

THE THREE ASPECTS OF PRAYER

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There are three aspects to our prayer: (1) concerning ourselves, (2) concerning God to whom we pray, and (3) concerning our enemy Satan. Every genuine prayer must be related to these three aspects. When we pray concerning ourselves, we are, of course, doing it for our own interest; we pray because we have needs, lacks, and expectations. Prayer is for gaining what we seek, yet genuine prayer should not seek after one's own interest alone, but should seek for God's glory and His governmental authority on earth. Of course, when our prayers are answered, the ones who receive the direct benefit are ourselves. However, the fact in the spiritual realm is that not only do the praying ones receive the benefit, but God receives His glory, and His will is done. An answer to prayer is a great glory to God because it shows God's love, power, sincerity, and greatness in accomplishing what His children ask for. An answer to prayer also shows that God's will is being accomplished because He never answers a prayer that is not according to His will.

We are the supplicating ones, and the One being supplicated is God. In a successful prayer, both the supplicants and the One being supplicated gain something. The supplicants get their intentions fulfilled, and the One being supplicated gets His will accomplished. We do not have to say too much concerning this point, for all God's faithful children who are experienced in prayer know the relationship between these two aspects of prayer. What we must now bring to the attention of God's children is that if our prayers take care only of these two aspects of God and man, though they may be effective at times, they are deficient; there is failure even in the success, and the real meaning of prayer has not yet been fully realized. Of course, the spiritual saints realize that prayer is not only for their own benefit but is intimately related to God's glory and God's will, yet this is not enough. We still have to pay attention to the third aspect. When we pray to God, not only should our prayer be related to God, but if we ask something from God, what we ask for and what God promises must be something that will cause some loss to God's enemy. We know that in the universe God is the sovereign Ruler, yet Satan is the ruler of this world (John 14:30); the whole world lies in his hand (1 John 5:19). Hence, we see two diametrically opposed forces competing against one another in this world. Of course, God has the final victory, but before the end of the millennium, Satan will continue to exercise authority in this world and will continue to oppose God's work, God's will, and God's interest. We the children of God belong to God. If we gain something from the hand of God, this means that God's enemy suffers some loss. The measure of the benefit which we who belong to God receive is equal to the measure of God's will that is fulfilled, and the measure of God's will that is fulfilled is equal to the measure of loss which Satan incurs. Since we belong to God, Satan's goal is to shatter us, persecute us, suppress us, and knock us off our feet. This is Satan's goal, but his goal will not necessarily succeed, because we can come to the throne of grace by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus and ask Him for protection and care. If God hears our prayer, Satan's plan will be defeated. For God to hear our prayer means that Satan's will is thwarted and that he is no longer able to persecute us according to his plan. Hence, the degree to which our prayers are answered is the degree to which Satan incurs loss. Our benefit together with God's glory is inversely proportional to Satan's loss. The increase of one means the loss of the other, and the loss of one means the increase of the other. Hence, in our prayers we should care not only for our benefit and God's glory and will, but should pay attention to the third aspect, which is the enemy, Satan. If a prayer does not take care of or affect all three aspects, this prayer is only superficial; it is worth very little and will accomplish very little.

We need not mention the senseless prayers, for they will have no effect on any of these three aspects. Yet even a sensible prayer by a fleshly Christian is one which addresses only his own interest. Its goal is to secure his own interest through prayer. All he has in mind are his own needs and lacks. If God answers his prayer and fulfills his desires, he is satisfied. He does not consider God's will or God's glory, much less think of Satan's loss. But not all of God's children are fleshly. We thank and praise the Lord that there are many among His children who are spiritual. When they pray, they do not care only for their own interest and then content themselves only with God's answer to their prayer while ignoring everything else. They pay much attention to God's glory and God's will. They ask God to answer their prayer, not for their own gain, but so that God may gain glory in the matter through the answering of their prayer. They do not insist on what they pray, but rather, take care of God's will. This care for God's will does not refer to a concern for God's being willing or unwilling to grant them what they ask for. It refers to their concern that, if God were to answer their prayer, would it run contrary to His work, His government, and the will that is according to His plan. This is not merely a consideration of the thing itself but of its relationship to the principle work of God. Such prayers take care of two aspects: God and man. However, very few Christians take care of the third aspect, which is Satan. The goal of a genuine prayer is not just for one's own interest; sometimes such prayer will even be ignored. One must pay attention to God's glory and Satan's loss, not considering his own gain or loss to be consequential. Such ones consider their prayer most successful if it causes loss to Satan and glory to God. Their concern is to inflict loss upon Satan through their prayer. Their eyes are looking not merely at the present environment but at

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God's work and will on the whole earth. Of course, this does not mean that they are merely concerned with God and Satan and forget themselves. What it means is that, practically speaking, when God's will is fulfilled and Satan has incurred loss, they will surely reap a benefit. The spiritual condition of a saint can be seen from the aspect of prayer that he emphasizes.