**Chapel Class**

**12.08.19**

**“Providence and Prayer: If God already knows, why pray?” Week 2**

REVIEW

**Providence:** “If creation, was a unique exercise of divine energy causing the world to be, providence is a continued exercise of that same energy whereby the Creator, according to his will, (a) keeps all creatures in being, (b) involves himself in all events and (c) directs all things to their appointed end.” … The doctrine of providence teaches Christians that they are never in the grip of blind forces (fortune, chance, luck, fate) all that happens to them is divinely planned and each event comes as a new summons to trust, obey and rejoice knowing that all is for one’s spiritual and eternal good (Rom 8:28). (J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology*)

Contra fatalism:the belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable

***If I get an answer to prayer sometimes, I think it would have happened anyway.***

**Prayer:** A complete definition of prayer is obtained by combining the two answers of the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, thus: “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, f*or things agreeable to his will,* in the name of Christ *by the help of his Spirit*, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.” (The clauses italicized above are the only two which are not found in both LC and SC). Key texts: Ps. 10:17; Ps 62:8; Matt 7:7-8; 1 John 5:14; John 16:23-24; Rom 8:26 (B.A. Palmer, *A Theology of Prayer*, 13)

A “dynamic monologue” rather than a conversation with God. “In this speaking to God, the Spirt of heaven stirs the spirit of the believer to speak to the heavenly Father. The intercession of the Son carries this prayer to the ear and heart of the Father. Then in deference to the voice of the Son with whom the believer is united, the Father lovingly responds. He causes the thoughts and inclinations of the believer both to engage the divine will (to accomplish God’s purposes) and to inform the human will (to desire and perform God’s purposes.” (B. Chapell, 177)

“As Hallesby reminds us, prayer is the risen Jesus coming on with his resurrection power, given free reign in our lives, then using his authority to enter any situation and change things.” (D. Kelly 31)

***Does prayer change God’s mind?***

1. On one hand, God is represented as one who not only makes up his mind in response to prayer, but who also appears to change his mind because of prayer. For example: Isa. 38:1-6.

***1*** *In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, “Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover.”* ***2*** *Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD,* ***3*** *and said, “Please, O LORD, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.* ***4****Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: Go and say to Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.****6*** *I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city.*’

1. On the other hand, *God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.* Numbers 23:19.
2. How do those truths fit together?

* “The living God is able to be touched by our weakness. Unlike the idols, who have eyes and ears but can neither see nor hear, God both knows and intervenes in the life of his people.” (John Oswalt)
* “Prayer does not change the eternal plan of God. But within that eternal plan are many plans for means and ends.” (John Frame)
* “The scriptural principle is, not that favors are by our importunity wrung from the reluctance of the Divine Being but that they antedate the prayer in the determinations of his sovereign and gracious will; and the true spirit of prayer, which he also imparts is the sign and pledge of the gift to be conveyed. Prayer then … is not the cause which procures through its own efficiency but merely the antecedent condition upon which a predetermined benefit is suspended. The purpose to give is, on Jehovah’s part, sovereign and free; it is the spontaneous movement of his own gracious and loving will. Yet in the exercise of the same sovereignty and goodness, he interposes the prayer of the creature as the channel through which his favor shall descend.” Example Ezek. 36:37 *I will let the house of Israel ask me to do this for them, to increase their people like a flock.* (Palmer)

***If God is in charge, what difference do our prayers make?***

***God already knows and has planned what he will do, so why pray?***

Three reasons (motives) to pray (John Frame)

1. *Normative:* God commands it in Scripture. 1 Thes. 5:17
2. *Existential:* fellowship with the Father. Luke 11:9-13
3. *Situational:* prayer change things. God ordains prayer as a means to change history. There are things that happen because of prayer and things that do not happen because of no prayer. (James 4:2)

On James 5:16b-18. “Calvin is both bold and yet careful in his language. He says prayer ‘in some sense’ affected the weather conditions in Israel. Obviously, in the ultimate sense, God is in charge of everything that occurs – our prayers could not possibly wrest control of any part of the universe away from God. However, it is part of God’s goodness and appointment that he allows the world to be susceptible to our prayers. How he does this – how he maintains control of history and yet makes human prayer and action responsible within history – is one of the most practical mysteries of the Bible.” (Keller, 224)

***How does the Holy Spirit influence our prayers?***

Three “voices” (agents) in prayer. (B.A. Palmer)

1. Jesus Christ intercedes for us *in heaven.* Heb. 7:24-28
2. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us *from within*. Rom. 8:26.

The Christian cries out in prayer. “The Spirit takes what Jesus is praying and makes (causes) us to pray for it. The is how our intercessions re-echo the intercession of the great High Priest who appears in heaven for us. Then the secret will, known to the great High Priest and the Father is re-echoed in some way in our praying by the Spirit who comes from the Father and the Son. This explains how our praying on the basis of God’s reveled will begins to get in line with the secret will.” (cited in D. Kelly 65)