

Systematic Theology for the Local Church

#33—Theology Proper—Part XII¹

Prayer and Divine Sovereignty

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The next and final topic in this section on theology proper will be a concluding summary of the errors of Open Theism. If you have the book, you should finish reading Bruce Ware's *Their God Is Too Small*. Also of great value is Reymond, pp. 343-381 and Piper, *et al Beyond the Bounds*. Relevant for today's study are Reymond, pgs. 969-76, Arthur Pink's "God's Sovereignty and Prayer," which can be found at <http://www.sovereign-grace.com/pink/chapter09.htm> and Curt Daniel's "Prayer and the Sovereignty of God," available at <http://members.aol.com/rbiblech/MiscDoctrine/PrayerTheSovOfGod.htm>.

It is likely that every serious Christian who wants to grow in Christ and please God has wondered about how prayer works. Most of us have asked ourselves questions like these: When does God answer prayer? How do I know if I am praying for what I should pray for? Does prayer change the course of history, or, put another way, does prayer make things happen that wouldn't have happened if I hadn't prayed? Why is some prayer not answered?

As we study the nature and attributes of God, it is important that we treat the place of prayer in God's universe, especially since Open Theism has an increasingly popular but unbiblical idea about who God is and what prayer means and accomplishes. We will deal particularly with prayer and God's attributes and sovereignty. This will not be a complete treatment of prayer.

The nature and necessity of prayer

In general, prayer is communication with God. It can involve 1) confession, 2) praise, 3) intercession for others or 4) petition for ourselves. It can be inward and silent or outward and audible. The NT pattern is for prayer to be made to the Father in the name of the Son in the power of the Spirit.

Prayer is not optional in the Christian life. There are many passages in the Bible where we are commanded to pray. In 1 Tim. 2:8 Paul says "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer." In 1 Thess. 5:17 we are commanded to pray without ceasing. Ephesians 6:18 tells us to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."

Here are some other passages in the NT that show the need for prayer: Mt. 6:5-13; 7:7-11; Jn. 14:13-14; 15:7, 16; 16:23-24, 26; Jas. 1:5-8; 4:2; 1 Jn. 3:21-22; 5:14-15.

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. asserts that all blessings and spiritual advances come through prayer.² Robert Reymond believes that "There is no sin that the Christian will ever commit that could not have been avoided by prayer."³ John Bunyan said, "You then are not a Christian if you are not a praying person. The promise is that everyone that is righteous will pray. You, then are a wicked wretch if you do not pray."

We need to mention something very important at this point. God does not answer the prayers of the unregenerate, no matter how sincere they might be. This applies to people of any age. The child who is

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² S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. "Prayer and the Attributes, or Why Bother an Infinite, Omnipotent God of Love," at http://www.believerschapeldallas.org/tapes/slj-69_systematic-theology/part-1.htm.

³ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 973.

encouraged in Sunday School to pray for his needs is being misled, if he is unregenerate: God does not hear him. An unregenerate person is an enemy of God, no matter what his age, has no access to God and can obtain no favor from God outside of God's general goodness toward his creation. While this sounds harsh, it is no more harsh than the biblical teaching that the unregenerate will never see God. At the very least it should make Christians—who *can* be heard by God—take prayer more seriously.

Prayer and the attributes of God

Some have raised questions about the value of prayer in light of certain attributes of God. That is, there appear to be conflicts between prayer and some of God's attributes.

Prayer and the infinity of God

Here is a question connected with God's infinity: If God is infinite, how can he concern himself with an insignificant, finite creature? The answer is straightforward. In Mt. 6:25-34 Jesus says that God is concerned with our smallest needs. In addition, God has told us to pray, so it must be important in his plan.

Prayer and the love of God

The argument goes like this: Since God is loving, can't we simply rely on his love without petitioning him? Besides the fact that God has told us to pray, God's relation of love to his children everywhere in Scripture involves mutual enjoyment. He loves us and wants us to love him in return. This is an interplay between living beings. Prayer is our communication with the one who loves us.⁴

Prayer and the omniscience of God

If God is omniscient, why should we pray, since he already knows what we will pray? But in Matt. 6:8 Jesus, speaking of the hypocrites, says, "Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." Immediately after this he says, "This, then, is how you should pray." He sees no problem with praying, even though we know God is omniscient! If God enjoys our coming to him in prayer, he enjoys it even though he knows what we will pray. In Ps. 139 the psalmist meditates on the omniscience and omnipresence of God and then turns to pray at the end! Why? He prays because he understands that ultimately it is good for him to ask God to use his omniscience in changing him. We will return to this point later in the study.

The relation between the decree of God and prayer

We have all heard the saying "Prayer changes things." By this people apparently mean that if we don't pray certain things will happen, but if we do pray, another set of things will happen. So the responsibility lies with us. Pray and God will act and do good things (assuming he chooses to answer) or don't pray, and God will not act and will not do good things. By praying we have the chance to change the future.

These are actually questions about the decree of God, about his plan for and control of the universe. Does prayer change the will of God or his plans—his decree? Is his decree open-ended to allow for prayer? Is it conditional, depending at points for acts of prayer to flesh it out? Does he have two decrees, or two subsets at some points, with one waiting in the wings just in case we pray? This is not a question that arises when we utter prayers of praise, but it does have to do with prayer that intercedes for others, petitions for oneself or, in a certain sense, confession. To answer these questions we need to make sure that we understand the biblical picture of the decree of God.

⁴ Johnson, "Prayer and the Attributes."

Review of the decree of God

Here is the definition we gave in Study #30:

The decree of God is his plan for the universe that includes all things and is certain to come to pass.

One of the best statements of the decree of God found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass (Q.7).

These definitions reflect what Paul wrote in Eph. 1:11:

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will

God has a plan that concerns everything. There are no exceptions in this verse. Nothing is excluded from the plan. The plan is actualized by God himself and it matches the ‘counsel’ of his ‘will’ (or ‘desire’). The decree is the outworking of what God wants.

The decree includes the existence, place and role of everything in the universe, including all acts of all animate objects. It includes the existence of sin, but does not make God the author of sin (Jas. 1:13—“For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone”). Human beings are responsible for sin. Outside of Christ the will is free only to act within bondage to sin. The Christian is also responsible for his sin, because he acts out of his old nature that is in bondage to sin.

Here are some other important points about the decree that will help us understand better the relation between prayer and the decree. Some of these points we have not seen in previous studies.

1. The decree of God is infinitely wise

It is wise and perfect because it is the plan of an infinitely wise God.

2. The decree of God brings God the greatest glory.

Any other plan would not bring God the glory that he desires for himself.

3. The decree of God is eternal and above time.

The decree does not depend on events in space and time for its outworking.

4. The decree of God will not fail to come to pass in all its parts.

The decree is worked out through God’s sovereign actions, which cannot be thwarted.

5. The decree of God is complete, unified and never added to.

If it were not complete from eternity past, then God would be dependent on some events or circumstances to make it complete. Charles Hodge, a great Reformed theologian of the 19th century says⁵:

⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I (London: James Clark & Co., Ltd., 1960), 537.

The decrees of God, therefore, are not many, but one purpose. They are not successively formed as the emergency arises, but are all parts of one all-comprehending plan. This view of the subject is rendered necessary by the nature of an infinitely perfect being. It is inconsistent with the idea of absolute perfection, that the purposes of God are successive, or that He ever purposes what He did not originally intend; or that one part of his plan is independent of other parts. It is one scheme, and therefore one purpose.

God's decree is entirely free of outside influence. No being helped God form his decree when space and time did not exist. Similarly, God is not dependent on anyone within space and time for the success of the decree. He does not require anything from anyone in order to bring all the elements of the decree to pass. Here is Isa. 40:13-14:

¹³ Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? ¹⁴ Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?

6. The decree of God is not dependent on any conditions for its fulfillment.

Here are the words of Charles Hodge again⁶:

The decrees of God are free in the sense of being absolute or sovereign. The meaning of this proposition is expressed negatively by saying that the decrees of God are in no case conditional. The event decreed is suspended on a condition, but the purpose of God is not. It is inconsistent with the nature of God to assume suspense or indecision on his part. If He has not absolutely determined on what is to occur, but waits until an undetermined condition is or is not fulfilled, then his decrees can neither be eternal nor immutable. He purposes one thing if the condition be fulfilled, and another if it be not fulfilled, and thus everything must be uncertain not only in the divine mind, but also in the event. H. 540

Similarly, Louis Berkhof, a 20th-century Reformed theologian says⁷:

The execution of the plan may require means or be dependent on certain conditions, but then these means or conditions have also been determined in the decree.

I believe that this is exemplified by Acts 2:23. God's plan involved the actions of human beings during the time the Lord Jesus Christ walked on the earth. God arranged for many actions to culminate in the crucifying of the Savior in a particular place at a particular point in time. The many prophecies of the Old Testament meant not only that God knew ahead of time what was going to happen but also that he determined it. What God foreknows must be certain. It cannot be another way. With regard to the crucifixion, this means that all the decision points in the lives of those responsible had their outcomes determined ahead of time. What appeared to them to be totally free conditional points in their lives actually had their outcomes—the direction of the decision—fixed from eternity past. If this were not so, then the events of the crucifixion would have been random and their certainty could never be guaranteed. God did not predict in the many prophecies of the OT just a general death of a savior, but specific details—the parting of garments, the nature of the suffering, what Jesus would drink and many other things. Alternatives introduced by whether or not people did one thing as opposed to another when they were faced with decision points could not have accomplished

⁶ Ibid, 540.

⁷ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 105.

the exact details that God wanted to come to pass. In Berkhof's words, the very condition points, the contingencies where people could have done one thing or another, were included, along with their outcomes.

There is another feature of biblical history that helps us to see this. During his time on earth, Jesus offered a kingdom to Israel, even presenting himself to them as their King. Bible students have long debated what would have happened if Israel had accepted his offer. The usual suggested answer is that the Kingdom would have begun, with Israel blessed under her King, and the Cross would never have occurred.

When we think in terms of the decree of God, the answer has to be that Israel could not have accepted her King, because the Cross had to happen. Was the offer of the Kingdom a sham, then? Was God being dishonest? God could not be unfair or deceptive, because he is perfect, good and fair. (Jas. 1:17—"the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows").

The answer is that his decree did not include Israel's accepting her King. The offer was legitimate, but Israel could not turn to the King. "If you will accept your King," was a valid offer, but God determined that Israel would not. In this case the condition, the decision point, for Israel was determined as negative. The alternative of responding or rejecting (accept the King and the Kingdom comes or reject the King and the Cross comes) ended up with rejection. The most important thing here is to realize that the events that actually came to pass did not depend on Israel's free will decision to accept the King or not accept the King. In Berkhof's words, again, the condition point (do this or do that) already had the outcome determined in the decree.

There is very pointed and powerful biblical evidence for what I have said in the previous paragraph. Shortly after Jesus presented himself as King at his entry into Jerusalem, we find the following words in Jn. 12:37-40:

³⁷ Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. ³⁸ This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" ³⁹ For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: ⁴⁰ "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them."

Israel could not receive Jesus as King, because God's decree prevented them from believing. When faced with the choice of receiving him or not receiving him, they did not because they could not. Remember also that in both the crucifixion and the rejection of the King human beings are held responsible for their sin. Acts 2:23 is clear: Israel bore the guilt of crucifying the Messiah.

This is very important for our understanding of the relationship between prayer and God's decree. Suppose that yesterday I had an opportunity to pray and request that God work on behalf of someone that I am concerned about, and I did pray and did so earnestly. God does not have one decree that includes my praying and another decree that does not include my praying (or one decree that includes my praying earnestly and one that includes my praying not so earnestly). God's decree was unified and complete before space and time. I did not have a genuine opportunity to change history when I faced the opportunity to pray or not pray. Remember, God works everything according to the counsel of his will. Ephesians 3:11 speaks of the decree as eternal:

according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord

One might argue that that God's purpose or plan in this verse concerns only the Cross. My point would be the same, however, since it is only necessary to show for some group of people at some point in history that the outcome of decision points is decided by God. It is safe to say that the details of the coming, life,

ministry, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ involved millions or billions of decision points in the lives of people in Israel and outside of Israel, people who lived at the time of Jesus' life on earth and before. No decision was unimportant to the final outcome, so no decision was left to human will and chance.

The key problem

The big question at this point, however, is why pray if the outcome is determined? There are several reasons we can and should pray.

1. God commands us to pray.

There are too many scriptures that tell us this to think otherwise.

2. Prayer honors God.

When we pray, we show our dependence on God. The very act of prayer shows that we are acknowledging that we are incapable of meeting our own needs.

3. Prayer brings spiritual blessing.

As we commune with God, we are enriched, whether we receive the answer we sought or not. Ps. 116:1-2 says:

¹ I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. ² Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.

4. Prayer is an acknowledgment that God knows what we need.

This is related to the question of praying to an omniscient God. I cannot improve on Arthur W. Pink's words on this⁸:

If God has foreordained, before the foundation of the world, everything which happens in time, what is the use of prayer? If it is true that "of Him and through Him and to Him are *all things*" (Rom. 11:30), then why pray? Ere replying directly to these queries it should be pointed out how that there is just as much reason to ask, What is the use of me coming to God and telling Him what He already knows? Wherein is the use of me spreading before Him my need, seeing He is already acquainted with it? as there is to object, What is the use of praying for anything when everything has been ordained beforehand by God? Prayer is not for the purpose of informing God, as if He were ignorant (the Saviour expressly declared "for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him"—Matt. 6:8), but it is to acknowledge He *does* know what we are in need of. Prayer is not appointed for the furnishing of God with the knowledge of what we need, but is designed as a confession to Him of *our sense* of need. In this, as in everything, God's thoughts are not as ours. God requires that His gifts should be sought for. He designs to be *honored* by our asking, just as He is to be *thanked* by us after He has bestowed His blessing.

5. Prayer is one of the means that God uses to bring about parts of his decree.

God has determined that certain things will happen through our prayer, just as the unsaved elect—who are certain to be saved—are brought to Christ in part through someone's giving them Scripture. God's decree

⁸ Arthur W. Pink, "God's Sovereignty and Prayer," in *The Sovereignty of God*.

includes prayer as an intermediate cause for things to come to pass. Pink points out that, although Elijah knew that God was about to provide rain, he prayed anyway (Jas. 5:17-18). Similarly, when Daniel understood that the Babylonian captivity would last 70 years, he prayed in keeping with this part of God's plan (Dan. 9:2-3). If God has planned to bless us or provide for us through prayer, he has also planned that we would seek his gift through prayer.

This brings us to the heart of the relationship between prayer and the decree of God. Supplicatory prayer seeks the accomplishment of God's purposes for ourselves and others. Here again is Pink⁹:

Here then is the *design* of prayer: not that God's will may be altered, but that it may be *accomplished* in His own good time and way. It is because God *has* promised certain things that we can ask for them with the full assurance of faith. It is God's purpose that His will shall be brought about by *His own* appointed means, and that He may do His people good upon *His own* terms, and that is, by the 'means' and 'terms' of entreaty and supplication. Did not the Son of God *know* for certain that after His death and resurrection He *would be* exalted by the Father. Assuredly He did. Yet we find Him *asking for* this very thing: "O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine Own Self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5)! Did not He know that none of His people could perish? yet He besought the Father to "keep" them (John 17:11)!

As W. Bingham Hunter says,¹⁰ "Prayer is a means God uses to give us what *He* wants."

At this point we should address the Open Theist's claim that God changes his mind in response to prayer. Using passages such as Ex. 32:11-14, they say that God can be persuaded to alter what he planned to do, and this is denoted by phrases such as "God relented." Here is the text:

⁹ "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." ¹¹ But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.' " ¹⁴ Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

Our knowledge of the decree of God tells us that God's intention all along was not to destroy Israel. Verse 14 is an anthropomorphic statement, made as if God's non-destruction were seen from a human standpoint. To us the non-destruction seems like a change of mind.

This is no difference in principle from Jesus' asking a question in order to prompt someone to think or do something, as with the woman at the well in Jn. 4:

¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ W. Bingham Hunter, *The God Who Hears* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 12.

Jesus knew that the woman had no husband and so could not comply with his request to get her husband. His request was designed to help her to see her spiritual condition.

To summarize, then: God's decree includes prayer itself as a means for bringing other things to pass.

6. Prayer increases our knowledge of God's will.

Recall that in Gethsemane Jesus prayed, "If it is your will." Jesus' prayers in the Garden were not requests to be released from going to the Cross. They were requests for information, and that phrase "If it is your will" is crucial for understanding this. Prayer involves bringing my will into line with God's will. God has determined the means for this—it is through adherence to Scripture, searching for God's will in the Book. This helps us to understand better the issue of unanswered prayer. In order to be answered, prayer must be in the will of God. Here is 1 Jn. 5:14-15:

¹⁴ This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

The more we understand and obey Scripture, the more we will understand God's will. We will be able to remove from consideration as prayer subjects those things that are not scriptural. There are some things that we know clearly are not God's will or that we know God won't do: save the dead, save the devil, forgive sin apart from the Cross, save someone apart from faith. We can know for sure that we should not pray for these things: they won't happen. We know clearly that there are some things that we can always pray for: the salvation of an unsaved person, the spiritual growth of another Christian, learning Scripture better, honoring Christ in our lives, growing in spiritual wisdom. We learn what to pray for from Scripture. John Bunyan said, "The Holy Spirit does not immediately quicken and stir up the heart of the Christian without, but by, in and through the Word. The Spirit, by the Word, directs the manner as well as the matter of praying."

God teaches us throughout life to keep searching for his will so that we will in doing so know him and his ways better. This is the lesson of 2 Cor. 12. Paul, a man who had unique dedication to the will of God, petitioned God three times for the removal of his "thorn in the flesh." Yet God did not remove it. God told Paul the reason for this unanswered prayer—so that Paul could have increased faith in the gracious provisions of God for his life. Here unanswered prayer itself involves a spiritual blessing. The answer isn't as important as that one way or another a person grows closer to God. Actually, God did answer, but not the way Paul expected. His answer was a "no" with an explanation of why this was better. Paul was satisfied with that. I certainly would be!

As we grow closer to God and know Scripture better, we will know to pray more and more for things that are in his will, and so we will have more and more answers. It has been my experience that godly people who have walked with God in humility for many years have many answers to prayer. I believe that this sensitivity to God's will is what John is talking about in v. 16 of 1 Jn. 5, the verse that follows what we just quoted:

¹⁶ If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. ¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

Notice that in the context of praying in God's will (v. 14) John gives one thing to pray for and one thing not to pray for. It is God's will to pray for the restoration of a sinning brother (v. 16). It is not God's will to pray for a person who has committed a sin that leads to his being taken from this life by God because of the sin. I believe that only a person with significant spiritual insight gained from many years of seeking God's will

through Scripture could be spiritually sensitive enough to know whether or not to pray for a person caught in a serious sin. John appears to be telling us that there are times when we can know when we should not pray. This is indeed a wonderful place to be in our prayer lives—so sensitive to the will of God for prayer that we refrain from praying.

7. Prayer changes us.

Ultimately prayer *changes us* as we draw closer to God, seeking to pray his will according to Scripture. Here is Arthur W. Pink¹¹:

Real prayer is communion with *God* so that there will be common thoughts between His mind and ours. What is needed is for Him to fill our hearts with *His* thoughts and then His desires will become *our* desires flowing back to Him. Here then is the meeting-place between God's Sovereignty and Christian prayer: If we ask anything according to *His will* He heareth us, and if we do *not* so ask He *does not* hear us; as saith the Apostle James, "Ye ask, and receive not, *because ye ask amiss*, that ye may consume it upon *your* lusts" or desires (4:3).

I appreciate what Curt Daniel says about the ultimate purpose of prayer¹²:

A more general misunderstanding surrounds the popular phrase, "Prayer changes things." Of course, it does not change God's secret will (Num. 23:19), nor does it change His essence (Mal. 3:6). It will not do, then, to use this ditty or even the more sanctimonious one, "Prayer changes God and God changes things." It would be more appropriate to say with Robert Lewis Dabney, "Prayer is not intended to produce a change in God, but in us." Calvin commented, "It was not so much for His sake as for ours." When we pray, we change our wills to conform with God's revealed will. Behind that process, we should observe that God is changing us.

This point is directly at odds with the view of Open Theism—that God is waiting for us to pray in order to help him make history. Bruce Ware's valid criticism of Open Theism reinforces the teaching in this study that prayer changes us¹³:

The open view which portrays a kind of human autonomy and self-importance attaching to what *we* decide and what *we* bring to the Lord in prayer is altogether unfitting to the posture that Scripture enjoins us to have. We are to come before the exalted Father, not with our great ideas but with our humble and childlike requests, recognizing that these petitions are only as good as is their meshing with the already established will of God. Prayer is not given us by God to encourage our contribution to God's decision-making, but rather to enable our following of God's perfect and already formed will. "Your will be done" should echo through all godly, humble Christian praying.

What, then, is the relation between God's sovereignty, his decree and prayer? Does prayer change God's plan? Prayer that brings requests to God is the outworking of an attitude of dependency on God, seeking to be more and more in conformity to his will through Scripture and asking for what God's will is—in other words seeking the fulfillment of the decree. Isn't this what Jesus meant when through a model prayer he encouraged the disciples to pray "May your kingdom come."

¹¹ Pink, "God's Sovereignty and Prayer."

¹² Curt Daniel, "Prayer and the Sovereignty of God," available at <http://members.aol.com/rbiblech/MiscDoctrine/PrayerTheSovOfGod.htm>.

¹³ Bruce Ware, *Their God is Too Small* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003), 91.

Study questions

1. Why is it not true that we change history when we pray?
2. How can prayer be genuine when God's decree is in place already?
3. Why should we not say that if the decree of God is fixed, we don't need to pray for blessing, since it will come anyway?
4. What can we say about unanswered prayer?
5. Given the solutions in this study, what does the Christian who prays little miss?
6. How are we changed by unanswered prayer? How are we changed by answered prayer?

Running compilation of key definitions

1. Systematic theology: The organized presentation of all that the Bible teaches about God and His works.
2. Exegesis: The actual practice of studying or interpreting a document or other message to determine its meaning.
3. Context: Context in a document or utterance is the surroundings of a portion of a word, a word, or a group of words.
4. Bibliology: The doctrinal study of the nature of the Bible.
5. Biblical authority: The quality inherent in Scripture by virtue of which human beings are completely answerable to its content.
6. Revelation: The information about Himself given by God to human beings.
7. General revelation: God's disclosure of Himself, available directly to everyone, given through means other than dreams, visions, direct words and Christ Himself.
8. Special revelation: The disclosure of information from God that is not available directly to all human beings.
9. Inspiration: A term applied to the Bible denoting that it is the product of God's creative activity, figuratively breathed out from Him (2 Tim. 3:16); applies to the process of recording Scripture, not specifically to the people involved; actually, *expiration* would be a better term to reflect the concept of 2 Tim. 3:16; the result is *inerrancy*.
10. Textual criticism: The science and art of attempting to discover the original text of a literary work for which the original document does not exist. It is especially important for biblical studies, and the foundational endeavor to all subsequent investigation of the Scriptures.
11. Canon: Transliterated from a Greek Word meaning "standard"; as used of the Bible, it refers to books authenticated as possessing divine origin and therefore authoritative; the Jewish canon consists of thirty-nine books, the Protestant of sixty-six and the Catholic of eighty (including apocryphal books).
12. Inerrancy is a term applied to the Bible, although not specifically found in it; it denotes that the Bible, as originally written, possessed no humanly induced deviations from the message God intended to be recorded and that it is true in every respect; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:19.
13. Infallibility: Although some assert that this term has a different meaning from inerrancy, the two terms are, for purposes of biblical study, synonymous; the Bible is infallible because inerrant, and inerrant because infallible.
14. Illumination is the teaching ministry of the Spirit of God that imparts understanding of the message of Scripture to the believer; not to be confused with inspiration, which in the Bible is used of the work of God in giving Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16); 1 Jn. 2:20; Jn. 16:13.
15. Spirituality: God is not physical, but immaterial, incorporeal, invisible and alive.
16. Self-existence/Aseity: God exists independently of anything else. He is self-existent.
17. Immensity: God is infinite in relation to space.
18. Eternality: God is infinite with regard to time.
19. Simplicity: God is not a plurality and cannot be looked at as divisible into parts.
20. Pure actuality: There is nothing about God that is potential. He is not unfinished in any way.
21. Necessity: God is uncaused and exists because he must exist.
22. Immutability: God is unchanging and unchangeable.
23. Impassibility: God is incapable of being changed or disturbed by what he experiences and is incapable of suffering.
24. Transcendence: God and the world are distinct; he is not part of the world, and the world is not part of him.
25. Immanence: God is present in the world.
26. Infinity: There are no limits to God's person and his perfections.
27. Omnipotence: God can do whatever he wills.
28. Omniscience: God knows everything there is to know.
29. Omnipresence: God is present everywhere in his creation

30. Holiness: God is morally pure and separated from all moral evil and sin.
31. Goodness: A quality that describes or includes his love, benevolence, mercy and grace
32. Truth: God's person, actions, knowledge and revelations correspond to reality
33. Love: God's continual communication of himself to his creatures.
34. Benevolence: God's goodness toward his creatures.
35. Mercy: God's goodness toward those who are helpless.
36. Grace: God's goodness toward sinners.
37. Glory: The greatness of God's perfections.
38. Trinity: There is only one true God, existing as a single Being comprised of three Persons who are equal in every way, yet distinct in their tasks and relations to humanity.
39. God's decree: The decree of God is his plan for the universe that includes all things and is certain to come to pass.
40. Providence: God's care for and upholding of his creation.
41. Sovereignty: God's control over his universe.