ πίστευων, rel. pres. ptc., "the one [characterized as constantly] believing."

⁸ ...ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται. "The righteous one [masculine] out of faith (i.e., faith as the source or spring of the believer's life. The phrase is in the emphatic position) shall live."

⁹ Cf. Rom. 8:26–27, and the word translated "helpeth," συναντιλαμβάνεται, literally, to take at one end, facing the opposite end, and taking it up. The Holy Spirit, as it were, takes up the heavy end of the heart's burden, and, consonant with the believer [facing him as it were], helps lift it up to God.

IV WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF PRAYER?

Scripturally, There are at least seven elements in prayer by precept, principle, and example:

PRAISE

This is recognizing God as he has revealed himself in his glory (the collective sum of his attributes: Power, immutability, wisdom, holiness, righteousness, grace and mercy, etc.). Praise to properly ascribe honor to God and eulogize him for who and what he is and what he has done, is doing, and will do. Praise presupposes such a comprehension of the nature and character of God that it produces a scriptural God-consciousness. There should be much praise in our prayers.

Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. (Psalm 29:1–2)

Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, *bless* his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good *things*; so *that* thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Psalm 103:1–5)

After this manner therefore pray ye: our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven. (Matthew 6:9–10)

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3)

CONFESSION OF SIN

God is absolutely and infinitely holy and righteous. True prayer not only presupposes a God-consciousness, it also assumes a self-consciousness. It is impossible to pray in the presence of a holy God with unconfessed sin. Prayer without a confession of sin is not real prayer.

And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that *are* therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which *am but* dust and ashes. (Genesis 18:23–27)¹⁰

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:5–6)

A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly

¹⁰ While Abraham has no open confession of sin, he is overcome with his “dust-consciousness” of being a mere mortal, a mortal who was sinful, addressing an infinitely holy and righteous God.

from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; *that* the bones *which* thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me *with thy* free spirit. (Psalm 51:1–12)

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear *me*. (Psalm 66:18)

...And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from [the] evil [one]: for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:12–15)

THANKSGIVING

We are wholly and utterly dependent upon God for all things. Our prayers should contain thanksgiving to God, acknowledging his sovereign government, kindness, mercies, providence and provision. Our prayers should be mingled with thanksgiving as we contemplate the absolute sovereignty and lovingkindness of God in our lives.

And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken *it*, he began to eat. (Acts 27:35)

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God....Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:1–5, 20)

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6–7)¹¹

¹¹ μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε... “Stop being anxious about even one thing.” (pres. imp. of prohib.) ...ἀλλ’ ἐν παντὶ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ δεήσει μετὰ εὐχαριστίας τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν γνωρίζεσθω πρὸς τὸν θεόν. “But rather to the contrary, in everything with general prayer and specific request, mingled with an attitude of thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God...” ...καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἣ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν... “and the peace of God [I mean that peace] which far surpasses all comprehension...” ...φρουρήσει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. “shall garrison about your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.”

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. (Colossians 2:6–7)¹²

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving. (Colossians 4:2)

PETITION OR REQUEST

Prayer is an acknowledgment of our utter dependence upon God for all things. We are taught to ask God for our needs, wants and desires, all subject to the will of our heavenly Father. What fills our prayers? Are they mostly petitions, with little praise or thanksgiving? Do we take time to simply praise God and worship him with a full heart?

Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)¹³

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (1 Peter 5:7)¹⁴

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. (1 John 5:14–15)

SUPPLICATION

This refers to specific requests or needs. The terms “prayer and supplication” are often used together as connoting general prayer and specific requests for certain needs.¹⁵ Faith is most pronounced in supplications. Do we pray for specific things, persons, issues? And do we pray fervently with the anticipation of an answer?

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. (Acts 1:14)

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. (Ephesians 6:18)

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6–7)

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men. (1 Timothy 2:1)

INTERCESSION

Intercession is prayer or a plea on the behalf of others. Our concerns must extend beyond ourselves in the context of the Gospel and Christian love to others.

¹² ἑρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει... “having been and continuing as rooted and grounded and constantly being built up in the faith...”

¹³ Such petitions for seemingly mundane things are to be brought boldly before God. This is a request for God to provide on a daily basis for one’s sustenance—a request that would be repeated simply and sincerely daily.

¹⁴ ...ὅτι αὐτῷ μέλει περὶ ὑμῶν. “...because it matters to him concerning you.” It may not matter to others, but it always does to God!

¹⁵ προσεύχη καὶ δεήσις, i.e., general prayer and specific requests. See Phil. 4:6.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit [him]self maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what *is* the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*. (Romans 8:26–27)

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. (Romans 9:1–3)

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*. (Ephesians 1:15–20)

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9–11)

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour. (1 Timothy 2:1–3)¹⁶

Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. (James 5:16–17)

FELLOWSHIP OR COMMUNION

This refers to our constant fellowship with God on a daily basis as we mentally and vocally commune with him.¹⁷ Cf. Eph. 5:18–21; 1 Thess. 5:17. What a blessed and unique privilege to consciously live in the presence of the eternal, infinite, immutable, sovereign God of all grace and mercy.

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:18–21)

Pray without ceasing. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

¹⁶ When Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, Nero, one of the most wicked men of ancient history, was emperor.

¹⁷ The Greek term is κοινωνία, and refers to what is held in common. It is variously translated as “fellowship” with idea of partnership or sharing in a thing.

V WHAT ARE THE TWO TYPES OF PRAYER?

Christian prayer can be divided into two major types: private and public.

PRIVATE PRAYER

This includes private sessions of prayer, as described in Matt. 6:5–8: “A quiet hour (*when thou prayest*), a quiet place (*enter into thy closet and...shut thy door*), and a quiet heart” (*pray unto thy Father*). (D. M. M’Intyre). Here the heart is full and unhindered in expression.

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do*: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. (Matthew 6:5–8)

Private prayer also includes the constant communion or fellowship with God in daily life—the “practice of the presence of God”.

PUBLIC PRAYER

This includes corporate prayer, e.g., prayer meetings when several pray together, or when one is asked to lead the assembly in prayer as an act of worship or for a specific request.

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. (Acts 1:14)

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:42)¹⁸

THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF PRAYER

Having now dealt with the basic realities of prayer, we can proceed to the presuppositions of prayer—the assumptions or axioms that necessarily underlie intelligent, scriptural prayer.

There are certain self-consistent and necessary truths or realities concerning both God and ourselves that must be presupposed before true prayer can be a reality and pursued in a scriptural context. These presuppositions deal with the very essence of prayer.

¹⁸ ταῖς προσευχαῖς. “...and in prayers.” The def. art. implies prayer meetings, or stated times of prayer.

I
PRAYER PRESUPPOSES THAT GOD EXISTS

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF TRUE PRAYER
APART FROM THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

THE FUTILITY OF PRAYER

Unless God exists or is real and actual, prayer is necessarily fictional, nonsense, a futile exercise such as transcendental meditation or communing with one's self. Apart from the reality of God, prayer is merely wishing, an emotional, irrational, psychological crutch for those who cannot face the realities of the present or the future.

THE REALITY OF PRAYER

The glorious reality of prayer is that we are neither limited to ourselves and our own resources, nor to mere human help or sympathy. When we pray, we look above and beyond ourselves and others to the eternal and almighty God.

A Psalm of David. Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. (Psalm 61:1–2)

The believer has recourse to God, to the “Rock” that is higher than he. The self-sufficient person who is without faith and thus without God, can only look within to himself or without to fate, chance, luck or fortune. Man was created in the image and likeness of God, and thus with a capacity to know God and by instinct cries out to him when a crisis becomes too great for earthly help.

THE SCRIPTURES PRESUPPOSE THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The Scriptures are the very Word of God inscriptured. They are the authoritative, inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. As such, they are self-authenticating, i.e., they need no external or independent witness to authenticate or credential them. As the very Word of God, they are absolute. The Bible never seeks to prove the existence of God, but everywhere presupposes it.

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as *they were* moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Peter 1:20–21)¹⁹

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16–17)²⁰

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

¹⁹ ΤΟΥΤΟ ΠΡΩΤΟΝ ΓΙΝΩΣΚΟΝΤΕΣ, ὅτι πᾶσα προφητεία γραφῆς ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεταί. “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture of its own self does not become,” i.e., the word does not originate within the soul, mind or inner personality of the prophet, but rather from the Spirit of God who carried the prophet along with his power and gave him what to speak. ...οὐ γὰρ θελήματι ἀνθρώπου ἠνέχθη προφητεία ποτέ, ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι.

²⁰ Lit: “All [every portion of] Scripture is God-breathed...that the man of God may be fully-limbed and completely outfitted...”

PRAYER IS AN ACT OF PERSONAL FAITH IN THE LIVING GOD

FAITH IN THE GOD OF SCRIPTURE

It is faith in the self-disclosing God of Scripture, not the “god” of one’s own imagination. The “god” of our imagination is usually created in our own image and likeness. This “god” is prayed to outside the bounds of scriptural warrant, often for things which are not consistent with the character of the God of Scripture.²¹

Everything in the believer’s life is a personal act of faith in the self-revealing God of Scripture. Prayer, the highest spiritual act of which the redeemed soul is capable, is preeminently so.

FAITH IN GOD AS THE LIVING REALITY

The true God, the God of Scripture, is the All-encompassing, Great Ultimate or Absolute Living Reality.

The men of Israel were commanded to appear before him three times a year and leave their families alone and unguarded. For the men to leave all behind when they worshipped God was an act of faith.

Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year. (Exodus 34:23–24)

*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:31)*²²

True prayer is thus an act of personal faith in the living God.

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

A GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS

Prayer not only presupposes that God exists, but also presupposes a God-consciousness on the part of the one who prays. In Lk. 18:1–14 Our Lord teaches both perseverance in prayer (v. 1–8) and a true God-consciousness in prayer (v. 9–14).²³ In the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican [tax collector], the Pharisee possessed no true God-consciousness whatsoever. He was filled with self-righteousness and self-sufficiency. The Publican, in the context of a true God-consciousness, was filled with a sinful self-consciousness and cried out for propitiation or mercy.

And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded

²¹ Cf. Rom. 1:18–25, esp. v. 23 and 25. In v. 23, man exchanges the truth for the lie, and seeks to bring God down to his own level so he can deal with him. In v. 25, he willfully by-passes God to worship his creation (...ἐσεβάσθησαν καὶ ἐλάτρευσαν τῇ κτίσει παρὰ τὸν κτίσαντα...).

²² θεοῦ ζῶντος, anarth.[no def. art.], stressing quality or character, and so emph. God as the Living Reality.

²³ Although the parable is primarily a warning against self-righteousness, it likewise demonstrates the utter lack of a God-consciousness and therefore a sinful self-consciousness.

man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 18:1–14)

II

PRAYER PRESUPPOSES THAT GOD IS PERSONAL

THE NECESSITY OF A PERSONAL GOD

One cannot pray to or petition an impersonal force or abstraction. Prayer must be addressed to a Person, a Personal Being who is intelligent, or capable of receiving or acknowledging prayer and understanding it.

A mere belief in God is *not* sufficient. The issue is not merely theism vs. atheism, or even monotheism vs. polytheism. The foundation for true prayer is personal faith in the triune, self-revealing God of Christian theism, i.e., the God who has revealed himself, not only in creation [general revelation], but in Scripture and ultimately in the Lord Jesus Christ [special revelation]. The dying prayer of the martyr Stephen was addressed to the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. It is in the Lord Jesus Christ that man’s desire and need to “see” God has been realized.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)²⁴

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)²⁵

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*. (John 1:18)²⁶

For in him [The Lord Jesus Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. (Colossians 2:9)

²⁴ This is a progressive argument revealing the eternity, equality and Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God. ...καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. Lit: “And the word as to his essence was [emphatically] Deity.”

²⁵ Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο... Lit: “And the Word flesh became...”

²⁶ The verb “declared” is ἐξηγήσατο, the verb form of the noun “exegesis.” The Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, the “Exegesis of God,” i.e., the technical, critical manifestation and representation of Deity.

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. (1 Timothy 3:16)

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high... (Hebrews 1:1–3)

But unto the Son *he saith*, Thy throne, O God, *is* for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness *is* the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, *even* thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: (Hebrews 1:8–10)

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon *God*, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:59–60)

THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE

The Scriptures reveal that God, in contrast to all polytheistic [many gods] and pantheistic [God inseparable from creation] concepts, is a distinct Person with the attributes and prerogatives of personality, e.g., he is intelligent; he possesses a distinct moral character; and he has a will or purpose. The God of Christian theism is the triune God who has revealed himself in the Scriptures. This means:

- that God possesses a distinct character or personality. Any answer to prayer must be given in the context of the moral character of God.
- that he is capable of an intelligent response and possesses the power to answer any request that is consistent with his will and moral character.
- that those who approach him scripturally have the standing of a right personal relationship through the Lord Jesus Christ.

For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5)

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1–2)

Mark in this context the close relationship between justification and prayer. A full, scriptural consciousness of our justification should enable us to pray, and to pray with great assurance.

THE NECESSITY OF A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PERSONAL GOD OF SCRIPTURE

GOD IS A PERSON

Because God is a Person, he must deal personally with his rational, moral creatures. He will not deal with us impersonally. He will deal with us according to his self-revelation, i.e., his inscripturated Word.

GOD POSSESSES A DISTINCT MORAL CHARACTER

By nature we are sinners, alienated from the holy, righteous, eternal God of Scripture. We are polluted with sin and under its reigning power; we are law-breakers and rebels against his authority. He must deal with us in the context of his moral character.

What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat *is* an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps *is* under their lips: Whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness: their feet *are* swift to shed blood: destruction and misery *are* in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin....For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:9–20)

Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:7–8)

GOD DEMANDS PERSONAL FAITH

God in his Word demands personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the imputation of his righteousness as a basis for prayer. Note that we must have a right relationship to God through the Lord Jesus Christ as Mediator, Redeemer, and Great High Priest.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Bbeing justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (Romans 3:21–26)

For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5)

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. (Romans 5:10–11)

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; (Ephesians 1:3–7)

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: (1 John 2:1)²⁷

THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND DAILY AFFAIRS

The presence of God is rarely noted in the mundane affairs of this life. The miraculous is the exceptional. Even in the Scriptures, the greater part of the history of redemption is left to the usual and seemingly mundane. There are eras when the miraculous is predominate and noticeable (The era of creation, the era of Moses, the era of Elijah and Elisha, the era of our Lord's earthly ministry and the Apostles).

III

PRAYER PRESUPPOSES THAT GOD IS OMNIPRESENT

AN UNSCRIPTURAL CONCEPT OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF TRUE PRAYER

A localized or tribal deity, or the *god* of Deism (i.e., an *absentee god*, a “god” who created the universe, set it in motion according to certain established laws, then left it to the deterministic outworking of such impersonal forces) is not the God of the Scriptures, who is everywhere present in the fullness of his power and government.

God is usually pleased to use what we might call “natural means” to providentially bring his purpose to fruition. However, God is just as present, powerful and purposeful in the so-called mundane as he is in the miraculous. Seeming coincidences, small details; the hindrances, opportunities and issues of daily life are often the great hinges on which turn the providential government and purpose of God.

- E.g., David's five *smooth stones* taken from the brook before he met Goliath. These stones had been intermittently turned by the rains and rush of a stream for hundreds of years until they were fitted for David's hand for this particular occasion.
- E.g., the Covenanter²⁸ and the spider's web. A Scottish Covenanter, being pursued by the king's men, ran into an abandoned house, and seeing an old oven, hid himself in it. He had to leave the door ajar. Almost at once a large spider crawled across the opening. His first inclination was to smash, it, but he thought that he had better keep as quiet as possible. The spider began to weave a web across the opening. When the king's men searched the house some minutes later, one of them commanded the oven to be opened, but one of the others, seeing the web, said that

²⁷ Τεκνία μου, ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα μὴ ἀμάρτητε. καὶ ἐάν τις ἀμάρτη, παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον. The context shows that it is the Christian who has the Lord Jesus Christ as his “advocate” or one called alongside to help. The verbs translated “sin” are both in the aor. subj., denoting an act of sin.

²⁸ The Scottish Presbyterians in the 17th century signed the National Covenant (1638) and the Solemn League and Covenant (1643), claiming the Lord Jesus Christ as Head of his Kirk, not the King of England. For this some 18,000 of them—men, women and children—died in the “killing times” of the Covenant, as the English sought impose Episcopal Church government upon them.

the oven had evidently not been opened for a long time, and thus the Covenanter escaped detection.

- E.g., the Covenanter and the eggs. Another Covenanter, being hotly pursued by the king's men, crawled into a haystack in a large barn. His pursuers camped in the barn for several days within just a few feet of his hiding place. Every day a hen came and laid an egg within arm's reach and so he sustained himself until his pursuers moved on.
- E.g., C. H. Spurgeon and the missed meeting with Dr. Angus through the negligence of a maid. Young C. H. Spurgeon had an appointment with Dr. Angus of the Baptist college at certain location. It was thought that a college education might be extremely profitable to young preacher. A young housemaid showed Spurgeon into one room and Dr. Angus into another, and both of them waited for the allotted time without meeting. Dr. Angus stated years later that a college education might have ruined Spurgeon, and that the missed meeting was providential.

THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE

The Scriptures reveal that God is omnipresent and his government rules over all. Because God is omnipresent, prayer and its answer may be immediate anywhere in the universe.

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? (1 Kings 8:27)

The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. (Psalm 103:19)

A Psalm of David. O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known *me*. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted *with* all my ways. For *there* is not a word in my tongue, *but*, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. *Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot *attain* unto it.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*. If I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light *are* both alike *to thee*. (Psalm 139:1–12)

And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Daniel 4:35)

GOD IS BOTH OMNIPRESENT AND SOVEREIGN OVER ALL THE AFFAIRS OF THIS WORLD

The first vision of Ezekiel the prophet gives a proper understanding of Divine government over the affairs of this world:

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, as I *was* among the captives by the river of Chebar, *that the heavens were*

opened, and I saw visions of God. In the fifth *day* of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.

And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof *came* the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And *they had* the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; *and* they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, *and* like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.

Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides: *and* they turned not when they went. As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was *their* spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. When those went, *these* went; and when those stood, *these* stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above. And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side, their bodies. And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings. And there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads, when they stood, *and* had let down their wings.

And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw *it*, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake. (Ezekiel 1:1–28)

This is a vision in symbolic form of the omnipresence and absolute sovereign rule of God over the affairs of this world:

- *The Call of Ezekiel and the Vision* (v. 1–3). Ezekiel was of the priestly line, and at the age of 30 should have entered into the priesthood, but he was in captivity, far removed from the temple in Jerusalem. Everything seemed to be wrong, devastated; and the promises of God seemed far removed. What Ezekiel needed to prepare him for his prophetic ministry was a vision of the glory of God with emphasis upon his omnipresence and sovereignty.
- *The Coming of the Vision* (v. 4). The word “likeness” occurs fifteen times. The phrase “the appearance of the likeness of” implies symbolism.
- *The Center of the Vision* (v. 5–24). A symbolic representation of the presence and sovereign rule of God over everything upon this earth. The rapidity of movement—like lightning, and the straight-forward motions going and returning—all betoken the omnipresence of God seeing, knowing all things. The rims of the wheels reached from heaven to earth, and their rims were full of eyes—the all-seeing presence of God. Above the creatures were great, dark clouds (“firmament,” v. 22–23).
- *The Climax of the Vision* (v. 25–28). Above the firmament was the throne of God, and it was occupied. Above the foreboding and devastating circumstances of Ezekiel and his people, God was on his throne in the fullness of his power and glory. He saw everything, was present in the midst of tragedy and trial, and was in sovereign control of all things. What Ezekiel saw in his vision, we must see by faith.

WHAT IS OUR ATTITUDE?

What is our attitude toward the all-encompassing presence of God? In Psa. 139 David contemplates the omniscience and omnipresence of God and his personal relation to them. He is not frightened, but greatly encouraged. The reason for this attitude is his *relationship* to God. What is your relationship to the omniscient, omnipresent self-revealing God of Scripture?

A Psalm of David. O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known *me*. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted *with* all my ways. For *there* is not a word in my tongue, *but*, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. *Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot *attain* unto it.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*. If I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light *are* both alike *to thee*. (Psalm 139:1–12)

IV
PRAYER PRESUPPOSES THAT GOD IS A PRAYER–HEARING
AND A PRAYER–ANSWERING GOD

THE REALITY OF GOD
AND THE NATURE OF DIVINE–HUMAN COMMUNICATION

- Unless God is capable of both hearing and answering prayer, it must yet prove futile. We would simply speak into the air. Prayer without anticipation of an answer is not really prayer.
- Unless God hears and answers prayer, his nature and character must be held in question. We would stand in doubt as to his personal nature, praying perhaps to an abstract, impersonal force or “universal life principle.”
- Unless God hears and answers prayer, his moral attributes—his truthfulness, faithfulness, righteousness and holiness—must be in conflict, for his Word declares that he is both a prayer–hearing and a prayer–answering God.
- Unless God hears and answers prayer, his very existence or essence may be doubted.

...For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) but to us *there is but* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him. (1 Corinthians 8:5–6)

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

- God *does* hear and answer prayer. This is the teaching of Scripture and the testimony of the experience of the people of God in every age.

THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE

The Scriptures present God as both hearing and answering prayer, implying his absolute power and control over all things

And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. (1 Kings 9:3)

This poor man cried, and the LORD heard *him*, and saved him out of all his troubles...The eyes of the LORD *are* upon the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their cry. The face of the LORD *is* against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. *The righteous cry*, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The LORD *is* nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. (Psalm 34:6, 15–18)

O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come. (Psalm 65:2)

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do*: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. (Matthew 6:6–8)

This implies that:

- Prayer is to be determined by the nature and character of God. Cf. the priests of Baal in 1 Kgs. 18:21–29.

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD *be* God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him. And the people answered him not a word. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, *even* I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets *are* four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay *it* on wood, and put no fire *under*: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay *it* on wood, and put no fire *under*: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress *it* first; for ye *are* many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire *under*. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed *it*, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But *there was* no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he *is* a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, *or* peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the *time* of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that *there was* neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. (1 Kings 18:21–29)

First, they cried aloud, i.e., thought they would be heard for their “much praying.” Second, “they leaped upon the altar,” i.e., they thought enthusiasm or emotionalism would gain answer. Third, “they cut themselves...until the blood gushed out upon them,” i.e., they resorted to utmost self-sacrifice, but there was no answer. Why not? It was because they were praying outside the realm of reality—to the “god” of their own imagination.

- Prayer is offered to God in faith with the anticipation of an answer. Prayer is not merely a religious or spiritual “daydreaming” or meditation. It is the prayer of God-engendered faith, prayed in the leading of the Holy Spirit and according to God’s will.²⁹
- The answer to prayer is neither static nor arbitrary. The answer to prayer reflects the character of God and is answered in the context of his will, wisdom and power.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (Matthew 7:7–11)

²⁹ Cf. Mk. 11:2, ΠΙΣΤΕΥΕΤΕ ὅτι ἔλάβετε, καὶ ἔσται ὑμῖν, Lit: “Believe that you have [already] received, and it shall be to you.” Note the aor. tense, emphasizing the faith which views the petition as already answered.

THE SCRIPTURAL ANTICIPATION
THAT GOD WILL BOTH HEAR AND ANSWER OUR PRAYERS

- The Scriptures declare that God both hears and answers prayer. We possess a scriptural warrant to pray.
- The Scriptures reveal that human beings, because we are sinners, must approach a righteous and holy God through a suitable Mediator: The Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, as sin carries with it the realities of guilt, penalty, pollution and power, we need a Mediator, Redeemer, and an Intercessor or Great High Priest. The Lord Jesus Christ is all these. Thus, in union with Christ by faith and in communion with him scripturally, we are enabled to pray with assurance and confidence.

For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5)

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*. (Hebrews 9:12)

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14–16)

(For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord swore and will not repent, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec;) by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this *man*, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, *maketh* the Son, who is consecrated for evermore. (Hebrews 7:21–28)

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, *which are* the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: (Hebrews 9:24)

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: (1 John 2:1)

- The Scriptures reveal that prayer is heard only in the context of the moral character of God.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear *me*: (Psalm 66:18)³⁰

³⁰ The term “regard” (רָאָה, *ra’ah*) denotes to “approve, consider or provide for.” The idea is that of going through the motions of praying to God all the while either approval of or harboring the thought of anticipated evil in one’s heart.

From whence *come* wars and fightings among you? *come they* not hence, *even* of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume *it* upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. (James 4:1–4)

- The Scriptures teach that prayers prayed according to God’s will or purpose will be answered.

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. (1 John 5:14–15)

V

PRAYER PRESUPPOSES THAT GOD IS ABSOLUTELY SOVEREIGN OVER ALL HIS CREATION

The Scriptures reveal that God has absolute power and unlimited control over all persons and things without exception.

But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. (Psalm 115:3)

And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Daniel 4:35)

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. (Ephesians 1:11)

In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. (Colossians 1:14–17)³¹

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:1–3)³²

There are five considerations:

³¹ Cf. especially vv. 16–17, ...τὰ πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται, καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν. Lit: “all things through him and unto [finding their conclusion in] him were created...and all things in him cohere [are held together].”

³² ...φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ... “...upholding all things by the word of his power...” (i.e., “...constantly sustaining all things by the utterance of his fiat decree...”).

GOD IS NOT UTILITARIAN

If God were less than absolutely sovereign, any answer to prayer would be reduced to urging God to do the best he could in a utilitarian situation. Any answer to prayer might be based upon its length, its fervency, or upon the opportunity God might be able to seize at that moment. However, God is absolutely sovereign and omnipotent; therefore we have the greatest encouragement to pray and anticipate an answer.

Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, *and* there is nothing too hard for thee. (Jeremiah 32:17)

GOD IS ABSOLUTE: HE IS NOT RELATIVE TO THE CREATED UNIVERSE

- If God were not absolute, there could be no certainty, confidence or faith in him, as he would be relative to the universe or all creation. He would be subject to the limitations of time, space, and circumstances. He would be impotent before the alleged “free will” of man in spiritual matters.
- If God were not absolute, this would necessarily imply or assume an Absolute above or beyond God. This in turn would necessarily mean that God himself would be subject or relative to that ultimate principle or person.
- Failure in the absolute control over his own created universe would necessarily imply inconsistency or imperfection within God. Either He *cannot* or *will not* control the universe he has made. If God *cannot* control his creation, then he is less than God in power and wisdom; if he *will not* control his creation, then he is morally–inconsistent, self–contradictory, and utterly unfit as the Object of our faith. Note that creation implies sovereignty, and sovereignty over creation and time implies an absolute power, wisdom and purpose.³³
- Divine sovereignty with respect to time is predestination. Divine predestination is not determinism or fatalism. The difference between determinism or fatalism and biblical Christianity can be noted by contrast: Determinism or fatalism sees everything at the mercy of an impersonal, amoral force in which human endeavor is ultimately meaningless. Divine predestination enables the biblical Christian by faith to view everything in the context of the God of Scripture—sovereign, omnipotent, infinitely wise and good, absolutely righteous and holy, and infinitely merciful and gracious toward his own. It is in this biblical context that the biblical Christian is to submit to the revealed Word and will of God, and live obediently by faith. Divine predestination forms the foundation of all biblical and consistent human responsibility and endeavor—and for every promise and prophecy of Scripture.³⁴

³³ God as the source, support and end of all things (Rom. 11:36) cannot be arbitrary. Rather, he is absolute, as all things are created, defined and governed by him in his moral self–consistency.

³⁴ If reality were ultimately determined by chance, then believers could plead overpowering circumstances to justify their failures, but Divine predestination forms the only consistent basis for human responsibility. The believer’s course is to live lovingly and submissively to the revealed will of God and thus realize his blessing. The certainty of every promise and prophecy rests upon the foundation of Divine predestination.

- Because God is both absolutely sovereign and possesses a distinct moral character, believers can be assured that “all things are working together for good...according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Whatever occurs in our lives and experience, occurs in the context of the moral character, love, wisdom, mercy and grace of our loving heavenly Father.

GOD IS ABSOLUTELY SOVEREIGN OVER PHYSICAL CREATION

Prayer for things in the physical realm such as rain, harvest, personal safety, the birth of a child, etc., would be useless and senseless unless God is absolutely sovereign over the physical universe. Note the following examples:

- The absolute sovereignty of God is seen in creation.

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that *it was good*: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light day, and the darkness he called night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which *were* under the firmament from the waters which *were* above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry *land* appear: and it was so. And God called the dry *land* earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he seas: and God saw that *it was good*. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, *and* herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed *was* in itself, after his kind: and God saw that *it was good*. And the evening and the morning were the third day.

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: *he made* the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that *it was good*. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl *that* may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that *it was good*. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that *it was good*.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the

cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:3–28)

- It is noted in the physical abilities and liabilities of human beings.

And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I *am* slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say. (Exodus 4:10–12)

For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall. (Psalm 18:29)

And as *Jesus* passed by, he saw a man which was blind from *his* birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? *Jesus* answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. (John 9:1–3)

And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. (Mark 3:1–5)

- The power and control of God are noted in nature. God sovereignly interposes in the so-called “laws” of nature, because these “laws” have been ordained, created and are controlled by him.

And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee. And the LORD said unto him, What *is* that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee. And the LORD said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow. And he said, Put thine hand into thy bosom again. And he put his hand into his bosom again; and plucked it out of his bosom, and, behold, it was turned again as his *other* flesh. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and pour *it* upon the dry *land*: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry *land*. (Exodus 4:1–9)

And the LORD said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And they did so; for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of

the earth, and it became lice in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not: so there were lice upon man, and upon beast. Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This *is* the finger of God... (Exodus 8:16–19)

And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go *back* by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry *land*, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry *ground*: and the waters *were* a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. (Exodus 14:21–22)

And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,) that the waters which came down from above stood *and* rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that *is* beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, *even* the salt sea, failed, *and* were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan. (Joshua 3:14–17)

So he [Elijah] arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman *was* there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch *it*, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I *am* gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go *and* do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring *it* unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day *that* the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat *many* days. *And* the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah. (1 Kings 17:10–16)

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD *be* God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him. And the people answered him not a word. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, *even* I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets *are* four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay *it* on wood, and put no fire *under*: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay *it* on wood, and put no fire *under*: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress *it* first; for ye *are* many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire *under*. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed *it*, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But *there was* no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made....And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the *time* of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that *there was* neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And

he repaired the altar of the LORD *that was* broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob...And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid *him* on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour *it* on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do *it* the second time. And they did *it* the second time. And he said, Do *it* the third time. And they did *it* the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water. And it came to pass at *the time of* the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou *art* God in Israel, and *that I am* thy servant, and *that I have* done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou *art* the LORD God, and *that* thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that *was* in the trench. And when all the people saw *it*, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he *is* the God; the LORD, he *is* the God. (1 Kings 18:21–39)

Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. (James 5:16–18)

And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go. So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast *it* in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take *it* up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it. (2 Kings 6:1–7)

For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. (Psalm 107:25)

Fire, and hail; snow, and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling his word: (Psalm 148:8)

Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken....And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest *is* upon you....So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. (Jonah 1:1–4, 12, 15)

And...there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee...And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine....And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the

brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare *it*. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: *but* thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him. (John 2:1–11)

And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to *him*, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him! (Matthew 8:23–27)

And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things. And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time *is* far passed: Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat? He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes. And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties. And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave *them* to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all. And they did all eat, and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. (Mark 6:34–43)

Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare *him* stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. (Luke 7:12–15)

Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up *his* eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go. (John 11:38–44)

- God is sovereign over the animal kingdom.

...behold, I will send swarms of *flies* upon thee, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thy houses: and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of

swarms of *flies*, and also the ground whereon they *are*. And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of *flies* shall be there; to the end thou mayest know that I *am* the LORD in the midst of the earth. And I will put a division between my people and thy people: to morrow shall this sign be. And the LORD did so; and there came a grievous swarm of *flies* into the house of Pharaoh, and *into* his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt: the land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of *flies*....And the LORD did according to the word of Moses; and he removed the swarms of *flies* from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; there remained not one. (Exodus 8:21–24, 31)

Behold, the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which *is* in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: *there shall be* a very grievous murrain. And the LORD shall sever between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt: and there shall nothing die of all *that is* the children's of Israel. And the LORD appointed a set time, saying, To morrow the LORD shall do this thing in the land. And the LORD did that thing on the morrow, and all the cattle of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one. (Exodus 9:3–6)

And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. (Exodus 23:28)

And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam, *Am* not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since *I was* thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay. Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. (Numbers 22:28–31)

And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came unto the prophet that brought him back: and he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place, of the which *the LORD* did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers.

And it came to pass, after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk, that he saddled for him the ass, *to wit*, for the prophet whom he had brought back. And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcase was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcase. And, behold, men passed by, and saw the carcase cast in the way, and the lion standing by the carcase: and they came and told *it* in the city where the old prophet dwelt. And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard *thereof*, he said, *It is* the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the LORD: therefore the LORD hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake unto him. And he spake to his sons, saying, Saddle me the ass. And they saddled *him*. And he went and found his carcase cast in the way, and the ass and the lion standing by the carcase: the lion had not eaten the carcase, nor torn the ass. (1 Kings 13:20–28)

And Elijah the Tishbite, *who was* of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook

Cherith, that *is* before Jordan. And it shall be, *that* thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that *is* before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. (1 Kings 17:1–6)

And he [Elisha] went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. (2 Kings 2:23–24)

For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day. And the king of Assyria brought *men* from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof. And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, *that* they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew *some* of them. Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land. (2 Kings 17:22–26)

Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights....And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry *land*. (Jonah 1:17; 2:10)

And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made *it* to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. (Jonah 4:6–7)

And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute *money* came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee. (Matthew 17:24–27)

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto *their* partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. (Luke 5:4–7)

Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net

on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. (John 21:3–6)

- He controls the acts of human beings and the inclusive context in which they occur.

And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which *is* in Samaria: behold, *he is* in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine... And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. (1 Kings 21:16–19, 23)

And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and enter into the battle; but put thou on thy robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself, and went into the battle....And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot...So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; and they buried the king in Samaria. And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the LORD which he spake. (1 Kings 22:30–38)

And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window. And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master? And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot. And when he was come in, he did eat and drink, and said, Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter. And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. Wherefore they came again, and told him. And he said, This is the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel: (2 Kings 9:30–36)

Thus, we can pray, and pray with the utmost confidence that God can answer prayer for any issue in the physical realm.

GOD IS ABSOLUTELY SOVEREIGN OVER THE MINDS, MOTIVES AND ACTIONS OF ALL MEN

Prayer for protection, justice, deliverance, and the social or moral condition of men would be irrational and futile unless God is sovereign over the minds, motives and actions of all men. Note the following examples:

- God withheld Abimelech from touching Sarah, Abraham's wife (Gen. 20:6).

And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She *is* my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou *art but* a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she *is* a man's wife. But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a

righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She *is* my sister? and she, even she herself said, He *is* my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her. Now therefore restore the man *his* wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore *her* not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that *are* thine. (Genesis 20:1–7)

- God moved upon the hearts of Egyptians, even though the Israelites were their slaves, and even after the severe judgments of God upon their nation, to freely give their riches to the Israelites. God sovereignly disposed the Egyptians to recompense the Israelites for their years of bondage. They received, as it were, all their “wages.”

And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: but every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put *them* upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians. (Exodus 3:19–22)

And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them *such things as they required*. And they spoiled the Egyptians. (Exodus 12:35–36)

- When the men and boys of Israel were commanded by God to present themselves before him three times a year, they had to leave their wives, daughters and property at home, several days’ journey away, and all unprotected. God promised them that no one would even desire their land to take it by conquest or plunder in their absence.

Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year. (Exodus 34:23–24)

Thus we can pray for protection, for God to motivate men to the truth, and for God to change the hearts or minds of others, because he is absolutely sovereign over the desires, motives and actions of men.

- God is sovereign over the hearts of men to accomplish his will. This is true not only in the physical realm, but in the moral and mental as well.

There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand. (Proverbs 19:21)

The king's heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will. (Proverbs 21:1)

And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go. (Exodus 3:19–20)

And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go. (Exodus 4:21)

What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth. (Romans 9:14–18)

- God hardened the hearts of the Canaanites to fight against Israel rather than make peace because God would have them destroyed. Their influence would have polluted the Israelites.

There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all *other* they took in battle. For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, *and* that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses. (Joshua 11:19–20)

- God sent an evil spirit to fulfill his sovereign will in judging both Abimelech and the men of Shechem (Judg. 9:22–23).

When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel, then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech: (Judges 9:22–23)

- God called Cyrus, the head of the Persian Empire by name, almost 200 years before he was born, and revealed his sovereign purpose in this monarch's life and reign.

Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call *thee* by thy name, *am* the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else, *there is* no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that *there is* none beside me. I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these *things*. (Isaiah 45:1–7)

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah....Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all *them* whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:1–2, 5)

And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to

strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. (Ezra 6:22)

- God works even through opposition to fulfill his sovereign will (Psa. 76:10).
Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain. (Psalm 76:10)
- God raised up the great King of Assyria to fulfill his will as an instrument of judgment, then punished him for his pride.

O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but *it is* in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. For he saith, *Are* not my princes altogether kings? *Is* not Calno as Carchemish? *is* not Hamath as Arpad? *is* not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? Wherefore it shall come to pass, *that* when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done *it*, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant *man*: and my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs *that are* left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake *itself* against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up *itself*, as if it were no wood. (Isaiah 10:5–15)

- God changes the disposition of the hearts of men (Dan. 1:9).
Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. (Daniel 1:9)
- The suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ were predestined by the sovereign purpose of God.

And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou *art* God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. (Acts 4:23–28)

We can both pray for God to change the hearts of men and we can trust him, even in adverse and unjust circumstances We are to leave a place for God to exercise his judgment; we are not to intrude on the Divine prerogative ourselves. (Rom. 12: 17–21).

- God puts concern into the hearts of Christians to care for others.

But thanks *be* to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you. For indeed he accepted the exhortation; but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you. (2 Corinthians 8:16–17)

- We are to pray for government leaders, as God is sovereign among the world leaders. When the Apostle wrote this, it is both interesting and important to note that Nero was Emperor at that time.

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. (1 Timothy 2:1–2)

In all these instances drawn from Scripture, the individuals involved acted freely and unhindered in the context of the absolute sovereignty of God. The Scriptures do not address any alleged contradiction or problem between Divine sovereignty and human responsibility or freedom.

GOD IS ABSOLUTELY SOVEREIGN OVER THE SPIRITUAL STATE OF ALL MEN

Prayer for preaching, the success of the Gospel and the conversion of sinners would be utterly absurd unless God is absolutely sovereign over the hearts, minds, souls and personalities of men in free and sovereign grace. How can Christians sincerely pray for the conversion of sinners unless God *can* save them?!

Because the truth of God's free and sovereign grace in the salvation of sinners causes the natural animosity of man to rise up against him, several objections must first be answered, then the Scriptural teaching will be asserted.

SEVERAL OBJECTIONS ANTICIPATED

Some attention must be given to objections against the absolute sovereignty of God and predestination, especially as these truths relate to the sovereignty of Divine grace in salvation. The objections made generally be considered in three areas: natural, philosophical and Biblical:

A NATURAL OBJECTION

Man by nature seeks autonomy and hates the thought of being controlled by another. Man as a sinner has always sought to implement the lie of Satan and become his own "god," determining for himself what is right and wrong (Cf. Gen. 3:1–7).

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened,

and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. (Genesis 3:1–7)³⁵

He seeks to superimpose his own meaning on everything and re-define everything in his own terms. He will not define himself or the creation about him in God's terms. *It is this natural aversion to being controlled by another that causes fallen man to hate the absolute sovereignty of God and Divine predestination.* It is not sovereignty *per se* that man hates, it is *Divine* sovereignty; it is not predestination *per se*, it is *Divine* predestination. Man seeks to be sovereign himself; it is *Divine* sovereignty that impugns upon his desires and aspirations. Man seeks to predestinate, i.e., plan and purpose in every area of human existence; it is *Divine* predestination that gives rise to his anger. The only alternatives, however, are:

- a fatalistic determinism, wherein the ultimate resides in the caprice or chance of an amoral, arbitrary impersonal force, or—
- an existentialism, whereby objective truth and reality are ultimately denied. Does man want God—a holy, righteous, gracious and loving God—in absolute control when he sincerely and fervently prays for God to answer his prayers?.

PHILOSOPHICAL OBJECTIONS

There are several objections that are not Scriptural, but of a philosophical nature:

- *Divine sovereignty and predestination are synonymous with fatalism or determinism.* It is true that everything is predetermined, but there is a great difference between the humanistic concept of determinism and *Divine* predestination. Fatalism or determinism holds that everything is determined by an amoral, arbitrary, impersonal force. *Divine* sovereignty and predestination as revealed in the Scriptures teach that all is predetermined by the self-revealing, morally self-consistent triune God of grace, mercy and love, who is working all things together for good to them that love him.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? (Romans 8:28–31)

Who can dare to improve upon or even dare to question God and bring him into account?

³⁵ This is an historical statement of the apostasy of man from God in the representative person of the first Adam. Satan began by casting doubt upon or questioning the Word of God. Finding Eve ill-grounded in God's Word, he immediately contradicted it, and lied, stating that man could be autonomous—independent from God and his Word. This lie of autonomy was to be attained in an empirical fashion by experimentation with eating the fruit of the tree. The act of Adam was a willful act of rebellion against God's known and understandable commandment. The subsequent sinful history of mankind as fallen beings is a record of man attempting to implement this lie and be his own "god," seeking to re-create the world and society in his own image and likeness, seeking to sinfully re-define everything on his own terms—to superimpose his own meaning on everything.

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, *are they* all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this *is* the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son. And not only *this*; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, *even* by our father Isaac; (For *the children* being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? *What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, *that* in the place where it was said unto them, Ye *are* not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God. (Romans 9:6–26)

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen. (Romans 11:33–36)³⁶

Can one pray to a God who is not in control? What manner of praying would it be if God were only struggling to maintain some semblance of control or were merely able to interfere at times in the affairs of men?

- *Divine sovereignty and predestination discourage responsible action.* This objection is certainly not scriptural, for the Scriptures clearly teach Divine sovereignty, predestination and responsible action. God has commanded the use of means to fulfill his revealed will.

³⁶ The entire section, Romans chapters 9–11 deal with the unbelief of the nation of Israel. It was tragic and seemed to stand opposed to the eternal redemptive purpose of God. The Apostle Paul under inspiration states that God's purpose did not and cannot fail. First, because Abraham's true children are believers [spiritual], not Jews [fleshly or national], and so the promise has not failed. Second, Israel's unbelief is neither final as to time nor total as to ultimate conversion. This passage is one of promise and hope, not one that should lead to despair or animosity against Divine election and predestination.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:18–20)

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. (Mark 16:15)

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. (Acts 16:31)

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (Acts 17:30–31)

- Certainty is a great encouragement for responsible obedience and action, according to the Scriptures.

For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:8–11)

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Now thanks *be* unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one *we are* the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ. (2 Corinthians 2:14–17)

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. (Galatians 6: 7–9)

- Such certainty does not discourage prayer. In the following prayer by Daniel, did the certainty of God's purpose keep Daniel from fervent confession and petition in prayer? No! it caused him to pray with utmost confidence and assurance.

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and

dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness *belongeth* unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, *that are* near, and *that are* far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. O Lord, to us *belongeth* confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord our God *belong* mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that *is* written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As *it is* written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God *is* righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice. And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people *are become* a reproach to all *that are* about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name. (Daniel 9:1–19)

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. (1 John 5:14–15)

Paul continued to pray fervently for the conversion of his fellow Jews. The highest good and motive for prayer is not the salvation of souls, but the glory of God.

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. (Romans 9:1–3)

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (Romans 10:1–3)

- *Divine sovereignty and predestination deny free will.* This objection presupposes that “free will” exists as the power of contrary choice, and that even God cannot transgress man’s alleged “free will” in salvation.
 1. The will as an entity is not free in the sense of the power of contrary choice. It is the expression of the given nature or character, and as such is only “free” within the context of that nature or character.
 2. To possess free will in the sense that this objection assumes, is to deny that man is a sinner, a fallen being, whose nature and character are under the reigning power of sin.

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out...No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:37, 44)

What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat *is* an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps *is* under their lips: whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness: their feet *are* swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery *are* in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes. (Romans 3:9–18)

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14)³⁷

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. (Romans 6:17–18)

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (Romans 8:5–14)

³⁷ ἁμαρτία γὰρ ὑμῶν οὐ κυριεύσει, οὐ γὰρ ἐστε ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν. The believer is no longer under a mere outward principle of command, but under a principle of enabling grace. Neither “Law” nor “grace” possess the definite article in the original.

3. Man, although a sinner, and as such a willing bondsman to sin, is yet responsible to love God completely, to repent, and to glorify him in all things.

Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. (Matthew 22:36–37)

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (Acts 17:30–31)

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

4. This objection confuses free will with responsibility and equates them. Responsibility derives from a higher authority and law, i.e., the right and power to command. Man is responsible to God and his commands, but man as a sinner is not free. His will is enslaved to sin and under its reigning power. Upon this reality hangs the whole truth of the necessity of salvation by grace alone! Had man a free will in the sense of the power of contrary choice, salvation could be by works or self-effort, human ability. Grace would be unnecessary!

Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. (Romans 11:5–6)

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)...For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:4–10)³⁸

5. Anyone who prays for God to have mercy on a sinner and save him, is praying for God to overrule that person's will and change that person's heart or nature.
6. But does not the Bible itself speak of "free will"? Yes, but *never* in the context of salvation. The term occurs seventeen times in Scripture. Sixteen times it refers to voluntary offerings for which there was no commandment because of specific sin. Once it is used in the context of those who would voluntarily return to Jerusalem from Chaldea to rebuild the temple and city and live there (Ezr. 7:13).

³⁸ Salvation by human ability, "free will," or by works is all the same—all stand opposed to salvation by grace. "Free will" and free grace are diametrically opposed to each other.

- *Divine sovereignty and predestination are unnecessary, unethical, and contradictory, as God cannot command a person to do what he or she does not have the ability to do. Hence, command implies ability.*³⁹

1. If a person's religious experience is confined to his own ability, then it is merely psychological and not spiritual! Only God can regenerate or transform the heart by his grace.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12–13)⁴⁰

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God....Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. (John 3:3–8)

So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. (Romans 9:16)

2. This is actually another argument for free-will, and is based upon a misunderstanding of Divine grace. Grace is more than a mere principle—it is also Divine prerogative and power. The grace of God *enables the sinner to savingly respond* to the Gospel.

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*. (Ezekiel 36:25–27)

³⁹ Such thinking always brings the demands of God down to the level of the sinner's ability to obey, i.e., makes the Divine command relative, not absolute. See this principle in the idea of sinless perfectionism as maintained by C. G. Finney:

*That entire sanctification is attainable in this life...*It is self-evident, that entire obedience to God's law is possible on the ground of natural ability. To deny this, is to deny that a man is able to do as well as he can. The very language of the law is such as to level its claims to the capacity of the subject, however great or small that capacity may be. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." Here then it is plain, that all the law demands, is the exercise of whatever strength we have, in the service of God. Now, as entire sanctification consists in perfect obedience to the law of God, and as the law requires nothing more than the right use of whatever strength we have, it is, of course, forever settled, that a state of entire sanctification is attainable in this life, on the ground of natural ability. (Finney, *Systematic Theology*, p. 407).

⁴⁰ Jn. 1:13 teaches emphatically that the "new birth" or regeneration is by the will of God, not by the will of man.

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31–34)⁴¹

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. (Acts 11:18)⁴²

And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: (Acts 18:27)⁴³

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)...For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:1–10)⁴⁴

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; (Philippians 1:29)⁴⁵

3. When prayer is offered up for the salvation of sinners, what is it that God is expected to do? He is expected to do whatever is included in the realm of salvation, i.e., saving a person from himself, from his sin and from its consequences. What exactly are we asking God to do when we pray for the conversion of sinners? We are asking God to *save* them.

⁴¹ The passages in Ezk. 36 and Jer. 31 are Old Testament prophecies of the New or Gospel Covenant, which finds its effectual power in regenerating grace.

⁴² “granted as a free gift” (ἔδωκεν).

⁴³ τοῖς πεπιστευκόσιν διὰ τῆς χάριτος. “the ones believing through [by means of] grace.” It was through a work of God’s free and sovereign grace that they believed.

⁴⁴ vv. 1, 5. Salvation by grace is nothing less than God bringing spiritual life to those who until that point have been spiritual corpses. v. 10, “...before ordained...” prepare beforehand, decree (προητοίμασεν).

⁴⁵ ἔχαρισθη. Given as a gift of free grace

- *Divine sovereignty and predestination would make God unethical.* Most objections stem from a failure to realize who God is. He is God, and is not answerable to his creatures. His creatures have no right to question his dealings with his own creation in any realm—physically, ethically, morally or spiritually.
 1. This objection seeks to make God accountable to his creatures. The Scriptures state that we do not have the right to call God into account or call his moral character into question (Rom. 9:14–26). Mark the three objections given and answered under divine inspiration:
 - *Is God unrighteous?* What shall we say then? *Is there unrighteousness with God?* God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth.
 - *Is God arbitrary?* Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?
 - *Is God accountable?* Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? *What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?
 2. These objections are grounded in unbelief, for the Scriptures clearly reveal and expound the moral character and moral self-consistency of God. Can we pray to a God in whom we cannot have faith and implicit trust?
 3. To charge God with being unethical is deny his true, full Deity, for the very idea of God must imply a Divine and sovereign prerogative. A “god” limited by the inconsistent and alleged ethical demands of his creatures would not in any true sense be God—and certainly not the God of Scripture.

BIBLICAL OBJECTIONS

There are several objections that purport to be of a more biblical nature:

- *Divine predestination is based upon foreknowledge* (Acts 2:23; 15:18; Rom. 8:29–30; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:2).

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: (Acts 2:23)

Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. (Acts 15:18)

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (Romans 8:29–30)

God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, (Romans 11:2)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. (1 Peter 1:1–2)

According to this view, God predestinated or purposed to save sinners because he foresaw their actions and their response to the Gospel. In answer:

1. Foreknowledge is not synonymous with omniscience. God knows all things, including all the possibilities and contingencies. This is omniscience. Closely related to this theory is the absurd idea put forth by some who deny the reality of Divine predestination, that God chose what *not* to know. Logically or consistently, God would have to foreknow *all things* in order to chose what *not* to know.
2. Scripturally, foreknowledge is always associated with certainty, never contingency or mere possibility. Foreknowledge implies a knowledge of what has been rendered certain.⁴⁶
3. In 1 Pet. 1:1–2, the term “elect” is to be construed with “strangers,” not with “foreknowledge,” i.e., “elect strangers.”⁴⁷
4. Pet. 1:18–20. The word in the KJV “foreordained” is literally “foreknown.”⁴⁸ God did not simply foreknow what would be, but foreordained our Lord to be the Redeemer, “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”—the truth of Acts 4:23–28; 15:18.
5. Salvific foreknowledge is never associated with things or *incidents that* are foreknown, but with *persons who* are foreknown and so, as “know” is used in the Old Testament.⁴⁹ Foreknowledge thus implies an intimate personal relation with and knowledge of its subject.
6. The idea of “foreseen faith,” which is essential to this objection, and presupposes that all faith is the same—a product of the human personality—is at variance with the scriptural teaching of salvation by grace.

⁴⁶ Acts 2:23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God...” (τοῦτον τῇ ὠρισμένῃ βουλή καὶ προγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ...). This is a construction wherein two substantives are joined by the coordinate conjunction καί, the first being articular and the second anarthrous (i.e., the “Granville Sharps” rule). Hence, the second refers to and enforces the first. In short, Divine foreknowledge is based upon the Divine decree—the truth of Acts 15:28 and 1 Pet. 1:20, where the term is translated as “foreordained.”

⁴⁷ ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις, “elect pilgrims.”

⁴⁸ προεγνωσμένου.

⁴⁹ “Know” in the Old Testament is from the root יָדָע (yada), which has the connotation of intimate personal knowledge. E.g., “And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain...” Amos 3:2, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth...”

Sinners are always said to be saved *by* or *through faith*,, never saved *because of faith*.⁵⁰

7. This objection necessarily implies that some fatalistic or impersonal, absolute force—fate, luck, fortune or chance—exists above and beyond God. If God merely “looked down through the avenues of time and laid his plans accordingly,” then to what purpose is prayer for the conversion of sinners? However, if God is absolutely sovereign in salvation, then prayer has its proper biblical place in the salvation of men (Rom. 10:1).
- *There are statements in Scripture that are opposed to predestinarian language*, e.g., God is said to repent or grieve with regard to the actions of men:

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. (Genesis 6:5–6)

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, *was* not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou *art* a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. (Jonah 3:10–4:2)

1. These are anthropomorphic expressions that are designed to accommodate the finite minds of men.
2. This is the only approach consistent with the Analogy of Faith (i.e., the total, self-consistent teaching of Scripture as it bears upon one given point), as the Scripture reveals the absolute sovereignty of God and this absoluteness with respect to time, i.e., predestination.

But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. (Psalm 115:3)

Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call *thee* by thy name, *am* the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else, *there is* no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that *there is* none beside me. I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these *things*. (Isaiah 45:1–7)

⁵⁰ διὰ πίστεως, by or through faith [as an instrument], never δια πίστιν, because of faith as the cause or source!

Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it. (Isaiah 46:9–11)

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: (Ephesians 1:11)

3. Any alternative would deny to God even a passive knowledge of the actions of men and also deny the self-consistency of Scripture. The glorious promises of God and the reality of prophecy all rest upon the sovereign prerogative of God.

- Could we pray to a God who himself could not control or even foresee the actions of men?.
- Could we pray to a God who would often be taken by surprise and lack the power and wisdom to prevent the sinful actions of men or even fulfill his promises?
- Could we trust in a God whose promises (i.e., prophecies) are to be held in question?

No! We want a God Who can fully and completely answer the prayers and longings of the soul for the salvation of others. We need a God whose promises are true and faithful. Such faith necessarily and instinctively rests in the glorious and comforting realities of Divine sovereignty and predestination.

- *Scripture teaches that the will of God is often thwarted or successfully contradicted.*

1. It is true that men do reject, contradict and oppose the *revealed* will of God, i.e., his precepts or commands e.g.:

And honour not his father or his mother, *he shall be free*. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. (Matthew 15:6)

But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. (Luke 7:30)

And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. (John 5:40)

2. They even resist his Holy Spirit—

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers *did*, so *do* ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: (Acts 7:51–52)

Note that these did as their fathers did, i.e., they resisted the Holy Spirit as he spoke *through the prophets*. Their murder of the prophets of God through whom he spoke was the stated resistance. This does not imply, however, that

men resist the effectual call of God to salvation. It is never resisted, either partially or finally. It is a call to life from spiritual death.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (Romans 8:29–30)⁵¹

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;). (Ephesians 2:4–5)

But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

3. Men never thwart the *secret* will of God, i.e., his *unrevealed counsel* or *decree*. E.g.:

The secret *things* belong unto the LORD our God: but those *things* which are revealed *belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we* may do all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29)

Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain. (Psalm 76:10)

O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but *it is* in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. For he saith, *Are* not my princes altogether kings? *Is* not Calno as Carchemish? *is* not Hamath as Arpad? *is* not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? Wherefore it shall come to pass, *that* when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done *it*, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant *man*: And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs *that are* left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? *or* shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake *itself* against them that lift it up, *or* as if the staff should lift up *itself*, as if *it were* no wood. (Isiah 10:5–10)

Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, my counsel

⁵¹ This “calling” in the eternal redemptive purpose must be effectual, as it would be needless if all were based on mere foresight, or it were limited to the mere external call of the Gospel. The language is covenantal, as everyone foreknown is predestined, called, justified and glorified.

shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it. (Isaiah 46:9–11)

Could we with scriptural confidence pray to a God whose will was constantly being thwarted? Our very natures and souls cry out for a God whose power is unlimited and whose will is supreme.

- *Divine sovereignty and predestination would make God the author of sin.* The teaching of Scripture is that God is absolutely sovereign over all men and things, even the sinful or evil acts of sinners.

I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else, *there is* no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that *there is* none beside me. I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these *things*. Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. (Isaiah 45:5–8)

The question is: How can God be absolutely sovereign over the sinful acts of men and yet remain holy, righteous i.e., morally self-consistent, and free from sin? There are three possible answers:

1. God only foreknew (in the sense of mere foresight or omniscience) the sinful acts of men. It is possible, then, that he might have prevented them by seeking some utilitarian solution, but evidently chose not to do so, thus possibly making him ultimately responsible for sin by allowing it when he could have prevented it. Or, he could not have prevented it, making him impotent with regard to sin and evil—a mere spectator to the affairs of this world. Language such as “permitting” or “allowing” sin does not remove the ultimate cause from God, unless it presupposes an impersonal force above or beyond God, i.e., a fatalistic determinism. Such an approach necessarily views God as arbitrary. Could we pray to a God whose answers to prayer would be completely arbitrary?
2. Evil in the universe exists in a mysterious dualism.⁵² It cannot be explained, but it exists apart from, independently of, and in opposition to God. But, then, God would be impotent to deal with it. Prayers would be all but useless, and petitions for the souls and lives of sinners would be senseless.
3. God is absolutely sovereign over all things, even evil and the sinful acts of men. He is good, and he ordains evil, controlling it to bring about the highest good for his own glory. As a wise and loving father who may himself use a sharp knife with consummate skill, but forbid his young child to use it or even get near it, so God ordains evil, uses it to bring glory to himself and yet

⁵² Any dualistic approach to the existence of sin and problem of evil is pagan and decidedly unscriptural. Dualistic thinking in Christian circles may well derive from either Gnosticism and its influence upon Christianity or from thinking that denies the sovereignty of God, and limits His power in order to explain what is seemingly inconsistent with His moral character.

remains untainted by it, while he forbids sin in his children.⁵³ God can foreordain evil only if he himself is good, because evil is “evil” only by contrast with the goodness of God, who is absolute, and the Source, Support and End of all things.

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen. (Romans 11:33–36)

Only, then, if God is absolutely sovereign over and foreordains evil, can he bring forth his good purpose in it for his own glory. Cf. the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. (Acts 2:23)

For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. (Acts 4:27–28)

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you. (1 Peter 1:18–20)

This approach alone is consistent with the teaching of Scripture. The very idea that God could be the author of sin in the sense of being himself tainted with evil or culpable to sin, is:

1. an unbelieving attempt to call God into account rather than humbly acknowledging that we have no right to question him (Rom. 9:14–29).
2. a misunderstanding of God’s moral self-consistency. He is holy and righteous, not morally neutral. Only with such a Scriptural concept of an absolutely sovereign and morally self-consistent God, can we pray with complete confidence and trust.

THE SCRIPTURAL TEACHING ASSERTED

Mark the glorious scope of the eternal covenant of redemption and grace portrayed by the inspired Apostle. Note the practicality of the context and the great encouragement Divine sovereignty gives to believers:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

⁵³ Cf. Herman Bavinck, *The doctrine of God*, p. 240.

What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?....For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:28–31, 38–39)

Note the Divine, eternal redemptive purpose described by the inspired Apostle in Eph. 1:3–14:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Two things must be noted:

- these glorious truths are considered as blessings.
- they are considered in the context of encouragement, confidence, and assurance. There is no scriptural assurance of faith apart from redemptive predestination.

Rarely does Scripture defend the nature or actions of God. *The theodicy in Romans Chapter nine is the inspired answer to any and all objections.* As such, it must suffice.

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, *are they* all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this *is* the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son. And not only *this*; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, *even* by our father Isaac; (For *the children* being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (Romans 9:6–24)

Mark the development of this passage: Paul answers three objections: (1) *God is unfaithful* (v. 6–8), (2) *God is unrighteous or unjust* (v. 9–18), and (3) *God is unkind* (v.19–24).

The answer to the first (v.6–8) is that the Word of God has not failed with regard to Israel. The promise was to the *spiritual children* of Abraham, i.e., believers, not to his *natural seed* (merely physical or national Israel), thus the promise has not failed.⁵⁴ The answer to the second (v.9–18) is that it is the sovereign right of God to act toward men as he pleases. He is sovereign in his bestowal of mercy. The answer to the third (v. 19–24) is that God does as he pleases—it is his right (cf. v. 21 “power” [ἐξουσία], when used of God, absolute authority or right to act), and we do not have the right to question him. Thus the inspired Apostle cuts off any and all objections to even question God or call him into account.

The success of Gospel preaching is dependent upon the sovereign power of God to render the Word effectual to salvation.

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.* And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. (Acts 9:1–7)

This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. (1 Timothy 1:15–16)⁵⁵

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit

⁵⁴ The New Testament makes a distinction between the natural seed of Abraham (σπερμα Ἀβραάμ) or national Israel, and the spiritual seed of Israel, or the children God (τέκνα Ἀβραάμ) i.e., believers (Cf. Jn. 8:33, 37–40; Rom. 9:6–8; Heb. 2:10–17).

⁵⁵ The conversion of Saul of Tarsus—later the great Apostle Paul—was clearly a miracle of free and sovereign grace. He states that his conversion was a pattern for subsequent converts as how God saves sinners.

and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1–5)

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians *which is* in God the Father and *in* the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. (1 Thessalonians 1:1–5)

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48 48)

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard *us*: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. (Acts 16:14)

Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, (2 Timothy 1:6–9)

Because God is absolutely sovereign in the salvation of sinners—

- We can pray for the preaching of the Gospel. What good is it to pray if God cannot save sinners?
- We can pray for the blessings of God upon the distribution of sound, evangelical literature, and for the conversion of all men. What good is it to pray if God cannot open hearts and minds savingly?
- We can pray for revival and spiritual awakening as did our forefathers. How can we pray for revival or spiritual awakening if God cannot break through in free and sovereign grace to convert multitudes?
- We can freely preach Christ to all, trusting that he can save the very worst of men and those who oppose his truth! Our confidence is in the God who saved the greatest enemy of the Gospel in early Christianity—Saul of Tarsus (1 Tim. 1:15–16).
- When we have exhausted all our responsibility, we trust God to effectually draw men and women to himself in sovereign grace.

VI
PRAYER PRESUPPOSES THAT GOD IS INTIMATELY INVOLVED
IN THE GOVERNMENT OF HIS UNIVERSE

GOD AND THE MUNDANE, THE INCIDENTAL,
AND THE PERSONAL ISSUES OF INDIVIDUAL LIFE

If God were only involved in the affairs of this universe in a general sense, then prayers for daily, personal matters would be irrelevant to him. We might be overlooked by a God too busy or too concerned with greater issues than our relatively insignificant problems and trials. We would find little encouragement to pray or seek to discern the will of God for our own lives and the issues of daily life.

God is a personal God, an omnipresent God, a God who hears and answers prayer, a God who cares for his creation and the least of his creatures. Creation itself reveals that God is a God of detail, of the minute, as well as a God of great and mighty things. Scripture teaches us that God is intimately interested and active in the most minute affairs of our lives.

THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE

The Scriptures reveal God to be both interested in and in control of everything pertaining to the lives, experience and well-being of his creatures. This is seen throughout nature and the animal realm. The care of our heavenly Father for his seemingly insignificant creatures should instruct us in our faith.

Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, *and* to the young ravens which cry. (Psalm 147:7–9)

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof. (Matthew 6:24–34)

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:29–31)

God cares especially for his children, even in the so-called mundane or daily affairs of life.

Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. (Ephesians 6:18)

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6–7)

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. (1 Timothy 4:1–6)

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are, yet* without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14–16)

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (1 Peter 5:6–7)

Comprehending by faith through the Scriptures the God who loves and cares for us, we have the greatest confidence to pray to and trust him.

The providence of God. When we consider the intimate involvement of God in even the most minute issues of our lives, we are confronted with his providence, i.e., that process whereby he is working out his eternal purpose in time and history. This means not only that God is intimately involved in all things, but also that everything is being brought to pass teleologically, i.e., with a predetermined end in view.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:28–39)

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him

before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:3–14)

How could we pray to a God who might consider us unimportant as compared to others?

PRAYER IS THE COMMON DENOMINATOR

Prayer, as exemplified in the lives and experiences of biblical personalities, must be the “common denominator” that reduces or rather lifts everything to a spiritual level. The Scriptures imply that there is nothing too great or too small to make a matter of prayer. As one must find the common denominator when adding various fractions, so we must find the common denominator to every situation—put it on a spiritual basis by making it a matter of prayer.⁵⁶

VII PRAYER PRESUPPOSES THAT GOD HAS A DISTINCT WILL, DETERMINATION OR PURPOSE

THE NECESSITY AND NATURE OF THE DIVINE PURPOSE

Purpose or determination is essential to God as a Person—an intelligent, moral Being. Purpose is essential to a scriptural concept of Deity.

A “god” without purpose would either be completely arbitrary in his own right, or wholly given over to the whims of his rational and moral creatures and their requests. Answers to prayer might be based on the length (Cf. The heathen and their “vain repetitions” in Matt. 6:7–8) or persuasiveness of the petitions (Cf. The prophets of Baal in 1 Kgs. 18:25–29), rather than his own purpose.

⁵⁶ Among the many reasons the Psalms minister to us in every situation as they do is simply because David made the crises and trials of his life—personal, political, military, religious, physical, moral, and national—a matter of prayer, i.e., he put everything on a spiritual basis. To seek to deal with issues on any other basis is to attempt what is not Christian in principle or practice.

A “god” without determination or purpose would be a “god” devoid of intelligence, wisdom and moral character. The Scripture puts the moral character of God and his purpose in the same context (Rom. 8:28).⁵⁷

The Divine will, purpose or determination reflects the nature and character of God, i.e., as God is eternal, absolutely sovereign, wise, holy, righteous, merciful, and gracious, so his purpose is eternal, sovereign (infallible), wise, holy, righteous, merciful and gracious.

Divine sovereignty in relation to time or duration is Divine predestination. As human purpose or determination reflects the attributes of human power and limitations, so the Divine purpose reflects the attributes of Divine sovereignty, power, and supra-temporalness—The Divine purpose is infallible and unbounded by time. To say these things is to say “predestination.”

Men do *not* hate predestination *per se*; they hate *Divine* predestination. Men want power, control and purpose over their own lives and the lives of others; but they do not want *God* to have power, and control, or to impose his purpose upon them. In whose hands do we want our lives and destinies? In our own hands? In the hands of our closest and most-trusted friends? Or in the hands of God?

THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE

POSITIVE STATEMENTS

- The Scriptures reveal that God has a will, determination, intention or purpose, and that this purpose is eternal and infallible.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: (Ephesians 1:3–11)

For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:8–11)

⁵⁷ To state that God has no purpose in the context of His nature and character, i.e., Divine predestination as proper and necessary to the absolute nature and character of God, is to assert that God is irrational. There is no avoidance of this from a Scriptural perspective.

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you. (1 Peter 1:18–20)

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. (Acts 2:23)

For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. (Acts 4:27–28)

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48)

Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. (Acts 15:18)

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (Romans 8:28–30)

- To be answered, prayer must be according to the Divine will.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what *is* the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*. (Romans 8:26–27)

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. (1 John 5:14–15)

This should not be a discouragement to prayer, but rather is to be reflected in our prayers. We are to submit in obedience to the Divine will.

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven. (Matthew 6:9–10)

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou *wilt*. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. (Matthew 26:36–44)

The will of God experientially worked out in our lives is good, acceptable and perfect.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:1–2)⁵⁸

A NECESSARY QUESTION ANSWERED

If Divine predestination is true i.e., scriptural—part of the revealed truth of God—why pray? Is such a question valid and proper? Consider the implications of this question. Does this question imply that God has no ultimate or infallible purpose? Are we seeking to change the mind or purpose of God in prayer? Can prayer give direction or information to God? Scripture itself answers this question:

- God both commands and encourages us to pray. Prayer is thus an act of obedience.

And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint. (Luke 18:1)

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. (Ephesians 6:18)

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6–7)

Pray without ceasing. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

- Prayer is a call to faith in the sovereign government of God. To set ourselves against the will or purpose of God in our prayers is to rebel against him.

After this manner therefore pray ye: our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven. (Matthew 6:9–10)

- Prayer is a call to submit or conform to the sovereign will of God. Prayer is primarily an act of worship in the context of loving, trusting submission to the sovereign will of God.

Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. (Luke 22:42)

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what *is* the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the*

⁵⁸ Romans 12:1–2 Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ, παραστήσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ, τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν· καὶ μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός, εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον. We are to put the will of God to the test and find it to be that which is morally good, well-pleasing, and complete.

will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:26–28)

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. (1 John 5:14–15)

- Prayer is one of the God–ordained means of accomplishing his will and bringing glory to himself. Thus, rather than discourage or render prayer unnecessary, predestination actually encourages prayer and gives to the believer the glorious anticipation of an answer.

And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master *were* in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor. And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, *even* the time that women go out to draw *water*. And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand *here* by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: *let the same be she that* thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master. And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. And the damsel *was* very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up. And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher. And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hastened, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw *water* for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. And she hastened, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw *water*, and drew for all his camels. And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not. (Genesis 24:10–21)

And this whole land shall be a desolation, *and* an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. (Jeremiah 25:11)

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; (Daniel 9:1–4)

For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, *say they*, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, *saying*, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him. But the LORD *is* with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: *their* everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten. But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, *and* seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause. Sing unto the LORD,

praise ye the LORD: for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evildoers. (Jeremiah 20:10–13)

Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. (James 5:16–18)

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

- Prayer is an acknowledgment of our finiteness and God’s infiniteness; of our dependence upon him and his care and concern for us.

Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what *is* the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. (Romans 8:26–28)

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6–7)

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (1 Peter 5:7)

VIII

PRAYER PRESUPPOSES THAT GOD POSSESSES A DISTINCT MORAL CHARACTER

GOD IS NOT ARBITRARY

Unless God possesses a distinct moral character (i.e., he is absolutely righteous, just and holy), any answer to prayer in the spiritual, moral, ethical or social realm would be completely arbitrary. Such a “god” would either be inconsistent in our idea of morality, or he would answer at least some prayers for evil and harm.

THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE

A POSITIVE STATEMENT

The Scriptures adequately reveal the moral character of God. God is absolute. This means that he is not moved by anyone or anything outside himself. He is moved or motivated solely from within. He is not relative to anyone or anything. Therefore, there is no power, authority, standard or law to which he must conform or to which he must give account—he is absolute. He is morally self-consistent, i.e., righteous, just and holy. Therefore whatever he does is right. Unrighteousness is only unrighteousness in contrast to the righteousness of God. The wars of extermination against the Canaanites were just because God commanded them. For God to command the prophet Hosea to marry Gomer, a prostitute, was a righteous act, simply because God had commanded it.

The word of the LORD that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, *and* Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, *departing* from the LORD. So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son. (Hosea 1:1–3)

To say that God is righteous and will do right is simply to assert the absolute character and moral self-consistency of God.

That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Genesis 18:25)

The LORD *is* righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. The LORD *is* nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy. (Psalm 145:17–20)

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. (Isaiah 57:15)

To call God’s moral character into question is to assert that we have the right to call God into judgment. We have already established from the Scriptures that no creature possesses that right or prerogative (Rom. 9:11–24).

THE IMPRECCATORY PSALMS

The “imprecatory Psalms” of David, in which he prays Divine judgment upon the ungodly, are prayed by him as the “Anointed of God.” He prays as one who sides with God and owns his righteous cause, not as one who prays from the self-centered perspective of personal vengeance.

A Psalm of David. Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy. Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity: Who whet their tongue like a sword, *and* bend *their bows to shoot* their arrows, *even* bitter words: That they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not. They encourage themselves *in* an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them? They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward *thought* of every one of *them*, and the heart, *is* deep. But God shall shoot at them *with* an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded. So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves: all that see them shall flee away. And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing. The righteous shall be glad in the LORD, and shall trust in him; and all the upright in heart shall glory. (Psalm 64:1–10)

A Psalm *or* Song of David. Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, *so* drive *them* away: as wax melteth before the fire, *so* let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice. (Psalm 68:1–3)

Let their table become a snare before them: and *that which should have been* for *their* welfare, *let it become* a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate; *and* let none dwell in

their tents. For they persecute *him* whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded. Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous. (Psalm 69:22–28)

To the chief Musician, A *Psalm* of David, to bring to remembrance. *Make haste*, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O LORD. Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul: let them be turned backward, and put to confusion, that desire my hurt. Let them be turned back for a reward of their shame that say, Aha, aha. Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: and let such as love thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified. But I *am* poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God: thou *art* my help and my deliverer; O LORD, make no tarrying. (Psalm 70:1–5)

Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man....For mine enemies speak against me; and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together, Saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for *there is none* to deliver *him*. O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help. Let them be confounded *and* consumed that are adversaries to my soul; let them be covered *with* reproach and dishonour that seek my hurt. But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more. (Psalm 71:4, 10–14)

It is *lawful* to pray for justice. Cf. Paul’s statement in 2 Tim. 4:14 concerning one who opposed the truth and sought to disrupt the work:

Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward (him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.⁵⁹

PRAYER IS ANSWERED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MORAL CHARACTER OF GOD

Because God is righteous, just, and holy, and because man has been created in the image and likeness of God, it is impossible that any prayer can be prayed or answered apart from the context of the moral character of God which determines his will. Note the pervading principles in Matt. 4:4; Acts 17:28; and 1 Cor. 10:31:

But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4)

For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. (Acts 17:28)

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

IX PRAYER PRESUPPOSES THAT THOSE WHO PETITION GOD HAVE A RIGHT OF ACCESS OR APPROACH

ALL HUMAN BEINGS ARE *NOT* THE CHILDREN OF GOD

Not everyone has the right to address God in prayer. If all men were the children of God, then:

- either God would be devoid of moral self-consistency, or

⁵⁹ The KJV reads “reward” as wish or prayer (TR, ἀποδοῦναι, aor. opt.). The critical text reads ἀποδώσει (fut.).

- God would be powerless to effect a spiritual and moral a transformation in his creatures, or
- redemption would be unnecessary.
- all such thinking is utterly contrary to the truth of Scripture.

As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: *but* the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, *even* God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? *even* because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (John 8:30–44)

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: (Romans 8:14–16)⁶⁰

GOD CAN ONLY BE APPROACHED THROUGH A MEDIATOR

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS THE ONLY MEDIATOR

Man is a sinner by both imputation and nature and as such is cut off from God. Man as a sinner is unholy, unrighteous, a rebel and an apostate. Man as a sinful being has offended God by his sinful nature and personal rebellion (Rom. 3:23).⁶¹ God is, righteous, just and holy. He cannot receive sinners as they are apart from a suitable mediator and still remain self-consistent. The God of Scripture is approached only through the mediatorship and intercessory work of the Lord Jesus Christ

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

⁶⁰ The language of Rom. 8:14 clearly and emphatically states that only those who are being constantly lead by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. (ὅσοι γὰρ πνεύματι θεοῦ ἄγονται, οὗτοι υἱοὶ θεοῦ εἰσιν.). V. 16 states that the Holy Spirit constantly bears to this fact. (αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν ὅτι ἐσμὲν τέκνα θεοῦ).

⁶¹ Romans 5:12 ...πάντες ἥμαρτον. Romans 3:23 πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον καὶ ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ... Cf. the aor. “sinned” and the pres. “constantly coming short...”

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1–2)

For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5)

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are, yet* without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14–16)

And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this *man*, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:23–25)

Now of the things which we have spoken *this is* the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; (Hebrews 8:1)

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?...For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, *which are* the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: (Hebrews 9:12–14, 24)

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And *having* an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19–22)

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (1 John 2:1)

THE WORK OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS COVENANTAL
AND CANNOT BE FRAGMENTED

The high priestly or intercessory work of the Lord Jesus Christ is intrinsically related to his position and work as Son, Mediator, and Redeemer. Therefore, those who are *not* united to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith *cannot* call God “Father,” *cannot* have access to God in prayer, and *do not* have the right to address God with any petition.

PRAYER IS ADDRESSED TO GOD
IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Note Jn. 14:13–14; 15:16; 16:23–27. This is the only “Name” that has significance in the presence of God. The use of Jesus’ name in prayer implies the right to use his authority and presupposes a valid claim upon his imputed righteousness (Rom. 5:1–2).⁶²

⁶² Romans 5:1–2 Δικαιωθέντες οὖν ἐκ πίστεως εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι· οὐ καὶ τὴν προσαγωγὴν ἐσχήκαμεν [τῇ πίστει] εἰς τὴν χάριν ταύτην ἐν ἣ ἐστήκαμεν, καὶ καυχώμεθα ἐπ· ἐλπίδι τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ. Cf. that our access is through Christ alone. It is by [saving] faith. It is constant or perpetual (Cf. the perf. ἐσχήκαμεν...ἐστήκαμεν).

And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do *it*. (John 14:13–14)

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. (John 15:16)

And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give *it* you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. (John 16:23–27)

WHAT OF THE “SINNER’S PRAYER?”

THE OBJECTION

It may be objected by some that such teaching about access to God carries with it an inherent contradiction—the “sinner’s prayer.” If we are saved by faith, and we must both believe in Jesus Christ and call upon him to save us, how can we pray and receive salvation if God does not hear the prayer of the unsaved individual?

THE ANSWER

This objection is itself based upon the erroneous and unscriptural assumptions that man possesses a “free will,” and according to such a scheme, exercises faith in Jesus Christ *first*, and then *as a consequence of this faith, is “born again.”* The Scripture, however, places regeneration or the “new birth” first, and saving faith and repentance as graces, consequences, or manifestations of regeneration. Thus, when the truly repentant sinner prays in faith for salvation, God will hear and answer his prayer.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God...The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. (John 3:3–8)

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth. (Acts 9:1–11)

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. (Acts 11:18)

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. (Acts 16:14)

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)....For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:5–10)

X PRAYER PRESUPPOSES THE MAINTENANCE OF A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

It is scripturally evident that unregenerate, unconverted individuals have no right of access to God or basis on which to approach him in prayer. But it must *not* be thought that simply because we are believers—Christians—that we have an assurance God will hear and answer our prayers. Prayer presupposes not only a right relationship with God, but the maintenance of confession, fellowship and communion with him.

OPEN SINFULNESS IS AN INDICATION OF AN UNCONVERTED STATE

Salvation, contrary to popular belief, is not from hell or eternal punishment, but from *sin*—from sin as the reigning or controlling power in and over the life. We need to be saved from sin and its full reality: its guilt, its penalty, its polluting influence, and its reigning power.

It is the clear teaching of the Word of God that Believers do not—cannot—live in sin.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue [to live] in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead [who died] to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized [identified] into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (Romans 6:1–14)

But God be thanked, that ye were [in a state of being] the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. (Romans 6:17–18)

Whosoever is born of God [every single one having been begotten of God] doth not [habitually practice] commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot [continue on in] sin, because he is born of God. (1 John 3:9)

It is impossible for a true believer to live a life of sin because he has been brought into union with the Lord Jesus Christ in both his death (which means that the old unregenerate self was crucified with Christ in order that the body as dominated by sin might be stripped of its controlling power)⁶³ and in his resurrection (which means that the same power of the Holy Spirit which raised up Christ from the dead is effectually at work in the life of believer).⁶⁴

It is also clear that believers must not even take one act of sin lightly.

What then? shall we [lightly commit acts of] sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things *is* death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:15–23)⁶⁵

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not [do not commit an act of sin]. And if any man sin [does commit an act of sin], we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (1 John 2:1)⁶⁶

To go back to a life of sin after professing Christ as Lord and Savior is apostasy.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. (Hebrews 3:12)

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge

⁶³ Cf. Romans 6:6 τοῦτο γινώσκοντες, ὅτι ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος συνεσταυρώθη, ἵνα καταργηθῇ τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ. Note the aor. "was crucified," and the two final clauses, "in order that...in order that..." denoting result.

⁶⁴ Cf. Rom. 6:4–5, 10–14.

⁶⁵ Romans chapter 6 is based on two questions: v. 1–14, believers cannot live in sin by virtue of their union with Christ; v. 15–23, believers cannot take even one act of sin lightly because its wages is eternal death. v. 1 is pres., implying a *life of sin*, and v. 15 is aor., imply an *act of sin*.

⁶⁶ Cf. the use of the aor. in both passages, ref. to *acts of sin*.

his people. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* (Hebrews 10:26–31)⁶⁷

UNCONFESSED OR SECRET SIN PRECLUDES FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Sin grieves the Holy Spirit and causes a loss of intimacy and fellowship. It creates a barrier between the believer and God.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear *me*. (Psalm 66:18)⁶⁸

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. (Ephesians 4:30)

Quench not the Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 5:19)⁶⁹

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what *is* the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*. (Romans 8:26–27)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

AN UNFORGIVING SPIRIT PREVENTS COMMUNION WITH GOD

The truth and Spirit of God teach us the reality and meaning of grace. We cannot expect to be forgiven if we ourselves do not forgive. The attitude of the believer is to be governed by the grace shown to him by the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:31–32; Col. 3:12–13). Scripturally, forgiveness always presupposes repentance.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors....For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:12, 14–15)

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:30–32)

⁶⁷ In Heb. 3:12, the words ἐν τῷ ἀποστῆναι ἀπὸ θεοῦ ζῶντος refer to apostasy. In Heb. 10:26, the words Ἐκουσίως γὰρ ἁμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν... gen. absol. with pres. ptc. refer to willfully or purposely returning to a life of sin.

⁶⁸ Psalm 66:18 אָמַן רָאִיתִי (kal. perf.) “see, expect, consider, give attention to, regard.” In this context the thought is hypocrisy, having a wicked end in view. The LXX translates ἐθέλωρουν, to look at a thing or consider it carefully with interest and for a purpose.

⁶⁹ τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέννυτε. Note the emph. pos. of τὸ πνεῦμα and the pres. imp. of prohib. μὴ σβέννυτε. The passage in the immediate context may have primary reference to the public meeting and preaching, but it also has valid *application* to personal experience and convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:12–16)

THE BELIEVER'S SCRIPTURAL DUTY TO MAINTAIN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

There are no scriptural options in our duty to maintain a right relationship with God. We are to live in complete obedience to his revealed will. We are to give up ourselves wholly and unreservedly to him as the only possible response to his glorious, gracious and infallible redemptive purpose (2 Cor. 5:14–15; Rom. 6:4, 18; 12:1–2). We are to live exclusively unto God as our ultimate Point-of-Reference as those who are alive from the dead (Rom. 6:9–13). We to mortify sin through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:12–13; Col. 3:1–5).

It is in the context of a right relationship with God that we can have confidence that we can pray and have true fellowship and communion with him.

XI ARE THERE ANY “SECRETS” TO PRAYER?

Prayer has received great and amazing answers. Yet not all of our prayers—perhaps most of our prayers—are not answered, and those which are answered are often not answered for a long time. Some have their prayers answered more than others. Some of our most ardent, selfless prayers, such as petitions for the conversion of our family or friends seem to remain unanswered for years, even though bathed in tears and agony. Such drawn out, painful, prolonged begging of God must cause us to ask, “What is the “secret” of prayer?” Not everyone who prays has his prayers answered. Many only have some prayers answered. A select few, seem to become true men and women of prayer. What do they know or possess that sets them apart? If we were to study the lives of great men of faith, who were mightily used of God, men such as George Müller of Bristol,⁷⁰ J Hudson Taylor⁷¹ and Charles Haddon Spurgeon,⁷² we would find them all to be great men of the Scriptures and of prayer. Their lives were lived in the conscious presence of God, and they did nothing but it was preceded by and performed under the influence of prayer. It is an sanctified exercise to study the lives of such great saints who, with all their liabilities and weaknesses, were strong in prayer and received amazing answers to their petitions.

From a study of the Scriptures and from the lives and prayers of those men and women of prayer found therein, we can suggest at least four “secrets” of prayer:

⁷⁰ A. T. Pierson, *George Müller of Bristol; George Müller, Answers to Prayer*, being excerpts from his Journals.

⁷¹ Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor in Early Years: The Growth of a Soul; Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission: The Growth of a Work of God*. Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 2 Vols.

⁷² C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography* 4 Volumes, Pilgrim Publications, Pasadena, Tx.

A BURDEN FROM GOD

These were burdened to pray, from the leading of the Spirit, according to the will of God. This means that they live such lives as do not consciously grieve the Holy Spirit.

Eph. 4:29–32. ²⁹ Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. ³⁰ And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: ³² And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

1 Jn. 5:14–15. ¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: ¹⁵ And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

LIVING IN COMMUNION WITH GOD

These lived in close communion with God and do not seek to pray with any unconfessed sin in their lives.

Psa. 66:18. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear *me*.⁷³

FERVENCY IN PRAYER

These were fervent in prayer. They did not pray casual prayers. Their hearts were often stirred or broken before God. Moses at times laid his life on the line, asking God to kill him if he would not forgive Israel's sin! The usual formula for prayer in the New Testament is the use of the aorist imperative, an urgent, determined entreaty.⁷⁴ They cried out in agony of soul or intensity of purpose! There was power in their prayers!

Jas. 5:16. ...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.⁷⁵

SHAMELESS PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER

These persisted in prayer until they receive an answer! Our prayers may often remain unanswered because we are not as concerned or fervent as we ought to be, or we simply pray a few times and then give up! The general focus of our Lord concerning prayer, especially in Luke's Gospel record, is that we must shamelessly persist in prayer.

Lk. 11:1–13. And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught

⁷³ Psa. 66:18. אֲנִי אֶחְרָאֲתִי בְלִבִּי לֹא יִשְׁמַעַ אֲדֹנָי. "If I see [envision, anticipate] evil in my heart, will never ever hear me the Lord!" Perpetual state [imperf. with לֹא]. LXX: ἀδικίαν εἰ ἐθεώρουν ἐν καρδίᾳ μου μὴ εἰσακουσάτω κύριος. "If unrighteousness I continue to perceive or retain [imperf] in my heart, will never begin to give me a hearing [the] Lord"! aor. imp. with μὴ.

⁷⁴ This use of the aor. imp. was found in both pagan and biblical Greek. Prayer by its very nature presupposes a fervency E.g., Jn. 17:17, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." ἀγιάσον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ· ὁ λόγος ὁ σὸς ἀλήθειά ἐστιν. Mark the fervency of our Lord, "[with a sense of urgency and all determination] Sanctify them through thy Truth, Thy Word [I mean Thine] truth is!"

⁷⁵ Jas. 5:16. Πολλὴ ἰσχὺεὶ δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη. "Much strength [the] petition of a righteous man in its working."

his disciples. ² And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. ³ Give us day by day our daily bread. ⁴ And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. ⁵ And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; ⁶ For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? ⁷ And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. ⁸ I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity ⁷⁶ he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. ⁹ And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. ¹⁰ For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. ^{77 11} If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? ¹² Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? ¹³ If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Lk. 18:1–8. And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; ² Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: ³ And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. ⁴ And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; ⁵ Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. ⁶ And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. ⁷ And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? ⁸ I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

There are certain necessary scriptural presuppositions that underlie prayer:

- Prayer necessarily presupposes that God exists.
- Prayer necessarily presupposes that is a personal God.
- Prayer necessarily presupposes that God is omnipresent.
- Prayer necessarily presupposes that God is a prayer–hearing and prayer–answering God.
- Prayer necessarily presupposes that God is absolutely sovereign over all his creation.
- Prayer necessarily presupposes that God is intimately involved in the government of his universe.
- Prayer necessarily presupposes that God has a distinct will, determination, or purpose.
- Prayer necessarily presupposes that God possesses a distinct moral character.

⁷⁶ Lk. 11:8, ...διὰ γε τὴν ἀναίδειαν αὐτοῦ ... “yet because of his shameless persistence...

⁷⁷ Lk. 11:9–10. The commands are all in the pres. imp. denoting a persistence, i.e., “keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking.”

- Prayer necessarily presupposes that those who petition God have a right of access or approach.
- Prayer necessarily presupposes the maintenance of a right relationship with God.

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