

THE ANGELIC CONFLICT

Before his fall Satan saw, conversed with, and knew God—and knowing this, he walked away (Isa. 14:13–14; Ezek. 28:12–18). Enter rebellion and sin. And this began the Angelic Conflict—a battle that still rages between good and evil, elect and fallen angels, redeemed and unredeemed, God and Satan. To condemn this rebellion the exact opposite must take place on earth: inferior creatures who do not see, hear, or know much about God will go to great lengths to know him by the only means available to them—by faith. They long for a personal relationship with God, and have settled for far less—hoping one day to experience the same face-to-face relationship that Satan threw away. Their *groping for God* condemns Satan's *rejection of God*. Some men seek what Satan rejected! The human race, then, was created to resolve the Angelic Conflict; that is, to prove to all that God is fair in sentencing Satan and fallen angels to the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41; John 16:11; 1 Cor. 6:3; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 20:10).

REWARDS FOR PERSISTENT PRAYER

That brings us to another reason why praying is so hard: it's part of the Angelic Conflict. Before the world was created Satan had immediate access to and perfect fellowship with God as "the anointed cherub who covers" (Ezek. 28:14). Then one day Satan decided he didn't want to talk to, have fellowship with, or serve God any longer, and left to form his own kingdom (Isa. 14:13–14). This ancient rebellion in heaven helps explain why prayer is so hard today. In light of the Angelic Conflict, prayer plays a role in condemning Satan.

God set up a means of communication between humans and himself called prayer. It's usually a one way street: we talk to him but he seldom talks back (except on rare occasions or through his written Word). We have to believe he's listening. And, as mentioned earlier, this makes prayer difficult and often discouraging. But remember, God has intentionally set it up this way to show Satan how much humans, inferior, fallen creatures, want to speak to and have a relationship with him—something Satan rejected long ago. Prayer, then, condemns Satan. Before his fall he talked to God, received immediate replies, and walked away; but some of God's people—living in darkness in a cursed world—are willing to hurdle every obstacle to have fellowship with their Creator.

Now you may ask, "Why doesn't God answer our prayers right

away?" Because repeated prayer shows Satan and his angels how hard we're willing to work to discover God's will and to advance his Kingdom. If prayer condemns Satan, persistent prayer condemns Satan even more. And, if this is true, then answers to prayer are not as important as persisting in prayer. The good news is, however, we're rewarded for our persistence because it's work or service that helps resolve the Angelic Conflict—and, in the process, glorifies God. If prayer is rewarded, then persistent prayer is rewarded all the more!

HARD THINGS AND THE ANGELIC CONFLICT

The Angelic Conflict provides a reason why so many things in the Christian life are downright hard, such as prayer, faith, spiritual growth, giving, testing, faithfulness, fasting, endurance, and suffering. Why do we have, for instance, such hard commands as give all your possessions to the poor (Luke 12:33; 14:33; 18:22)? The answer, in light of the Angelic Conflict, is to show that inferior creatures are willing to give up everything they own along with all their desires for the future just to obey and to please God. They are willing to trust God with an unknown and uncertain future of *his* choosing. This, of course, completely condemns Satan, because he was not willing to give up any of his future plans to please God. Giving up everything you own is one of the greatest sacrifices you can ever make for God—and will be greatly rewarded (Luke 18:22). Or another example: Why does God let the righteous suffer so much for so long before dying? Many believers are sick, in pain, uncomfortable, and discouraged for years, yet, incredibly, they still desire a close relationship with the Creator. Their refusal to reject God in prolonged pain condemns the devil who rejected God in a perfect environment with perfect health. Or hard work. The point of condemnation in the Angelic Conflict is this: there are inferior creatures in the universe who are willing to work hard for God, much harder than Satan ever did, just because he asks—and because they love him.

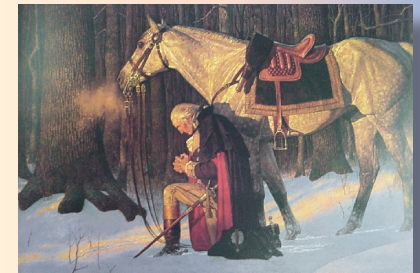


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REWARDS FOR PRAYING

Why Prayer Is So Hard

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Prayer and Good Works



And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.
~ Matthew 6:5-6 ~

PRAYER IS HARD WORK

Have you ever noticed that praying is hard work? It's hard to concentrate. It's hard to keep your mind from wandering. It seems like a monologue. It seems like we receive few answers. Answers are often long delayed. Is Anyone listening? For years I prayed every Sunday morning on the way to church for more people and better finances—but mostly to no avail. I used to think it was my fault: I just don't know how to pray. So years ago I hit the Scriptures to find out everything I could about prayer. And after all that study, it was still just as hard. Then, after years in the ministry, it dawned on me one day that *God has designed prayer to be hard!* It was intended to be hard. He could answer our prayers in words, but, for the most part, chooses not to. Or send an angel. Or create a fireworks display to confirm receipt. Or appear as a theophany and reply immediately to our petitions. But, no, none of that—at least not very often (just a few select people in the Old and New Testaments). Silence. Waiting. Hoping. Last minute saves. That's the norm.

PRAYING IS DOING GOOD WORKS

Prayer is one of the hard things in the Bible, like rejoicing in persecution (Luke 6:22–23), having faith when things are humanly impossible (Rom. 4:19–21), or giving thanks when it seems there is nothing to be thankful for (1 Thess. 5:18). Why is praying so hard? Are you ready for an answer? *Praying is doing good works.* It's work. Hard work! And because it's work or service it will be rewarded (cf. Matt. 6:5–6). It's work done with your mind, not hands; mental work, not physical work. It can be work done for others (intercession). Or it can be good works done for yourself (bailouts). Or good works done for God to advance his Kingdom. Any believer can do this kind of mental work . . . anywhere . . . at any time. That is to say, paraplegics, shut-ins, and little old ladies can do good works right up to the end of their lives if their minds are sharp. Even if you're bedridden and can't do any physical work you can still earn rewards in God's marvelous program by praying. For example, you can do good works for others in private or public prayer by asking God to help, lead, guide, or bless them.

PRAYER IS REWARDED

It's the clear teaching of Scripture that prayer is rewarded. It's repayment for good works or service: "your Father who sees in secret will repay you" (Matt. 6:6). In this verse the

Greek verb *apodidomi* means (1) "to recompense someone, whether positively or negatively, depending upon what the individual deserves — 'to reward, to recompense.' . . . 'who will recompense each person in accordance with what he has done' Ro 2:6" (Louw & Nida); (2) "to make a payment, with the implication of such a payment being in response to an incurred obligation — 'to pay, to render.' . . . 'call the workers and pay them their wages' Mt 20:8; . . . 'they will pay him his share of the harvest at the right time' Mt 21:41; . . . 'render to Caesar what are his and to God what are his' Mt 22:21; . . . 'there you will stay (literally 'you will never come out from there') until you pay the last penny (of your fine)' Mt 5:26" (Louw & Nida). God *promises* to pay, recompense, or reward us for our prayers.

PRAYER IS A SERIES OF GOOD WORKS

Now here's an exciting thought: *Each person or thing you pray for is a good work* done for that person (intercession), country (petition), church (supplication), or God (warfare prayer). To intercede for a sick friend is to spend a few minutes doing a good work for him—and is rewarded. And if God answers your prayer, you've really done a good work for him. Having not asked, he may not have received (cf. James 4:2). So, *prayer is a series of mental good works performed for others or for God.*

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

And here's the really exciting thing: *Each item you pray for is rewarded!* You can store up a lot of heavenly treasure in this way. People who pray often will lay up a lot more treasure than people who don't. I would venture to say that prayer is the most efficient way to earn future rewards: you don't have to wait for opportunities to come along to do good works—to help or to give or to use your spiritual gifts (e.g., to prepare and teach a Sunday School class once a week). Obviously, the more time you spend praying—the more things you pray for in your prayers and the more often you pray—the greater your spiritual payment or reward. More is better. Praying without ceasing, then, is the maximum; it's earning as many rewards as you can in a day, day after day, month after month, year after year. Ceaseless prayer is, of course, impossible (hyperbole)—but you get the idea. Why "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17)? Because the more you pray the more eternal rewards you will receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ. More prayer is more treasure stored up in heaven for the next life.

MOTIVATION FOR PRAYING

All of this answers the question: "Why pray?" Because (1) you're doing good works for others, (2) you're earning heavenly rewards, and (3) you're increasing your future status, wealth ("not rich toward God" in Luke 12:21 versus "you are rich" in Rev. 2:9), and honor (least or greatest) in the Millennial and Eternal Kingdoms. Now, please note: payment (rewards) for praying does not depend on God answering your prayers. It's still a good work done for others, a sacrifice of your time and energy, no matter what the answer is—a "Yes," "No," or "Wait." For me, doing good works and storing up treasure in heaven is a powerful motivation for prayer—especially when there are no pressing needs to bring before God.

GOOD WORKS ARE REWARDED

Rewards are wages owed and paid to servants for work performed (Rom. 4:4; Rev. 11:18). Payment is promised (Matt. 6:4, 6, 18; Eph. 6:8; Heb. 10:36; James 1:12) and will be received (Matt. 10:41; John 4:36; 1 Cor. 3:8, 14; 2 John 8) in the future (2 Tim. 4:8). And we will all be paid for our work (Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6–7; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12). Here are some other good works that God rewards: loving your enemies (compare Matt. 5:44 with 5:46), doing good for those who hate you (compare Luke 6:27 with 6:35), lending money to your enemies without interest (Luke 6:35), almsgiving (Matt. 6:3–4), feeding the poor, crippled, lame, and blind (Luke 14:12–14), generosity and sharing (1 Tim. 6:18), fasting (Matt. 6:17–18), hospitality (Matt. 10:41), giving a cup of cold water to little children or poor disciples (Matt. 10:42; Mark 9:41), evangelism ("reaps" in John 4:36; "planting" in 1 Cor. 3:8), preaching and teaching ("watering" in 1 Cor. 3:8; cf. 9:16–17), and shepherding the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1–4).

HARD WORK IS REWARDED EVEN MORE

All work done for the Lord, no matter how easy or how hard, will be rewarded. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil (*kopos*) is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). *Kopos* means "to engage in hard work, implying difficulties and trouble . . ." (Louw & Nida). Service is often exhausting because of difficulties or troubles encountered. But take heart: the harder the work, the greater the pay or reward.