

Lord Teach Us To Pray

"Your Will Be Done"

Lesson 6

INTRODUCTION:

- I. One of the dilemmas religious theologians have debated for centuries is whether God accomplishes His will regardless of whether we pray or not.
 - A. In other words, does God ever change HIS WILL based on our prayers?
 1. When we pray as JESUS taught us to pray – sincerely and persistently – does OUR WILL influence GOD’S WILL?
 2. The truth of the matter is simply that NONE OF US can fully comprehend how prayer functions in the infinite mind and plan of God.
 - a. What may seem like a hopeless situation to US is NO DILEMMA to GOD.
 3. But that doesn’t mean theologians haven’t ATTEMPTED to solve this mystery about prayer and God’s will.
 - B. As a result, TWO BASIC DOCTRINAL VIEWS have been put forward in an effort to help us understand this question.

1. ONE VIEW emphasizes God's sovereignty, and in its EXTREME APPLICATION says that God works according to His perfect will REGARDLESS of how men pray, or even WHETHER they pray or not.
 - a. Those who hold THIS position basically see prayer as nothing more than our "TUNING IN" to – or simply being AWARE of – God's will.
2. At the OPPOSITE EXTREME is the view that says God's actions pertaining to us are determined largely BY our prayers.
 - a. This position says our persistent pleading will MAKE God do for us what He wouldn't OTHERWISE do.
3. In essence, ONE VIEW says our prayers NEVER change God's will, and THE OTHER VIEW says our prayers ALMOST ALWAYS change God's will.
 - a. The FIRST VIEW sees God's actions toward us much like being on a roller coaster ride – once it starts, we don't get off until the end. And along the way, we must hopelessly face every predetermined dip and curve that comes our way.
 - b. The SECOND VIEW sees God as that "Cosmic Vending Machine" we talked about in an earlier lesson – we simply put in our prayer request and out pops the answer we were wanting.

- II. The truth is that we simply can't EVEN BEGIN to fathom all the divine working that makes prayer effective.
 - A. The Bible is crystal clear about God's ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY and RIGHT TO RULE in our lives. And yet WITHIN His sovereignty He commands us to come to Him in prayer.
 - 1. If God NEVER ACTS in response to our prayers, then Jesus' teaching about prayer would be COMPLETELY MEANINGLESS, and all those commands to pray would be UTTERLY POINTLESS.
 - 2. Our task is not to SOLVE THE DILEMMA of HOW God's sovereignty works, but to simply BELIEVE AND ACT on what God commands us about prayer.
 - 3. Therefore, when we once again take a closer look at the model prayer Jesus gave His disciples in Matthew chapter 6, we see that the THIRD PETITION in this pattern for prayer is to pray for GOD'S WILL to be accomplished ON EARTH as it is IN HEAVEN.

BODY:

- I. After asking for God's name to be hallowed and His kingdom to come, Jesus says we are to pray, "*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*"
(Matthew 6:10)

A. When we make this petition in our prayers there are actually SEVERAL THINGS we are requesting.

1. ONE is to say that when we pray, we are to pray IN CONCERT with GOD'S WILL.

a. In other words, GOD'S WILL is to become OUR WILL.

2. But, we are ALSO PRAYING for His will to prevail over all the EARTH, just as it is IN HEAVEN.

a. David prayed with the attitude of this third petition when he said, "*I delight to do YOUR WILL, O my God. . .*" (**Psalm 40:8**)

b. This was also CHRIST'S ATTITUDE when He said: "*My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me. . .*" (**John 4:34**) and, "*I have come down from heaven, NOT to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*" (**John 6:38**)

c. And because JESUS was committed to doing the will of His Father, He told His disciples they needed to do the same: "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who DOES the will of My Father in heaven.*" (**Matthew 7:21**)

- II. But this still leaves the question: Is God's will INEVITABLE – UNCHANGING – or do our prayers have an IMPACT on the will of God in some way?
- A. Unfortunately, many people, INCLUDING BELIEVERS, don't have the attitude of "*YOUR WILL BE DONE*" in their prayers.
1. And the reason for this is that some believers actually see God's will as an IMPOSITION – they see God as some kind of "DIVINE DICTATOR" who FORCES His SOVEREIGN, SELFISH WILL on His people.
 - a. They pray with a sense of utter FUTILITY, believing they can NEVER escape from the predetermined and inevitable will of God.
 - b. Commentator William Barclay wrote: "A man may say, 'Thy will be done,' in a tone of defeated resignation. He may say it, not because he wishes to say it, but because he has accepted the fact that he cannot possibly say anything else; he may say it because he has accepted the fact that God is too strong for him, and that it is useless to batter his head against the walls of the universe." (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*)
 - c. Sadly, those who hold this view see God much like a chess player with TOTAL POWER over the game pieces, moving

them at His whim and, when necessary, even SACRIFICING THEM for His OWN benefit.

- d. I think we could safely say that those who hold this view of God have a genuine LACK OF UNDERSTANDING about how God TRULY interacts with His people.
2. But then, OTHER BELIEVERS have adopted a kind of "PASSIVE RESIGNATION" regarding God's will.
 - a. They don't RESENT God's will. In fact, they view Him as a loving, caring Father who has their best interests in mind.
 - b. And yet they're RESIGNED to His will as some kind of INEVITABLE, UNCHANGEABLE, and IRRESISTIBLE FORCE in their lives, and so they don't REALLY BELIEVE their prayers will make ANY DIFFERENCE.
 - c. They pray for His will to be done ONLY BECAUSE they're COMMANDED to do so.
 - (1). But that's certainly not a prayer of faith – it's more like a prayer of CONCESSION.
 - (2). Those who pray THIS WAY accept God's will with a DEFEATIST attitude.
 - d. No wonder so many believers have weak prayer lives – they don't REALLY BELIEVE their prayers accomplish anything.

- (1). They pray to the Lord for something, but IN THEIR HEARTS they don't really believe God will grant their request.
3. Even in the EARLY DAYS of the church, when faith was STRONG and VITAL, people sometimes prayed prayers of "PASSIVE RESIGNATION" regarding God's will.
 - a. A good example is when the apostle Peter was imprisoned in Jerusalem, and a group of concerned believers met at the house of Mary, John Mark's mother, to pray for Peter's release. **(Acts 12:12)**
 - b. As they were praying, an angel of the Lord miraculously delivered Peter from his chains and led him out of the prison into the street. **(Acts 12:5-10)**
 - c. While the believers were still praying, Peter arrived at the house of Mary and began knocking on the door.
 - (1). **Acts 12:13-14** – *And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate.*
 - d. I think it's AMAZING that the others DIDN'T BELIEVE HER, thinking she had seen his "angel" (There was a popular belief

among the Jews that everyone had a guardian angel that resembled the person whose duty it was for the angel to guard.) **(Acts 12:15)**

e. But, here's the MOST AMAZING thing about this story.

(1). **Acts 12:16** – *Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.*

(2). The word "*astonished*" ("*amazed*") doesn't mean they were simply OVERJOYED. It means they were SHOCKED OUT OF THEIR MINDS!

4. Now, why do you suppose they were so SHOCKED to see that their prayers had been answered?

a. I think the answer's OBVIOUS!

b. Herod had ALREADY killed James the brother of John, and had arrested Peter who was NOW in prison awaiting the same fate! **(Acts 12:1-4)**

c. I believe those believers who were praying at Mary's house thought Peter was AS GOOD AS DEAD!

d. And, as best as I can figure out, NONE of them prayed for Peter's DELIVERANCE because they apparently didn't think the Lord would ANSWER THAT prayer.

- e. Most commentators actually believe they were praying that Peter's FAITH remain intact to the end of his life.
- B. Prayer should NEVER be thought of as a DUTY to be performed simply because we're COMMANDED to pray, NOR should prayers be offered with a FATALISTIC sense of PASSIVE RESIGNATION.
1. Praying because we're COMMANDED to do so may seem like a good reason, but prayers offered simply because we think of them as a DUTY are NO DIFFERENT from the empty, meaningless, hypocritical prayers of THE PHARISEES.
 - a. Instead of praying for the Lord to "bless those whom it's our DUTY to pray for," maybe we should pray for the Lord to "bless those whom it's our PRIVILEGE to pray for."
 2. Furthermore when we pray, believing that God WON'T OR CAN'T GRANT our request, we're praying an UNBIBLICAL PRAYER.
 3. We need to pray IN FAITH – believing that our prayers DO make a difference to God.
- C. Believers are URGED to pray in faith – to pray with the CONFIDENCE that God WILL GRANT our petitions.
1. In the Parable of the Persistent Widow, Jesus said the purpose of the parable was so that, "*...men always ought to pray and not lose heart.*" **(Luke 18:1)**

2. James, the Lord's brother, has TWO important things to say about prayer.
 - a. Concerning the need to pray for wisdom: **James 1:5-8** – *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it WILL BE given to him. But let him ASK IN FAITH, with NO DOUBTING, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*
 - b. Concerning praying in general: **James 5:16** – *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*
- D. But keep one thing in mind – this is NOT saying that God is somehow going to grant EVERY request.
 1. It IS, however, a prayer that is offered with the FULL CONFIDENCE that God CAN grant our petition in His divine providence, but that He may choose NOT to grant the request.
 2. It's a prayer that lays our deepest needs before the throne of God, with the understanding that, in ALL THINGS, GOD'S WILL takes priority over OURS.

3. AND it's a prayer that ACCEPTS GOD'S WILL even though we may NEVER understand why He chose to answer our prayer the way He did.

III. But there are OTHER aspects to this third petition Jesus taught His disciples to pray – namely, "YOUR will be done on earth."

A. While we recognize the need for GOD'S SOVEREIGN WILL to be done on earth, there are FAR TOO MANY believers who think of God's sovereign will in a FATALISTIC way.

1. They see EVERY TRAGEDY as coming from God's hand – whether it's PERSONAL (such as illness or the death of a loved one), or whether it's a UNIVERSAL tragedy (like an earthquake and the accompanying Tsunami).
2. Sadly, this kind of attitude DESTROYS faithful prayer, and it SERIOUSLY undermines the ability for us to CONTINUE faithfully serving the Lord.
3. This is clearly an UNBIBLICAL and DESTRUCTIVE view of God's sovereignty.
 - a. It leaves the believer to question God's love.
 - b. In fact, in the aftermath of the terrible Tsunami that swept through many countries in Indonesia, India and Southeast

Asia, one survivor said, "It's going to be IMPOSSIBLE to explain the love of God to THESE people."

4. Rather than blame GOD, we need to see some things. We need to see that SOME tragedies are CLEARLY directed by Satan himself – Job's tragedies are an example of this.
5. But OTHER TIMES, events are simply the result of TIME AND CHANCE.
 - a. **Ecclesiastes 9:11-12** – *I returned and saw under the sun that – The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all. For man also does not know his time: like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them.*
 - b. It's simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time – becoming a victim of those kinds of things that happen from time to time to ALL people.
 - c. While it's certainly true that God has brought calamities against wicked and rebellious people, it's UNBIBLICAL to credit God with ALL such calamities.
6. In fact, the Scriptures portray God in a COMPLETELY different way.

- a. **1 John 1:5** – *God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.*
 - b. **James 1:17** – *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*
- B. But even though the Scriptures portray God in a positive light, there are still questions about God allowing BELIEVERS or other INNOCENT PEOPLE (like innocent children) to become the victims of terrible and violent CRIMES.
1. Acts of THAT nature are CLEARLY the result of SIN.
 - a. While God ALLOWS sin, He doesn't AUTHORIZE it, CONDONE it, or APPROVE of it.
 - b. HOLY GOD could NEVER be the cause or agent of sin.
 2. While it's NOT GOD'S WILL that people die, death – even from sinful acts of crime and violence – is a reality of the world we live in.
 - a. THEREFORE, God sent Christ to earth to conquer death through HIS resurrection, and give US the hope of a resurrection as well.
 - b. While Christians of the first century faced UNIMAGINABLE HORRORS at the hands of godless men, they DIDN'T FEAR DEATH because they had faith in THE RESURRECTION from the dead.

3. It's ALSO not God's will that people will be LOST ETERNALLY in hell – but that's ALSO a reality of the world we live in.
 - a. Therefore, God sent His Son to take the penalty of sin on HIMSELF that WE might escape hell.
 - b. **2 Peter 3:9** – *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*
 4. The fact that sin exists on earth and causes such horrible consequences is NOT evidence of God's desire to inflict suffering, RATHER it's evidence of God desire to see all men TURN TO HIM and accept the salvation that He offers through His Son Jesus Christ.
- C. But, even though God does not want anyone to die from violence or to be lost eternally, God STILL GRANTS US the freedom of CHOICE.
1. **Joshua 24:15** – *". . . choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*

2. When we pray, *"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,"* it means that we are totally COMMITTED to doing GOD'S will and totally OPPOSED to the will of Satan.
 - a. It's to REJECT the notion sin is NORMAL and INEVITABLE in our lives and should therefore be TOLERATED.
 - b. We will turn away from those things that DISHONOR Christ, and weaken our resolve to live FAITHFUL to the Lord.
 - c. This DOESN'T mean that we will never sin. But it says when we DO sin, we will do WHATEVER we need to do to TURN AWAY from that sin and STRIVE TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITY to live a life acceptable to God.
 - d. It means we will seek to do GOD'S will as PERFECTLY and COMPLETELY in OUR life on EARTH, as His will is done perfectly and completely in HEAVEN.
- D. So, to pray that God's will be done on earth as it is done in heaven means we stand firmly AGAINST evil and wickedness in the world around us.
 1. But let me add a word of CAUTION here in case you take this idea of standing against evil and wickedness in our world TOO FAR.
 2. While we need to react negatively AGAINST evil and pray for God to accomplish His will here, we should NOT attempt to carry out God's will for Him.

- a. As we mentioned in our previous lesson, it is NOT the responsibility of the Lord church to change the culture by trying to promote a political agenda.
- (1). The mission of the CHURCH is to preach the gospel of Christ and thereby save the souls of men and women destined to spend an eternity in hell.
 - (2). As INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS, we have every right, and a DUTY, to use our constitutionally guaranteed rights to vote AGAINST legislation or legislators that promote ungodly and immoral laws.
 - (3). But THE MISSION OF THE LORD'S CHURCH is to save souls – and that should be OUR principle concern as well.
 - (4). I've ALWAYS believed that if we could get brethren to be as zealous in promoting the gospel of CHIRST, as in promoting various POLITICAL AGENDAS, we would be winning souls for Christ DAILY.
- b. And just as it's not the responsibility of the church to promote political agendas, NEITHER are we to oppose evil through CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE.
- (1). The ONLY time New Testament Christians refused to obey civil authorities is when those authorities

demanded the Christian to COMPROMISE his convictions, or DISOBEY the Lord.

(2). Any OTHER kind of rebellion is disobedience to God and His Word. **(Rom. 13:1–5; 1 Peter 2:13–17)**

3. While I'm an advocate of Christians VOTING against wickedness, and doing those activities that are RIGHTEOUS and ALLOWABLE under the law, we should NEVER forget that the MOST EFFECTIVE WAY to defeat wickedness in this world is through the PRAYERS OF RIGHTEOUS SAINTS.

- a. **Psalm 68:1-3** – *Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let those also who hate Him flee before Him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God; yes, let them rejoice exceedingly.*
- b. **Revelation 6:9-10** – *When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"*

- (1). The prayer of THOSE persecuted saints brought down the MOST POWERFUL, not to mention the most EVIL, empire on earth – Rome!
- (2). When UNGODLINESS and WICKEDNESS rises up in OUR world, OUR prayers can have JUST AS MUCH POWER as the saints of the first century.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Let's be painfully honest with ourselves.
 - A. The REALITY is that most of us tend to think of prayer as a way of making a difference in OUR CIRCUMSTANCES rather than making a difference in the WORLD WHERE WE LIVE.
 1. Therefore, when God doesn't answer our prayers right away in the way WE want, we lose confidence in the EFFECTIVENESS and POWER of our prayers.
 2. But when we pray, "*YOUR will be done on earth as it is in heaven,*" we are not only asking for GOD'S WILL to be done ON EARTH, we are ALSO asking for God's will to take precedence over OURS.
 - B. And here's where we have a valuable lesson to learn.

1. One of the MOST COMFORTING and yet MOST CHALLENGING passages about prayer is found in the apostle Paul's closing comments to the saints in Philippi.
 - a. **Philippians 4:6-7** – *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*
 - b. Notice that Paul said, "*in EVERYTHING by prayer and supplication, WITH THANKSGIVING, let your requests be made known to God...*"
 - c. The apostle Paul taught first century Christians to pray WITH THANKSGIVING **WHILE** they are letting their requests be made known to God.
 - d. That means these saints were giving God THANKSGIVING **BEFORE** their prayers were EVEN ANSWERED.
 - e. How can we thank God for the OUTCOME of our prayers BEFORE we even know what that outcome IS? By praying, "YOUR WILL be done on earth as it is in heaven."
 - f. The apostle Paul said THAT KIND of prayer, "*will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*"

II. The GREATEST HINDRANCE to prayer is NOT lack of TECHNIQUE, or a lack of BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE, or even lack of ENTHUSIASM for the Lord's work – the GREATEST HINDRANCE to prayer is a LACK OF FAITH.

A. We simply don't pray with the CONFIDENT EXPECTATION that our prayers will make a DIFFERENCE in OUR LIVES, in the lives of OTHERS, in the CHURCH, or in the WORLD.

1. Remember the admonition of James?

a. **James 1:6-8** – *But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

2. A "double-minded man" is one who wants to do GOD'S WILL while ALSO wanting to do his OWN WILL, and CAN'T DECIDE which one he wants to do MORE.

3. That's why James links prayers of FAITH with being SINGLE-MINDED – a mind that is FIRMLY SET on putting GOD'S WILL before our OWN.

4. The ONLY WAY we can SINCERELY pray for God's will in sincerity and faith, is to ABANDON our OWN WILL for the sake of GOD'S WILL.

B. Whose will do YOU serve?

1. Your OWN will, or the WILL OF GOD?