

Sermon 30, Pray Like This, Pt. 5: Obeying God's Will, Matthew 6:10b

Doing God's will "Is as necessary as salvation."--Thomas Watson

"What Hypocrites are these to kneel down in the church, and lift up their eyes to heaven, and say, "Thy will be done," yet have no care at all to do God's will? What is this but to hang out a flag of defiance against heaven?"--Watson

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Proposition: The third petition of the Lord's Prayer teaches and demands partnership: we prayerfully work with God to accomplish His will.

As some of you know, I have a little device up here with me that records the sermon as I deliver it. Tomorrow, I will take that recording and upload it to Sermonaudio.com, the largest conservative sermon site in the world. Nearly 5,000 other pastors or sound guys will do the same. In fact, Sermonaudio has 1.3 million sermons, and more are uploaded every day. Well, people can come and listen to the sermon there, and they are attracted by different titles. My most popular sermons there are the ones on loving your enemies and on Biblical divorce [update:

as of September 20, 2016, that has changed to loving your enemies and how to pray.]. I expect last week's sermon to shoot up the rankings as well: everyone wants to know God's will! But I fear that today's sermon will be far less popular. Who wants to hear about doing God's will? That sounds hard. That sounds boring. That sounds like *obedience*. And it is about obedience. In fact, this whole sermon will be about how the third petition of the Lord's Prayer demands not just your prayers, but your obedience. You need to do what God commands if you're going to pray "Thy will be done." In fact, if you're going to pray for God's will, you need to *do* God's will. Last Sunday we went all over the Bible to look at the background to this text. But today, we are going to stay right here and dive into the depths of these few words. What I hope to show you is that you need to obey God. You must prayerfully work with God to accomplish His will. This is not a metaphysical necessity; God can accomplish His will without you. Rather, this is a moral necessity. You are morally obligated to work with God to bring about His will in this world.

I. Partnership in Doing God's Will, v. 10b

To see that, we need to look closely at the grammar of this petition. "Thy will be done." What does that say?

A. Not First Person: "We Do Your Will" (us without God)

Well, notice that it *doesn't* say a couple of things. First, it doesn't say "We do your will," or "Let us do your will." It's not in the first person, whether as a statement or a request. It's just not. Why is that important? Because going before God, in prayer or otherwise, and saying, "I do your will," isn't a request. It's a brag. Or at the very least, it's a statement about how good you are. Even if it were true, it would not really be a prayer at that point. It would be telling God something, not asking Him something. And that, in turn, would be a way of saying, "God, I've got this. I don't need your help. I don't need your assistance. Thanks anyway."

Do you see that, brothers and sisters? Do you see that if this were a first person statement, it would not properly be a request for God's will to be done anymore? Instead, it would simply be a way of informing God that His will *is* getting done, and that He doesn't need to worry about it because we're taking care of it. That, in turn, would imply that we can do everything God wants of us without His assistance. "God, you can go on break, because we're fine without you." We would be saying, "We don't need grace. We don't need help. We don't need assistance. Your will is within our power." In short, this would be the ultimate Pelagian prayer.

B. Not Second Person: "Do Your Will" (God without us)

But on the other hand, this is no hyper-Calvinist prayer either. The hyper-Calvinist prays, "God, do your will. Make it happen, Lord. Whatever you want; it's all within your mighty power. I'm just going to sit back and enjoy the show." But that's not what Jesus taught us to pray either! He didn't tell us to pray in the second person imperative like this. Why not? Because this kind of prayer implies that we have nothing to do with the accomplishment of God's will. The ball is in His court; we are passive spectators. But that is the false doctrine commonly known as hyper-Calvinism! Real Calvinism — real Christianity — teaches that God works not only *in* us, but *with* us. The same action, at one and the same time, is done by God and done by us. That's

why Paul says he is “working together with” Jesus, imploring sinners to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 6:1). God is perfectly capable of working without us, and our lack of cooperation cannot hinder Him. Of course. Never forget that truth. But at the same time, God insists that we use the means He has given to us. If we do not obey Him, if we do not fulfill our responsibilities, then very little work will get done. Very little will happen. Don't limit what God can do, but never operate on the basis of what He *can* do when He's already told you what He *will* do. And He's told us that people won't hear without a preacher. He's told us that those who don't work shouldn't eat and likely won't eat. He's told us to pray “Thy will be done,” not “Do your will.” Why? Because He does His will through us. He accomplishes His vast, awe-inspiring purposes for history through us and with us.

C. But a Third Person Passive Imperative: “Let Your Will Be Done”

That's the truth resident in the grammar of this request. It's not first person. It's not second person. It's third person, and it's passive. What does that mean?

1. Passive Voice

As you hopefully recall (while you're recalling, recall that my side job is teaching AP English Literature and Composition, plus a section of English 1!), the passive voice is the verb construction in which the subject of the sentence is acted upon by the action of the verb. Contemporary English prose style is overwhelmingly allergic to passive voice, mercilessly rooting it out of sentences, so if you read little that was written before 2010, you might not even know what passive voice sounds like. It sounds like this: “Thy will be done.” Or this: “The books were opened.”

a) God's Will Is the Subject

In this particular sentence, “Thy will be done,” the subject of the verb is God's will. We talked at length about God's will last week. As you should remember, God's will is distinguished by us into two kinds: decretive and preceptive. Both are in view in this petition. We are talking, all the way through, about God's will.

b) Doing Is the Verb

The verb is “do,” or “come to be.” This is the content of what we're praying for: that God's will, His faculty of choice, would be enacted. We're praying that the things God wants to happen would happen, and that the things He doesn't want to happen would not happen.

c) The Agent Is Purposely Obscured

Notice, then, that in the passive the agent is obscured, and of course, since Jesus did nothing pointlessly, the agent is purposely obscured. That is, we are not praying, “God, make sure you do your will.” Nor are we praying, “God, make sure I do your will.” We are, instead, praying that both we and God would do His will. The third person passive is a way of showing that two agents are involved in this request: God, and us. The same is true, by the way, of the previous two petitions. All three of these God-centered petitions are things that God does and things that we do. They are “both-and” kinds of petitions. God does His will, and we do His will. But rather

than praying, "May you and we work together to do your will," we can pray (much more simply) "Thy will be done."

2. Imperative: This Is an Authoritative Request

Well, not only is this request passive in voice; it is imperative in mood. The imperative is a command. Instead of saying, "Would somebody please shut the door?" I might say, "Joe, go shut the door!" The first is a request. The latter is a command. The first is in the indicative mood. The second is in the imperative mood. As we are shy of passives, so we are shy of imperatives. They just seem so rude; they cross the grain of the other person's will, and we know it. That's why, in polite society, people generally use requests rather than commands.

a) Jesus Tells Us to Command God

But this is not a request. This is not a "God, would you be willing to ensure that your will is done?" This is an in-God's-face imperative: "Thy will be done," or "Let thy will be done!" Can you believe that Jesus tells us to address God with an *imperative*? Most of us hardly dare use imperatives on our younger siblings! But God tells us that our prayers are supposed to be so bold that we, in one sense, literally command God Himself to ensure that His will is done. How can we do this? Where do we get the boldness to do it? By knowing that we are praying in accordance with God's will. We are asking Him to do what He wants to do.

b) God Will Obey Your Command!

And that's where the amazing part comes in: God will obey your command! He will ensure that His will is done. Already, with His eternal decrees, He ensures that His plan for history is worked out, moment by moment, event by event. Already, He is subduing people like us and teaching us to obey His moral will.

So pray with imperatives! Not with any and all imperatives, but imperatives demanding, if I may use the word, that God do what He has promised to do! Jesus didn't tell us to pray that God's will would be done, knowing that it actually won't be!

3. Third Person: Both God and We Do God's Will

So, to return to grammar — what does this third person construction imply? It implies that both God and we do God's will. There is no room here for anyone to get off the hook. There is no way to say, "Well, God failed to do His will, and so that's why I sinned." Nope. The request is not that God would do His will without you. The request is for partnership in doing His will!

a) We Ask to Do It, and Do It

When you pray this petition, you are asking for the opportunity to do God's will. When you ask that His will be done, you are asking that you would obey His law. You are asking that you would not cheat on your spouse, that you would not lie to your children, that you would not steal from your employer, that you would not break the Sabbath day or lust after a woman. When you pray this prayer, you are asking to keep God's law. And so, if you're going to pray the way Jesus taught you to pray, you need to obey the way Jesus taught you to obey! This is not optional; this is not some kind of secondary thing. Obeying God's will is a fundamental part of this third

petition. We must exert effort to do the right thing, the thing God wants us to do, in every situation.

b) We Ask God to Do It, and He Does It

But again, the fact that doing God's will is our responsibility doesn't mean that it's not His responsibility too. Eliminate from your head that idea that responsibility is a zero-sum game, and that if we are responsible then God is not responsible, and vice versa. It is completely and totally your responsibility to do God's will. If you fail to do God's will, the excuse that "God didn't move me to do His will, so I'm off the hook" is not available to you. It doesn't hold water. You are responsible to do God's will. But God is also responsible to do His will. When you ask Him to do it, He does it. He is working out His plan for history. He is at work in all of us, aiding us by His Holy Spirit to make us able and willing to do His will. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth" (Psa 110:3 KJV). It is God's power that makes us willing. It is God who is working out His purposes, bringing to pass everything that He wills according to the counsel of His will. And yet, at the same time, many people are disobedient to God's revealed will. So, like His Kingdom coming, we pray that His will would be done. We pray that people would obey His law, and He works in people to make them obedient.

II. Perfection in Doing God's Will, v. 10c

Well, not only do we pray that God's will would be done; we pray that it would be done perfectly, that it would be done here on earth just like it is in heaven.

A. God's Will Is Done Perfectly In Heaven

How is God's will done in heaven? It's done perfectly. It's done by angels. "Bless the LORD, you His angels, Who excel in strength, who do His word, Heeding the voice of His word" (Psa 103:20 NKJ)! As the Larger Catechism has it, the angels know, obey, and submit to God's will with "humility, cheerfulness, faithfulness, diligence, zeal, sincerity, and constancy" (WLC 192). That's how God's will is done in heaven. Everything in heaven is perfectly obedient to Him. Everything in heaven is exactly how He wills it to be.

This is a theological statement. There are three such direct statements in the prayer. One is that God is our Father. Another is that He dwells in heaven. The third is this: that God's will is done in heaven. This tells us what heaven is like — and, as many commentators commented, it tells us that if everyone on earth obeyed God's law perfectly, then earth would practically be like heaven.

B. God's Will Must Be Done Perfectly on Earth

When we pray this petition, then, we are requesting that God's will would be done perfectly on earth. In other words, we are putting ourselves on the hook to do God's will with "humility, cheerfulness, faithfulness, diligence, zeal, sincerity, and constancy." Does that describe you? If I asked your spouse and said, "Does Frank obey God's will with humility? Does he obey God cheerfully? Does he faithfully obey? Does he do what God wants with diligence? Does he do it with zeal? Is his obedience totally sincere? Is it constant?" — what would your spouse say?

What would you say? None of us do God's will this way! How do we dare to pray that we would? Well, the answer is that God requires us to pray this way. He requires us to obey this way, too. And so, this has to be our goal, even though we know that we will not and cannot reach it in this life. As in parenting, in medicine, and so on, we pursue a goal that is ultimately out of reach on this sin-cursed earth. You will never have perfect health here; no matter how healthy you are, you're still dying. You will never have perfect children; no matter how good they are, they will still have the remnants of a sin nature. Yet you try to be healthy, and you try to raise your kids to be good. In the same way, you pray that God's will be done, and you try to do it! The problem comes in not from failure, but from lack of trying. If you're praying that God's will be done and you're not trying to do it, then you are a hypocrite. Shame on you. If you're praying that God's will be done, you are re-obligating yourself, further obligating yourself, to do it just the way that God wants you to do it. You should be trying to do God's will perfectly. This means repenting when you fail. It means going to God and asking forgiveness. After all, part of doing God's will is recognizing that His will is for you to be saved. As we discussed last week, it was God's will to send Jesus to His death on behalf of everyone who embraces Him for salvation! Praying for God's will to be done is not a requirement for salvation; it's a result of salvation. After all, salvation is nothing more than God's will being done. Living in light of your salvation is nothing more than doing God's will!

So don't let yourself off the hook. Don't say, "I will not try because I will never be perfect." That's false.

C. God's Will Shall Be Done Perfectly on Earth

In fact, the promise latent in this request is that you *will* be perfect. God's will *will* be done perfectly on earth. That's a promise, because Jesus only teaches us to pray for things that God wills to grant. God wills that His will be done on earth. That's part of His plan for history. It's part of what He's working out. Remember those verses we talked about last week? Paul tells us explicitly that your sanctification is God's will. He tells us in 1 Timothy that God wills for everyone to be saved. That means that He wills for you to be saved. He wills it so much that if you are a true believer in Jesus, it is certain that you will be saved.

Do you embrace this promise? Does it motivate to pray this way? Does it make you long to do God's will perfectly on earth? It should. If you understand how much God has done to bring about His will in your life and on this earth, it should make you want to work with Him in pursuing that will, praying for that will, doing that will.

III. Prayer Perfects Partnership in Doing God's Will!

The reason you can be encouraged to keep trying now is because God will see to it that your prayers are answered. The more you pray this prayer, the more empowered you will be to do God's will. The more you will see Him doing His will all around you, in you, and through you. Prayer is a way of realizing the partnership with God in doing His will that you are supposed to have.

A. Pray for Power to Obey God's Will

First, then, pray for power to obey God's will. You can't obey it on your own. You need grace. You need help. You need strengthening. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (Joh 15:5 NKJ). Do you believe that with God everything is possible, but that without Him you can do exactly nothing? You should. You must! You need His help. So ask for it. Pray for it!

B. Pray for God Accomplish His Will

Secondly, pray that God would do His will. He is ultimately the one who will make it happen. He is the one who is bringing people to obey Him and bringing history to its foreordained conclusion. What God wants is better than you can even dream. So don't wait; don't sit back: you are privileged to be an active partner in what God is doing for His kingdom!

Do you want to partner with God? Do you think that that's what prayer is about? It is, at least partly. You get to participate in the doing of God's will in the world, not just by doing it, but by asking for it. Amazing!

C. Recognize that God's Will Will Be Accomplished Through Your Obedience!

Finally, recognize that God's will will be accomplished through your obedience, both your obedience of God's law in general and your obedience of God's command to pray in particular. Do you want to see a better world? Do you want to live a place where thugs with medical degrees are not allowed to murder children? Where husbands don't beat up wives? Where bureaucrats don't shut down hard-working people who were making energy plentiful for all? Then obey God's will. Pray God's will. Do God's will. And ask Him to do it. He will. His will works through people just like you and me. In fact, it works through us. So let's glorify Him by doing what He commands. Amen.