

What is Prayer?

Grace Gospel Church Ministry

Prayer is privileged communications with God. In this sense, demons and the non-elect are excluded from this function. There is Scriptural documentation of even the Devil himself conversing with God, but not in a congenial way, in that blasphemy can hardly be classified as prayer. Intimate conveyances can only be delivered to God by those whom He loves, i.e., believers in Him. Probably the best concise definition of prayer is, "informed communion of intimate conveyances that are motivated by the unique relationship that exists between God and His beloved." Correct prayer is the offering up of His elect's desires for and unto God, concerning things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, which may include confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of His mercy and grace. In this sense, God has assigned prayer to His elect of every dispensation as both a duty and a privilege, as His commands are to pray (I Thessalonians 5:17; Philippians 4:6; Hebrews 4:16; Matthew 7:7; Luke 18:1). Thus prayer is part of the revealed will of God.

Prayer is a privilege in that God's children have been granted access into the inner dwellings of their Father (Hebrews 4:16). This appanage has not been extended to all men, as it is granted only to those who belong to Christ by faith. It is one of the highest privileges that the believer has. God, of course, did not grant this appanage on any basis of merit. Neither did He design prayer on the basis of eliciting consultation in conducting the business of running the universe as He is fully capable, all by Himself. After all, He did all the counseling that was necessary in formulating the eternal decrees (Ephesians 1:11; Romans 11:34). It is in His providence that He grants the privilege of prayer to His children, thus God has designed the function of this forum of endowment in that it pleases Him to exercise such intimate communications with His beloved. This must be firmly understood as one examines the matter of prayer and the sovereignty of God.

Even in light of the facts stated above, the question yet remains in the minds of many, "if God is sovereign and governs the world by His providence, **What is the usefulness of prayer?**" Here it should be noted that this question is always asked in the mindset that components of creation can function independently from God. The fact is that the very opposite is true, i.e., God has foreknown and predestinated everything that happens in the Heavens above as well as in the earth beneath, in that He controls the orbits of planets held in check in a galaxy in the same manner as the leaves that fall from trees in the forest. In this sense, foreordination (predestination) embraces the great and the small, and reaches forth unto all things; but the question remains, **why should one pray** if this is so? A plausible explanation can be afforded with a similar inquiry as to why should one do anything? It is just as logical to ask, "why should one breathe, eat, sleep, move or do anything? Now most will respond, "of course the answer is these are the prescribed functions of life." Here, this response immediately induces another question, i.e., what causes these functions to be operational acts of living? The answer to this and all other inquiries of this nature can traced back to only one plausible explanation namely, **It has all been predetermined and ordained by God.**

Accordingly, prayer is a prescribed function of the designed process in the lives of God's elect because He has ordained and decreed it to be so. In this sense, prayer is a function of the producing links in the chain of ordained facts. Thus destiny decrees that privilege ones should pray as it also decrees what should be conveyed in prayer. Documentation of this is expressed in the Apostle Paul's first epistle to his son in the gospel, Timothy wherein he states (from the Greek text), "I exhort first of all to make supplications, intercessions, thanksgivings for all men, for kings and all those being in a

high place, that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour” (I Timothy 2:1-3).

Here as we focus on the contextual analysis of these verses of Scripture; we observe the progressive flow of information from verse (3), which reads, “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.” In focusing on the contents of verse three, we note that it begins with the demonstrative pronoun **too-to** rendered “this”, obviously referencing information that is provided in verse two. Hence, its reference is to the Greek word **vee-on** rendered “life”, denoting a tranquil and quiet state of mind and existence as conveyed by the phrase, “in all godliness and gravity”. This seems to be the goal of the exhortation beginning with the wording of verse one, i.e., “I exhort therefore first of all to make supplications, intercessions, thanksgivings, for all men, for kings and all those being in a high place”. The intent of the entire appeal and exhortation is expressed by the Greek phrase **een-ah ee-rehmon keh eeseekheon veeon** rendered, “that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life”. The general premise expressed is the emphasis on the importance of prayer, which in essence is stating that we are to speak to the Lord in prayer.

So the general discourse of the context could be labeled, “Foreordination in the practice of the petitioner’s prayer”. There are litanies of instructions in verse one delineating **how we should pray**. As it has been forestated in this discourse, prayer is privileged communication with God as it may be in the form of:

- 1) Supplications (**theh•ee•sees**) in the format of petitions; expressing wants, needs and requests.
- 2) Prayers (**pro•ehf•khahs**), denoting the act of conversing and communicating.
- 3) Intercessions (**ehn•dehf•xees**), which is derived from a combination of two Greek words literally meaning “to fall in with” or “to align with”, thus to plead for or intercede for someone or something on the basis of appealing to be in alignment with the will of God.
- 4) Thanksgiving (**ehf•khahr•ees•tee•ahs**), is derived from two Greek words literally meaning “to communicate to God”, “good grace”, “gratitude”, and “gratefulness”, as it denotes giving thanks and expressing gratitude to God.

The last phrase in verse one, **eepehr pahndon ahnthron** rendered “for (on behalf of) all men”, identifies those **who we should pray for**. Note, there are no limiting qualifications in this phrase, in the view that while we may know in a general sense, some things concerning the will and workings of God, we are not privy to the specifics. Thus verse two specifically states, “for kings and all those in a high place”, denoting men (and women) possessing regal authority and authoritative positions, i.e., kings, emperors, monarchs, and civic leaders (prime ministers, premiers, and presidents) in general. These are unconditional instructions in the sense that regardless of the politics or character of these individuals; the directive is to **pray for them**, but more specifically, our prayers are addressed to and intended to be in alignment with the sovereign God, who is in control of all men and uses them as He is pleased to do so.

For one to understand the relevancy of the context, it is necessary to be totally committed to the fact that God is absolutely immutable and nothing about His divine essence is subject to nor ever could change. Accordingly, God’s immutability is established in His unchanging and unchangeable will. This knowledge is crucial in maintaining a balance in the practice of petitionary prayer.

The key to comprehending the compatibility of making requests and God hearing and answering prayers must be inoculated in ones total reliance on the efficacy of His perfect knowledge and power to effectuate the best possible workings of all things. It is a flawed perception to the intent of prayer for one to petition Him on the premise that a request that is made and answered accordingly, requires God to bring about something as a result of the individual’s prayer. The first thing we must

understand is that God brings about only those things that he has unchangingly willed to bring about. If His will is immutable, then there can be no alteration of God's will by anything on the part of the creature.

At this point, it is important to affirm the necessity of prayer as God has decreed and caused it to be a function of the proceedings of His will. The fact that every occurrence is predetermined does not deny the usefulness of prayer when it (prayer) in itself is understood to be part of the decree. Our prayer (petitions) should not be submitted in the view that they constitute the determinant cause. We should never pray in order to dominate or change the decree of divine providence, but our prayer should be to impetrate (obtain through request) those things, which God has already determined. Thus the function of prayer is not a determining factor but it is a part of the design of actions previously ordained.