

Pleading the Promises of God

By Paul R. Blake

On Friday evening, May 17, 1850 at Moorfields, C. G. Finney presented a sermon on the Promises of God. In it, he explained the connection between the promises of God and the prayers of believers. He observed the following:

- 1) God's promises are given to reveal His will and His desire to give us all good things.
- 2) God is good, but does not give us all good things He has promised. For example, He may not pardon our sins; justice is as much an attribute of His goodness as mercy is.
- 3) His promises are given on the condition of our faith manifested by our prayers pleading that He will fulfill His promises, and on our cooperation with and obedience to His will. His promises are not necessarily designed to produce faith nor are they a product of our faith, but are granted on the condition of our faith.
- 4) Therefore we conclude that God wants to bless us and has promised to do so. However, He does not give all of the blessings He promised, because certain ones are conditional. His conditions for those promises are two-fold: first, that we keep His commands, and second, that we by faith plead in prayer for those things He promised. In short, God wants to give us His blessings, but He is bound by the conditions of the promises to wait until we ask for them in faith.

A. M. Gesswein wrote of a visit with a 73 year old blacksmith and part time preacher named Ambrose Whaley whose prayers moved him as a 24 year old preacher. He asked how the old blacksmith learned to pray like that. He took him to the haymow of his barn where he had two Bibles lying on a bale of hay to remind him of the promises God made in His word. And then he said about learning to pray well: "Young man, learn to plead the promises of God."

In this series of articles, we will consider prayer and the questions about its effectiveness with which 21st century Christians struggle.

What is God's role in His promises and our prayers?

What is the purpose of prayer? Why do we need to plead with God to fulfill His promises?

What is the relationship between our faith and the power of prayer?

Why should one keep praying when God does not answer his prayer?

At the fundamental level, certain facts must be more than just accepted; they must be fully embraced by faith as more immutable than the laws of physics. Let the scriptures do the talking; they are far more eloquent than any man.

First, God keeps His promises. "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Num.23:19). "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Heb.10:23). "Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (Isa.46:11). "My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips" (Psalm 89:34). "Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you; And therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; Blessed are all those who wait for Him" (Isa.30:18).

"...Do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, 'Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.' And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. ...God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast..." (Heb. 6:12-15, 17-19ff).

Second, God listens to our prayers. “For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers...” (1Peter 3:12). “The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears...” (Psalm 34:17). “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” (1John 5:14). “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (2Chron. 16:9). “...The LORD will hear when I call to Him” (Psalm 4:3). “He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, And shall not despise their prayer” (Psalm 102:17).

Third, God answers our prayers. “It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.” (Isa.65:24). “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jer. 33:3). “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them” (Mark 11:24). “Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24). “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7). “Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am'” (Isa. 58:9). “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think...” (Eph. 3:20). “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matt.7:7).

God keeps his promises. God hears our prayers. God answers our prayers. The word of God has spoken and the matter has been answered. But often our experiences with prayer lead us to doubt that these three tenets are true. Rare is the person who has fervently prayed and always received the answers and blessings he sought on his knees before the throne of God. As one brother wrote: “Christians get the same diseases as people in the world, and have the same recovery rate. Sick and suffering Christians, who supposedly benefit from the prayers of the church, are no better off than people in the world.” What are we to conclude about the gap between our heartfelt prayers and the apparent lack of Divine response?

We are not the only believers to have asked that question. “...They seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, As a nation that did righteousness, And did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; They take delight in approaching God. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?'" (Isa. 58:2-3).

It would be wrong to offer a glib answer to such a profound question. As the question is weighty, the answer must be equally so. Let's begin at the heart of the question by going to the heart of the questioner. What do we believe? The word of God states unequivocally that God keeps His promises and that He hears and answers our prayers. Our limited experiences often suggest otherwise. Which do we choose to believe: the inspired scriptures or our inadequate reasoning? We cannot understand the answers to the next three questions in this study without answering this matter. Faith is a choice. Faith in prayer is also a choice. Choose. “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2Cor. 5:7). (Upcoming questions: What is the purpose of prayer? Why do we need to plead with God to fulfill His promises? What is the relationship between our faith and the power of prayer? Why should one keep praying when God does not answer his prayer?)