

What Should One Pray For?

Grace Gospel Church Ministry

Informed prayers are foundationally established on the basis on God's instructions for such utterances. A proper understanding of God's directives concerning this subject will offset the constant misuse of prayer as it is exhibited in many circles. It is God's prerogative as our sovereign creator and redeemer to Set forth directives regarding the privilege of prayer which He gives. It is fruitless to petition or claim things that are contrary to God's promises. It is in this light that we view the proper exegesis of Philippians 4:19 (from the Greek Text), which states, "And my God shall fulfill your every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Here the focus must ultimately rest on what God has determined the need(s) of His people to be. Note the Greek phrase **plee-ro•see pahn•ahn khree•ahn ee•mon** rendered "fulfill your every need", denotes to fill, make full, furnish or supply every need of the believer.

Observe that the indicative mood of the verb **plee-ro•see** does not infer a factual statement in the sense of an unqualified promise. Here the noun **khree•ahn** translated "need" refers to what is necessary and essential as determined independently by God, as this is conveyed by the preposition **kaht•ah** rendered "according to." Thus God's supply of His elect's "need" is not governed by His power or capacity to provide, in that, **to ploot•os ahf•to thox•ee** rendered "His glorious riches" or "His glorious wealth", is unlimited in scope. But the "need" was previously determined according to (dominated by) what He has purposed for His elect, **ehn Khrees•to Ee•ee•soo** rendered "in Christ Jesus", i.e., for each believer (**ee•mon**) in the Body of Christ.

Corroboration of this is expressed in I John 5:14, which states (from the Greek Text), "And this is the assurance that we have toward Him, that if anything we may ask according to His will, He does hear (receive) us." Here we begin with the Greek phrase **eepahr•ree•see•ah een ehkh•o•mehn pros ahf•ton** rendered "the confidence (assurance) that we have in (toward) Him", as it refers to that which relates to affirmatively answered petitions. Note that the Greek noun **pahr•ree•see•ah** rendered "confidence", is in the nominative case, which designates it as the subject or focal point in the conveyance of the verse. Thus it is assurance that one seeks foremost above all in the submitting of petitions to God. The sense is, one of the effects of believing on the Lord Jesus (I John 5:13), is that one can have the assurance that ones prayers will be affirmatively answered.

Again, note the qualifying statement, **ot•ee eh•ahn tee eh•to•meh•thah kaht•ah to thehl•ee•mah ahf•too ahk•oo•ee ee•mon** rendered "that if anything we may ask according to His will, He does hear (receive) us." This is the proper and the necessary limitation in all prayer. God has not promised to grant anything that shall be contrary to His will, and it should be understood that it is right that He would do accordingly. One ought not to wish to receive anything that could be contrary to what He has determined to be best. No one can hope for good results who would esteem his own wishes to be a better guide than the will of God; and it is one of the most desirable of all arrangements that the promise of any blessing to be obtained by prayer should be limited and bounded by the will of God.

The limitation here, **kaht•ah to thehl•ee•mah ahf•too** rendered "according to His will," implies the following:

- (1) In accordance with what God has "declared" that He is willing to grant. Here the range is large, as there are many things expressed in the Scriptures that He has already accomplished in eternity and are thus obviously in accordance with His will for the elect, i.e., the forgiveness

of sins, the sanctification of the soul, etc., (I Thessalonians 4:3). There are also directional guideline conveyed concerning situations that are encountered in the course of ones journey, i.e., comfort in trials, the supply of necessities, grace in the performance of ministry, wisdom for direction and guidance, deliverance from evils circumstances, the influences of His Spirit in ascertaining enlightenment of His Word and the understanding of the workings of ones salvation. There is a plethora of qualifying subjects of petition that may be correctly addressed in prayers, that are too numerous to delineate in these writings.

(2) The expression, "according to His will," limits assenting answers in prayer to what God has determined to be best according to His plan for each ones course in life. Only God is qualified to determine what is best for ones life, as none can ever perceive it as clearly as our Maker does. This is verified by the fact that many times, in many things, mankind is wholly mistaken. Certainly one ought not to desire to ask anything which God has determined not to be for ones good.

(3) The expression, "according to His will," must limit the petition to what would be "consistent" for God to bestow upon the petitioner. One should not expect God to work a "miracle" in affirmation to a petition requesting blessings in violation of decrees which He has ordained or in any other way than that which He has appointed. It is better that the so-called "blessing" should be withheld than the principles which He has decreed should be disregarded. It is better that one should not have a profitable venture, though he may fervently pray for it, than for God to change that which He has determined, as such accommodation would be in violation of at least some of , if not all His attributes, i.e., His immutability.

(4) Finally, the expression, "according to His will," must limit the promise of "blessings" to what will be for the "good pleasure of His will" (Ephesians 1:5, 9, 11; Philippians 2:13). God presides over the entire universe and in Him there is infinite fullness and perfection. These as well as all His attributes control the vast system of His creation. They are in fact the sustaining checks and balances of creation. Hence the regard or the desires of individual components throughout His immense unlimited empire does not necessarily contribute to the interests of the whole. Thus none of the entities are to be consulted and regarded for their individual sakes, as it is conceivable that some favor or bestowment would interfere materially with the operation or be inconsistent with the good of the whole. Accordingly, only that which is accommodated to the perfection of God, should comprise the necessary limitations in the range of the promises in prayer. In the observance of these limitations, it is true beyond a question that God does hear and answer prayer "according to His good and perfect will" (Romans 12:2; Hebrews 13:21).

Thus, Scriptural documentation certifies that there are some things, which God has promised to supply when presentations of requests are formatted according to His prescription. I John 5:15 (from the Greek Text) states, "And if we have known that He does hear us, we have known that we have the request that we have requested from Him." This verse opens with a subordinating conjunction **keh** rendered "and", linking its subsequent thought to the antecedent verse (14). Thus the usage of the Greek verb **ee-thah-mehn** rendered "we have known", is in the indicative mood and perfect tense, denoting a factual perception obtained from previously supplied information. Hence, an understanding of the facts identified in verse 14, assures one **o-teeahk-o-nee ee-mon** rendered "that He does hear us." In effect, if one is assured of these truths, then even though one may not "see" immediately that the petition is answered according to ones expectation, there is always the utmost confidence that it is not disregarded.

Total unconditional commitment and trust in God (faith) entails the confidence that ones petition will be received to be answered in the way most suited and adaptable to promote the best possible solution. The specific thing that has been requested may not indeed be granted (II Corinthians 12:8-9; Luke 22:42) but the prayer will not be disregarded and the thing which is best for ones good will be bestowed. The proposition stated here is derived from the faithfulness of God and assurance because

one has the confidence of His promise that He hears us, there will be sooner or later be a sufficient answer to the petition. The next phrase **o eh•ahn eh•to•meh•thah ee•thah•mehn** rendered “whatever we may ask, we have known”, denotes the spiritual propriety of making request according to the knowledge of what is the acceptable will of God in ones petition to Him.

The final phrase of this verse (15) **o•tee eh•kho•mehn tah eh•tee•mah•tah ah ee•tee•kah•mehn ahp ahf•too** rendered “that we have the request that we have requested from Him”, evidently conveys that the petition will be answered. It does not mean that one already has the precise thing for which one has prayed. In essence the indication of the workings of God may be tailored as a future manifestation for:

(a) the prayer may relate to something future, as protection on a journey, a harvest, restoration to health, the safe return of a love one from military service or even the salvation of souls; all of which are "future," and cannot be expected to be granted at once.

(b) the answer to certain petitions are sometimes delayed, though ultimately granted. There may be reasons why the answer should be deferred and the promise is not that it shall be immediate. The "delay" may arise from such causes as these:

(1) The development of ones faith in the process of growth and maturity.

(2) Its immediate effectuation would not be in the immediate interest of God’s purpose in a particular situation.

(3) It might not be consistent with His divine arrangements to grant it instantaneously.

(4) Ones own condition may not be such that it would be best to grant it at once before the affliction is removed or the request may be delayed for months or years or it may be best that it is never removed. Yet, in the interim, one can have the firmest assurance that the prayer is heard, and that its answer is reflective in its way and period, as God has determined it to be best accommodated.

Thus an informed petitioner has (submits) the petition that conforms to the will of God. This is not the secret will of predestination but the revealed will of perception. The gist is this, if we pray in faith in the name of Christ with an understanding that exudes obedient and a selfless attitude for thing which God has commanded us to have, then we can be assured that He will grant what is best, which is according to His will. This is amply stated in the noted theologian, Augustine’s prayer, “Give what Thou commandest and command what Thou will.” This is praying aright with a view to the sovereignty of God in His revealed will. He commands believers to have what only He can give; therefore He promises to give only that which is requested properly. This requires knowledge of God’s decrees and His principles and methodology in accomplishing all things according to the dictates of His divine will, plan and purpose, which originated in eternity. What is evidently misunderstood by many of God’s people is that His unlimited power to act, functions in subordination to His immutable and sovereign will.