



Prayer and
Free Will
Theology

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Prayer is one of the most revealing acts of faith. Every time we pray, we reveal what we truly believe about God - His power, His will, and His relationship to human freedom. *The very act of praying assumes that Someone both hears and can answer.* Prayer is not wishful thinking. It is communion with a sovereign God who purposes and performs according to His will.

If the world were governed by chance, prayer would be pointless. If God were unable to change anything, prayer would be an exercise in futility. But *because* He is God - all-knowing, all-wise, and all-powerful - prayer makes sense.

“The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all.” (Psalm 103:19)

✚ **To pray is to confess that He truly reigns.**

The Sovereignty that Makes Prayer Possible

The question often raised is this: “If God is sovereign and His purposes cannot be thwarted, why pray?”

But the inverse question is even more revealing: *If God is not sovereign, why pray to Him?*

For what possible difference can prayer make to a god who cannot affect change? *Prayer therefore, not only assumes sovereignty, it depends on it.* Only the God who is sovereign over all and reigns can meaningfully respond. Only He who ordains the end can also ordain the means, and prayer is one of those means.

“This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.” (1 John 5:14–15)

That passage unites both divine will and human petition. It neither diminishes responsibility to pray nor questions sovereignty; it harmonizes them. We pray *not* to

change God's mind, but *because* prayer asked "according to *His* will" is the very ground of our confidence, John says.

Influence, Not Coercion

When Scripture describes God working in the hearts of men, it never depicts coercion or mechanical control – as some openly mischaracterize us to say or mean. God moves through **influence**, and **persuasion**, not compulsion. The problem is that most do not actually understand what these two terms mean in their dictionary-definition and practical sense. The human will is not "violated" – though God's dealing with the proud pagan King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 demonstrates God *can* do even that if He wills. But the human will is truly *acted upon* by God and the operative power of His grace and Spirit.

Every choice we make is shaped by countless influences such as affections, fears, desires, habits, understanding and circumstances. Our decisions are *never* born in a vacuum. To talk as if they are reveals only how little one understands the subject and the "real world." If temptation, blindness, and deceit can influence the will toward evil, shall not grace likewise have power to influence the heart toward good? *Is Satan stronger or more persuasive than God?*

Influence and **persuasion** both often -if not always - presuppose resistance, a hesitation to, or even opposition against, a proposed course of action. If not so, no one would ever need to be *persuaded* by something that was different in direction, understanding or belief than what they currently have.

✚ **If human beings can influence and persuade one another, how much more, not less, can God, who made the heart and governs the will?**

That is the miracle of regeneration: *God does not force the unwilling; He makes the unwilling willing.* He enlightens the darkened mind and liberates the enslaved heart –

"He *breaks* the power of cancelled sin; He *sets the prisoner free.*"

If sin is not a real *power* in the "heart" – the mind, will and emotions - in the sinner, what exactly does God need to '*break*'? per the words of this believed hymn sung as truth in worship by multitudes.

He *gives* a new "heart of flesh" and *removes* "a heart of stone" (Ez. 36:24-26; cf Psalm 80:3, 86:11; Jer. 3:23; 24:7)

**What is a “heart of stone” if not a stubborn, unwilling, rebellious one?
What is a “heart of flesh” if not the polar opposite?**

- Unless God has the moral right, authority and *power* to so move in and on the human “heart,” *why* does *He* say He can and does ?

These passages immediately refute a popular -yet wholly unbiblical -claim that such action, if done by God would constitute a “violation” of the sinner. In their context on Jeremiah, Psalms and Ezekiel, God does *not* say, “I can do this in you *if* you give your prior consent.”

- ✚ **Why does God need to do this at all? For if the willingness to consent, obey is *first* supplied by the sinner, what need is there for God to *remove* an *unwilling* heart and *give* a willing one? The sinner has already done that on their own!**

Think about it: Such an idea renders useless the very purpose the all-knowing great Physician has in performing such radical, invasive spiritual surgery in the first place! Because it effectively says the sinner must first provide the very change in their ‘heart of stone’ so that God may then remove it and give them a willing heart.

- **If they have – or even can do this before He so acts, then it is no longer a heart of stone. In which case the very fact they would even think – or care – to so ask, is proof the sovereign God is *already* at work in them!**

Questions like these – based *entirely* on *God’s own diagnosis* of the problem and *His* own remedy to it – expose the logical, theological incoherence and opposition of free-will / synergistic theology to God’s word. It effectively requires the sinner to perform their own “cure” before God will do so. The idea is absurdity. And renders any act of the great Physician in this context at best, anticlimactic and at worst *irrelevant*.

- ✚ **The “heart” – of stone or flesh - is not a reference to the physical organ but the *entire* inner person which thinks, feels, reasons and chooses. What God *is* referring to then is the *complete nature – including the will – of the person He will so act on.***

A “*reductio ad absurdum*” is “a method of proving the falsity of a premise by showing that its logical consequence is absurd or contradictory”

I have now clearly, logically, textually and grammatically established the sovereign / moral right and ability of God to act on “the clay” in such ways. I have also exposed the incoherence of philosophical or theological objection to this self-evident biblical truth as being the **reductio ad absurdum**, it is. We can now continue with the question of *how* and *why* prayer makes sense *because* these things are true.

Prayer Within the Will of God

When believers pray, they do not introduce new information to God. Are not trying to “twist His arm” or change His mind. They enter into the fellowship of *His* purpose -which is why John qualifies the promise of answered prayer that is asked “*according to His will.*” (1 John 5:14-15) This is the *only* way prayer can be both confident and humble; confident *because* He hears, humble *because* He – not we - decides.

➤ *Prayer is not man persuading God to act, but God inviting man to participate.*

“The LORD reigns... not merely in heaven, but in all the earth.” (Psalm 22)

The Scope of Divine Desire and Illogic of a Common Interpretation

Paul wrote, “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men” (1 Tim 2:1). But the context plainly defines “all men” as classes - *kings and those in authority*, - thus, not every individual without exception. It is a figure of speech, a synecdoche, where the part stands for the whole.

Think about it: “Kings and those in authority” are already included in the term “all men” – if that term was intended literally, adding this as emphasis is redundant.

Thus, God’s desire for “all men to be saved” (v. 4) in its context, expresses His saving purpose toward every *kind* or class of person, not a frustrated longing for all without distinction.

✚ **Even granting that “all men” is literal here, IF God is *unable* to effect the “desired result” of salvation *for* “all men” THEN *why are we asked to pray to Him for them in that context?***

This basic question on its own, at face-value, *prima facie* also *easily* dismantles the typical free-will / synergistic argument and use of this as a “proof text.”

The unavoidable dilemma

If the “universal” passages about atonement are interpreted literally, rather than as the synecdoche they obviously represent - especially when compared to other passages that describe atonement in specific terms - **then** scripture would contradict itself in an irresolvable way.

✚ **For if God truly wills the salvation of all, possesses all power, and promises to answer every prayer aligned with His will, how then do we explain that so few believe when we have so asked?**

This obvious question on its own merit, *easily* dismantles the objection and logically, theologically requires which way to understand the atonement is and *must* therefore be, correct.

Human Freedom and Divine Sovereignty

The *mystery* of prayer lies here: God is sovereign, yet man is responsible. The Bible holds both without apology. We choose, and those choices are real, *but the power to choose rightly in matters spiritual and saving, is grace itself.*

Every prayer, therefore, *begins* with God and *ends* with God. The Spirit prompts it, Christ perfects it, and the Father hears it – when asked according to His will. The believer prays freely, yet his freedom is the fruit of divine influence. “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44). Grace is not a chain; it is the key that unlocks the heart of stone replacing it with the heart of flesh.

The Sovereign God Who Hears

The same hand that rules and can use extreme means to humble, as He did to Nebuchadnezzar, also reaches to restore. Nebuchadnezzar – whose will and sanity *was* overruled, violated by sovereign-power - confessed it in the end:

“He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” — Daniel 4:35

Think about it: Nebuchadnezzar *thanked and praised* God in His awesome sovereignty for doing the very thing that many synergists insist either God cannot *morally* do and remain “good,” or does not even possess the ability to do! What they would argue made Nebuchadnezzar a *victim* – he himself *worshipped* God for precisely that! The stakes are getting much higher as we go.

This is therefore not a trite, merely intellectual curiosity which may or may not be of value; it *speaks directly to the issues of worship, brokenness, humility before and men – as well as the very nature and character of God Himself!*

- **A powerless god might sympathize, but he could not save. The GOD who reigns can do both.**

Why Prayer Matters

Prayer is *not* an attempt to wrest control from God; it is the act of *surrender to His control*. We do not pray because we *think* we can change Him.

✚ We pray *because He can change us and those for whom we ask of Him, when it is His will, how it is His will to do so.*

If God’s purpose could fail, then evil would be stronger than grace and Satan more persuasive than the Spirit. But the Bible leaves no such possibility. “Our God is in the heavens; *He does whatever He pleases*” (Psalm 115:3).

That certainty is not fatalism; it is faith. It gives courage to pray, even when outcomes seem fixed *because* the One who ordains the outcome also ordains the means. He commands prayer so that His children may learn both dependence and delight.

Conclusion

In the end, prayer is the *biblical* harmony of both truths that while the sinner is responsible, God is sovereign; that while the sinner is stubborn and unwilling, God can change that condition to create the willingness; that the God who invites us to

pray *has* the power and means to positively answer when such prayer is asked “according to *His* will.”

✚ **It affirms that God is sovereign and that man is responsible and that persuasive, influential, transforming, life-changing *grace* is the bridge between.**

To pray is to believe that God hears, that He rules, and that He cares. Every kneeling soul testifies to that truth.

I do not pray to persuade Him, nor to inform Him.
I pray because He is God.

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