

There are many things that we need to be reminded of in prayer, but surely the most essential thing is the promises of God found in Scripture. Prayer is dependent upon the promises, for by them we are assured that our prayer will be accepted. The promises are so foundational to prayer that without them, “the sinner, pressed with a sense of need, has nothing to support him, and therefore cannot pray in faith.” Owen stated that ignorance of the promises of God is one of the reasons why “men are so barren in their supplications.” Thankfully, this is one of the chief ways in which the Spirit helps us in prayer. Boston spoke of the Spirit as giving us a right view of the grace and promise of the covenant. Similarly, John Gill (1697–1771) said the Spirit helps “by bringing to remembrance and applying the precious promises of the Gospel.” This help is essential if we would pray with understanding and faith, for, as Boston wrote, “The promises are the rule and encouragement of prayer”; they “regulate our prayers” and act as “God’s bills and bonds to his people, and by them he shows what he allows us to ask of him.”

The promises of God are, as Owen wrote, “the measure of prayer.” He affirmed, “What God hath promised, all that he hath promised, and nothing else, are we to pray for; for ‘secret things belong unto the Lord our God’ alone, but the declaration of his will and grace belongs unto us, and is our rule.” Owen described the help offered by the Spirit in making us comprehend the promised grace and mercy of God as “that which gives spiritual beauty and order unto the duty of prayer, namely, the suiting of wants and supplies, of a thankful disposition and praises, of love and admiration, unto the excellencies of God in Christ, all by the wisdom of the Holy Ghost.” Owen warned of the danger of thinking we do not need the Spirit’s help in reminding us of the grace and promises of God: “To say that of ourselves we can perceive, understand, and comprehend these things, without the especial assistance of the Holy Ghost, is to overthrow the whole gospel and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The heart of all the promises is Christ our Mediator. If the Spirit did not give us a view of Christ, He would be, as Boston said, “a hidden beauty to us.” This help is to “point us to the only way of acceptance of our prayers.... He teaches us to pray as we ought, and so to pray in the name of Jesus Christ, depending on his merit and intercession.” Boston argued that this is to lay before the believer a “firm foundation of confidence before the Lord.” We must realize that Christ, through whom our prayers are heard by God, is an advocate who never loses a case, “having an undisputable ground to go upon, namely, the purchase of his own blood.” Boston wrote, “Are we sinful and vile? The merit of Christ is of infinite value. Are we unworthy for whom God should do such a thing? Yet the Mediator is worthy. Can our prayers, smelling so rank of sinful imperfections, not be accepted at our polluted hands? Yet being perfumed with his merit, they can be accepted at his hand, [Revelation 8:4](#).”

Joel R. Beeke and Brian G. Najapfour, eds., *Taking Hold of God: Reformed and Puritan Perspectives on Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

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