

THE SOUTHEAST SOWER

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FOR WHAT MAY A CHRISTIAN PRAY?

Marshall Patton

Question: (Note: The following are excerpts from a letter identifying the issue on which our querist seeks information—MEB) - I wonder if you agree with me that there is confusion and uncertainty among the brethren regarding what we have a right to pray for. This may be, in some measure, the result of an over-reaction to the charismatic movement. Since miracles have ceased, and God's revelation is complete, many seem to believe that there is very little we can ask for that would not fall into one of those categories.

For example, we hear brethren say when praying for the sick, "Bless the means being used in their care," or "Guide the hands of the doctors as they minister." I am unable to see how it is less a miracle for God to guide the doctor's hands, or bless the means being used, than for Him to touch the life and body of the sick with his comforting, healing hand...One preacher told me he didn't ask God's help in preaching—that he had the Spirit-inspired word, and "What else can He do for me?" When James wrote that men should pray for wisdom, and Paul wrote the Corinthians that they helped in the delivery of himself and his companions from the peril of death by their prayers, were these written only for the days of miracles?

Answer: I agree that there is confusion and uncertainty among brethren on the subject of prayer. Much of this can be accounted for on the following grounds: 1) Rationalism. Some accept only what can be comprehended by human reasoning, plain statements of the Bible to the contrary, notwithstanding. These need faith. 2) A lack of knowledge of what the Scriptures teach on prayer, and 3) A failure to distinguish between God's miraculous power and His providential power.

The word "miracle" in our English Bible is a translation from two Greek words: 1) "Dunamis," which is defined: "power, inherent ability, is used of works of a supernatural origin and character, such as could not be produced by natural agents and means" (W. E. Vine); 2) "Semeion," which is defined: "a sign, mark,

token...is used of miracles and wonders as signs of Divine authority" (Ibid). In the light of these definitions, let it be understood that by "God's miraculous power" we mean *supernatural* power—power that is over, above, and beyond natural ability, agents, and means.

Our querist understands that "miracles have ceased." This means that God is not exercising such power among men today. This, however, is not to deny that He exercises power above human ability through natural laws, agents, and means. The later identifies His providential power. It is by this power He is able to answer prayer today above human ability, yet without working a miracle. While this means His providential power is limited in its operation to natural laws, agents, and means, it nevertheless, is far superior to human ability. This ought not to appear strange, because we see demonstration of it every day.

The fowls of the air and the animals of the earth hear the cry of their young and respond, over and above the ability of their young, fulfilling their request by utilizing natural means—and this without working a miracle. Parents, by reason of superior knowledge, wisdom, and ability, continually exercise power over, above, and beyond that of their young in fulfilling their requests by utilizing the laws of nature—and this without working a miracle. Furthermore, this is our Lord's illustration of this very point: "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that

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Sunday: 10 am, 10:50am; 6:00pm

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knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto you children, how much more shall your Father, which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. 7:7-11).

The Bible teaches us to pray:

"Confess you faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. 5:16).

"For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Pet. 3:12).

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed" (Jas. 1:5, 6).

"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (1 Jno. 5:14, 15).

There is nothing to indicate that these passages were limited to or intended to apply only in the age of miracles. Notice, we have the assurance that, if our petition be "according to his will, he heareth us." God wills for us only that which is for our good. Just as a parent often refuses the request of his child, for his own good, so God in his infinite knowledge and wisdom sometimes refuses our request—and that for our own good. How thankful we should be for this! Parents sometimes err in their judgment; God never does. Furthermore, we must be resigned to the fact that it is His will to grant our request now according to natural laws. Such are immutable. However, this is not to say that we can understand how He does it in every instance. A child may not understand, because of inferior knowledge and wisdom, how the parent fulfills his request. Nevertheless, he believes and continues to ask. So must we in making our prayers to God. Remember, Paul said that He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). To conclude, simply because we cannot see, that He cannot bless the means used in ministering to the sick or guide the physician effectively without working a miracle is to indulge rationalism. I may not understand how He does such through natural means, but such is no more a miracle than hearing us when we pray in the first place.

Note: Article take from: "Answers For Our Hope," pg. 241-243

A Reminder & Note of Appreciation

During this time of stress and uncertainty as we deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, I wanted to pass on a note of appreciation to the congregation for the consideration, care, and "watchfulness" on the part of so many of you regarding our members. As we continue to "press on" during these uncertain times I want to encourage you to continue "checking" on each other. A card, phone call, e-mail, text to each other to remind us that although our personal association with each other is at best at limited; yet, we still have each other in mind. I'm confident that your efforts are appreciated. Keep up the good work, and as Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord*" (1 Cor. 15:58).