

The Prayers Of All Saints

Rev. Herman HoeksemaThe opening verses of the eighth chapter of the book of Revelation depict to us a scene that will serve as a striking illustration of the Word of God in [James 5:16](#): "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." The scene introduces us into heaven on the eve of the judgments that are to be executed upon the earth when the seven trumpets are blown. Six seals have already been opened, and the one hundred and forty four thousand saints have received the seal of God on their forehead, that throughout all the judgments of God on earth they may be preserved unto final salvation. Now the seventh seal is to be opened. But the seventh seal becomes manifest as consisting of seven trumpets that are to be blown by as many angels. These trumpets in distinction from the seals symbolize, no doubt, that the judgments of the Most High that are to be executed in the world will increase in severity. Troublesome times therefore, are about to come. Terrible judgments are impending. Already the seven angels that must serve as the agents of these divine judgments stand in readiness. The trumpets are given unto them. And it is at this important moment that the book of Revelation pictures to us the significant scene to which I referred a moment ago.

There is silence in heaven for the space of about half an hour. And this silence is expressive of the reverence of adoration, of the solemnity of an hour of prayer. For, an hour of prayer it evidently is. The prayers of the saints, of all the saints, are to be presented to Jehovah-Sabaoth. An angel mingles incense with the prayers of the saints and with the incense offers them to God upon the golden altar. The meaning, no doubt, is that the prayers of God's people certainly reach His ears and are pleasing to Him. The prayers rise with the smoke of the incense to Him that sitteth upon the throne. And they are answered. For, from the very altar upon which the incense had been kindled and from which the prayers were offered, fire was taken and cast upon the earth. And the result is, first of all, that there were voices and lightnings and thunderings, and an earthquake, those harbingers of divine wrath and judgment; and secondly, that immediately after the seven angels prepare themselves to sound.

It is not my purpose to call your attention to this passage of the book of Revelation alone. Rather would I take from it its central thought and general significance, which is, not merely that the prayers of the saints are certainly remembered by the Most High, so that the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much, but more particularly that the answer to the prayers of the saints revealed itself frequently in the form of judgments on the earth, as symbolized in these voices, lightnings, thunderings and the earthquake; and is indicated by the fact that immediately upon the presentation of these prayers of the saints the seven angels prepare themselves to sound. In fact, we hope to see that God's answer to the prayers of all the saints necessarily implies an element of judgment for the world. This pamphlet, therefore, is a brief treatise of:

The Prayers Of All Saints.

I. Their Idea.

II. Their Contents.

III. Their Answer.

Their Idea

Innumerable passages of Holy Writ speak of the prayers of the saints, both in the Old Testament and in the New. God's people are presented as a praying people throughout the Word of God. They cry to Jehovah in distress, they call upon Him in the day of trouble, they seek His fellowship, they worship and adore His holy name, they praise Him and give Him thanks. And they are admonished always to pray and never to faint, yea, to pray without ceasing. Several prayers of the saints are preserved to us in Scripture, as the prayers of Abraham, of Moses, the prayers of David and Solomon, the prayers of Isaiah and Hezekiah, the prayers of Elijah and of the remnant according to the election in captivity, the prayers of the Church in Jerusalem and of Paul; and above all the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as recorded in [John 17](#) and His prayer in the hour of agony in the garden. And the Lord has left us what may be considered a model for all our prayer, embodying in a few petitions the principles that should govern all our prayers.

If we consult our Bible we find that different words are employed for different forms of prayer and to express different aspects of this sacred engagement of the whole soul. First of all, there is in the Old Testament a word that may also signify to judge. If you ask how it is possible that the same term can be used to express the act of judging and that of praying the answer is probably that the root-meaning of the word calls to our mind a roll that is evened out or leveled, and thus the word signifies the act of exhibiting or exposing one's cause, and that, with application to the holy occupation of prayer it means: to exhibit one's cause before the face of the Lord. The word is used for instance, in [Ps. 5:3](#), "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee and will look up." Another word is commonly translated *supplication*. The term has the same root in it as the word that is used for "grace", and presents to us the act of prayer as an invocation of God's favor, grace, pity or mercy, according to the condition in which the worshipper is found. Thus we meet with the term in [Ps. 6:9](#): "The Lord hath heard my supplication"; and very frequently in the Old Testament. A third term means literally *to bring forth*, to produce, to speak; the contents of this speech depending on the state and condition of the speaker. Sometimes it is, therefore, translated very properly by "to cry out", as e.g. in [Ps. 55:17](#), "I will pray and cry aloud", sometimes it is merely rendered by "to talk", as in [Ps. 105:2](#): "Talk ye of all his marvelous works." There is yet another word that is frequently employed to denote a certain form of prayer, usually when the prayer consists of a cry for help from the midst of suffering, persecution or oppression. It is found, e.g., in [Ex. 3:9](#), "The cry of the children of Israel is come unto Me"; and in [Ps. 9:18](#): "He forgetteth not the cry of the humble."

If we turn to the New Testament we find that also there several terms are used to denote different aspects of prayer. The word that is translated *worship* in our English Bible is rather formal and expresses the proper attitude of the soul, that of profound reverence, when it presents itself before the face of the supreme Majesty in heaven. Overwhelmed by His infinite glory and holiness the soul lies prostrate before Him and worships. Besides, there are three words, that respectively denote the childlike confidence and fellowship of faith, a sense of need expressed in prayer and supplication, and devotional address. The Lord employs the word that denotes profound reverence when He replies to the last temptation of the devil: "The Lord thy God shalt thou worship and Him only shalt thou serve." The apostle Paul uses the word that is expressive of confidence and fellowship and is the root-meaning of "to meet" in [Tim. 2:1](#), when he admonishes the church: "I exhort that supplications, prayers intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men." He uses the word that denotes the expression of a sense of need when in Phil. 4:6 he exhorts to be careful in nothing, but to let our requests be known unto God in prayer, a word that is strengthened by the term supplication. And the word that denotes devotional address is found e.g. in [Acts 1:14](#), where we read of the disciples that they continued with one accord in prayer.

Then, too, the Word of God expresses in various ways the activity of the believing soul in prayer. It is called a lifting up of one's soul to God, a calling upon the Lord, a seeking of Him or of His face, a bowing toward His holy place, an entering into His sanctuary, a drawing near unto the Lord, a crying unto Him or a pouring out of the heart before Him, a waiting patiently for Him and even a panting of the soul after Him.

From all this we may conclude that all true prayer contains the following elements. It is an activity, a spiritual activity of the entire soul, with heart and mind and all its strength. It is, in the second place, such an act of the soul as brings us consciously in the presence of the living God, so that we are near Him, enter into His Holy place, present ourselves before His face. From this it follows, that all prayer is an act of worship, whereby the soul prostrates itself before the glory of His heavenly majesty, lost in wonder and humble reverence by the contemplation of His holiness and infinite power. Again, there is in all prayer an expression of childlike confidence, rooted in the assurance that this infinite majesty is filled with love to usward and will give unto us every good thing. Besides, there is the sense of our real need, which is fundamentally a longing for His favor, and the acknowledgment that He is the sole Fount of all good. And thus, finally, there is in all prayer the expression of our need and of the heartfelt desire that He hear us and fill our every want. Prayer is the holy activity of the believing, regenerated soul, whereby we acknowledge the living God as the sole and infinite Fount of all good and desire to drink from that Fountain!

When, therefore, we speak, following Scripture, of the prayers of the saints, this modifier is not to be understood as a distinguishing term, differentiating between their prayers and those of the ungodly. If prayer is worship and devotional address to the living God, if it is an acknowledgment of the living God as the sole Fount of all good, a seeking of Him and presenting of ourselves before Him with all our needs that He may fulfill them and bless us with

His favor, it will be evident that it is quite impossible to speak of the prayers of the ungodly. The wicked can-not approach God in prayer. This is impossible from God's side, because to the wicked, God is a consuming fire. The Holy One can have no fellowship with the sinner as he is in himself. His sins testify against the ungodly and in His justice God must consume him. But this is equally impossible from the viewpoint of the ungodly.

In the first place because he is carnal and stands in enmity against God. There is no fear of God before his eyes. His soul does not long for the living God, but flees far from Him. How, then, shall he ever seek Him and earnestly desire to know Him and extol His holy name?

And in the second place, he has no sense of his real needs, and, therefore, no need of God. He is carnal in his desires. And he conceives of his needs as carnal. He minds earthly things. On the things of this world, apart from their relation to God and apart, too, from the things that are eternal, he has set his mind and heart. The spiritual things of the Kingdom of God, righteousness and peace and eternal life he does not know, neither does he desire them. What he desires is earthly things, health and wealth, power and position, name and fame, that which he calls "prosperity", in order that he may press them into the service of sin. It is for this reason that you will never witness an attempt on the part of the ungodly world to imitate the prayers of the saints, as long as he may possess a reasonable share of these earthly, material things to the satisfaction of the flesh. When even these things are threatened, when they are taken away from him, in times of great stress and depression, the world is not infrequently the first to remind us of the need of prayer. But even then, the motive and the purpose of this imitation of prayer is purely carnal and for that reason the prayer and sacrifice of the wicked are abomination to Jehovah!

The prayers of the saints, however, are pleasing to the Lord, as, in the passage from the eighth chapter of the book of Revelation, as indicated by the fact that they are presented as rising up to God in the smoke of the incense kindled by the fire from the altar. The saints are those that are in Christ Jesus. It is by virtue of their relation to Him that they are saints. Outside of Him they lie in the midst of death. In themselves they are nothing but children of wrath, guilty and corrupt, and from their own carnal nature no prayer could possibly arise that is acceptable to God. But in Christ Jesus they are, first of all, justified. Their sins are blotted out in the blood of the Lamb and they are righteous before God by virtue of their forensic relation to their representative head, Jesus Christ. For that reason they pray by faith only. In the consciousness of a saving and justifying faith, that is, in the consciousness that they belong to that legal corporation of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head, they draw near into the inner sanctuary and present themselves before God without fear. They know that God can receive only the righteous and they are assured by faith that they are clothed with the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, their Lord. Christ only is the ground of their approach of the living God. Nor is this all. Their relation to their Lord is not merely forensic, it is also spiritual. Christ does not only represent them, He also dwells in them by His Spirit. They are not only justified, they are also sanctified. The life of the risen Lord is the life of their life: "I live, yet not I, Christ liveth in me!" The mind of Christ is the light of their mind, the will of Christ motivates their will from within. The result is

a radical change in their whole attitude of God, to sin and righteousness, to the world and the kingdom of God, to things below and things above, to things temporal and things eternal. They love God, seek Him, adore and worship Him, long for His favor which is more to them than life, know of an inner desire to be pleasing to Him, strive after righteousness and peace, hate sin, yearn after perfection, seek the things which are above and desire all things only in as far as they are subservient to the will and counsel of the Most High. Of that life, renewed in Christ Jesus, with all its motives and purposes with all its need and longing, with all its yearning and aspiration, the prayers of the saints are the expression. They are the expression of what God Himself by the Spirit of Christ works to His glory in the hearts of His own elect.

You will understand, then, that when we speak of the prayers of the saints, and, more emphatically, of the prayers of all the saints, not everything is included that from the imperfect church-militant is sent to the throne of grace by the name of prayer. For, first of all, we may not forget that the people of God in the world have not reached the limit of perfection. The motions of sin are still in their MEMBERS and they have but a small beginning of the new obedience. This imperfection characterizes all their life and conversation in the world. Small wonder, then, that it should above all characterize their prayer, that highest and most delicate expression of their gratitude. Also their prayers are often carnal and sinful. They also are often tempted to seek earthly things. And all such prayers or elements in prayer as has its source in this carnal imperfection of the saints in the world, are eliminated, when we speak of the prayers of all the saints. We merely have in mind the prayers that arise from the inner principle of regeneration, are rooted in faith in harmony with the will of God and to His glory.

In the second place, we must not forget that often we know not what we should pray for as we ought, for the simple reason that we are not acquainted with the details of the counsel of God. In general we know the will of God, for God has revealed it unto us. But in concrete detail and in particular circumstances we are not introduced into the secret counsel of the Most High. It is then, that the Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be uttered. And this groaning of the Spirit, often, no doubt, contrary to the expressed desire of the saint, is included in these prayers of all the saints as they are presented to and received by the Lord our God. And in the third place, there is in the phrase "the prayers of all the saints" a certain generalization. It refers to those prayers which all the saints sent in unison to the throne of grace. The prayers of all saints may have their individual and personal aspects, in deepest root they are all the same. They have their origin in the same God, they are mediated through the same Christ, they are wrought in the heart by the same Spirit, they arise from the consciousness of saints that are united in one Body, saints that have the same needs, the same life, the same purpose and whose prayers, therefore, are principally and fundamentally of the same contents. They are the prayers of all the saints, from the old and from the new dispensation. In all lands and from among all nations. And they constitute one mighty chorus, grand and harmonious, the different voices of which are determined by an endless variety of different saints, differing in character and name, in sound and language, differing because of time and circumstance, but nevertheless contributing one and all to the beauty and grandeur of one mighty God-adoring theme!

Prayer's Content

What is that theme? What constitutes the contents of the prayers of all saints throughout the ages? What remains of the prayers of all saints, when all those elements that are due to our present imperfection and ignorance, all the sinful elements of our prayers are eliminated? What is the meaning of that one grand melody of prayer that rises in the smoke of the incense from the altar to Him that sitteth upon the throne, that is pleasant music in his divine ears, that has the approval of His divine heart, that is certainly heard by Him and answered and that, therefore, may be concluded with a mighty Hallelujah, Amen!

First of all we may remark here that the contents of the prayers of all the saints certainly concentrate about the will of God. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!" certainly must be the basic note of all true prayer. This stands to reason. First of all, because only that which is in harmony with the will of God can possibly be pleasing to Him. And secondly, because it is the inmost desire of all the saints that His will may be done. A prayer of the saints can, therefore, never openly demand or secretly desire that our will be imposed upon God's will; it is, on the contrary, above all complete submission to the will of the Lord of heaven and earth and the desire for its realization. And this may be applied both to God's ethical will and to the will of His counsel. Application of this truth to prayer in its relation to God's ethical will probably will not meet with serious opposition. Prayers are the expression of the holy desires of regenerated and sanctified saints and their contents cannot include sinful objects. That the prayers of the saints also are in harmony with the counsel of God or the will of God's decree, however, is not always admitted. And yet, nothing could be more manifest than the truth of that statement.

First of all, it must be self-evident that God will not alter His good pleasure because of our prayers and that, therefore, our prayers are only heard in so far as, and because they are, in accord with His eternal counsel concerning all things. As our prayers are presented to Him and rise up before Him in the smoke of the incense, they certainly are in perfect harmony with the divine decree.

Secondly, it is clear, that no child of God would ever desire anything of which he knows that it is in conflict with the will of God's decree; and as we remarked before, in its general course that will of God's counsel is known to him. He knows that all the elect must be gathered in and no one else shall have a place in glory. He knows that the kingdom of God must come and that it will come not in the way of gradual evolution, but through the final wonder of grace at the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. He knows that before that final coming many things must come to pass, the gospel must be preached throughout all the earth, the great apostasy must needs take place, the kingdom of Antichrist must be realized, there must be wars and rumors of war, judgments over the world, earthquakes and pestilences, and the end shall not yet be. Surely, the child of God cannot possibly pray that these things may never come, nor that they may be postponed or changed for his sake. On the contrary, knowing that these things are in the counsel of God, he wills them and prays for them as means unto the realization of the kingdom of glory. And, finally, in as far as he does not know the details of this counsel of

God, from Scripture neither from actual experience, he absolutely submits his own judgment and desires to God's will, confesses that he does not know what to pray for as he ought, and concludes: not my will, but Thy will be done! And even in this last instance, he prays in deepest sense for the realization of the counsel of God, assured that His way is the best way. We may certainly maintain then, that the prayers of all the saints have for their contents the will of God.

And do not object that this is quite an abstract conception of prayer and that it deprives our prayers of all possible concrete content. It is, indeed, this conception of prayer that is in harmony with the Word of God, that must furnish us with those guiding principles that must dominate all our prayers and cause them to be acceptable to God. It is only in as far as our prayers are in harmony with these principles that we can truly feel in our hearts that they shall be heard of God and that our desires shall be granted. True, it will, no doubt, change our actual prayers, but only to purge them and cause them to be pleasing to the Lord. And it gives to them a rich and sacred content. For, we know the will of God. We know that it is His will that His Name be glorified in the highest sense; that unto this end it is His will that His covenant may be perfected, that His kingdom may come; that this kingdom of God must come through the ingathering of all the elect and the destruction of the present world; that it is His will that we shall be to the praise of His glory, and that all things must be conceived as subservient to this purpose; and that He will cause all things to work together for our salvation. How all this affects the contents of our prayers in detail, we have no time to show, neither is this necessary. But in general we can easily see, that in the prayers of all the saints all earthly and temporal things, prosperity and adversity, health and sickness, peace and war, joy and sorrow, life and death can be conceived only as means to an end. As means to the highest purpose, that the Name of God may be glorified through us and by us, whether it be through joy or sorrow, through health or sickness, through life or through death; and as a means which God employs to our final salvation and to the realization of His Kingdom. These things are, therefore, not conceived as a good in themselves, but only as a good in relation to the end they must serve. And the prayer of all the saints is always: In whatever way and by whatever means it may please Thee, O, Thou Most High, let Thy Name be glorified, let Thy will be done, let Thy Kingdom come! And fill me with that grace by which I may always be willing to will Thy will and to be subservient unto that end!

Such is, indeed, the content of all the prayers of all the saints whose prayers have been preserved for us in Holy Writ. When Abraham prays in connection with the threatened and impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the content of his prayer is not at all concerned with the wicked cities, but only with the preservation of the righteous in the midst of that destruction. The glory of God's Name surely could not permit the righteous to be destroyed with the wicked. And his prayer was heard in the salvation of righteous Lot. When Israel in Egypt cry unto Jehovah, they certainly beseech the Lord for deliverance from oppression, but let us not forget that this deliverance meant the fulfillment of the Promise and the realization of the covenant. When in the desert the people of Israel apostatize from God and Moses intercedes

for them, his chief concern in all his prayers is emphatically, that the Name of God may not be blasphemed by the nations and His cause may not suffer defeat. When Elijah in the wilds of Gilead bends his knees and cries to Jehovah his God, he is consumed with the zeal of Jehovah and rather would have the land burn up with drought and the people perish than have Baal rob the Most High of His glory. And when Hezekiah hears the word that he must die and laments because of it, it is because he has no seed and the promise of God concerning David and his seed will fail. Thus it is in the Psalms. It is always for the Name of the Lord and the salvation of His people, for the peace of restoration of God's Holy House, for the fulfillment of the Promise, that all the saints storm the throne of grace. And it is only in antithesis to this chief object that the deprecatory prayers in the Psalms and the Prophets can properly be understood. Such is the contents of that beautiful, sacerdotal prayer of the Lord, preserved for us in [John 17](#). It is a prayer that God may be glorified and that He may glorify the Son. It is a prayer, not for the world, but for those whom the Father gives to Christ out of the world. And it is a prayer for that final fulfillment of the counsel of God, when the tabernacle of God shall be with men, the Father shall be in Christ and Christ in His people, that they may be perfect in one. It is the prayer of the Church throughout the new dispensation, the prayer of the Bride, actuated by the Spirit: Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly! Amen!

Prayer's Answer

And this prayer of all saints is surely answered. You probably object, that if prayer is fundamentally nothing else than the expression of the desire that God's will may be done and that His counsel may be realized, it is of no avail that we pray; that the prayer of the righteous is not effectual at all and that it availeth nothing, quite in contradiction with the statement in Jas. 5:16. God's counsel will surely be realized, whether we pray or accept it in silence. In answer to this, I may remark in the first place, that this latter statement is absolutely true. God will do all His good pleasure without a doubt. His counsel is unchangeable, irresistible, absolutely efficacious and it comprehends all things. If the efficaciousness of our prayers is conceived of as consisting in the power to change God's counsel, it may be admitted that in this sense they are absolutely without effect. And thanks be to God that this is true. Is not His way higher than ours? Are not His thoughts far exalted above ours? Shall we presume to tell the Almighty how the course of this world, or even the individual way of the saint should be? Would in that case prayer not be a terrible weapon to our own destruction? No, God be thanked, that such is not the effectualness of our prayers.

And in the second place, I answer that our prayers are effectual exactly because they are in harmony with the will of God. It has pleased God to receive us into His covenant, to make known unto us His will, to reveal unto us His counsel, and to make us co-workers, prophets, priests and kings of God. And, therefore, it has pleased Him to realize His counsel through the prayers of His saints, that they might know that He is their God, and that the world may know that He realizes the desires of His saints to bless them. The counsel and the prayers and the realization of the counsel through the prayers of all saints, it is all of God. There is perfect harmony. And the purpose of it all is that God may receive the glory, even through the

prayers of His people. And, therefore, the prayer of a righteous man availeth much; it is certainly answered.

And let us notice, that the answer of God to the prayers of all the saints must needs be antithetical. They pray for the glory of God's name through the coming of His Kingdom, the realization of His covenant and the salvation of the entire Body of Christ, through every means and by every God-ordained way. God will, therefore, in answer to their prayers surely glorify His Name in them and through them and through all things in time. He will surely cause His kingdom to come and His everlasting covenant to be realized. And He will do so in the way of the antithesis, so that His people are surely saved and all the wicked of the earth are utterly destroyed. And the coming of that kingdom for which the people of God pray, necessarily involves the coming of judgments upon the earth. All the seals of the book of Revelation must be broken, one by one, all of the seven trumpets must be sounded and all the vials must be poured out before the final kingdom of glory will be ushered in. And it is for this reason that the answer to the prayers of the saints must also be seen in these judgments of God, in war and rumors of war, in earthquakes and upheavals, in trouble and tribulation, in confusion and economical depression, in droughts and pestilences, God answers the prayers of all the saints.

This does not necessarily imply that all the saints of all ages directly pray for these judgments to come at certain times, although this is sometimes the case according to Scripture. Elijah prayed and the contents of his prayer was undoubtedly that God's justice might be revealed in the land of His covenant, and for three years and six months the heavens were shut up and refused to give rain. And in the Psalms we have numerous examples of such prayers for the judgments of God upon the enemies of Jehovah and the oppressors of His saints. In the parable of the unjust judge the widow represents the church that must always pray and never faint, and she prays for vengeance day and night and has the promise that God will speedily avenge her, though He is long-suffering over her. And when the fifth seal is opened we find the souls, under the altar, that is of them that were slain for the Word of God and the testimony which they held, crying with a loud voice: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" And thus we find it in the beginning of my lecture. For, when the prayers of all the saints are presented to the Lord there are voices and lightnings and thunderings and an earthquake, caused by the fire from the altar, and, therefore, in answer to these prayers. Surely, there rises a direct cry for vengeance, for the manifestation of the justice of God and of the cause of His Son, to the ears of Jehovah-Sabaoth. But even when this cry for vengeance and invocation of the wrath of God is not directly expressed in the prayers of all saints, it is certainly always implied. For, the coming of the kingdom cannot and will not be realized, and the glory of the Name of God cannot be fully revealed, except in the way of judgments. Jerusalem cannot be saved but by the destruction of Babylon; the glory of Christ can be manifested only in the way of God's terrible wrath upon Antichrist; the light must needs dispel the darkness. When the children of Israel in Egypt cry to Jehovah for deliverance from oppression they invoke the tenfold fury of the Most High upon the House of Bondage. And when the Spirit and the Bride say: Come! they pray for the destruction of all the powers of darkness that oppose the Christ they love.

The prayers of all saints, therefore, are certainly effectual and avail much. In the way of their prayers God's judgments are in the world even unto the final revelation of the righteous judgment of God in the day of Christ. And in the way of their prayers Jerusalem is glorified, Zion is redeemed, the kingdom of God is realized and His covenant is established. And in the midst of all the outpourings of wrath God's saints are preserved and saved even unto the end. For, the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished. Let us, therefore, always pray and never faint. And let us not be amazed when, in answer to the prayers of all the saints, God's judgments are upon the earth. For the Lord will redeem Israel out of all her troubles!