

BIBLICAL PRAYER (44)

(Area of Change #2) - Prayer will change the one who is praying.

This is a very personal and subjective change that prayer accomplishes. Thomas Constable wrote his TH.D. dissertation on the "Doctrine of Prayer." In it he said, "Even skeptics who deny that prayer accomplishes anything objectively concede that the practice of praying has beneficial effects on the person who prays. Not only does prayer provide spiritual benefit for the person praying, it also helps him psychologically. Studies have been done indicating that praying results in greater mental and emotional stability. When a person experiences psychological peace, his physical condition also improves. So praying contributes to the general well-being of the person who prays" ("What Prayer Will and Will Not Change," *Essays in honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, p. 101). Naturally, we do not base our belief that prayer changes the one praying on the opinions of skeptics, but on Biblical revelation.

One clear passage of Scripture that specifically says prayer will change the one praying is Philippians 4:6-7. This text clearly states that the believer who prays can and will experience a peace and tranquility in the midst of anxious moments and circumstances.

Another text that clearly establishes this point is John 16:24. Jesus taught that prayer was a key to an individual having "full joy." The assumption we may make is that when we pray, more and more joy will flood our souls and a person who is sad can be transformed into one who has joy.

Regardless of what God does with the requests we make to Him, we may be absolutely certain that prayer will change us. When we pray, we will see things differently and we will behave differently. Prayer will subjectively change the one who is praying.

Let me cite a personal example. One time I was praying by name for some people who had done me much harm in ministry. Later that very day, I went to a store and saw two of them. When they spotted me they took off in a different direction. I quietly prayed and asked God to give me wisdom as to how I should respond, and immediately a couple of passages came to mind that admonish us to leave vengeance to God and try to do good, even to enemies (**Romans 12:17-21; Matthew 5:38-42**). I decided to march right up to these two and look them straight in the eye and say hello. I could not overlook their wrong, but I could graciously apply another Biblical principle. I am totally convinced that the prayer I had prayed that morning, which actually named these two individuals, was a critical factor in me being able to respond in a God-honoring way. Were they changed? No. Were they repentant? No. Were they humble? No. The difference wasn't in them; it was in me. Prayer for them changed me.

(Area of Change #3) - Prayer can change the world or any situation.

The Bible is clear that prayer can result in a moving of God which can bring about significant changes in the world. In order to grasp just how sovereign and powerful God is, we need to consider certain theological matters:

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God is totally and completely sovereign and as such He has a right as the perfect, holy God to answer prayer requests any way He wants. Let us say that two people are praying one day who live in the same area; one is a farmer and the other is a vacationer. The farmer prays that morning for rain so his crops will grow and the vacationer prays for sunshine so he may enjoy his vacation. The decision of what prayer gets answered belongs to the sovereign God, and thank God for this because if the answers belonged to us, this would be one bizarre world.

Furthermore, for the child of God who prays, there are no unanswered prayers. Often there are just failures to see how God actually answered the prayer. There are at least four ways God may sovereignly and legitimately choose to answer our prayers which He clearly reveals in Scripture.

Potential Answer #1 - God may choose to answer no. **II Corinthians 12:8-9**

Potential Answer #2 - God may choose to answer yes. **Acts 12:5-19**

Potential Answer #3 - God may choose to answer wait. **Romans 1:8-15; 15:30, 32**

Potential Answer #4 - God may choose to answer work/apply.
I Corinthians 5:1-7; Revelation 2:19-23

In this case, His people need to stop praying about something and start obeying His Word and appropriating it to their own lives.

We must always keep in our minds that whenever we pray, God is totally and complete sovereign. He knows all things in perfection and in His great wisdom He may choose to overrule our requests in any way He chooses. He is the sovereign God and His determinations will always be perfect answers no matter what it appears from our perspective.

Now the central problem which seems to challenge theologians when it comes to the subject of prayer is God's sovereignty. The Bible clearly testifies time and time again that God is completely and totally sovereign over all things. As Dr. Chafer said, "In approaching the sovereignty of God there can be no retreat from recognizing that it is absolute and all-inclusive. Anything less than this would be unworthy of an infinite God" (*Systematic Theology*, Abridged Edition, Vol. 1, p. 155).

When one realizes that the Bible does teach this about God, the question is raised, Why bother to pray since God is sovereign and knows the end from the beginning and is the One who actually decrees all things that come to pass?