

Christians pray in accord with the will of God

God wills that we give Him thanks in our prayers. When we stop and count all the blessings God has given us in our lives, both temporal and spiritual, we have much for which to give thanks. Paul wrote, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil 4:6). When only one leper out of ten came back to thank Jesus for healing, Jesus said, "Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" (Luke 17:17). When we remember to thank God for His blessings in our prayers, we also shall see that God has richly blessed us. It will enable us to keep the problems God permits to come into our lives in proper perspective.

God wills that we include all people in our prayers. Paul wrote, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Tim. 2:1-2). Jeremiah urged the exiles in Babylon to pray for the peace and prosperity of the place where they had been taken captive (Jer. 29:7). We shall pray even for our enemies. Jesus tells us to do this (Matt. 5:44). Jesus did this for His enemies as He suffered on the cross (Luke 23:34).

Stephen prayed for those who stoned him (Acts 7:60). We receive the strength to do this from God's love for us (1 John 4:19).

God also tells us to pray in accord with His will. John wrote, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). We may pray for spiritual blessings unconditionally, for we know what God's will is with regard to our spiritual lives. Paul wrote, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified" (1 Thess. 4:3). God wants us to grow in faith, love, and sanctified living. Thus we do not have to ask for these things conditionally, saying "not my will but Your will be done."

God wills that we pray conditionally for earthly blessings. In this way we, in faith, place the governance of our lives into His hands. With regard to earthly blessings, we do not know what God's will is. We do not know if His will is that we be rich or poor, sick or healthy, and so on. We leave these matters up to God. We bring our requests to God with the confidence that God will do what is best for us. We know He loves us, for He has given His Son to die for us. Thus we have the assurance He will do what is best for us (Rom. 8:32). If an earthly father can give his children good gifts, certainly our heavenly Father will give us what is best for us (Luke 11:9-13). Thus, when we ask God for earthly blessings, we place ourselves by faith into the hands of our loving heavenly Father. Jesus did this as He prayed for His Father to spare Him the cross, if that was possible (Luke 22:42). The leper did this as he asked Jesus to heal him, if it was His will (Matt. 8:2).

God wills that we pray with the confidence that He will hear and answer our prayers. God does not want us to pray with doubt that He will help. James wrote, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does" (1:5-8). When people approach God with the attitude "I really don't think this will help but I am ready to try anything once," they should not expect God to answer their prayers.

There are those who have said that prayer is like a blank cheque. Just fill in the amount you want God to give you. It is true, no request we can make is too great for our God. Yet we are told to pray conditionally for earthly blessings. Thus we leave earthly matters up to God's will. Further, Paul tells us that God the Holy Spirit distributes His gifts as He wills. So the claim that the Holy Spirit must give us the gifts of speaking in tongues and healing if we ask Him for them does not agree with Scripture.

Further, those who say that God must heal us if we believe strongly enough do not teach what Scripture teaches. Faith healers do not acknowledge that it may not be God's will to heal someone. We are directed to ask for earthly blessings in accord with God's will. Three times the apostle Paul asked God to heal him. Three times the Lord told Paul that it was not His will to heal him. Rather, God gave Paul the strength to bear the problem he had (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

Finally, we will not pray for the dead. Scripture tells us that people are judged at death (Heb 9:27). Those who die as believers go to heaven. They do not need our prayers, as they rest in glory. Those who die as unbelievers go to hell. Not one of our prayers cannot help them.