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God's people are to take careful note of the answers to their prayers

Firstly, when we have prayed to God we can be sure that He will answer us. 'My God will hear me', says the prophet Micah (Micah 7:7). 'I will ... look out to see what he will say to me', says Habakkuk (2:1). Why should we do this? Because we shall despise God's gracious provision for us if we think that prayer will not be any use in bringing about the purpose for which God has ordained it. Every faithful prayer is ordained by God to be a means of obtaining what we desire and pray for. 'This is the confidence that we have towards him [God], that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us' (1 John 5:14). It is true that God hears an enemy, but this is not the kind of meaning we are talking about. God hears His people's prayers with favour. God's ears are said to be open to their prayers, and so John follows his statement by saying in the next verse, 'And if we know he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him' (1 John 5:15). Our prayers are granted as soon as we have prayed, even though the process of fulfilling our requests has not yet begun. As soon as a godly man prays, the prayer instantaneously arrives in heaven and the petition is

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immediately granted. As soon as Daniel prayed, an answer was given, although the angel that brought that message did not arrive until some time later (Dan. 9:20-23). No prayer is ever useless. Where God has given a heart to speak, He has an ear to hear. To think otherwise is to despise God's gracious provision for us.

Secondly, if we are not confident that our prayer is going to be heard, we are not only misusing God's provision for us. We are also misusing His name. You evidently think God's arm is too short to save or His ear too dull to hear. You thus rob God of one of His most royal titles, for He describes himself as 'a God that hears prayer'. You should remember that the petitions of God's people do not pass out of His sight until He sends an answer. After David had prayed, he said that he waited for an answer more than watchmen wait for the morning (Ps. 130:6). Elsewhere David says, 'O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I direct my prayer to you and watch' (Ps. 5:3, margin). He expected an answer.

Thirdly, if God gives you an answer and you take no notice of it, you let God speak to you in vain. That is a great insult to God. Our speaking to God in prayer and His answering us form a great part of our experience of walking with God. We should study His dealings with us and compare our prayers with His answers. In 1 Kings 8:56 Solomon states that not one word had failed of all God's good promises. We should regard our prayers as a way of putting God's promises into action.

Again, if you do not wait for the Lord to speak, you will provoke Him not to answer you at all. God will see that it will be quite useless for Him to answer. It is not enough just to pray. After you have prayed, you need to

listen for an answer, so that you may receive what you have prayed for. Otherwise, you will not observe God fulfilling your prayers. How then will you bless God and give Him thanks for hearing you?

Watchfulness and thankfulness are required in prayer (Col. 4:2). Perhaps the reason you pray so much and give thanks so little is because you take such little notice of God's answers. When we have offered a faithful prayer, God is made our debtor because of His promises. We are to take note of His payment and give Him a receipt. Otherwise, God loses some of the praise due to Him. And if God is the loser so you will be too. You will lose the experience you might have had through it—an experience of God and His faithfulness. If you have proved God again and again in answering your prayers, such experiences will give you hope and confidence in God at other times. David says, 'Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live' (Ps. 116:2). It is as if he had said, 'Now that God has heard me, I know where to go. This experience, even if I had no more, is enough to encourage me to go on praying to God'.

Furthermore, by observing God's answers to your prayers, you will gain an insight into your own heart, ways and prayers, and learn how to judge them. David's assurance that he did not have sinful desires in his heart was strengthened by God's having heard his prayers. He reasons like this: 'If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer' (Ps. 66:18-19). If God does not answer your petitions, it will make you enquire as to the reason for it. You will then examine your prayers and the state of your heart to see

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whether, in fact, you had prayed with wrong motives (see James 4:3). If you have a friend who is usually punctual in answering your letters but who then fails to answer you in a particular matter, you begin to think that something must be wrong. You then take steps to find out what has caused the delay. Perhaps you have offended your friend in some way. It is like this with your prayers. If you do not take careful note of answers to prayer you will lose much comfort. There is no greater joy than seeing prayers answered. 'Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full', says Jesus (John 16:24). As it is a great joy to see anyone converted, it is an even greater joy to the one who has been the means of it. To see God do much good to His Church, and hear others' prayers for it, is a comfort. How much more is it a joy to see God do it as a result of one's own prayers! That God and we should be of one mind and desire the same things is a cause for great joy. It is wonderful when we see that we ourselves have been answered. You lose much comfort and blessing when you do not take note of the answers to your prayers.