

matter," in order that all the people might know from his denial, even to Moses, how dreadful a thing sin is in the sight of the Lord. For a similar reason, probably it was that David's prayer for the life of his child was not granted. And, when Paul thrice besought the Lord for the removal of his thorn, the answer came not in the healing of his body, but in the strengthening of his spirit ; that believers in every age might be able to appropriate the promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee ; my strength is made perfect in weakness."

It is thus apparent that the promise of answer to prayer though given in universal terms in some passages, is qualified by the wisdom and love of him who gives it, and that he will keep it, only in so far as it shall be for the highest welfare of his people that he should. While declaring in general phrase that he will give what his children ask, God yet, to speak after the manner of men, reserves to himself a certain discretionary power, so that he may either deny that which is requested, or bestow something else, according as he sees what shall be best in all the circumstances of each case. His great design in the administration of his moral government, is to advance the interests of the gospel, and through that to promote holiness and happiness among men. Now, the hearing of prayer by him is only a means to an end ; it is not an end in itself. God does not exist simply and only to answer prayer. He is the grand geometrician of the universe and the Father of his people, and his hearing of prayer is only among one of many means which he employs for the discipline of his people, and the training of them unto holiness. Now, if these views are sound and scriptural, then there may be deduced from them three inferences of great practical value.

In the first place, it may be seen how impossible it is for men to discover the result of prayer, by any merely human test. How shall, for example, they determine when a true prayer is offered ? If so much depends on the character of the suppliant, how can anyone, who is unable to read the heart, tell when the request which a seeker presents is such as God can approve ?