

The Purpose and Plan for the Church Pt. 8

Acts 2:40-47

Acts 2:40–47

And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”

41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*.

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,

45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Introduction:

In May of 2016 the IMB, along with the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, signed an amicus brief (*literally means "friend of the court."* *The term is used to refer to a legal **brief**, that may be filed with an appellate court, including a supreme court, by a party not involved with a current case, but in support of one side or another on the legal issue at hand.*).....in support of a mosque to be built in New Jersey.

The action, which was done without the knowledge of IMB trustees, led Tennessee pastor Dean Haun of First Baptist Church, Morristown, to resign as a trustee. In addition, First Baptist has been escrowing Cooperative Program funds to the Southern Baptist Convention in response to the action. The church has, however, continued to send funds to the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board for missions and ministries in the state.

As **reported by the Baptist and Reflector**, the Tennessee Baptist Convention's state newspaper, David Platt issued an apology related to the International Mission Board's (IMB) 2016 support of an amicus brief supporting the construction of a New Jersey mosque.

According to the report, Platt, President of the Southern Baptist Convention's IMB, issued the apology February 15, 2017 while at a meeting of The Association of Baptist Publications in California.

Prefacing his apology, Platt said "I grieve how the amicus brief in the recent mosque case has been so divisive and distracting." The IMB's signatory alliance on the amicus

brief, joining a vast array of ecumenical signatories – including the SBC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission – indeed sparked consternation within the Convention.

The issue was brought up by a pastor from the floor of the SBC Annual Meeting in St. Louis. The question, cited below, was directed at Russell Moore, President of the ERLC.

“I would like to know how in the world someone in the Southern Baptist Convention can support the defending of rights for Muslims to construct mosques in the United States when these people threaten our very way of existence as Christians and Americans. They are murdering Christians, beheading Christians, imprisoning Christians all over the world. Do you actually believe that if Jesus Christ were here today, He would actually support this and that He would stand up and say, well, let us support the rights of those Baal worshippers to erect temples to Baal? Do you believe that Dr. Moore?” Dr. Moore gave a terse, smug, belittling response to the pastor.

“You know sometimes we have to deal with questions that are really complicated and we have to spend a lot of time thinking them through and not sure what the final result was going to be. Sometimes we have really hard decisions to make. This isn’t one of those things.”

Moore’s arrogant answer, which also included the *“What it means to be a Baptist is to support soul freedom for*

everybody” line, did not quell the more than obvious and unbiblical alliance of “light with darkness,” of “righteousness with lawlessness,” that the ERLC’s and IMB’s actions reflected. It would be hard to imagine what further could be done to visibly defy to the commands of Scripture “not be unequally yoked.” (2 Corinthians 6:14)

Perhaps the only thing worse would have been if the two SBC agencies had organized a short-term missions trip to New Jersey to labor alongside Muslims in a mosque-raising.

By January 2017, the unacceptable alliance of the IMB particularly reached a further point of denominational stress. An IMB trustee, **Pastor Dean Haun resigned his position** in protest to the IMB’s actions and his inability to receive a satisfactory answer to his concerns.

“When I look at our IMB mission and purpose statements, I cannot see how this action meshes with them ... If we defend the rights of people to construct places of false worship are we not helping them speed down the highway to hell?...I want no part in supporting a false religion even if it is in the name of religious freedom...Our Baptist institutions’ names will be on this brief setting legal precedence and supporting the right of mosques to be built all over our nation for years to come.” (Source)

Haun, former president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, and his 2,000 member church took further action by escrowing their financial support to the Convention’s Cooperative Program.

Though Haun's actions were not cited by Platt as instrumental in his apology, it seems clear that a convention with agencies eager to disregard the clear instruction of Scripture seem to suddenly be all ears and apologies when the purse-strings are snatched closed.

Further evidence, of course, of the true priorities of a denomination that is, almost by the day, redefining the notion of "downgrade."

Platt's apology for his agency's participation is as follows.

"All this to say, in short, I apologize to Southern Baptists for how distracting and divisive this has been. I am confident that in the days ahead, the IMB will have better processes in place to keep us focused on our primary mission: partnering with churches to empower limitless missionary teams who are evangelizing, discipling, planting and multiplying healthy churches, and training leaders among unreached peoples and places for the glory of God." David Platt

Though Pastor Haun has not publicly commented on Platt's apology, it's curious to note that it's not really an apology for what the IMB did. Platt didn't acknowledge that his agency had made a grave error in supporting the Muslims in their legal proceedings. He did not apologize for disregarding God's perspicuous commands in Scripture. (2 Corinthians 6:14-18) What Platt apologized for was the "distracting and divisive" result such participation generated.

It seems not altogether unlike the cookie-thieving child who is sorry for getting caught, not for actually committing

the crime. Or perhaps like the adulterous husband who regrets the repercussions of his sin more than the sin itself. It just doesn't seem to evoke authentic "godly grief."

(2 Corinthians 7:10)

But in the case of much of the SBC, it seems that Biblical disobedience isn't all that much of a crime, isn't a sin, and isn't an issue. When you get caught, apologize for the confusion, not for the transgression.

However, Platt may at least be credited for issuing an apology – of sorts, something Moore and the ERLC have yet to do. And, to his credit, Platt seems to be implementing protocols within the IMB that might preclude such future violations of Scriptural prohibitions. If anything, Platt's actions in that regard alone may hopefully ensure that at least his CP-funded agency won't be engaged in the future in building temples to Baal.

And that is the kind of Scriptural obedience that is much needed in the SBC.

Contributed by Bud Ahlheim Pulpit and Pen

Mt 16:15–19

- 15** He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
- 16** Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
- 17** Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

- 18** And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
- 19** And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

1 Tim 3:15

15 but if I am delayed, *I write* so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Review

I. Christ is Lord of His Church

II. Christ Builds His Church

III. Christ Plans His Church

IV. Christ Gives Purpose to His Church

Lesson:

I. Christ is Lord of His Church

II. Christ Builds His Church

III. Christ Plans His Church Separated

A. Saved

B. Steadfast

C. Teaching

D. Fellowshiping

E. Celebrating Lords supper/ baptism

F. Praying

G. Giving

H. Praising

I. Fearing

1. The Church was Separated

2. The Church was Saved

41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

3. The Church was steadfast.

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

v.42 And they continued steadfastly — —

Pres Active Participle

46 So continuing daily — same word, and parsing

proskartereó: to attend constantly

Original Word: προσκαρτερέω

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: proskartereó

Phonetic Spelling: (pros-kar-ter-eh'-o)

Short Definition: I persist

Definition: I persist, persevere in, continue steadfast in; I wait upon.
4342 *proskarteréō* (from **4314** /*prós*, "towards, interactively *with*" and **2594** /*karteréō*, "show steadfast strength," derived from **2904** /*krátos*, "prevailing strength") – properly, to consistently showing strength which *prevails* (in spite of difficulties); to *endure* (remain firm), ***staying in a fixed direction***.
 [4342 /*proskarteréō* means "to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of despite difficulty – 'to devote oneself to, to keep on, to persist in'"

4. The Church was Teaching

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine

continued steadfastly

προσκαρτερέω (4342)

verb: present, active, participle, nominative, plural, masculine

- 1 to adhere to one, be his adherent, to be devoted or constant to one
- 2 to be steadfastly attentive unto, to give unremitting care to a thing
- 3 to continue all the time in a place
- 4 to persevere and not to faint

doctrine

διδαχή (1322)

noun: dative, singular, feminine

- 1 teaching
 - 1 that which is taught
 - 2 doctrine, teaching, concerning something
- 2 the act of teaching, instruction
 - 1 in religious assemblies of the Christians, to speak in the way of teaching, in distinction from other modes of speaking in public

5. The Church was Fellowshiping

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship,
fellowship

κοινωνία (2842)

noun: dative, singular, feminine

[Find all occurrences \(approximately 18\)](#)

- 1 fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse
 - 1 the share which one has in anything, participation
 - 2 intercourse, fellowship, intimacy
 - 1 the right hand as a sign and pledge of fellowship (in fulfilling the apostolic office)
 - 3 a gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship

6. Celebrating the Lord's Table and Baptism

41 Then those who gladly received his word **were baptized**; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*.

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

7. The Church was Praying

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Acts 1:14

These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Acts 1:24-25

And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place."

Acts 2:42

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 4:23-31

When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?'"

Acts 12:12

And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying

Acts 6:3-4

"Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Acts 6:6

And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

Acts 7:59-60

They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 9:40

But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

Acts 12:5

So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

Acts 13:2-3

While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Acts 14:23

When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Acts 16:22-25

The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Acts 20:36

When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

Acts 21:5

When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another.

Acts 28:7-8

Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days. And it happened that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to see him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him.

Colossians 4:2

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;

Romans 12:12

rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,

Ephesians 6:18

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

1 Thessalonians 5:17

pray without ceasing;

1 Timothy 2:1

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,

1 Peter 4:7

The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

Colossians 4:3-4

praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of

Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

Ephesians 6:19-20

and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

2 Thessalonians 3:1

Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you;

James 5:14

Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

1 John 5:16-17

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.

James 5:16

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

Romans 15:30

Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,

2 Corinthians 1:11

you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.

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1 Corinthians 11:4-5

Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.

1 Corinthians 11:13-15

Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.

Colossians 1:9-10

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Ephesians 1:16-21

do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

Ephesians 3:16-19

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

Philippians 1:9-11

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Colossians 1:3

We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

1 Thessalonians 1:2

We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

If God Is Sovereign, Why Pray?

REMOVED LINK FROM BY-LINE: FROM R.C. Sproul Sep 14, 2016 Category: Articles

Nothing escapes God's notice; nothing oversteps the boundaries of His power. God is authoritative in all things. If I thought even for one moment that a single molecule were running loose in the universe outside the control and domain of almighty God, I wouldn't sleep tonight. My confidence in the future rests in my confidence in the God who controls history. But how does God exercise that control and manifest that authority? How does God bring to pass the things He sovereignly decrees?

Augustine said that nothing happens in this universe apart from the will of God and that, in a certain sense, God ordains everything that happens. Augustine was not attempting to absolve men of responsibility for their actions, but his teaching raises a question: If God is sovereign over the actions and intents of men, why pray at all? A secondary concern revolves around the question, "Does prayer really change anything?" "Let me answer the first question by stating that the sovereign God commands by His holy Word that we pray. Prayer is not optional for the Christian; it is required. We might ask, "What if it doesn't do anything?" That is not the issue. Regardless of whether prayer does any good, if God

commands us to pray, we must pray. It is reason enough that the Lord God of the universe, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, commands it. Yet He not only commands us to pray, but also invites us to make our requests known. James says that we have not because we ask not (James 4:2). He also tells us that the prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much (James 5:16). Time and again the Bible says that prayer is an effective tool. It is useful; it works.

John Calvin, in the Institutes of the Christian Religion, makes some profound observations regarding prayer:

But, someone will say, does God not know, even without being reminded, both in what respect we are troubled and what is expedient for us, so that it may seem in a sense superfluous that “he should be stirred up by our prayers—as if he were drowsily blinking or even sleeping until he is aroused by our voice? But they who thus reason do not observe to what end the Lord instructed his people to pray, for he ordained it not so much for his own sake as for ours. Now he wills—as is right—that his due be rendered to him, in the recognition that everything men desire and account conducive to their own profit comes from him, and in the attestation of this by prayers. But the profit of this sacrifice also, by which he is worshiped, returns to us. Accordingly, the holy fathers, the more confidently they extolled God’s benefits among themselves and others, were the more keenly aroused to pray . . .

Still it is very important for us to call upon him: First, that our hearts may be fired with a zealous and burning desire ever to seek, love, and serve him, while we become accustomed in every need to flee to him as to a sacred

*anchor. Secondly, that there may enter our hearts no desire and no “wish at all of which we should be ashamed to make him a witness, while we learn to set all our wishes before his eyes, and even to pour out our whole hearts. Thirdly, that we be prepared to receive his benefits with true gratitude of heart and thanksgiving, benefits that our prayer reminds us come from his hand. (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960], Book 3, chapter 20, section 3.)*

Prayer, like everything else in the Christian life, is for God’s glory and for our benefit, in that order. Everything that God does, everything that God allows and ordains, is in the supreme sense for His glory. It is also true that while God seeks His own glory supremely, man benefits when God is glorified. We pray to glorify God, but we also pray in order to receive the benefits of prayer from His hand. Prayer is for our benefit, even in light of the fact that God knows the end from the beginning. It is our privilege to bring the whole of our finite existence into the glory of His infinite presence.

One of the great themes of the Reformation was the idea that all of life is to be lived under the authority of God, to the glory of God, in the presence of God. Prayer is not simply a soliloquy, a mere exercise in therapeutic self-analysis, or a religious recitation. Prayer is discourse with the personal God Himself. There, in the act and dynamic of praying, I bring my whole life under His gaze. Yes, He knows what is in my mind, but I still have the privilege of articulating to Him what is there. He says: “Come. Speak to me. Make your requests

known to me.” So we come in order to know Him and to be known by Him.

There is something erroneous in the question, “If God knows everything, why pray?” The question assumes that prayer is one-dimensional and is defined simply as supplication or intercession. On the contrary, prayer is multidimensional. God’s sovereignty casts no shadow over the prayer of adoration. God’s foreknowledge or determinate counsel does not negate the prayer of praise. The only thing it should do is give us greater reason for expressing our adoration for who God is. If God knows what I’m going to say before I say it, His knowledge, rather than limiting my prayer, enhances the beauty of my praise.

My wife and I are as close as two people can be. Often I know what she’s going to say almost before she says it. The reverse is also true. But I still like to hear her say what is on her mind. If that is true of man, how much more true is it of God? We have the matchless privilege of sharing our innermost thoughts with God. Of course, we could simply enter our prayer closets, let God read our minds, and call that prayer. But that’s not communion and it’s certainly not communication.

We are creatures who communicate primarily through speech. Spoken prayer is obviously a form of speech, a way for us to commune and communicate with God. There is a certain sense in which God’s sovereignty should influence our attitude toward prayer, at least with respect to adoration. If anything, our understanding of God’s sovereignty should provoke us to an intense prayer life of thanksgiving. Because of such knowledge, we should see that every benefit, every good and perfect gift, is an expression of the abundance of His grace.

The more we understand God's sovereignty, the more our prayers will be filled with thanksgiving.

In what way could God's sovereignty negatively affect the prayer of contrition, of confession? Perhaps we could draw the conclusion that our sin is ultimately God's responsibility and that our confession is an "accusation of guilt against God Himself. Every true Christian knows that he cannot blame God for his sin. I may not understand the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, but I do realize that what stems from the wickedness of my own heart may not be assigned to the will of God. So we must pray because we are guilty, pleading the pardon of the Holy One whom we have offended.

The Sovereignty of God and Prayer

Article by John Piper Modal

Founder & Teacher, desiringGod.org

I am often asked, "If you believe God works *all things* according to the counsel of his will (Ephesians 1:11) and that his knowledge of all things past, present, and future is infallible, then what is the point of praying that anything happen?" Usually this question is asked in relation to human decision: "If God has predestined some to be his sons and chosen them before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4,5), then what's the point in praying for anyone's conversion?"

The implicit argument here is that if prayer is to be possible at all man must have the power of self-determination. That is, all man's decisions must *ultimately* belong to himself, not God. For otherwise he is determined by God and all his decisions are really

fixed in God's eternal counsel. Let's examine the reasonableness of this argument by reflecting on the example cited above.

God Decides Who Will Be Saved

1. "Why pray for anyone's conversion if God has chosen before the foundation of the world who will be his sons?" A person in need of conversion is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1); he is "enslaved to sin" (Romans 6:17; John 8:34); "the god of this world has blinded his mind that he might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians. 4:4); his heart is hardened against God (Ephesians 4:18) so that he is hostile to God and in rebellion against God's will (Romans 8:7).

Now I would like to turn the question back to my questioner: If you insist that this man must have the power of ultimate self-determination, what is the point of praying for him? What do you want God to do for him? You can't ask that God overcome the man's rebellion, for rebellion is precisely what the man is now choosing, so that would mean God overcame his choice and took away his power of self-determination. But how can God save this man unless he act so as to change the man's heart from hard hostility to tender trust?

Will you pray that God enlighten his mind so that he truly see the beauty of Christ and believe? If you pray this, you are in effect asking God no longer to leave the determination of the man's will in his own power. You are asking God to do something within the man's mind (or heart) so that he will surely see and believe. That is, you are conceding that the *ultimate* determination of the man's decision to trust Christ is God's, not merely his.

God's Sovereignty Enables Prayer

What I am saying is that it is not the doctrine of God's sovereignty which thwarts prayer for the conversion of sinners. On the contrary, it is the unbiblical notion of self-determination which

would consistently put an end to all prayers for the lost. Prayer is a request that *God* do something. But the only thing God can do to save a lost sinner is to overcome his resistance to God. If you insist that he retain his self-determination, then you are insisting that he remain without Christ. For "no one can come to Christ unless it is *given* him from the Father" (John 6:65, 44).

Only the person who rejects human self-determination can consistently pray for God to save the lost. My prayer for unbelievers is that *God* will do for them what he did for Lydia: He opened her heart so that she gave heed to what Paul said (Acts 16:14). I will pray that *God*, who once said, "Let there be light!", will by that same creative power "shine in their hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). I will pray that *he* will "take out their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). I will pray that they be born not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of *God* (John 1:13). And with all my praying I will try to "be kind and to teach and correct with gentleness and patience, if perhaps *God* may grant them repentance and freedom from Satan's snare" (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

In short, I do not ask God to sit back and wait for my neighbor to decide to change. I do not suggest to God that he keep his distance lest his beauty become irresistible and violate my neighbor's power of self-determination. No! I pray that he ravish my unbelieving neighbor with his beauty, that he unshackle the enslaved will, that he make the dead alive and that he suffer no resistance to stop him lest my neighbor perish.

The Relationship between Prayer and Evangelism

2. If someone now says, "O.K., granted that a person's conversion is ultimately determined by God' I still don't see the point of your prayer. If God chose before the foundation of the

world who would be converted, what function does your prayer have?" My answer is that it has a function like that of preaching: How shall the lost believe in whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach unless they are sent (Romans 10:14f.)? Belief in Christ is a gift of God (John 6:65; 2 Timothy 2:25; Ephesians 2:8), but God has ordained that the means by which men believe on Jesus is through the preaching of men.

It is simply naive to say that *if* no one spread the gospel, all those predestined to be sons of God (Ephesians 1:5) would be converted anyway. The reason this is naive is because it overlooks the fact that the *preaching* of the gospel is just as predestined as is the *believing* of the gospel: Paul was set apart for his preaching ministry before he was born (Galatians 1:15), as was Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5). Therefore, to ask, "If we don't evangelize, will the elect be saved?" is like asking, "If there is no predestination, will the predestined be saved?" God knows those who are his and he will raise up messengers to win them. If someone refuses to be a part of that plan, because he dislikes the idea of being tampered with before he was born, then he will be the loser, not God and not the elect. "You will certainly carry out God's purpose however you act but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John." (*Problem of Pain* chapter 7, *Anthology*, p 910, cf. p 80)

God Uses Means

Prayer is like preaching in that it is a human act also. It is a human act that God has ordained and which he delights in because it reflects the dependence of his creatures upon him. He has promised to respond to prayer, and his response is just as contingent upon our prayer as our prayer is in accordance with his will. "And this is the confidence which we have before him, that if we ask anything *according to his will*, he hears us" (1 John 5:14). When we don't know how to pray according to God's will

but desire it earnestly, "the Spirit of God intercedes for us *according to the will of God*" (Romans 8:27).

In other words, just as God will see to it that his Word is proclaimed as a means to saving the elect, so he will see to it that all those prayers are prayed which he has promised to respond to. I think Paul's words in Romans 15:18 would apply equally well to his preaching and his praying ministry: "I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles." Even our prayers are a gift from the one who "works in us that which is pleasing in his sight" (Hebrews 13:21). Oh, how grateful we should be that he has chosen us to be employed in this high service! How eager we should be to spend much time in prayer!

God has appointed prayer as his way of dispensing, and our way of obtaining all promised good.

The Prayer Meeting and Its History, J. B. Johnston

A church is never more like the New Testament church than when it is praying.

He answered prayer—not in the way I sought
Nor in the way that I had thought He ought;
But in His own good way; and I could see
He answered in the fashion best for me.