

*Knocking on Heaven's Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer.*

By David Crump. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. Pp. 345.

David Crump is a professor in the Department of Religion at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. *Knocking on Heaven's Door* is a New Testament theology of petitionary prayer, beginning with the synoptic Gospels, the Lords' Prayer, and the Johannine corpus before turning to the Acts, the Pauline corpus, the General Letters and the book of Revelation.

Crump combines exegetical comment on the key NT passages with insights offered from his personal life, his pastoral experience and concise theological analyses. He is particularly concerned to integrate theology and, to borrow a phrase from Rudolf Bultmann, "the act of living" (p. 18). This methodology underscores the keen pastoral thrust of the book and lends some urgency to his robust critique of those contemporary theologies of prayer encountered the world over that essentially blame the pray-er's lack of faith or failure to persist or failure to "surrender" completely as the reason for the phenomenon of unanswered prayer. Such theologies, Crump implies, are more akin to magic and cultic manipulation of the divine, and certainly induce unhealthy guilt in the pray-er when the prayed for outcome does not eventuate.

The biblical, and especially the NT data, lead to other conclusions which are the particular province of the first four chapters on the synoptic Gospels, namely, that the frequency of prayer, the earnestness of the pray-er and the immensity of the faith of the pray-er are neither scripturally-based guarantees of answers to our prayers nor quantifiable commodities. But there is another insidious enemy of prayer, namely, the view that God has decreed all that will happen such that prayer becomes an exercise in conforming our will to God's. Prayer only changes the pray-er since God has immutably fore-ordained all that is to come to pass. Consequently prayer can only serve to change us insofar as we come to the realisation that he gives us only those things that are in his will to grant and not always those things for which we pray.

Crump is insistent that the NT supports the view that God can be influenced by prayer, that his mind can be changed and his decree does not extend to all events of history. He does not micromanage all events of human history (pp. 290–91) but has left room for the prayers of his people to form his mind and direct his action. God, writes Crump, "has sovereignly determined some things, especially the gift of a beginning and a final hope, but the greater remainder is left for us to negotiate by faith . . ." (p. 295). There can be no other way to account for the assumption across the NT corpus that people pray because they believe that God can be influenced by prayer. Crump calls this impetratory prayer—prayer that affects God "and makes a difference in the way things happen, moving God to do something he otherwise may not have done" (p. 219).

But if God is a God who can be affected by our prayers, what do we make of unanswered prayer? This is a particular concern of the final chapter of the book. There is much that happens to us and to those we love, despite our prayers on their behalf, that calls into question any confidence we have in his providential ordering of the creation. The thrust of the Crump's argument is that praying can move God to act, yet he readily admits that he is free to respond negatively to our requests, as in the case of Jesus' probing the "flexibility" of the Father's plan in Gethsemane or Paul requesting the Roman church that he be spared from his enemies in Jerusalem. The God of the Bible does hide his good purposes, nowhere better (we now see) in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. While great evils do happen for which we will never have an answer this side of the full realization of the Kingdom of God, faith consoles us. God's saving intention for his creation will not fail and even great evil can be used by him to bring about his good purposes.

There is no doubting the essential soundness of his conclusions and the pastoral sense that shines through the book, especially its final chapter. This is a book I can highly recommend to the theological college student, university student or church member wrestling with prayer and finding much that dissatisfies among the many contemporary voices on the subject.

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