

# WHAT TRUE PRAYER IS

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

**P**RAYER is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised or according to His Word, for the good of the Church, with submission in faith to the will of God

In this description, there are these seven things. Prayer is (1) a sincere; (2) a sensible; (3) an affectionate pouring out of the soul to God through Christ; (4) by the strength or assistance of the Spirit; (5) for such things as God has promised or according to His Word; (6) for the good of the Church; (7) with submission in faith to the will of God.

**1. FOR THE FIRST OF THESE, IT IS A SINCERE POURING OUT OF THE SOUL TO GOD.** Sincerity is such a grace as runs through all the graces of God in us, and through all the actings of a Christian, and has the sway in them too, or else their actings are not regarded of God. David speaks particularly of sincerity when he mentions prayer: “I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled<sup>1</sup> with my tongue. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psa 66:17-18). Part of the exercise of prayer is sincerity, without which God does not accept it as prayer (Psa 16:1-4). “Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jer 29:12-13). The [lack] of this made the Lord reject the prayers of those mentioned in Hosea 7:14, where He says, “They have not cried unto me with their heart,” that is, in sincerity, “when they howled upon their beds.” It is rather for a pretense, for a show in hypocrisy, to be seen of men and applauded for the same that they pray. Sincerity was that which Christ commended in Nathaniel when he was under the fig tree. “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile<sup>2</sup>” (Joh 1:47). Probably this good man was pouring out his soul to God in prayer under the fig tree, and that in a sincere and unfeigned<sup>3</sup> spirit before the Lord. The prayer that has this in it as one of the principal ingre-

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<sup>1</sup> **extolled** – exalted by praise.

<sup>2</sup> **guile** – deceit; treachery.

<sup>3</sup> **unfeigned** – sincere.

dients is the prayer that God regards. Thus, “The prayer of the upright is his delight” (Pro 15:8).

And why must sincerity be one of the essentials of prayer that is accepted of God? Because sincerity carries the soul in all simplicity to open its heart to God, and to tell Him the case plainly, without equivocation;<sup>4</sup> to condemn itself plainly, without dissembling;<sup>5</sup> to cry to God heartily, without complimenting. “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning<sup>6</sup> himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke” (Jer 31:18). Sincerity is the same in a corner alone as it is before the face of all the world. It knows not how to wear two masks, one for an appearance before men and another for private use. It must have God and be with Him in the duty of prayer. It is not a lip-labor<sup>7</sup> that it regards; for sincerity, like God, looks at the heart. That is where prayer comes from—*if it is true prayer*.

**2. IT IS A SINCERE AND SENSIBLE POURING OUT OF THE HEART OR SOUL.** It is not, as many take it to be, a few babbling, prating,<sup>8</sup> complimentary expressions, but a sensible feeling in the heart. Prayer has in it a sensibleness of diverse things—sometimes sense of sin, sometimes of mercy received, sometimes of the readiness of God to give mercy.

**(1) A sense of the [lack] of mercy, by reason of the danger of sin.** The soul, I say, feels, and from feeling sighs, groans, and breaks at the heart. For right prayer bubbles out of the heart when it is overcome with grief and bitterness, as blood is forced out of the flesh by reason of some heavy burden that lies upon it (1Sa 1:10; Psa 69:3). David roars, cries, weeps, faints at heart, fails at the eyes, loses his moisture<sup>9</sup> (Psa 38:8-10). Hezekiah mourns like a dove (Isa 38:14). Ephraim bemoans himself (Jer 31:18). Peter weeps bitterly (Mat 26:75). Christ has strong cryings and tears (Heb 5:7.) And all this from a sense of the justice of God, the guilt of sin, the pains of hell and destruction. “The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD” (Psa 116:3-4). And in another place, “My sore ran in the night” (Psa 77:2). Again, “I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning

<sup>4</sup> **equivocation** – a statement that is vague and often deliberately misleading.

<sup>5</sup> **dissembling** – disguising one’s true character or feelings.

<sup>6</sup> **bemoaning** – expressing sorrow.

<sup>7</sup> **lip-labor** – empty talk, especially vain repetition of words in prayer.

<sup>8</sup> **prating** – to talk in a silly way and at length about nothing important.

<sup>9</sup> **moisture** – vitality and strength.

all the day long” (Psa 38:6). In all these instances, you may see that prayer carries in it a sensible feeling, and that first from a sense of sin.

**(2) Sometimes there is a sweet sense of mercy received—encouraging, comforting, strengthening, enlivening, enlightening mercy.** Thus, David pours out his soul to bless, praise, and admire the great God for His lovingkindness to such poor, vile wretches. “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Psa 103:1-4). Thus is the prayer of saints sometimes turned into praise and thanksgiving and yet is still prayer. This is a mystery: God’s people pray with their praises, as it is written, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phi 4:6). A sensible thanksgiving for mercies received is a mighty prayer in the sight of God; it prevails with Him unspeakably.

**(3) In prayer, there is sometimes in the soul a sense of mercy to be received.** This again sets the soul aflame. “Thou, O LORD of hosts,” says David, “hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee” (2Sa 7:27). This provoked Jacob, David, Daniel, with others, not by fits and starts<sup>10</sup> nor yet in a foolish, frothy<sup>11</sup> way, but mightily, fervently, and continually, to groan out their conditions before the Lord, as being sensible of their [need], their misery, and the willingness of God to show mercy (Gen 32:10-11; Dan 9:3-4).

**3. PRAYER IS A SINCERE, SENSIBLE, AND AN AFFECTIONATE POURING OUT OF THE SOUL TO GOD. O,** what heat, strength, life, vigor, and affection there is in true prayer! “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God” (Psa 42:1). “I have longed after thy precepts” (Psa 119:40). “I have longed for thy salvation” (Psa 119:174). “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God” (Psa 84:2). “My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times” (Psa 119:20). O, what affection is here

<sup>10</sup> fits and starts – stopping and starting.

<sup>11</sup> frothy – empty; vain.

discovered in prayer! You have the same in Daniel. “O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God” (Dan 9:19). Every syllable carries a mighty vehemency<sup>12</sup> in it. James calls this the fervent or the working prayer. So again, “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly” (Luk 22:44). He had His affections more and more drawn out after God for His helping hand. O how wide are the most of men with their prayers from this prayer! Alas! The greatest part of men make no conscience at all of the duty. As for them that do, it is to be feared that many of them are very great strangers to a sincere, sensible, and affectionate pouring out their hearts or souls to God. They content themselves with a little lip-labor and bodily exercise, mumbling over a few imaginary prayers. When the affections are indeed engaged in prayer, then the whole man is engaged, and in such sort that the soul will spend itself, as it were, rather than go without that good desired, even communion and solace<sup>13</sup> with Christ. Hence it is that the saints have spent their strength and lost their lives rather than go without the blessing (Psa 69:3; 38:9-10; Gen 32:24, 26).

All this is too evident by the ignorance, profaneness, and spirit of envy that reign in the hearts of those men who are so hot for the *forms* and not the *power* of praying. Few among them know what it is to be born again, to have communion with the Father through the Son, to feel the power of grace sanctifying their hearts. For all their prayers, they still live cursed, drunken, whorish, and abominable lives, full of malice, envy, deceit, persecuting the dear children of God. O what a dreadful judgment is coming upon them!...which all their hypocritical assembling themselves together, with all their prayers, shall never be able to help them against or shelter them from.

Prayer is a pouring out of the heart or soul. There is in prayer an unbosoming<sup>14</sup> of a man’s self, an opening of the heart to God, an affectionate pouring out of the soul in requests, sighs, and groans. “All my desire is before thee,” says David, “and my groaning is not hid from thee” (Psa 38:9). Again, “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me” (Psa 42:2, 4). Mark, “I pour out my soul.” It is an expression signifying that in prayer there goes the very life and whole strength to God. As in another place, “Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him”

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<sup>12</sup> **vehemency** – passionate force.

<sup>13</sup> **solace** – comfort in a time of distress, sadness, or disappointment.

<sup>14</sup> **unbosoming** – bringing out of the heart; to make known one’s thoughts and desires.

(Psa 62:8). This is the prayer to which the promise is made for the delivering of a poor creature out of captivity and thralldom.<sup>15</sup> “But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul” (Deu 4:29).

Again, prayer is a pouring out of the heart or soul to God. This shows also the excellency of the spirit of prayer. It is the great God to Whom it goes. “When shall I come and appear before God?” (Psa 42:2). And it argues that the soul that thus prays indeed sees an emptiness in all things under heaven; that in God alone there is rest and satisfaction for the soul. “Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God” (1Ti 5:5). So says David, “In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion. Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape: incline thine ear unto me, and save me. Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress. Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth” (Psa 71:1-5). Many speak of God; but right prayer makes God the hope, stay,<sup>16</sup> and all. True prayer sees nothing substantial and worth the looking after, but God. And that, as I said before, it does in a sincere, sensible, and affectionate way.

Again, prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God *through Christ*. This “through Christ” must needs be added, or else it must be questioned whether it is prayer, though in appearance it be never so eminent and eloquent.

Christ is the way through Whom the soul has admittance to God, and without Whom it is impossible that so much as one desire should come into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.<sup>17</sup> “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (Joh 14:13-14). This was Daniel’s way in praying for the people of God; he did it in the name of Christ. “Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord’s sake” (Dan 9:17). And so David, “For thy name’s sake, O LORD”—that is, for thy Christ’s sake—“pardon mine iniquity; for it is great” (Psa 25:11). But now, it is not

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<sup>15</sup> **thralldom** – the condition of being under the control of another person; slavery.

<sup>16</sup> **stay** – support; an object of reliance.

<sup>17</sup> **Lord of Sabaoth** – Lord of the Armies; Lord of Hosts.

every one that makes mention of Christ's name in prayer that does indeed, and in truth, effectually pray to God in the name of Christ or through Him. This coming to God through Christ is the hardest part of prayer. A man may be sensible of his condition and sincerely desire mercy, and yet not be able to come to God by Christ. The man that comes to God by Christ must first have the knowledge of Him: "For he that cometh to God must believe that he is" (Heb 11:6). So he that comes to God through Christ must be enabled to know Christ. "I pray thee," says Moses, "shew me now thy way, that I may know thee" (Exo 33:13).

This Christ, none but the Father can reveal (Mat 11:27). And to come through Christ is for the sinner to be enabled of God to hide himself under the shadow of the Lord Jesus, as a man hides himself under a thing for safeguard (Mat 16:16). Hence it is that David so often terms Christ his shield, buckler,<sup>18</sup> tower, fortress, rock of defense (Psa 18:2; 27:1; 28:1). Not only because *by* [Christ,] he overcame his enemies, but also because *through* [Christ,] he found favor with God the Father. So God says to Abraham, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield (Gen 15:1). The man, then, that comes to God through Christ must have faith by which he puts on Christ and in Him appears before God. Now he that has faith is born of God and so becomes one of the sons of God by virtue of which he is joined to Christ and made a member of Christ (Joh 3:5, 7; 1:12). Therefore, he as a member of Christ comes to God; I say, as a member of Christ, so that God looks on that man as part of Christ, part of His body, flesh, and bones, united to Him by election, conversion, enlightenment, the Spirit being conveyed into the heart of that man by God (Eph 5:30). So that now he comes to God in Christ's merits—in His blood, righteousness, victory, intercession<sup>19</sup>—and so stands before Him, being "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph 1:6). And because this poor creature is thus a member of the Lord Jesus, and under this consideration has admittance to God, therefore, by virtue of this union is the Holy Spirit conveyed into him, whereby he is able to pour out his soul before God.

**4. PRAYER IS A SINCERE, SENSIBLE, AFFECTIONATE POURING OUT OF THE HEART OR SOUL TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST BY THE STRENGTH OR ASSISTANCE OF THE SPIRIT.** These things so depend one upon another that it is impossible that it should be prayer without a joint concurrence<sup>20</sup> of them. Though it be [most] eloquent, yet without these

<sup>18</sup> **buckler** – a small round shield.

<sup>19</sup> **intercession** – pleading on behalf of another.

<sup>20</sup> **concurrence** – happening together at the same time.

things, such prayer is rejected of God. For without a sincere, sensible, affectionate, pouring out of the heart to God, it is but lip-labor; and if it be not through Christ, it falls far short of ever sounding well in the ears of God. So also, if it is not in the strength and by the assistance of the Spirit, it is but like the sons of Aaron offering strange fire (Lev 10:1-2).

I say that which is not petitioned through the teaching and assistance of the Spirit cannot be “according to the will of God” (Rom 8:26-27). There is no man or church in the world that can come to God in prayer but by the assistance of the Holy Spirit. “For through him [*Christ*] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18). Wherefore, Paul says, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom 8:26-27). And because there is in this Scripture so full a discovery of the spirit of prayer and of man’s inability to pray without it, therefore I shall in a few words comment upon it.

“For we.” Consider first the person speaking, even Paul, and, in his person, all the apostles. We apostles, we extraordinary officers, the wise master-builders, some of whom have been caught up into paradise (Rom 15:16; 1Co 3:10; 2Co 12:4). “We know not what we should pray for.” Surely there is no man but will confess that Paul and his companions were as able to have done any work for God as any pope or proud prelate<sup>21</sup> in [the Roman Catholic tradition], and could as well have made a Common Prayer Book<sup>22</sup> as those who at first composed this. [Paul and his companions were] not a whit<sup>23</sup> behind them either in grace or gifts.

“For we know not what we should pray for.” We know not the matter of the things for which we should pray, the object to whom we pray, nor the medium by or through whom we pray. None of these things know we but by the help and assistance of the Spirit. Should we pray for communion with God through Christ? Should we pray for

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<sup>21</sup> **prelate** – a minister or priest of the higher order, as an archbishop, bishop, or patriarch.

<sup>22</sup> **Book of Common Prayer** – the official service book of the Anglican tradition, compiled by Thomas Cranmer and others, first issued in 1549.

<sup>23</sup> **a whit** – the least bit.

faith, for justification<sup>24</sup> by grace, and a truly sanctified<sup>25</sup> heart? We know none of these things. “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” (1Co 2:11). But here, alas! the apostles speak of inward and spiritual things, which the world knows not (Isa 29:11).

Again, as they know not the matter of prayer without the help of the Spirit, so neither know they the manner thereof without the same. Therefore, he adds, “We know not what we should pray for as we ought”; but the Spirit helps our infirmities with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered. Mark here: they could not so well and so fully succeed in the manner of performing this duty as these in our days think they can.

The apostles, when they were at the best—yea when the Holy Ghost assisted them—were fain to come off<sup>26</sup> with sighs and groans, falling short of expressing their mind but with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered.

“For we know not what we should pray for as we ought.” Mark this: “as we ought.” For the not thinking of this word, or at least the not understanding it in the spirit and truth of it, has occasioned some men to devise, as Jeroboam did, another way of worship, both for matter and manner, than is revealed in the Word of God (1Ki 12:26-33). “But,” says Paul, “we must pray as we ought.” This we cannot do by all the art, skill, cunning, and device of men or angels. “For we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit,” nay, further, it must be “the Spirit itself” that helps our infirmities—not the Spirit and man’s lusts. What man may imagine and devise of his own brain is one thing; what [he is] commanded and ought to do is another.

Many ask and have not because they ask amiss;<sup>27</sup> and [they] so are never nearer the enjoying of those things they petition for (Jam 4:3). It is not to pray at random that will cause God to answer. While pray-

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<sup>24</sup> **justification** – Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 32) See FGB 187, *Justification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>25</sup> **sanctification** – Sanctification is the work of God’s Spirit whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 34) See FGB 215, *Sanctification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>26</sup> **fain to come off** – glad under the circumstances to succeed.

<sup>27</sup> **amiss** – wrongly; with wrong motives.



er is making, God is searching the heart to see from what root and spirit it arises (1Jo 5:14). “And he that searcheth the heart knoweth,” that is, approves only the meaning “of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom 8:27). For in that which is according to His will only, He hears us, and in nothing else. Only the Spirit can teach us so to ask, it only being able to search out all things—even the deep things of God. Without which Spirit, though we had a thousand Common Prayer Books, yet we know not what we should pray for as we ought, being accompanied with those infirmities that make us absolutely incapable of such a work.

**5. PRAYER IS A SINCERE, SENSIBLE, AFFECTIONATE POURING OUT OF THE HEART OR SOUL TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST, IN THE STRENGTH AND ASSISTANCE OF THE SPIRIT, FOR SUCH THINGS AS GOD HAS PROMISED (Mat 6:6-8).**

Prayer is only true when it is within the compass<sup>28</sup> of God’s Word; it is blasphemy, or at best vain babbling, when the petition is unrelated to the Book. David therefore in his prayer kept his eye on the Word of God. “My soul,” says he, “cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.” And again, “My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word” (Psa 119:25, 28. See also verses 41-42, 58, 65, 74, 81-82, 107, 147, 154, 169, 170). And, “Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope” (119:49). Indeed, the Holy Ghost does not immediately quicken and stir up the heart of the Christian without the Word, but by, with, and through [it], by bringing that to the heart and by opening that whereby the man is provoked to go to the Lord to tell Him how it is with him, to argue, and to supplicate,<sup>29</sup> according to the Word. Thus it was with Daniel, that mighty prophet of the Lord. He, understanding by books that the captivity of the children of Israel was nearing its end, then, according unto that word, he makes his prayer to God. “I Daniel,” says he, “understood by books,” viz.,<sup>30</sup> the writings of Jeremiah, “the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes” (Dan 9:2-3).

As the Spirit is the helper and the governor of the soul when it prays according to the will of God, so it guides by and according to

<sup>28</sup> **within the compass** – within the boundaries or limits.

<sup>29</sup> **supplicate** – ask for humbly or earnestly.

<sup>30</sup> **viz.** – abbreviation for Latin *videlicet*: that is; namely.

the Word of God and His promise. Hence it is that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself did make a stop, although His life lay at stake for it. “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” (Mat 26:53-54). “Were there but a word for it in the Scripture, I should soon be out of the hands of mine enemies, I should be helped by angels”; but the Scripture will not warrant this kind of praying, for that says otherwise.

It is a praying, then, according to the Word and promise. The Spirit by the Word must direct in the *manner*, as well as in the *matter* of prayer. “I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also” (1Co 14:15). But there is no understanding without the Word. For if they reject the word of the Lord, “What wisdom is in them?” (Jer 8:9).

**6. FOR THE GOOD OF THE CHURCH.** This clause covers whatsoever tends to the honor of God, Christ’s advancement, or His people’s benefit. For God, Christ, and His people are so linked together that if the good of the one be prayed for, [then] the others must needs be included. As Christ is in the Father, so the saints are in Christ; and he that touches the saints touches the apple of God’s eye. Therefore, pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and you pray for all that is required of you. For Jerusalem will never be in perfect peace until she be in heaven; and there is nothing that Christ more desires than to have her there. That also is the place that God through Christ has given her. He, then, that prays for the peace and good of Zion, or the Church, asks in prayer [for] that which Christ has purchased with His blood; and also [for] that which the Father has given to Him as the price thereof. Now he that prays for this must pray for abundance of grace for the Church, for help against all her temptations, that God would let nothing be too hard for her; that all things might work together for her good; that God would keep His children blameless and harmless, the sons of God, to His glory, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation (Phi 2:15). This is the substance of Christ’s own prayer in John 17. And all Paul’s prayers run that way, as one of his prayers eminently<sup>31</sup> shows: “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteous-

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<sup>31</sup> **eminently** – plainly; obviously.

ness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Phi 1:9-11). But a short prayer, you see, and yet full of good desires for the church from the beginning to the end that she may stand and go on and that in the most excellent frame of spirit, even without blame, sincere, and without offence until the day of Christ, let her temptations or persecutions be what they will (Eph 1:16-21; 3:14-19; Col 1:13).

**7. AND BECAUSE, AS I SAID, PRAYER SUBMITS TO THE WILL OF GOD AND SAYS, “THY WILL BE DONE,” AS CHRIST HAS TAUGHT (Mat 6:10).** Therefore, the people of the Lord in all humility are to lay themselves and their prayers and all that they have at the foot of their God, to be disposed of by Him as He in His heavenly wisdom sees best. Yet not doubting but God will answer the desire of His people that way that shall be most for their advantage and His glory. When the saints therefore pray with submission to the will of God, it does not argue that they are to doubt or question God’s love and kindness to them. But because they at all times are not so wise, [and] sometimes Satan may get advantage of them, [tempting] them to pray for that which, if they had it, would prove neither to God’s glory nor [to] His people’s good. “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1Jo 5:14-15), that is, [if we ask] in the Spirit of grace and supplication. For, as I said before, that petition that is not put up in and through the Spirit is not to be answered because it is beside the will of God. For the Spirit only knows that, and so consequently knows how to pray according to that will of God. “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” (1Co 2:11).

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**John Bunyan (1628-1688):** English Baptist preacher and influential author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and numerous other titles; born at Elstow near Bedford, England. (Bunyan’s complete works are available at [www.chapellibrary.org](http://www.chapellibrary.org).)



Here is prayer under three aspects. It is the appeal of creaturely dependence; it is the wail of a sinner’s guilt; it is the articulate worship of an intelligent soul.—*B. M. Palmer*.