

## What is Prayer for? Where is Prayer from? What is the use of Prayer?

The question: "What is then the use of Prayer?" is a natural logical question once one starts thinking about the Sovereignty of God.

First of all let me clarify. When we talk about predestination we are specifically talking about the Salvation of an individual. We are not talking about the predestination of the color of shirt he will wear tomorrow. This is not the issue we are addressing. I'll save that question for a Philosophical day. And frankly I don't know the answer to that. It may logically follow but it may not, I thought it did follow but I think there may be caveats to that.

However one may logically ask: If God knows everything and is omnipresent in Time and Space, and He cannot change His mind, then what is the use of Prayer? And does it achieve anything when we pray and ask God for something?

Well we have first of all the verse that says "The prayer of a righteous man, availeth much"

### **James Chapter 5**

*<sup>13</sup>Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup>Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup>Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

So it seems prayer can do something. However we cannot say that it changes the mind of God (see my separate paper on this topic where I address the places in the Bible that seem to indicate that God changed His mind but really didn't).

I think the key to understanding this may be Romans 8.

**Rom. 8:26** *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*

**Rom. 8:27** *And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.*

**Rom. 8:28** *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

The first question is: Who is the Spirit? Well in this context we know it's the Holy Spirit not our spirit.

So the next question to ask is: Is the interceding according to God's will, or is What the Spirit prays for according to God's will?

Obviously both. Because the Holy Spirit is God. So whatever the Spirit does is God's will. And whatever the Spirit asks for is also God's will. So when we pray in the Spirit we are praying what the Spirit wants us to pray. And the Spirit wants us to pray according to what God has already willed.

And when we pray for what God has willed and God answers that prayer positively, then God is glorified. And that is God's Chief purpose (to Glorify Himself and Enjoy Himself for ever).

You see it all starts with God and ends with God. It is the Holy Spirit in us that causes us to pray.

Because if we can't do anything apart from the Holy Spirit to please God then, the very fact that we desire to pray must originate from the Holy Spirit.

We don't know what to pray for, so God Himself causes us to pray, for the very things that he is going to answer. And the Spirit (God) intercedes Himself with Himself in accordance to His very OWN will. Please note that I'm not taking this out of context; I'm merely expanding it logically.

Here's how I got there-

Here are the original verses:

***Rom. 8:26** In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*

***Rom. 8:27** And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.*

***Rom. 8:28** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Here are the same verses but I've expanded each mention of who and what. And I've replaced Spirit with God. All the changes and the pertinent words are marked in **bold**.

***Rom. 8:26** In the same way, **God** helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray **for to God**, but **God** himself intercedes for us **to Himself** with groans that words cannot express.*

***Rom. 8:27** And **God** who searches our hearts **knows His own Mind**, because **He** intercedes **with Himself** for the saints in accordance with **His own will**.*

***Rom. 8:28** And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love **him**, who have been called according to **his** purpose.*

So it starts with God and ends with God. We are merely the vessel. So when He answers that prayer that He himself initiated. He is glorified.

Note also a very critical point. In Verse 28, Paul says

***Rom. 8:28** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Well if God works for the good of those who are called according to his purpose, He's obviously working through their prayers for His Purpose. Well, for how long has he had that Purpose? From the beginning of time obviously since God being outside of time doesn't. So the Holy Spirit causes us to pray for what God had planned from the beginning of Time. Make sense?

Back to **James 5** again:

*<sup>16</sup>Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

So when James talks about a righteous man, we know that no man can be righteous apart from the power of God being in him. So as James tells us, God the Holy Spirit moves in us to cause us to Pray for what God is going to answer "Yeah" or "Nay." That makes is powerful and effective I'd say. The very person who's going to answer our prayers is prompting us to ask in our prayers.

Also in **James 5:15**:

*<sup>15</sup>And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well;*

Well, where does this faith come from? It comes from God. (Yes, I know, one of these day's I'll have to get into figuring out the details of Romans 10:17..... But for right know we know that Faith which is a good thing can only come from God.)

Note that God may choose to glorify Himself in answering a prayer with a NO, though it was a prayer that His Spirit had caused us to pray for. Our obedience glorifies Him just as much.

I know, I know it doesn't sound like much fun for God. And I'd never be able to convince my Atheist friends that God would want that<sup>1</sup>. But how can we be fully expected to understand what God enjoys or not? So I don't particularly worry about if it sounds like fun for Him. I just want to be sure it's Biblical.

OK now some of you are thinking that I skipped a part. What about if we pray for something that God doesn't want? Well if we do it doesn't avail much, does it.

But then you may ask. What if we pray for something God doesn't want to happen and he decides to grant it to us (some may use Hezekiah's request to extend his life 15 years as an example). But let's think about this, if God is sovereign he's never going to say yes to a prayer for something that he doesn't want to happen within his Sovereign Will. Recall that God's moral will is different from His Sovereign will (you may want to read up on the difference between the Sovereign will of God and the Moral Will of God in another paper that I've written). Thus in all things God is sovereign.

## **Summary**

So in summary, what's the purpose prayer?

I believe that the purpose of prayer is to Glorify God in our obedience. I know, you think this is a cop out....But don't you stop praying lest you experience your own personal 40 years in the wilderness for disobeying God and not praying a lot.

In my personal experience, prayer changes me more than anything. Usually I realize how much I really have and how thankful I should be and how what I'm praying for is usually very selfish in light of the millions that have nothing. I usually also realize how little I do deserve.

When I pray for others, I usually realize how Omnipotent and Powerful God is and how His Sovereign Will will take place. So I pray that His Moral Will will match His Sovereign Will in this case. In the end I just can't worry too much because I know God is in control regardless.

So pray much, pray hard, pray long and Glorify God.

Neil Mammen

*Updated in 1998*

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<sup>1</sup> With my Atheist friends I focus on other things, like their personal experiential reasons for rejecting the concept of God and why the Bible is accurate first, before I work on this area.