

DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL (18)
SEEKING HIS UNREVEALED WILL-Part Six
“WHEN GOD SEEMS SILENT” – Part Two
Sermon 10/21/18

Last week we talked about the times when God seems silent; when He delays His response to our prayers. We looked at four reasons why God seems silent while we wait expectantly for Him to respond to our needs and concerns.

- #1 – WE DO NOT ASK
- #2 – WE ASK WITH WRONG MOTIVES
- #3 – GOD IS TESTING US
- #4 – GOD IS FIGHTING FOR US

James tells us that we have not because we ask not. Sometimes we simply expect God to do something because we believe He is omnipotent and omniscient; In other words, we believe God sees and knows everything that is happening to us and will therefore take action on our behalf without our asking. God is indeed omnipotent and omniscient but He has made a condition to His moving in our life. We must first ask, and then He will answer. We can wait expectantly for God to move while we remain silent and worry over our concerns but we will find no peace; Paul tells us that the peace of God comes only when we let our concerns be known through prayer and supplication It is only after we let our requests be made known to God that His peace will rule over our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:6-7). So if God remains silent He may only be mimicking your own silence towards Him.

James also tells us that God is silent towards our prayers because we are asking with wrong motives. We are asking for something that will allow us to pursue our own pleasures. God provides for spiritual sustenance, not for fleshy indulgence. He will respond to prayers that seek after His will but will remain silent when we pray to fulfill the desires of our flesh.

In these two cases God's silence was the result of negatives in our lives. We did not ask so we did not receive, or we did ask but our motives negated God's willingness to answer. But we also looked at the positive side of our requests; when we ask with good motives, sincerely seeking after His will, and yet God still seems silent and unresponsive.

It was here we learned that God may remain silent in order to test us, to see what is in our hearts. Satan would have us give up; to quit the race and follow our own path. But that is not the purpose of God's silence. His purpose is to see what we will do when faced with adversity. God wants to reveal to us the depth of love or the depth of resistance we have towards Him. He wants us to understand that we are not to walk by sight; we are to walk by faith. When God delays His answer He does so, not to punish us, but rather to test our faith. Our response to this test will determine whether or not we will receive God's peace in the midst of adversity.

The last thing we looked at is the battle that is going on in the heavenlies between the messengers of God and of Satan. We saw this in the book of Daniel where God's angel was sent to deliver an answer to Daniel's prayer but he was delayed while he fought against demonic forces

for twenty-one days until the archangel Michael came to help him and they finally won the battle.

From this example we saw that sometimes God's silence is the result of a battle in the heavenlies between the forces of good and the forces of evil. God may immediately send an answer to our prayer but the answer may be delayed because the spiritual forces of wickedness are fighting against the spiritual forces of God in the heavenly places, preventing our answer from being delivered.

Of all the reasons for God's silence these last two are the most applicable to sincere believers who pray earnestly for answers. Why do I say that? Because the Scriptures tell us that God's eyes and ears are open to the prayers of His people. Heaven is not closed to their prayers.

1 PETER 3:12

"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayers."

The eyes of the Lord are on those who are called by His name and His ears are attentive to their prayers. God knows what is happening to them. He sees and hears when they cry out to Him. His eyes are not shut nor are His ears closed to the cries of His people. As God's redeemed people, made righteous by the blood of Christ, we can be assured that God hears our cries and does not dismiss them.

So if God seems silent it could mean that either God is testing us, or there is a battle going on in the heavenlies which is delaying our answer. Knowing this we must not give up. We must persevere in prayer until we either pass the test or God's angels win the battle in the heavenlies.

In a moment we will look at other reasons why God seems silent when we pray. But I first want to look at some verses from Matthew and John. From these verses we will learn that there are conditions to answered prayer.

JOHN 14:14

(Jesus said), "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."

The first condition is this:

WE MUST ASK IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

When we pray "in Jesus name" it is like knocking on the door of heaven. When we are asked, "Who is there?" we respond, "We have come in the name of Jesus to make our requests known to God." The name of Jesus will open the door of heaven so that our prayers can be heard. Faith and trust in the name of Jesus allows us to boldly enter the throne room of God and present our petitions before Him (Hebrews 14:16).

The second condition is this:

OUR REQUEST MUST GLORIFY THE FATHER

When we ask anything in His name Jesus says He will do it. But the purpose of Jesus

granting our request is so that the Father would be glorified through the Son. This implies that whatever request glorifies the Father will be granted. Whatever does not glorify the Father will not be granted. Let's look now at 1st John.

1 JOHN 5:14-15

“This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.”

The third condition is this:

WE MUST PRAY ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD

When we pray according to the will of God we have the promise that He hears and will answer our prayer. If it is not His will, God will not answer our prayer. This is one of the reasons we have been on a journey over the past several months to discover the will of God. We cannot pray according to His will if we do not know what His will is. Let's turn now to the book of Matthew.

MATTHEW 18:19-20

“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

The fourth condition is this:

TWO OR THREE OF US MUST AGREE ABOUT ANYTHING WE ASK

When we come together and cannot agree on what the will of God is we cannot be united in prayer. Jesus says when two or three are gathered together in His name He is there in their midst. This implies that Jesus is guiding and directing our thoughts so that we will be united in our requests and whatever we ask will be in accordance with the will of God. This does not mean that we cannot pray by ourselves as individuals. It simply means when we gather together for prayer we must agree so that we can be united in our requests.

Here is what we have learned so far. As God's redeemed people we are assured that God hears our cries; His eyes and ears are attentive to our prayers. Whether or not they will be granted is dependent upon four things: (1) are we dependent upon the name of Jesus for entry into heaven, (2) will the answer to our prayers glorify God, (3) are we praying according to the will of God, and (4) are we in agreement with others in our prayers?

Let's look now at additional reasons why God seems silent when we pray. If we comply with each of the above conditions does that mean all our prayers will be answered? If we pray in the name of Jesus in accordance with His will and are in agreement with two or three believers will our prayers always be answered? If the answer is yes, and I believe it is, then why is it that we don't always see answers to these types of prayers?

Before I answer that let me read a passage of Scripture that deals with prayers that plead for

God's will to be done but God's response is to wait. These prayers come from those who have died and are in heaven and their answer comes immediately and directly from God Himself. Even in death, those martyred for their faith ask God why He is delaying His justice.

REVELATION 6:9-11

"...I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?..."

"And they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also."

There is a time and a purpose for everything under heaven. When we pray for something we know is God's will we can rest assured that it will be answered. Scripture promises this to us. But it does not promise immediate results. Like the answer to the martyr's residing in heaven, God has implemented a plan to bring all things under submission to His will. Every prayer uttered that is according to His will will be granted. But that may not occur until certain events transpire.

Let me show you what I mean by using a few practical examples. Most of us have prayed at one time or another for God to conform us to His image; that we may be more like Jesus; and that our desires would be under submission to His. These are all prayers that God will grant because they conform to His will. Yet we know in our own lives that even though God says He is at work within us to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13), we are not yet fully compliant to His will.

Let me use another example. As believers we know that life begins at conception so we pray for the unborn children across the world who are in danger of being aborted. According to the latest statistics 125,000 abortions are performed every day around the world. As believers we pray against this because we believe it is God's will for these children to live. And yet abortion continues and our prayers remain unanswered. Here is what R.C. Sproul, Jr. of Ligonier Ministries had to say about these types of unanswered prayers.

"The reason some prayers haven't been answered is not too difficult to understand. God has determined to glorify His name in the battles, in our pursuit of godliness, in our repentance for our failures. He has determined to glorify His name in the battle over the little babies. He certainly could end all of history whenever He wishes, making all things right. But such is clearly not His will.

"The more difficult question then, given His will is not to complete history now, is what did Jesus mean when He said that what we ask in His name He would grant. My answer is this – He will so grant..."

" My heart's desire is that I would be like Him, And He is busy making that happen. My heart's desire is that all the babies would be safe in their mother's wombs. And He is busy making

that happen. A day will come when both of these desires will come to pass, and Jesus is moving history forward to that day.

“These two principles come together when we remember the faithfulness of what it means to pray in Christ’s name – it is to seek, ultimately, the one thing He is seeking, the glory of God. My sanctification, even the rescue of the unborn, these are goals near to my heart, but they are subservient to the greatest goal, that God would be glorified...

Paul tells us in Philippians 2:10 that, *“At the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* God will one day bring everything under submission to His will. This will result in glory being given to the Father of us all. We frequently pray for this to occur yet this has yet to happen.

So here is the fifth reason why God seems silent when we pray:

#5-GOD IS INTEGRATING OUR PRAYERS INTO HIS ETERNAL PLAN

The best example of God integrating our prayers into His eternal plan comes from the prayers of the Jews. God promised them a Messiah who, through the implementation of a New Covenant, would provide a way for the forgiveness of their sins. Those who believed God prayed earnestly and consistently for the Promised Messiah to come. But it was several thousand years for some and centuries for others before their prayers were fulfilled. Their prayers seemed to them unanswered; but God integrated their prayers into His eternal plan so that, as the Scriptures say, *“When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman”* (Galatians 4:4). All of these seemingly unanswered prayers were answered through Jesus *“at just the right time”* (Romans 5:6). The same holds true for us regarding His second coming.

God is true to His word and does answer prayers that are according to His will, prayed in the name of Jesus, and whose answers will result in glorifying the Father. But like the prayers of the Jews, some of our prayers may not be fulfilled until God places all things under the feet of Jesus. Though all who call of the name of the Lord have been sanctified and are being sanctified, we will not be fully sanctified until we receive our heavenly inheritance. Though we pray to be submissive to His will we will not be fully submissive until we leave this mortal body behind and receive our eternal one. We pray for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven but it will not be fully done on earth until Jesus reigns; and even then it will only last a thousand years before Satan is released and resistance to God’s will returns. Not until God creates a new heaven and a new earth will God’s will be completely done on earth as it is in heaven.

My point is this: Even when we pray for things which we know are God’s will they may not occur until Jesus returns. That does not mean God did not answer our prayers. It simply means that our prayers became part of God’s larger eternal plan. A plan that is still unfolding as the world awaits God’s final victory over man’s rebellion against Him. This should give us courage to persevere in prayer – to keep on knocking, keep on seeking, keep on asking (Matthew 7:7) for God’s will to be done; in due time it will come to pass.

Now, I need to clarify one thing. Asking for something in the name of Jesus is not like waving a magic wand and saying *“abra cadabra”* in order for a rabbit to appear out of a hat. The

name of Jesus is not a magic word that when spoken ensures we will receive what we ask for. We can pray, “Lord, please buy me a Mercedes Benz” or “Lord, please let me win the Lottery” and even add “in Jesus’ name”, but that prayer will never be answered because it is a prayer spoken with wrong motives. It feeds the flesh and not the spirit.

Those who are called by His name have a right to use the name of Jesus because His name grants them access to the throne room of God. But using the name of Jesus will not magically transform a fleshly prayer into a righteous one. Prayers asked with the wrong motives will still not be answered no matter whose name is attached to the prayer.

David reminds us of this important truth when he wrote: *“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened”* (Psalm 66:18). When we cherish sin more than we cherish the Lord, God remains silent to our prayers. There is no better example of this than what is found in the book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was a young man when God called him to warn the Jewish people to repent of their sins. He told them if they did not heed his warnings judgment was coming in the form of the armies of Babylon. For many years the rulers, elders, religious leaders, and people of both Israel and Judah refused to heed the warnings of Jeremiah, going so far as to beat and imprison him in order to silence his message. They became so obstinate, so against the word of the Lord, that God finally said to Jeremiah,

JEREMIAH 7:16; 8:6 (NIV)

“Do not pray for these people or offer any plea or petition for them, because I will not listen when they call to me in their time of distress...I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. None of them repent of their wickedness, saying, ‘What have I done?’”

What we learn from this is that a refusal to repent after being confronted with our sin can result in God’s refusal to answer prayer. But there is something else I need to highlight; for we have all come from a background of constant sinning yet at some point God heard our prayers for help and rescued us from our sin.

Here is the difference between the unrepentant people of Israel during the time of Jeremiah and we who have received mercy in our time of need. When God heard our cry for help He heard a cry of repentance. We acknowledged our sin, sought forgiveness for it, and were willing to exchange our life of sin for a life of righteousness. The people of Israel were not willing to repent, in fact saw nothing wrong with what they were doing. They did not wish to live under the counsel of God but rather sought their own counsel. As David said in Psalm 81:

PSALM 81:11-12

“...My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart to walk in their own devices.”

In addition to not listening to their prayers God gave them over to the stubbornness of their own hearts to do what they felt was right in their own eyes. If they would not heed His call to repentance and His warnings of judgment then He would give them free reign to reap the

consequences of their actions.

2 Timothy tells us that *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”* What we can learn from these Scriptures is that unrepentant hearts receive unmerciful judgment. But repentant hearts receive merciful grace. Let me say that again.

Unrepentant hearts receive unmerciful judgment
Repentant hearts receive merciful grace

Though God will use His people and His word to draw unrepentant sinners into the circle of His love, if they consistently refuse to repent of their sin and seek after their own counsel, God will eventually stop listening to their prayers. He will even close His ears to those who pray for their repentance, as He did with Jeremiah.

So here is the final reason for God’s silence:
#6-GOD CLOSES HIS EARS TO UNREPENTANT SINNERS

If those who are far from the fold of God truly seek after Him with their whole heart, God says He will be found. (*“You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart”*- Jeremiah 29:13). But if their heart is full of sin and they refuse to repent, God will give them over to their own desires and will close His ears to their prayers. David confirms this in Psalm 66.

PSALM 66:18-20

“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me!”

There are reasons for God’s silence. Some of them are self-imposed; others are a result of testing or battles occurring in the heavenlies. If God is silent because of something we have or have not done we must adjust our ways in order to break His silence. If we are being tested we must walk by faith and not by sight so that we do not fail the test. If we are awaiting the results of a battle we must persevere in prayer so that the battle may be won. If we are deep in sin we must repent so that we may receive God’s merciful grace.

God has a deep desire to answer prayer but He will actively resist our prayers if we actively resist Him. If we desire His will to be done, rely on Jesus to plead our case before Him, seek after that which will glorify His name, and agree with others so we can be united in prayer, God will not be silent for long. He will open up the windows of heaven and pour out His blessings on us.

I hope this journey into the reasons for God’s silence has been helpful. Next time I speak I will talk about why, even when we understand what the will of God is, we still refuse to do it. The battle which the angels are waging in the heavenlies over our prayers is not the only battle that must be fought. We too must fight our own battle – flesh against Spirit. We will look at this next time.

Unless otherwise noted all scriptures have been taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked “NIV” are from the NIV® Bible (The Holy Bible, New International Version®), copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.