

Matthew 6:10 "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Dear Friends in Christ,

Ah, Sunday afternoons. God is so glad that you didn't let Sunday afternoon creep into Sunday morning, but that you came in to worship and listen this morning. I understand that not all have the luxury, but Sunday afternoons are supposed to be the relaxing part of the week where you leave all the duties and obligations to the side, and just enjoy God's gifts. Sunday evenings aren't quite the same. Sunday evening is when we start to get tooled up for the week. But there is that golden 5 or 6 hours of Sunday afternoon.

I can remember being a youngster and being sure of what would make me very happy on a given Sunday afternoon. I was praying that God would bless my favorite football team with a victory. They always seemed to be on the edge of being a great team year after year, yet they never could manage. Yes, I am a fan of the four-time Superbowl losers, the Minnesota Vikings. I wanted them to win. So I prayed. It didn't happen. Didn't God want me to be happy?

Fewer and fewer people read the newspapers any more, but I did see a paper on Friday. In the religion section, there was the religious question of the week. "Does God want me to be happy?" There's a zinger. There are about a hundred ways to answer that question. The most obvious answer that we all want to hear is, "What parent does not want his/her child to be happy?" But obvious answers to difficult questions, usually are only partially true. "Does God want me to be happy? Well, you know, I like chocolate. So if God wants me to be happy, doesn't that mean that God wants me to eat a Kit-Kat at every meal?"

If God wants us to be happy, that gets to be a problem. What does he do about football games when each side has people praying for a victory? What should God do? Does he consider the holiness of the players? Does he do a census of Christians supporting each team? Should all games end in ties? And here is another problem: when I pray for a victory, I am praying against the other side—should I be doing that?

IS IT EVER RIGHT TO PRAY AGAINST SOMEONE?

I. Praying for God's Will Means Praying against the Opposition

Today's portion of the Lord's Prayer is an answer to that question: Is it ever right to pray against someone?

We pray, "*Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" Jesus teaches us to look beyond football teams. Jesus teaches us to pray that the will of God be victorious.

Satan, the devil, is that angel who rebelled against God's authority and rule in the beginning. He has been living in unwavering opposition to God. He deceived our first parents, Adam and Eve. He prompted Judas to betray Jesus. He continues to lie and deceive people into opposing God's will. Jesus called him "*the father of lies*" and "*a murderer from the beginning*" (John 8:44). Satan's original lie is that following our own self-chosen paths are the only way to be happy. After all, isn't our happiness what matters?

That is Satan's lie. We most certainly do pray against Satan, asking God to frustrate his plans and work when we pray to our heavenly Father, "*Your will be done.*"

But Satan is not a single outlaw living in lonely opposition to God's will. The world is full of Satan's allies. We pray that the horrible criminals who murder, rape and rob, that they would be

stopped in their tracks. They are obviously doing what is contrary to the will of God. —And the people who defame God’s name on radio, television, movie and video, we pray that they would be kept from doing so in the future. —And we pray that the drug pushers and the pimps, the abortionists and the swindlers would fail in their endeavors. —And we pray that all who persecute Christianity, whether in the name of science or another religion or bigotry, that they would be frustrated. We pray that all these come to nothing when we pray, “***your will be done.***” Yes, praying for God means praying against the other team.

II. Praying for God’s Will: that People Be Saved

But here is the other part: we pray against their works, yet we never stop praying for them. We pray that unbelievers eyes, ears and hearts may be opened to the truth of Jesus. Jesus taught us, “*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*” (Matthew 5:44-45). That is a balance we can spend a lifetime trying to achieve: opposing people’s sinful plans and actions, while still praying for those same people!

While that may seem to be a contradiction, we know this is God’s will. Listen to God speak through the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel to a people who refused his guidance: “*As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die?*” (33:11). God pleads with every person to repent, even while he reserves the right to punish.

Repeatedly, the Bible declares this to be God’s will: 1 Timothy 2:4: “*[God our Savior] wants all men to be saved.*” John 6:40: “*My Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life.*” Jesus himself, as he approached the city in which he would be murdered, he looked at it and broke out in tears saying, “*If you... had only known on this day what would bring you peace.*” (Lk 19:42). When it comes to saving people, God’s “emotion” runs over. And so, we can never take lightly, our responsibility to pray against those who oppose God’s will. And yet we balance it with prayer for them for their salvation.

III. Praying for God’s Will Means Praying against Ourselves

So whom should we pray against when we pray, “***Your will be done***”?

There is a well-documented event of a man who prayed, “***Your will be done.***” One night he was camped out in a local park. He was there with a few friends. This man, through no fault of his own, had run afoul of the authorities. He knew that the police would soon be coming for him. He couldn’t sleep, so he spent his time praying. His praying wasn’t like I pray—you know, bowing the head, folding the hands in the comfort of home or study, mostly trying to filter out the distractions. No, this man prayed so hard that even outside in the cool April evening he was sweating profusely. And though he knew that he would be wrongly arrested and executed, yet he prayed, “*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done*” (Lk 22:40). Yes, the man was Jesus, the park was the Garden of Gethsemane, and his end would be the cross. But listen to his prayer. I hear Jesus praying against someone. Who? Listen again: “*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.*” It is the mystery of our Savior Jesus which I cannot adequately explain, but here is what we observe: Jesus was sinless, yet being truly human he was also tempted by a choice: the Father’s will of his death for the saving of others, or a self-preserving avoidance of suffering. Yes, we can pray *against* someone in our prayers. Sometimes we must. And the person we must pray *against* most often is ourselves.

God’s word requires me to do things that my human nature does not want. God wants me to support his kingdom work through generous and cheerful offerings to the church. But don’t I have expenses? car repairs? a kid in school? house payments? clothing expenses? insurance premiums and taxes? And once in a while I like to enjoy life, at least a little bit. God’s church can get along. Other

people with more money can support it. ***“Father in heaven... Your will be done.”***

When the unpopular teachings of God’s Word come up, and we are internally conflicted over God’s Word. When God’s Word confronts us with sticky issues like church fellowship, the Lord’s Supper, who can vote in a congregation, etc., we need to listen to God and say, ***“Your will be done.”***

A request for a time commitment, whether in church or family or community, we tend to first think of the massive time commitments we already have. The young have to get life started and say, “When I get settled down, a regular job, married and a family, Yes, then I will have time for God. Not now.” When you get that job that requires you to travel and work on Sundays, you know what happens: “When the kids are grown, when I get the promotion, then I’ll have time.” Years down the road the kids are grown, and that promotion came through but demands even more time and the Lord is still calling you. You say, “When I retire.” Retired, as the years advance, the doctors demand big chunks of time and you have to take care of the grandkids, and don’t have the energy you once did, or a driver’s license for that matter. “Maybe next week, next month, next year.” It’s time to pray, ***“Your will be done.”***

You know the movie rating systems: G, PG, etc. There are basically three things that can get the movies demoted from G to PG, or PG to PG-13, etc. It even says it on the labels. Even the film industry still displays vestiges of a vanished morality. They put it on their labels that there are three things that get movies restricted: language, sex and violence. Amazing that even the heathen world realizes this. And yet how often don’t we think, “Hey, I’m good. I can watch that stuff without it affecting me.” Yet God’s word tells us, *“The LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name”* (Ex 20:7). God’s word directs us, *“I made a covenant with me eyes not to look lustfully”* (Job 31:1). God’s word tells us, *“The unfaithful have a craving for violence”* (Prov 13:2). Lord, help us to remember, ***“Your will be done.”***

We pray, ***“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*** because we love God. And we hate it and regret it when we fall short of the love we want to show God. We pray, ***“Your will be done”*** asking God to direct us, to strengthen us, to enable us to serve him as we wish we could. Which is why Jesus taught us to pray, ***“on earth as it is in heaven.”***

“When I say ‘Jump,’ you say, ‘_____.’” Bring back any memories? That’s not how we usually act. When someone tells us to jump, we ask, “Who are you to tell me to jump? And even if you do have the authority to tell me to jump, why are you telling me to jump? Are you just yanking my chain? And even if I do go along and jump, it’s going to be the way *I* want to jump.” The drill sergeant screams, “Jump” and the recruits have only one answer, “How high, sir?”

Which isn’t really how God’s will is done in heaven. Because in heaven, it isn’t out of fear that the angels say, “How high?” But they say it with joy in their hearts because they know what we only dimly understand on this earth. They know the great love our God has for us, and complete trust that whatever he has said to us will certainly be for our good.

Perhaps, rather than a raw recruit in boot camp, it is more like newly-weds in that magical first year of marriage where each is supremely concerned for the other. What can I make for you for breakfast? On your feet all day and your feet ache—Can I massage them? Daily cards & compliments.

The complete obedience that we see in boot camp, together with the joy of newlyweds serving each other. That is a pale earthly image of what Jesus meant when he taught us to pray, ***“Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*** Amen.