

Chapter Ninety-Eight

What about Competing Prayer Requests of the Faithful?

Suppose that two neighbors who both faithfully love God happen to be voting in a very important upcoming political election. Assume further that they each support a different candidate. Each neighbor believes that his candidate is a very good person and that his candidate's opponent is a bad choice because that opponent has very bad views on the issue of, say, immigration. One candidate believes that we should secure our borders first and that only *after* we do that can we think about comprehensive immigration reform. In contrast, the other candidate thinks we should *start* with comprehensive immigration reform, not securing the border first but instead dealing with the entire issue all at once. Each neighbor believes that it would be better for America's security and economy if his particular candidate got elected. As a result, both neighbors begin to pray in earnest asking God to make sure that *their* respective candidates win for the sake of America and for the sake of America's future immigration policy.

Assume that both neighbors work very hard supporting their candidates; however, recall that they are also equally faithful. Both believe in the power of prayer, and both believe that God answers prayer, so the question is, Would either prayer, either appeal directly to God to intervene in the election, actually affect the outcome of the election? If so, would God answer yes to the prayer of the more righteous neighbor and no to the "less Godly" neighbor? What if God thinks one candidate is great on the immigration issue but also would be a horrible choice regarding many other issues? How would God answer the immigration prayer, if at all, in those circumstances? What if God thinks that candidate A should be elected instead of candidate B? Would God actually *change* His mind and allow candidate B to win instead, provided one of the neighbors really had prayed hard for candidate B (at least harder than the neighbor praying for candidate A)? Would it also depend on how many other people had prayed for candidate A to win and how many had prayed for candidate "B to win?"

Maybe God should just hold an election to see how many prayers candidate A receives and how many prayers candidate B receives, because, after all, perhaps God shouldn't be "fixing" elections—how undemocratic (and un-American) that would be of Him! The silly nature of these questions, as well as how ludicrous any attempt at an answer would be, illustrates my point. Is God in control and dictating His will as God, or is He simply running a representative democracy and taking requests? If God believes in democracy for us, would He defer to the democratic will of the people in certain situations, or would He instead insist upon His own will and change the result of an otherwise fair election regardless of the democratic will of the people?

THE PARADOX OF FAITH AND RATIONALITY

Of course, in our political system of democracy, the policy is “one person, one vote,” a principle established by the Supreme Court in *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533, 84 S. Ct. 1362, 12 L. Ed. 2d 506 (1964). The Supreme Court held that a state's apportionment plan for seats in its state legislature had to be based on population so that the voting power of each voter is equal. In God's system, however, a more righteous person's prayer might be worth more than a less righteous person's prayer (Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”), so wouldn't an all-powerful God just veto all prayers anyway, as none of us is truly worthy or righteous (Romans 3:10: “There is none righteous, no, not one.”) and simply follow His own intended will? After all, God is God, and His will is *His* will, not ours. If God is constantly changing His mind based on prayers, then God's will is not really God's will but more of God's first rough draft.

If you really think about it, prayers such as the ones that ask God to do something simply because we ask are either disrespectfully blasphemous or completely superfluous and ineffectual in achieving the intended result (other than making us feel better). Such a prayer seems blasphemous because it is quite arrogant to assume that we can influence God and can convince Him to change His mind based, potentially, on an entirely selfish human desire. Of course, how made up can God's mind be if we can convince Him to change it with a prayer? If we do not have this kind of pull with the Supreme Being of the universe, our prayers are superfluous and ineffectual because God is going to do whatever He is going to do anyway!

This calls into question, by the way, why Jesus ever prayed. There are numerous accounts in the Bible of Jesus praying to God (Matthew 11:25–26, Luke 10:21, and John 11:41–42, for example), but, literally, wouldn't that mean that Jesus was just talking to Himself? I guess it is OK for one to talk to oneself—I talk to myself sometimes. Maybe we talk to ourselves all of the time whenever we think about anything. Still, although I think and talk to myself, I would not consider what I do to be a prayer that I pray to myself. Jesus prayed to God the Father, but did God the Father ever pray to Jesus, and does either of them ever pray to the Holy Ghost? If so, wouldn't they all *already* know what the prayer is before it is prayed? Maybe Jesus's praying was just to teach us that we should pray, but again, pray for what—for God to change His plans, or to make up His apparently very un-made-up mind?