

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

E.M. Bounds

The Necessity of Prayer and other books by E.M. Bounds are unfailing wells for a lifetime of spiritual water-drawing. His wise counsel on prayer are words that originated on the anvil of experience.

His thoughts are inspiring, dynamic, and forthright. Probably no one has ever written more convincingly on the subject of prayer than E.M. Bounds. The Necessity of Prayer will help today's earnest Christians to discover the mystery and the majesty of prayer.

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FOREWORD

EDWARD McKENDREE BOUNDS did not merely pray well that he might write well about prayer. He prayed because the needs of the world were upon him. He prayed, for long years, upon subjects which the easy-going Christian rarely gives a thought, and for objects which men of less thought and faith are always ready to call impossible. From his solitary prayer-vigils, year by year, there arose teaching equaled by few men in modern Christian history. He wrote transcendently about prayer, because he was himself, transcendent in its practice.

As breathing is a physical reality to us so prayer was a reality for Bounds. He took the command, "Pray without ceasing" almost as literally as animate nature takes the law of the reflex nervous system, which controls our breathing.

Prayer-books -- real text-books, not forms of prayer -- were the fruit of this daily spiritual exercise. Not brief articles for the religious press came from his pen -- though he had been experienced in that field for years -- not pamphlets, but books were the product and result. He was hindered by poverty, obscurity, loss of prestige, yet his victory was not wholly reserved until his death.

In 1907, he gave to the world two small editions. One of these was widely circulated in Great Britain. The years following up to his death in 1913 were filled with constant labour and he went home to God leaving a collection of manuscripts. His letters carry the request that the present editor should publish these products of his gifted pen.

The preservation of the Bounds manuscripts to the present time has clearly been providential. The work of preparing them for the press has been a labour of love, consuming years of effort.

These books are unfailing wells for a lifetime of spiritual water-drawing. They are hidden treasures, wrought in the darkness of the dawn and the heat of the noon, on the anvil of experience, and beaten into wondrous form by the mighty stroke of the Divine. They are living voices whereby he, being dead, yet speaketh. -- C.C.

The above Foreword was written by Claude Chilton, Jr., an ardent admirer of

Dr. Bounds, and to whom we owe many obligations for suggestions in editing the Bounds Spiritual Life Books. We buried Claude L. Chilton February 18, 1929. What a meeting of these two great saints of God, of shining panoply and knightly grace!

HOMER W. HODGE.

Wilkes-Barre, Pa.



The Necessity of Prayer

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I. PRAYER AND FAITH

"A dear friend of mine who was quite a lover of the chase, told me the following story: 'Rising early one morning,' he said, 'I heard the baying of a score of deerhounds in pursuit of their quarry. Looking away to a broad, open field in front of me, I saw a young fawn making its way across, and giving signs, moreover, that its race was well-nigh run. Reaching the rails of the enclosure, it leaped over and crouched within ten feet from where I stood. A moment later two of the hounds came over, when the fawn ran in my direction and pushed its head between my legs. I lifted the little thing to my breast, and, swinging round and round, fought off the dogs. I felt, just then, that all the dogs in the West could not, and should not capture that fawn after its weakness had appealed to my strength.' So is it, when human helplessness appeals to Almighty God. Well do I remember when the hounds of sin were after my soul, until, at last, I ran into the arms of Almighty God." -- A. C. DIXON.

IN any study of the principles, and procedure of prayer, of its activities and enterprises, first place, must, of necessity, be given to faith. It is the initial quality in the heart of any man who essays to talk to the Unseen. He must, out of sheer helplessness, stretch forth hands of faith. He *must* believe, where he cannot prove. In the ultimate issue, prayer is simply faith, claiming its natural yet marvellous prerogatives -- faith taking possession of its illimitable inheritance. True godliness is just as true, steady, and persevering in the realm of faith as it is in the province of prayer. Moreover: when faith ceases to pray, it ceases to live.

Faith does the impossible because it brings God to undertake for us, and nothing is impossible with God. How great -- without qualification or limitation -- is the power of faith! If doubt be banished from the heart, and unbelief made stranger there, what we ask of God shall surely come to pass, and a believer hath vouchsafed to him "whatsoever he saith."

Prayer projects faith on God, and God on the world. Only God can move mountains, but faith and prayer move God. In His cursing of the fig-tree our Lord demonstrated His power. Following that, He proceeded to declare, that large powers were committed to faith and prayer, not in order to kill but to

make alive, not to blast but to bless.

At this point in our study, we turn to a saying of our Lord, which there is need to emphasize, since it is the very keystone of the arch of faith and prayer.

"Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

We should ponder well that statement -- "Believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Here is described a faith which realizes, which appropriates, which *takes*. Such faith is a consciousness of the Divine, an experienced communion, a realized certainty.

Is faith growing or declining as the years go by? Does faith stand strong and four square, these days, as iniquity abounds and the love of many grows cold? Does faith maintain its hold, as religion tends to become a mere formality and worldliness increasingly prevails? The enquiry of our Lord, may, with great appropriateness, be ours. "When the Son of Man cometh," He asks, "shall He find faith on the earth?" We believe that He will, and it is ours, in this our day, to see to it that the lamp of faith is trimmed and burning, lest He come who *shall* come, and that right early.

Faith is the foundation of Christian character and the security of the soul. When Jesus was looking forward to Peter's denial, and cautioning him against it, He said unto His disciple:

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, to sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fall not."

Our Lord was declaring a central truth; it was Peter's faith He was seeking to guard; for well He knew that when faith is broken down, the foundations of spiritual life give way, and the entire structure of religious experience falls. It was Peter's faith which needed guarding. Hence Christ's solicitude for the welfare of His disciple's soul and His determination to fortify Peter's faith by His own all-prevailing prayer.

In his *Second Epistle*, Peter has this idea in mind when speaking of growth in grace as a measure of safety in the Christian life, and as implying fruitfulness.

"And besides this," he declares, "giving diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness."

Of this adding process, faith was the starting-point -- the basis of the other graces of the Spirit. Faith was the foundation on which other things were to be built. Peter does not enjoin his readers to add to works or gifts or virtues but to *faith*. Much depends on starting right in this business of growing in grace.

There is a Divine order, of which Peter was aware; and so he goes on to declare that we are to give diligence to making our calling and election sure, which election is rendered certain adding to faith which, in turn, is done by constant, earnest praying. Thus faith is kept alive by prayer, and every step taken, in this adding of grace to grace, is accompanied by prayer.

The faith which pcreates powerful praying is the

faith which centres itself on a powerful Person. Faith in Christ's ability to *do* and to *do greatly*, is the faith which prays greatly. Thus the leper lay hold upon the power of Christ. "Lord, if Thou wilt," he cried, "Thou canst make me clean." In this instance, we are shown how faith centered in Christ's ability to *do*, and how it secured the healing power.

It was concerning this very point, that Jesus questioned the blind men who came to Him for healing:

"Believe ye that I am able to do this?" He asks. "They said unto Him, Yea, Lord. Then touched He their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you."

It was to inspire faith in His ability to *do* that Jesus left behind Him, that last, great statement, which, in the final analysis, is a ringing challenge to faith. "All power," He declared, "is given unto Me in heaven and in earth."



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II. PRAYER AND FAITH (Continued)

"The guests at a certain hotel were being rendered uncomfortable by repeated strumming on a piano, done by a little girl who possessed no knowledge of music. They complained to the proprietor with a view to having the annoyance stopped. 'I am sorry you are annoyed,' he said. 'But the girl is the child of one of my very best guests. I can scarcely ask her not to touch the piano. But her father, who is away for a day or so, will return tomorrow. You can then approach him, and have the matter set right.' When the father returned, he found his daughter in the reception-room and, as usual, thumping on the piano. He walked up behind the child and, putting his arms over her shoulders, took her hands in his, and produced some most beautiful music. Thus it may be with us, and thus it will be, some coming day. Just now, we can produce little but clamour and disharmony; but, one day, the Lord Jesus will take hold of our hands of faith and prayer, and use them to bring forth the music of the skies." -- ANON

GENUINE, authentic faith must be definite and free of doubt. Not simply general in character; not a mere belief in the being, goodness and power of God, but a faith which believes that the things which "he saith, shall come to pass." As the faith is specific, so the answer likewise will be definite: "He shall have whatsoever he saith." Faith and prayer select the things, and God commits Himself to do the very things which faith and persevering prayer nominate, and petition Him to accomplish.

The American Revised Version renders the twenty-fourth verse of the eleventh chapter of Mark, thus: "Therefore I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Perfect faith has always in its keeping what perfect prayer asks for. How large and unqualified is the area of operation -- the "All things whatsoever!" How definite and specific the promise -- "Ye shall have them!"

Our chief concern is with our faith, -- the problems of its growth, and the activities of its vigorous maturity. A faith which grasps and holds in its keeping the very things it asks for, without wavering, doubt or fear -- that is the faith we need -- faith, such as is a pearl of great price, in the process and practise of prayer.

The statement of our Lord about faith and prayer quoted above is of supreme importance. Faith must be definite, specific; an unqualified, unmistakable request for the things asked for. It is not to be a vague, indefinite, shadowy thing; it must be something more than an abstract belief in God's willingness and ability to do for us. It is to be a definite, specific, asking for, and expecting the things for which we ask. Note the reading of Mark 11:23:

"And shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatever he saith."

Just so far as the faith and the asking is definite, so also will the answer be. The giving is not to be something other than the things prayed for, but the actual things sought and named. "He shall have whatsoever he saith." It is all imperative, "He shall have." The granting is to be unlimited, both in quality and in quantity.

Faith and prayer select the subjects for petition, thereby determining what God is to do. "He shall have whatsoever he saith." Christ holds Himself ready to supply exactly, and fully, all the demands of faith and prayer. If the order on God be made clear, specific and definite, God will fill it, exactly in accordance with the presented terms.

Faith is not an abstract belief in the Word of God, nor a mere mental credence, nor a simple assent of the understanding and will; nor is it a passive acceptance of facts, however sacred or thorough. Faith is an operation of God, a Divine illumination, a holy energy implanted by the Word of God and the Spirit in the human soul -- a spiritual, Divine principle which takes of the Supernatural and makes it a thing apprehendable by the faculties of time and sense.

Faith deals with God, and is conscious of God. It deals with the Lord Jesus Christ and sees in Him a Saviour; it deals with God's Word, and lays hold of the truth; it deals with the Spirit of God, and is energized and inspired by its holy fire. God is the great objective of faith; for faith rests its whole weight on His Word. Faith is not an aimless act of the soul, but a looking to God and a resting upon His promises. Just as love and hope have always an objective so, also, has faith. Faith is not believing just *anything*; it is believing God, resting in Him, trusting His Word.

Faith gives birth to prayer, and grows stronger, strikes deeper, rises higher, in the struggles and wrestlings of mighty petitioning. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the assurance and realization of the inheritance of the saints. Faith, too, is humble and persevering. It can wait and pray; it can stay on its knees, or lie in the dust. It is the one great condition of prayer; the lack of it lies at the root of all poor praying, feeble praying, little praying, unanswered praying.

The nature and meaning of faith is more demonstrable in what it does, than it is by reason of any definition given it. Thus, if we turn to the record of faith given us in that great honour roll, which constitutes the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, we see something of the wonderful results of faith. What a glorious list it is -- that of these men and women of faith! What marvellous achievements are there recorded, and set to the credit of faith! The inspired writer, exhausting his resources in cataloguing the Old Testament saints, who were such notable examples of wonderful faith, finally exclaims:

"And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets."

And then the writer of *Hebrews* goes on again, in a wonderful strain, telling of the unrecorded exploits wrought through the faith of the men of old, "of whom the world was not worthy." "All these," he says, "obtained a good report through faith."

What an era of glorious achievements would dawn for the Church and the world, if only there could be reproduced a race of saints of like mighty faith, of like wonderful praying! It is not the intellectually great that the Church needs; nor is it men of wealth that the times demand. It is not people of great social influence that this day requires. Above everybody and everything else, it is men of faith, men of mighty prayer, men and women after the fashion of the saints and heroes enumerated in *Hebrews*, who "obtained a good report through faith," that the Church and the whole wide world of humanity needs.



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III. PRAYER AND TRUST

"One evening I left my office in New York, with a bitterly cold wind in my face. I had with me, (as I thought) my thick, warm muffler, but when I proceeded to button-up against the storm, I found that it was gone. I turned back, looked along the streets, searched my office, but in vain. I realized, then, that I must have dropped it, and prayed God that I might find it; for such was the state of the weather, that it would be running a great risk to proceed without it. I looked, again, up and down the surrounding streets, but without success. Sudden]y, I saw a man on the opposite side of the road holding out something in his hand. I crossed over and asked him if that were my muffler? He handed it to me saying, 'It was blown to me by the wind.' He who rides upon the storm, had used the wind as a means of answering prayer." -- WILLIAM HORST.

PRAYER does not stand alone. It is not an isolated duty and independent principle. It lives in association with other Christian duties, is wedded to other principles, is a partner with other graces. But to faith, prayer is indissolubly joined. Faith gives it colour and tone, shapes its character, and secures its results.

Trust is faith become absolute, ratified, consummated. There is, when all is said and done, a sort of venture in faith and its exercise. But trust *is firm belief*, it is faith in full flower. Trust is a conscious act, a fact of which we are sensible. According to the Scriptural concept it is the eye of the new-born soul, and the ear of the renewed soul. It is the feeling of the soul, the spiritual eye, the ear, the taste, the feeling -- these one and all have to do with trust. How luminous, how distinct, how conscious, how powerful, and more than all, how Scriptural is such a trust! How different from many forms of modern belief, so feeble, dry, and cold! These new phases of belief bring no consciousness of their presence, no "Joy unspeakable and full of glory" results from their exercise. They are, for the most part, adventures in the peradventures of the soul. There is no safe, sure trust in anything. The whole transaction takes place in the realm of Maybe and Perhaps.

Trust like life, is feeling, though much more than feeling. An unfelt life is a contradiction; an unfelt trust is a misnomer, a delusion, a contradiction. Trust

is the most felt of all attributes. It is *all* feeling, and it works only by love. An unfelt love is as impossible as an unfelt trust. The trust of which we are now speaking is a conviction. An unfelt conviction? How absurd!

Trust sees God doing things here and now. Yea, more. It rises to a lofty eminence, and looking into the invisible and the eternal, realizes that God has done things, and regards them as being already done. Trust brings eternity into the annals and happenings of time, transmutes the substance of hope into the reality of fruition, and changes promise into present possession. We know when we trust just as we know when we see, just as we are conscious of our sense of touch. Trust sees, receives, holds. Trust is its own witness.

Yet, quite often, faith is too weak to obtain God's greatest good, immediately; so it has to wait in loving, strong, prayerful, pressing obedience, until it grows in strength, and is able to bring down the eternal, into the realms of experience and time.

To this point, trust masses all its forces. Here it holds. And in the struggle, trust's grasp becomes mightier, and grasps, for itself, all that God has done for it in His eternal wisdom and plenitude of grace.

In the matter of waiting in prayer, mightiest prayer, faith rises to its highest plane and becomes indeed the gift of God. It becomes the blessed disposition and expression of the soul which is secured by a constant intercourse with, and unwearied application to God.

Jesus Christ clearly taught that faith was the condition on which prayer was answered. When our Lord had cursed the fig-tree, the disciples were much surprised that its withering had actually taken place, and their remarks indicated their incredulity. It was then that Jesus said to them, "Have faith in God."

"For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore, I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

Trust grows nowhere so readily and richly as in the prayer-chamber. Its unfolding and development are rapid and wholesome when they are regularly and well kept. When these engagements are hearty and full and free, trust flourishes exceedingly. The eye and presence of God give vigorous life to trust, just as the eye and the presence of the sun make fruit and flower to grow, and all things glad and bright with fuller life.

"Have faith in God," "Trust in the Lord" form the keynote and foundation of

prayer. Primarily, it is not trust in the Word of God, but rather trust in the Person of God. For trust in the Person of God must precede trust in the Word of God. "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me," is the demand our Lord makes on the personal trust of His disciples. The person of Jesus Christ must be central, to the eye of trust. This great truth Jesus sought to impress upon Martha, when her brother lay dead, in the home at Bethany. Martha asserted her belief in the fact of the resurrection of her brother:

"Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus lifts her trust clear above the mere fact of the resurrection, to His own Person, by saying:

"I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."

Trust, in an historical fact or in a mere record may be a very passive thing, but trust in a person vitalizes the quality, fructifies it, informs it with love. The trust which informs prayer centres in a Person.

Trust goes even further than this. The trust which inspires our prayer must be not only trust in the Person of God, and of Christ, but in their ability and willingness to grant the thing prayed for. It is not only, "Trust, ye, in the Lord," but, also, "for in the Lord Jehovah, is everlasting strength."

The trust which our Lord taught as a condition of effectual prayer, is not of the head but of the heart. It is trust which "doubteth not in his heart." Such trust has the Divine assurance that it shall be honoured with large and satisfying answers. The strong promise of our Lord brings faith down to the present, and counts on a present answer.



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IV. PRAYER AND DESIRE

"There are those who will mock me, and tell me to stick to my trade as a cobbler, and not trouble my mind with philosophy and theology. But the truth of God did so burn in my bones, that I took my pen in hand and began to set down what I had seen." -- JACOB BEHMEN.

DESIRE is not merely a simple wish; it is a deep seated craving; an intense longing, for attainment. In the realm of spiritual affairs, it is an important adjunct to prayer. So important is it, that one might say, almost, that desire is an absolute essential of prayer. Desire precedes prayer, accompanies it, is followed by it. Desire goes before prayer, and by it, created and intensified. Prayer is the oral expression of desire. If prayer is asking God for something, then prayer must be expressed. Prayer comes out into the open. Desire is silent. Prayer is heard; desire, unheard. The deeper the desire, the stronger the prayer. Without desire, prayer is a meaningless mumble of words. Such perfunctory, formal praying, with no heart, no feeling, no real desire accompanying it, is to be shunned like a pestilence. Its exercise is a waste of precious time, and from it, no real blessing accrues.

And yet even if it be discovered that desire is *honestly* absent, we should pray, anyway. We *ought* to pray. The "ought" comes in, in order that both desire and expression be cultivated. God's Word commands it. Our judgment tells us we ought to pray -- to pray whether we feel like it or not -- and not to allow our feelings to determine our habits of prayer. In such circumstance, we ought to pray for the *desire* to pray; for such a desire is God-given and heaven-born. We should pray for desire; then, when desire has been given, we should pray according to its dictates. Lack of spiritual desire should grieve us, and lead us to lament its absence, to seek earnestly for its bestowal, so that our praying, henceforth, should be an expression of "the soul's sincere desire."

A sense of need creates or should create, earnest desire. The stronger the sense of need, before God, the greater should be the desire, the more earnest the praying. The "poor in spirit" are eminently competent to pray.

Hunger is an active sense of physical need. It prompts the request for bread. In like manner, the inward consciousness of spiritual need creates desire, and desire breaks forth in prayer. Desire is an inward longing for something of

which we are not possessed, of which we stand in need -- something which God has promised, and which may be secured by an earnest supplication of His throne of grace.

Spiritual desire, carried to a higher degree, is the evidence of the new birth. It is born in the renewed soul:

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

The absence of this holy desire in the heart is presumptive proof, either of a decline in spiritual ecstasy, or, that the new birth has never taken place.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

These heaven-given appetites are the proof of a renewed heart, the evidence of a stirring spiritual life. Physical appetites are the attributes of a living body, not of a corpse, and spiritual desires belong to a soul made alive to God. And as the renewed soul hungers and thirsts after righteousness, these holy inward desires break out into earnest, supplicating prayer.

In prayer, we are shut up to the Name, merit and intercessory virtue of Jesus Christ, our great High Priest. Probing down, below the accompanying conditions and forces in prayer, we come to its vital basis, which is seated in the human heart. It is not simply our need; it is the heart's yearning for what we need, and for which we feel impelled to pray. Desire is the will in action; a strong, conscious longing, excited in the inner nature, for some great good. Desire exalts the object of its longing, and fixes the mind on it. It has choice, and fixedness, and flame in it, and prayer, based thereon, is explicit and specific. It knows its need, feels and sees the thing that will meet it, and hastens to acquire it.

Holy desire is much helped by devout contemplation. Meditation on our spiritual need, and on God's readiness and ability to correct it, aids desire to grow. Serious thought engaged in before praying, increases desire, makes it more insistent, and tends to save us from the menace of private prayer -- wandering thought. We fail much more in desire, than in its outward expression. We retain the form, while the inner life fades and almost dies.

One might well ask, whether the feebleness of our desires for God, the Holy Spirit, and for all the fulness of Christ, is not the cause of our so little praying, and of our languishing in the exercise of prayer? Do we really feel these inward pantings of desire after heavenly treasures? Do the inbred groanings of desire stir our souls to mighty wrestlings? Alas for us! The fire burns altogether too low. The flaming heat of soul has been tempered down to a tepid lukewarmness. This, it should be remembered, was the central cause of the sad

and desperate condition of the Laodicean Christians, of whom the awful condemnation is written that they were "rich, and increased in goods and *had need of nothing*," and knew not that they "were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind."

Again: we might well inquire -- have we that desire which presses us to close communion with God, which is filled with unutterable burnings, and holds us there through the agony of an intense and soul-stirred supplication? Our hearts need much to be worked over, not only to get the evil out of them, but to get the good into them. And the foundation and inspiration to the incoming good, is strong, propelling desire. This holy and fervid flame in the soul awakens the interest of heaven, attracts the attention of God, and places at the disposal of those who exercise it, the exhaustless riches of Divine grace.

The dampening of the flame of holy desire, is destructive of the vital and aggressive forces in church life. God requires to be represented by a fiery Church, or He is not in any proper sense, represented at all. God, Himself, is all on fire, and His Church, if it is to be like Him, must also be at white heat. The great and eternal interests of heaven-born, God-given religion are the only things about which His Church can afford to be on fire. Yet holy zeal need not to be fussy in order to be consuming. Our Lord was the incarnate antithesis of nervous excitability, the absolute opposite of intolerant or clamorous declamation, yet the zeal of God's house consumed Him; and the world is still feeling the glow of His fierce, consuming flame and responding to it, with an ever-increasing readiness and an ever-enlarging response.

A lack of ardour in prayer, is the sure sign of a lack of depth and of intensity of desire; and the absence of intense desire is a sure sign of God's absence from the heart! To abate fervour is to retire from God. He can, and does, tolerate many things in the way of infirmity and error in His children. He can, and will pardon sin when the penitent prays, but two things are intolerable to Him -- insincerity and lukewarmness. Lack of heart and lack of heat are two things He loathes, and to the Laodiceans He said, in terms of unmistakable severity and condemnation:

"I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth."



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V. PRAYER AND FERVENCY

"St. Teresa rose off her deathbed to finish her work. She inspected, with all her quickness of eye and love of order the whole of the house in which she had been carried to die. She saw everything put into its proper place, and every one answering to their proper order, after which she attended the divine offices of the day. She then went back to her bed, summoned her daughters around her . . . and, with the most penitential of David's penitential prayers upon her tongue, Teresa of Jesus went forth to meet her Bridegroom." -- ALEXANDER WHYTE.

PRAYER, without fervour, stakes nothing on the issue, because it has nothing to stake. It comes with empty hands. Hands, too, which are listless, as well as empty, which have never learned the lesson of clinging to the Cross.

Fervourless prayer has no heart in it; it is an empty thing, an unfit vessel. Heart, soul, and life, must find place in all real praying. Heaven must be made to feel the force of this crying unto God.

Paul was a notable example of the man who possessed a fervent spirit of prayer. His petitioning was all-consuming, centered immovably upon the object of his desire, and the God who was able to meet it.

Prayers must be red hot. It is the fervent prayer that is effectual and that availeth. Coldness of spirit hinders praying; prayer cannot live in a wintry atmosphere. Chilly surroundings freeze out petitioning; and dry up the springs of supplication. It takes fire to make prayers go. Warmth of soul creates an atmosphere favourable to prayer, because it is favourable to fervency. By flame, prayer ascends to heaven. Yet fire is not fuss, nor heat, noise. Heat is intensity -- something that glows and burns. Heaven is a mighty poor market for ice.

God wants warm-hearted servants. The Holy Spirit comes *as a fire*, to dwell in us; we are to be baptized, with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Fervency is warmth of soul. A phlegmatic temperament is abhorrent to vital experience. If our religion does not set us on fire, it is because we have frozen hearts. God dwells in a flame; the Holy Ghost descends in fire. To be absorbed in God's will,

to be so greatly in earnest about doing it that our whole being takes fire, is the qualifying condition of the man who would engage in effectual prayer.

Our Lord warns us against feeble praying. "Men ought always to pray," He declares, "and not to faint." That means, that we are to possess sufficient fervency to carry us through the severe and long periods of pleading prayer. Fire makes one alert and vigilant, and brings him off, more than conqueror. The atmosphere about us is too heavily charged with resisting forces for limp or languid prayers to make headway. It takes heat, and fervency and meteoric fire, to push through, to the upper heavens, where God dwells with His saints, in light.

Many of the great Bible characters were notable examples of fervency of spirit when seeking God. The Psalmist declares with great earnestness:

"My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto Thy judgments at all times."

What strong desires of heart are here! What earnest soul longings for the Word of the living God!

An even greater fervency is expressed by him in another place:

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"

That is the word of a man who lived in a state of grace, which had been deeply and supernaturally wrought in his soul.

Fervency before God counts in the hour of prayer, and finds a speedy and rich reward at His hands. The Psalmist gives us this statement of what God had done for the king, as his heart turned toward his Lord:

"Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips."

At another time, he thus expresses himself directly to God in preferring his request:

"Lord, all my desire is before Thee; and my groaning is not hid from Thee."

What a cheering thought! Our inward groanings, our secret desires, our heart-longings, are not hidden from the eyes of Him with whom we have to deal in prayer.

The incentive to fervency of spirit before God, is precisely the same as it is for continued and earnest prayer. While fervency is not prayer, yet it derives from an earnest soul, and is precious in the sight of God. Fervency in prayer is the precursor of what God will do by way of answer. God stands pledged to give us the desire of our hearts in proportion to the fervency of spirit we exhibit, when seeking His face in prayer.

Fervency has its seat in the heart, not in the brain, nor in the intellectual faculties of the mind. Fervency therefore, is not an expression of the intellect. Fervency of spirit is something far transcending poetical fancy or sentimental imagery. It is something else besides mere preference, the contrasting of like with dislike. Fervency is the throb and gesture of the emotional nature.

It is not in our power, perhaps, to create fervency of spirit at will, but we can pray God to implant it. It is ours, then, to nourish and cherish it, to guard it against extinction, to prevent its abatement or decline. The process of personal salvation is not only to pray, to express our desires to God, but to acquire a fervent spirit and seek, by all proper means, to cultivate it. It is never out of place to pray God to beget within us, and to keep alive the spirit of fervent prayer.

Fervency has to do with God, just as prayer has to do with Him. Desire has always an objective. If we desire at all, we desire *something*. The degree of fervency with which we fashion our spiritual desires, will always serve to determine the earnestness of our praying. In this relation, Adoniram Judson says:

"A travailing spirit, the throes of a great burdened desire, belongs to prayer. A fervency strong enough to drive away sleep, which devotes and inflames the spirit, and which retires all earthly ties, all this belongs to wrestling, prevailing prayer. The Spirit, the power, the air, and food of prayer is in such a spirit."

Prayer must be clothed with fervency, strength and power. It is the force which, centered on God, determines the outlay of Himself for earthly good. Men who are fervent in spirit are bent on attaining to righteousness, truth, grace, and all other sublime and powerful graces which adorn the character of the authentic, unquestioned child of God.

God once declared, by the mouth of a brave prophet, to a king who, at one time, had been true to God, but, by the incoming of success and material prosperity, had lost his faith, the following message:

"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him. Herein hast thou done foolishly; therefore, from

henceforth thou shalt have wars."

God had heard Asa's prayer in early life, but disaster came and trouble was sent, because he had given up the life of prayer and simple faith.

In Romans 15:30, we have the word, "strive," occurring, in the request which Paul made for prayerful cooperation.

In Colossians 4:12, we have the same word, but translated differently: "Epaphras always labouring fervently for you in prayer." Paul charged the Romans to "strive together with him in prayer," that is, to help him in his struggle of prayer. The word means to enter into a contest, to fight against adversaries. It means, moreover, to engage with fervent zeal to endeavour to obtain.

These recorded instances of the exercise and reward of faith, give us easily to see that, in almost every instance, faith was blended with trust until it is not too much to say that the former was swallowed up in the latter. It is hard to properly distinguish the specific activities of these two qualities, faith and trust. But there is a point, beyond all peradventure, at which faith is relieved of its burden, so to speak; where trust comes along and says: "You have done your part, the rest is mine!"

In the incident of the barren fig tree, our Lord transfers the marvellous power of faith to His disciples. To their exclamation, "How soon is the fig tree withered away!" He said:

"If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

When a Christian believer attains to faith of such magnificent proportions as these, he steps into the realm of implicit trust. He stands without a tremor on the apex of his spiritual outreaching. He has attained faith's veritable top stone which is unswerving, unalterable, unalienable trust in the power of the living God.



The Necessity of Prayer

Edward M. Bounds

RTFToC11

VI. PRAYER AND IMPORTUNITY

"How glibly we talk of praying without ceasing! Yet we are quite apt to quit, if our prayer remained unanswered but one week or month! We assume that by a stroke of His arm or an action of His will, God will give us what we ask. It never seems to dawn on us, that He is the Master of nature, as of grace, and that, sometimes He chooses one way, and sometimes another in which to do His work. It takes years, sometimes, to answer a prayer and when it is answered, and we look backward we can see that it did. But God knows all the time, and it is His will that we pray, and pray, and still pray, and so come to know, indeed and of a truth, what it is to pray without ceasing." -- ANON.

OUR Lord Jesus declared that "men ought always to pray and not to faint," and the parable in which His words occur, was taught with the intention of saving men from faint-heartedness and weakness in prayer. Our Lord was seeking to teach that laxity must be guarded against, and persistence fostered and encouraged. There can be no two opinions regarding the importance of the exercise of this indispensable quality in our praying.

Importunate prayer is a mighty movement of the soul toward God. It is a stirring of the deepest forces of the soul, toward the throne of heavenly grace. It is the ability to hold on, press on, and wait. Restless desire, restful patience, and strength of grasp are all embraced in it. It is not an incident, or a performance, but a passion of soul. It is not a want, half-needed, but a sheer necessity.

The wrestling quality in importunate prayers does not spring from physical vehemence or fleshly energy. It is not an impulse of energy, not a mere earnestness of soul; it is an inwrought force, a faculty implanted and aroused by the Holy Spirit. Virtually, it is the intercession of the Spirit of God, in us; it is, moreover, "the effectual, fervent prayer, which availeth much." The Divine Spirit informing every element within us, with the energy of His own striving, is the essence of the importunity which urges our praying at the mercy-seat, to continue until the fire falls and the blessing descends. This wrestling in prayer may not be boisterous nor vehement, but quiet, tenacious and urgent. Silent, it may be, when there are no visible outlets for its mighty forces.

Nothing distinguishes the children of God so clearly and strongly as prayer. It is the one infallible mark and test of being a Christian. Christian people are prayerful, the worldly-minded, prayerless. Christians call on God; worldlings ignore God, and call not on His Name. But even the Christian had need to cultivate continual prayer. Prayer must be habitual, but much more than a habit. It is duty, yet one which rises far above, and goes beyond the ordinary implications of the term. It is the expression of a relation to God, a yearning for Divine communion. It is the outward and upward flow of the inward life toward its original fountain. It is an assertion of the soul's paternity, a claiming of the sonship, which links man to the Eternal.

Prayer has everything to do with moulding the soul into the image of God, and has everything to do with enhancing and enlarging the measure of Divine grace. It has everything to do with bringing the soul into complete communion with God. It has everything to do with enriching, broadening and maturing the soul's experience of God. That man cannot possibly be called a Christian, who does not pray. By no possible pretext can he claim any right to the term, nor its implied significance. If he do not pray, he is a sinner, pure and simple, for prayer is the only way in which the soul of man can enter into fellowship and communion with the Source of all Christlike spirit and energy. Hence, if he pray not, he is not of the household of faith.

In this study however, we turn our thought to one phase of prayer -- that of importunity; the pressing of our desires upon God with urgency and perseverance; the praying with that tenacity and tension which neither relaxes nor ceases until its plea is heard, and its cause is won.

He who has clear views of God, and Scriptural conceptions of the Divine character; who appreciates his privilege of approach unto God; who understands his inward need of all that God has for him -- that man will be solicitous, outspoken and importunate. In Holy Writ, the duty of prayer, itself, is advocated in terms which are only barely stronger than those in which the necessity for its importunity is set forth. The praying which influences God is declared to be that of the fervent, effectual outpouring of a righteous man. That is to say, it is prayer on fire, having no feeble, flickering flame, no momentary flash, but shining with a vigorous and steady glow.

The repeated intercessions of Abraham for the salvation of Sodom and Gomorrah present an early example of the necessity for, and benefit deriving from importunate praying. Jacob, wrestling all night with the angel, gives significant emphasis to the power of a dogged perseverance in praying, and shows how, in things spiritual, importunity succeeds, just as effectively as it does in matters relating to time and sense.

As we have noted, elsewhere, Moses prayed forty days and forty nights, seeking to stay the wrath of God against Israel, and his example and success

are a stimulus to present-day faith in its darkest hour. Elijah repeated and urged his prayer seven times ere the raincloud appeared above the horizon, heralding the success of his prayer and the victory of his faith. On one occasion Daniel though faint and weak, pressed his case three weeks, ere the answer and the blessing came.



The Necessity of Prayer

Edward M. Bounds

RTFToC12

VII. PRAYER AND IMPORTUNITY (Continued)

"Two-thirds of the praying we do, is for that which would give us the greatest possible pleasure to receive. It is a sort of spiritual self-indulgence in which we engage, and as a consequence is the exact opposite of self-discipline. God knows all this, and keeps His children asking. In process of time -- His time -- our petitions take on another aspect, and we, another spiritual approach. God keeps us praying until, in His wisdom, He deigns to answer. And no matter how long it may be before He speaks, it is, even then, far earlier than we have a right to expect or hope to deserve." -- ANON.

THE tenor of Christ's teachings, is to declare that men are to pray earnestly -- to pray with an earnestness that cannot be denied. Heaven has harkening ears only for the whole-hearted, and the deeply-earnest. Energy, courage, and persistent perseverance must back the prayers which heaven respects, and God hears. All these qualities of soul, so essential to effectual praying, are brought out in the parable of the man who went to his friend for bread, at midnight. This man entered on his errand with confidence. Friendship promised him success. His plea was pressing: of a truth, he could not go back empty-handed. The flat refusal chagrined and surprised him. Here even friendship failed! But there was something to be tried yet -- stern resolution, set, fixed determination. He would stay and press his demand until the door was opened, and the request granted. This he proceeded to do, and by dint of importunity secured what ordinary solicitation had failed to obtain.

The success of this man, achieved in the face of a flat denial, was used by the Saviour to illustrate the necessity for insistence in supplicating the throne of heavenly grace. When the answer is not immediately given, the praying Christian must gather courage at each delay, and advance in urgency till the answer comes which is assured, if he have but the faith to press his petition with vigorous faith.

Laxity, faint-heartedness, impatience, timidity will be fatal to our prayers. Awaiting the onset of our importunity and insistence, is the Father's heart, the Father's hand, the Father's infinite power, the Father's infinite willingness to hear and give to His children.

Importunate praying is the earnest, inward movement of the heart toward God. It is the throwing of the entire force of the spiritual man into the exercise of prayer. Isaiah lamented that no one stirred himself, to take hold of God. Much praying was done in Isaiah's time, but it was too easy, indifferent and complacent. There were no mighty movements of souls toward God. There was no array of sanctified energies bent on reaching and grappling with God, to draw from Him the treasures of His grace. Forceless prayers have no power to overcome difficulties, no power to win marked results, or to gain complete victories. We must win God, ere we can win our plea.

Isaiah looked forward with hopeful eyes to the day when religion would flourish, when there would be times of real praying. When those times came, the watchmen would not abate their vigilance, but cry day and night, and those, who were the Lord's remembrancers, would give Him no rest. Their urgent, persistent efforts would keep all spiritual interests engaged, and make increasing drafts on God's exhaustless treasures.

Importunate praying never faints nor grows weary; it is never discouraged; it never yields to cowardice, but is buoyed up and sustained by a hope that knows no despair, and a faith which will not let go. Importunate praying has patience to wait and strength to continue. It never prepares itself to quit praying, and declines to rise from its knees until an answer is received.

The familiar, yet heartening words of that great missionary, Adoniram Judson, is the testimony of a man who was importunate at prayer. He says:

"I was never deeply interested in any object, never prayed sincerely and earnestly for it, but that it came at some time, no matter how distant the day. Somehow, in some shape, probably the last I would have devised, it came."

"Ask, and ye shall receive. Seek, and ye shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." These are the ringing challenges of our Lord in regard to prayer, and His intimation that true praying must stay, and advance in effort and urgency, till the prayer is answered, and the blessing sought, received.

In the three words ask, seek, knock, in the order in which He places them, Jesus urges the necessity of importunity in prayer. Asking, seeking, knocking, are ascending rounds in the ladder of successful prayer. No principle is more definitely enforced by Christ than that prevailing prayer must have in it the quality which waits and perseveres, the courage that never surrenders, the patience which never grows tired, the resolution that never wavers.

In the parable preceding that of the Friend at Midnight, a most significant and instructive lesson in this respect is outlined. Indomitable courage, ceaseless pertinacity, fixity of purpose, chief among the qualities included in Christ's

estimate of the highest and most successful form of praying.

Importunity is made up of intensity, perseverance, patience and persistence. The seeming delay in answering prayer is the ground and the demand of importunity. In the first recorded instance of a miracle being wrought upon one who was blind, as given by Matthew, we have an illustration of the way in which our Lord appeared not to hearken at once to those who sought Him. But the two blind men continue their crying, and follow Him with their continual petition, saying, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." But He answered them not, and passed into the house. Yet the needy ones followed Him, and, finally, gained their eyesight and their plea.

The case of blind Bartimaeus is a notable one in many ways. Especially is it remarkable for the show of persistence which this blind man exhibited in appealing to our Lord. If it be -- as it seems -- that his first crying was done as Jesus entered into Jericho, and that he continued it until Jesus came out of the place, it is all the stronger an illustration of the necessity of importunate prayer and the success which comes to those who stake their all on Christ, and give Him no peace until He grants them their hearts' desire.

Mark puts the whole incident graphically before us. At first, Jesus seems not to hear. The crowd rebukes the noisy clamour of Bartimaeus. Despite the seeming unconcern of our Lord, however, and despite the rebuke of an impatient and quick-tempered crowd, the blind beggar still cries, and increases the loudness of his cry, until Jesus is impressed and moved. Finally, the crowd, as well as Jesus, hearken to the beggar's plea and declare in favour of his cause. He gains his case. His importunity avails even in the face of apparent neglect on the part of Jesus, and despite opposition and rebuke from the surrounding populace. His persistence won where half-hearted indifference would surely have failed.

Faith has its province, in connection with prayer, and, of course, has its inseparable association with importunity. But the latter quality *drives* the prayer to the believing point. A persistent spirit brings a man to the place where faith takes hold, claims and appropriates the blessing.

The imperative necessity of importunate prayer is plainly set forth in the Word of God, and needs to be stated and re-stated today. We are apt to overlook this vital truth. Love of ease, spiritual indolence, religious slothfulness, all operate against this type of petitioning. Our praying, however, needs to be pressed and pursued with an energy that never tires, a persistency which will not be denied, and a courage which never fails.

We have need, too, to give thought to that mysterious fact of prayer -- the certainty that there will be delays, denials, and seeming failures, in connection with its exercise. We are to prepare for these, to brook them, and cease not in our urgent praying. Like a brave soldier, who, as the conflict grows sterner, exhibits a superior courage than in the earlier stages of the battle; so does the

praying Christian, when delay and denial face him, increase his earnest asking, and ceases not until prayer prevail. Moses furnishes an illustrious example of importunity in prayer. Instead of allowing his nearness to God and his intimacy with Him to dispense with the necessity for importunity, he regards them as the better fitting him for its exercise. When Israel set up the golden calf, the wrath of God waxed fierce against them, and Jehovah, bent on executing justice, said to Moses when divulging what He purposed doing, "Let Me alone!" But Moses would *not* let Him alone. He threw himself down before the Lord in an agony of intercession in behalf of the sinning Israelites, and for forty days and nights, fasted and prayed. What a season of importunate prayer was that!

Jehovah was wroth with Aaron, also, who had acted as leader in this idolatrous business of the golden calf. But Moses prayed for Aaron as well as for the Israelites; had he not, both Israel and Aaron had perished, under the consuming fire of God's wrath.

That long season of pleading before God, left its mighty impress on Moses. He had been in close relation with God aforetime, but never did his character attain the greatness that marked it in the days and years following this long season of importunate intercession.

There can be no question but that importunate prayer moves God, and heightens human character! If we were more with God in this great ordinance of intercession, more brightly would our face shine, more richly endowed would life and service be, with the qualities which earn the goodwill of humanity, and bring glory to the Name of God.



The Necessity of Prayer

Edward M. Bounds

RTFToC13

VIII. PRAYER AND CHARACTER AND CONDUCT

"General Charles James Gordon, the hero of Khartum, was a truly Christian soldier. Shut up in the Sudanese town he gallantly held out for one year, but, finally, was overcome and slain. On his memorial in Westminster Abbey are these words, 'He gave his money to the poor; his sympathy to the sorrowing; his life to his country and his soul to God.'" -- HOMER W. HODGE.

PRAYER governs conduct and conduct makes character. Conduct, is what we do; character, is what we are. Conduct is the outward life. Character is the life unseen, hidden within, yet evidenced by that which is seen. Conduct is external, seen from without; character is internal -- operating within. In the economy of grace conduct is the offspring of character. Character is the state of the heart, conduct its outward expression. Character is the root of the tree, conduct, the fruit it bears.

Prayer is related to all the gifts of grace. To character and conduct its relation is that of a helper. Prayer helps to establish character and fashion conduct, and both for their successful continuance depend on prayer. There may be a certain degree of moral character and conduct independent of prayer, but there cannot be anything like distinctive religious character and Christian conduct without it. Prayer helps, where all other aids fail. The more we pray, the better we are, the purer and better our lives.

The very end and purpose of the atoning work of Christ is to create religious character and to make Christian conduct.

"Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

In Christ's teaching, it is not simply works of charity and deeds of mercy upon which He insists, but inward spiritual character. This much is demanded, and nothing short of it, will suffice.

In the study of Paul's Epistles, there is one thing which stands out, clearly and unmistakably -- the insistence on holiness of heart, and righteousness of life. Paul does not seek, so much, to promote what is termed "personal work," nor is

the leading theme of his letters deeds of charity. It is the condition of the human heart and the blamelessness of the personal life, which form the burden of the writings of St. Paul.

Elsewhere in the Scriptures, too, it is character and conduct which are made preeminent. The Christian religion deals with men who are devoid of spiritual character, and unholy in life, and aims so to change them, that they become holy in heart and righteous in life. It aims to change bad men into good men; it deals with inward badness, and works to change it into inward goodness. And it is just here where prayer enters and demonstrates its wonderful efficacy and fruit. Prayer drives toward this specific end. In fact, without prayer, no such supernatural change in moral character, can ever be effected. For the change from badness to goodness is not wrought "by works of righteousness which we have done," but according to God's mercy, which saves us "by the washing of regeneration." And this marvellous change is brought to pass through earnest, persistent, faithful prayer. Any alleged form of Christianity, which does not effect this change in the hearts of men, is a delusion and a snare.

The office of prayer is to change the character and conduct of men, and in countless instances, has been wrought by prayer. At this point, prayer, by its credentials, has proved its divinity. And just as it is the office of prayer to effect this, so it is the prime work of the Church to take hold of evil men and make them good. Its mission is to change human nature, to change character, influence behaviour, to revolutionize conduct. The Church is presumed to be righteous, and should be engaged in turning men to righteousness. The Church is God's manufactory on earth, and its primary duty is to create and foster righteousness of character. This is its very first business. Primarily, its work is not to acquire members, nor amass numbers, nor aim at money-getting, nor engage in deeds of charity and works of mercy, but to produce righteousness of character, and purity of the outward life.

A product reflects and partakes of the character of the manufactory which makes it. A righteous Church with a righteous purpose makes righteous men. Prayer produces cleanliness of heart and purity of life. It can produce nothing else. Unrighteous conduct is born of prayerlessness; the two go hand-in-hand. Prayer and sinning cannot keep company with each other. One, or the other, must, of necessity, stop. Get men to pray, and they will quit sinning, because prayer creates a distaste for sinning, and so works upon the heart, that evil-doing becomes repugnant, and the entire nature lifted to a reverent contemplation of high and holy things.

Prayer is based on character. What we are with God gauges our influence with Him. It was the inner character, not the outward seeming, of such men as Abraham, Job, David, Moses and all others, who had such great influence with God in the days of old. And, today, it is not so much our words, as what we really are, which weighs with God. Conduct affects character, of course, and counts for much in our praying. At the same time, character affects conduct to

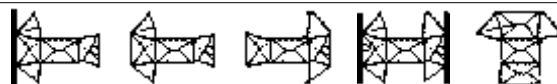
a far greater extent, and has a superior influence over prayer. Our inner life not only gives colour to our praying, but body, as well. Bad living means bad praying and, in the end, no praying at all. We pray feebly because we live feebly. The stream of prayer cannot rise higher than the fountain of living. The force of the inner chamber is made up of the energy which flows from the confluent streams of living. And the weakness of living grows out of the shallowness and shoddiness of character.

Feebleness of living reflects its debility and langour in the praying hours. We simply cannot talk to God, strongly, intimately, and confidently unless we are living for Him, faithfully and truly. The prayer-closet cannot become sanctified unto God, when the life is alien to His precepts and purpose. We must learn this lesson well -- that righteous character and Christlike conduct give us a peculiar and preferential standing in prayer before God. His holy Word gives special emphasis to the part conduct has in imparting value to our praying when it declares:

"Then shalt thou call and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am; if thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth the finger, and speaking vanity."

The wickedness of Israel and their heinous practices were definitely cited by Isaiah, as the reason why God would turn His ears away from their prayers:

"And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood."



The Necessity of Prayer

Edward M. Bounds

RTFToC14

IX. PRAYER AND OBEDIENCE

"An obedience discovered itself in Fletcher of Madeley, which I wish I could describe or imitate. It produced in him a ready mind to embrace every cross with alacrity and pleasure. He had a singular love for the lambs of the flock, and applied himself with the greatest diligence to their instruction, for which he had a peculiar gift. . . . All his intercourse with me was so mingled with prayer and praise, that every employment, and every meal was, as it were, perfumed therewith." -- JOHN WESLEY.

UNDER the Mosaic law, obedience was looked upon as being "better than sacrifice, and to harken, than the fat of lambs." In Deuteronomy 5:29, Moses represents Almighty God declaring Himself as to this very quality in a manner which left no doubt as to the importance He laid upon its exercise. Referring to the waywardness of His people He cries:

"O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children after them."

Unquestionably obedience is a high virtue, a soldier quality. To obey belongs, preeminently, to the soldier. It is his first and last lesson, and he must learn how to practice it all the time, without question, uncomplainingly. Obedience, moreover, is faith in action, and is the outflow as it is the very test of love. "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me."

Furthermore: obedience is the conserver and the life of love.

"If ye keep My commandments," says Jesus, "ye shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

What a marvellous statement of the relationship created and maintained by obedience! The Son of God is held in the bosom of the Father's love, by virtue of His obedience! And the factor which enables the Son of God to ever abide in His Father's love is revealed in His own statement, "For I do, always, those things that please Him."

The gift of the Holy Spirit in full measure and in richer experience, depends upon loving obedience:

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments," is the Master's word. "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever."

Obedience to God is a condition of spiritual thrift, inward satisfaction, stability of heart. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the fruit of the land." Obedience opens the gates of the Holy City, and gives access to the tree of life.

"Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates, into the city."

What is obedience? It is doing God's will: it is keeping His commandments. How many of the commandments constitute obedience? To keep half of them, and to break the other half -- is that real obedience? To keep all the commandments but one -- is that obedience? On this point, James the Apostle is most explicit: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law," he declares, "and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

The spirit which prompts a man to break one commandment is the spirit which may move him to break them all. God's commandments are a unit, and to break one strikes at the principle which underlies and runs through the whole. He who hesitates not to break a single commandment, would -- it is more than probable -- under the same stress, and surrounded by the same circumstances, break them all.

Universal obedience of the race is demanded. Nothing short of implicit obedience will satisfy God, and the keeping of all His commandments is the demonstration of it that God requires. But can we keep all of God's commandments? Can a man receive moral ability such as enables him to obey every one of them? Certainly he can. By every token, man can, through prayer, obtain ability to do this very thing.

Does God give commandments which men cannot obey? Is He so arbitrary, so severe, so unloving, as to issue commandments which cannot be obeyed? The answer is that in all the annals of Holy Scripture, not a single instance is recorded of God having commanded any man to do a thing, which was beyond his power. Is God so unjust and so inconsiderate as to require of man that which he is unable to render? Surely not. To infer it, is to slander the character of God.

Let us ponder this thought, a moment: Do earthly parents require of their children duties which they cannot perform? Where is the father who would

think, even, of being so unjust, and so tyrannical? Is God less kind and just than faulty, earthly parents? Are they better and more just than a perfect God? How utterly foolish and untenable a thought!

In principle, obedience to God is the same quality as obedience to earthly parents. It implies, in general effect, the giving up of one's own way, and following that of another; the surrendering of the will to the will of another; the submission of oneself to the authority and requirements of a parent. Commands, either from our heavenly Father or from our earthly father, are love-directing, and all such commands are in the best interests of those who are commanded. God's commands are issued neither in severity nor tyranny. They are always issued in love and in our interests, and so it behooves us to heed and obey them. In other words, and appraised at its lowest value -- God having issued His commands to us, in order to promote our good, it pays, therefore, to be obedient. Obedience brings its own reward. God has ordained it so, and since He has, even human reason can realize that He would never demand that which is out of our power to render.

Obedience is love, fulfilling every command, love expressing itself. Obedience, therefore, is not a hard demand made upon us, any more than is the service a husband renders his wife, or a wife renders her husband. Love delights to obey, and please whom it loves. There are no hardships in love. There may be exactions, but no irk. There are no impossible tasks for love.

With what simplicity and in what a matter-of-fact way does the Apostle John say: "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in His sight."

This is obedience, running ahead of all and every command. It is love, obeying by anticipation. They greatly err, and even sin, who declare that men are bound to commit iniquity, either because of environment, or heredity, or tendency. God's commands are not grievous. Their ways are ways of pleasantness, and their paths peace. The task which falls to obedience is not a hard one. "For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

Far be it from our heavenly Father, to demand impossibilities of His children. It is possible to please Him in all things, for He is not hard to please. He is neither a hard master, nor an austere lord, "taking up that which he lays not down, and reaping that which he did not sow." Thank God, it is possible for every child of God, to please his heavenly Father! It is really much easier to please Him than to please men. Moreover, we may *know* when we please Him. This is the witness of the Spirit -- the inward Divine assurance, given to all the children of God that they are doing their Father's will, and that their ways are well-pleasing in His sight.

God's commandments are righteous and founded in justice and wisdom. "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good."

"Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints." God's commandments, then, can be obeyed by all who seek supplies of grace which enable them to obey. These commandments *must* be obeyed. God's government is at stake. God's children are under obligation to obey Him; disobedience cannot be permitted. The spirit of rebellion is the very essence of sin. It is repudiation of God's authority, which God cannot tolerate. He never has done so, and a declaration of His attitude was part of the reason the Son of the Highest was made manifest among men:

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."



The Necessity of Prayer

Edward M. Bounds

RTFTtoC15

X. PRAYER AND OBEDIENCE (Continued)

"Many exemplary men have I known, holy in heart and life, within my four score years. But one equal to John Fletcher -- one so inwardly and outwardly obedient and devoted to God -- I have not known." --
JOHN WESLEY.

IT is worthy of note that the praying to which such transcendent position is given and from which great results are attributable, is not simply the saying of prayers, but holy praying. It is the "prayers of the saints," the prayers of the holy men of God. Behind such praying, giving to it energy and flame are the men and women who are wholly devoted to God, who are entirely separated from sin, and fully separated unto God. These are they who always give energy, force and strength to praying.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was preeminent in praying, because He was preeminent in saintliness. An entire dedication to God, a full surrender, which carries with it the whole being, in a flame of holy consecration -- all this gives wings to faith and energy to prayer. It opens the door to the throne of grace, and brings strong influence to bear on Almighty God.

The "lifting up of holy hands" is essential to Christly praying. It is not, however, a holiness which only dedicates a closet to God, which sets apart merely an hour to Him, but a consecration which takes hold of the entire man, which dedicates the whole life to God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," had full liberty of approach and ready access to God in prayer. And He had this free and full access because of His unquestioning obedience to His Father. Right through His earthly life His supreme care and desire was to do the will of His Father. And this fact, coupled with another -- the consciousness of having so ordered His life -- gave Him confidence and assurance, which enabled Him to draw near to the throne of grace with unbounded confidence, born of obedience, and promising acceptance, audience, and answer.

Loving obedience puts us where we can "ask anything in His name," with the assurance, that "He will do it." Loving obedience brings us into the prayer realm, and makes us beneficiaries of the wealth of Christ, and of the riches of

His grace, through the coming of the Holy Spirit who will abide with us, and be in us. Cheerful obedience to God, qualifies us to pray effectually.

This obedience which not only qualifies but fore-runs prayer, must be loving, constant, always doing the Father's will, and cheerfully following the path of God's commands.

In the instance of King Hezekiah, it was a potent plea which changed God's decree that he should die and not live. The stricken ruler called upon God to remember how that he had walked before Him in truth, and with a perfect heart. With God, this counted. He hearkened to the petition, and, as a result, death found his approach to Hezekiah barred for fifteen years.

Jesus learned obedience in the school of suffering, and, at the same time, He learned prayer in the school of obedience. Just as it is the prayer of a righteous man which availeth much, so it is righteousness which is obedience to God. A righteous man is an obedient man, and he it is, who can pray effectually, who can accomplish great things when he betakes himself to his knees.

True praying, be it remembered, is not mere sentiment, nor poetry, nor eloquent utterance. Nor does it consist of saying in honeyed cadences, "Lord, Lord." Prayer is not a mere form of words; it is not just calling upon a Name. Prayer is obedience. It is founded on the adamant rock of obedience to God. Only those who obey have the right to pray. Behind the praying must be the doing; and it is the constant doing of God's will in daily life which gives prayer its potency, as our Lord plainly taught:

"Not every one which saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto Me in that day, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name, and in Thy Name have cast out devils? And in Thy Name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that worketh iniquity."

No name, however precious and powerful, can protect and give efficiency to prayer which is unaccompanied by the doing of God's will. Neither can the doing, without the praying, protect from Divine disapproval. If the will of God does not master the life, the praying will be nothing but sickly sentiment. If prayer do not inspire, sanctify and direct our work, then self-will enters, to ruin both work and worker.

How great and manifold are the misconceptions of the true elements and functionings of prayer! There are many who earnestly desire to obtain an answer to their prayers but who go unrewarded and unblest. They fix their minds on some promise of God and then endeavour by dint of dogged perseverance, to summon faith sufficient to lay hold upon, and claim it. This

fixing of the mind on some great promise may avail in *strengthening* faith, but, to this holding on to the promise must be added the persistent and importunate prayer that expects, and waits till faith grows exceedingly. And who is there that is able and competent to do such praying save the man who readily, cheerfully and continually, *obeys God?*

Faith, in its highest form, is the attitude as well as the act of a soul surrendered to God, in whom His Word and His Spirit dwells. It is true that faith must exist in some form, or another, in order to prompt praying; but in its strongest form, and in its largest results, faith is the fruit of prayer. That faith increases the ability and the efficiency of prayer is true; but it is likewise true that prayer increases the ability and efficiency of faith. Prayer and faith, work, act and react, one upon the other.

Obedience to God helps faith as no other attribute possibly can. When obedience -- implicit recognition of the validity, the paramountcy of the Divine commands -- faith ceases to be an almost superhuman task. It requires no straining to exercise it. Obedience to God makes it easy to believe and trust God. Where the spirit of obedience fully impregnates the soul; where the will is perfectly surrendered to God; where there is a fixed, unalterable purpose to obey God, faith almost believes itself. Faith then becomes almost involuntary. After obedience it is, naturally, the next step, and it is easily and readily taken. The difficulty in prayer is not with faith, but with obedience, which is faith's foundation.

We must look well to our obedience, to the secret springs of action, to the loyalty of our heart to God, if we would pray well, and desire to get the most out of our praying. Obedience is the groundwork of effectual praying; this it is, which brings us nigh to God.

The lack of obedience in our lives breaks down our praying. Quite often, the life is in revolt and this places us where praying is almost impossible, except it be for pardoning mercy. Disobedient living produces mighty poor praying. Disobedience shuts the door of the inner chamber, and bars the way to the Holy of holies. No man can pray -- really pray -- who does not obey.

The will must be surrendered to God as a primary condition of all successful praying. Everything about us gets its colouring from our inmost character. The secret will makes character and controls conduct. The will, therefore, plays an important part in all successful praying. There can be no praying in its richest implication and truest sense, where the will is not wholly and fully surrendered to God. This unswerving loyalty to God is an utterly indispensable condition of the best, the truest, the most effectual praying. We have "*simply got to trust and obey; there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus -- but to trust, and obey!*"



The Necessity of Prayer

Edward M. Bounds

RTFTtoC16

XI. PRAYER AND VIGILANCE

"David Brainerd was pursued by unearthly adversaries, who were resolved to rob him of his guerdon. He knew he must never quit his armour, but lie down to rest, with his corselet laced. The stains that marred the perfection of his lustrous dress, the spots of rust on his gleaming shield, are imperceptible to us; but they were, to him, the source of much sorrow and ardency of yearning." -- LIFE OF DAVID BRAINERD.

THE description of the Christian soldier given by Paul in the sixth chapter of the *Epistle to the Ephesians*, is compact and comprehensive. He is depicted as being ever in the conflict, which has many fluctuating seasons -- seasons of prosperity and adversity, light and darkness, victory and defeat. He is to pray at all seasons, and with all prayer, this to be added to the armour in which he is to fare forth to battle. At all times, he is to have the full panoply of prayer. The Christian soldier, if he fight to win, must pray much. By this means, only, is he enabled to defeat his inveterate enemy, the devil, together with the Evil One's manifold emissaries. "Praying always, with all prayer," is the Divine direction given him. This covers all seasons, and embraces all manner of praying.

Christian soldiers, fighting the good fight of faith, have access to a place of retreat, to which they continually repair for prayer. "Praying always, with all prayer," is a clear statement of the imperative need of much praying, and of many kinds of praying, by him who, fighting the good fight of faith, would win out, in the end, over all his foes.

The Revised Version puts it this way:

"With all prayer and supplication, praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplications, for all saints, and on my behalf, that utterance may be given unto me, in opening my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am in bonds."

It cannot be stated too frequently that the life of a Christian is a warfare, an intense conflict, a lifelong contest. It is a battle, moreover, waged against

invisible foes, who are ever alert, and ever seeking to entrap, deceive, and ruin the souls of men. The life to which Holy Scripture calls men is no picnic, or holiday junketing. It is no pastime, no pleasure jaunt. It entails effort, wrestling, struggling; it demands the putting forth of the full energy of the spirit in order to frustrate the foe and to come off, at the last, more than conqueror. It is no primrose path, no rose-scented dalliance. From start to finish, it is war. From the hour in which he first draws sword, to that in which he doffs his harness, the Christian warrior is compelled to "endure hardness like a good soldier."

What a misconception many people have of the Christian life! How little the average church member appears to know of the character of the conflict, and of its demands upon him! How ignorant he seems to be of the enemies he must encounter, if he engage to serve God faithfully and so succeed in getting to heaven and receive the crown of life! He seems scarcely to realize that the world, the flesh and the devil will oppose his onward march, and will defeat him utterly, unless he give himself to constant vigilance and unceasing prayer.

The Christian soldier wrestles not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in high places. Or, as the Scriptural margin reads, "wicked spirits in high places." What a fearful array of forces are set against him who would make his way through the wilderness of this world to the portals of the Celestial City! It is no surprise, therefore, to find Paul, who understood the character of the Christian life so well, and who was so thoroughly informed as to the malignity and number of the foes, which the disciple of the Lord must encounter, carefully and plainly urging him to "put on the whole armour of God," and "to pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Wise, with a great wisdom, would the present generation be if all professors of our faith could be induced to realize this all-important and vital truth, which is so absolutely indispensable to a successful Christian life.

It is just at this point in much present-day Christian profession, that one may find its greatest defect. There is little, or nothing, of the soldier element in it. The discipline, self-denial, spirit of hardship, determination, so prominent in and belonging to the military life, are, one and all, largely wanting. Yet the Christian life is *warfare*, all the way.

How comprehensive, pointed and striking are all Paul's directions to the Christian soldier, who is bent on thwarting the devil and saving his soul alive! First of all, he must possess a clear idea of the character of the life on which he has entered. Then, he must know something of his foes -- the adversaries of his immortal soul -- their strength, their skill, their malignity. Knowing, therefore, something of the character of the enemy, and realizing the need of preparation to overcome them, he is prepared to hear the Apostle's decisive conclusion:

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His

might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

All these directions end in a climax; and that climax is prayer. How can the brave warrior for Christ be made braver still? How can the strong soldier be made stronger still? How can the victorious battler be made still more victorious? Here are Paul's explicit directions to that end:

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

Prayer, and more prayer, adds to the fighting qualities and the more certain victories of God's good fighting-men. The power of prayer is most forceful on the battle-field amid the din and strife of the conflict. Paul was preeminently a soldier of the Cross. For him, life was no flowery bed of ease. He was no dress-parade, holiday soldier, whose only business was to don a uniform on set occasions. His was a life of intense conflict, the facing of many adversaries, the exercise of unsleeping vigilance and constant effort. And, at its close -- in sight of the end -- we hear him chanting his final song of victory, a "I have fought a good fight," and reading between the lines, we see that he is more than conqueror!

In his *Epistle to the Romans*, Paul indicates the nature of his soldier-life, giving us some views of the kind of praying needed for such a career. He writes:

"Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea."

Paul *had* foes in Judaea -- foes who beset and opposed him in the form of "unbelieving men" and this, added to other weighty reasons, led him to urge the Roman Christians to "strive with him in prayer." That word "strive" indicated wrestling, the putting forth of great effort. This is the kind of effort, and this the sort of spirit, which must possess the Christian soldier.



The Necessity of Prayer

Edward M. Bounds

RTFToC17

XII. PRAYER AND THE WORD OF GOD

"How constantly, in the Scriptures, do we encounter such words as 'field,' 'seed,' 'sower,' 'reaper,' 'seed-time,' 'harvest'! Employing such metaphors interprets a fact of nature by a parable of grace. The field is the world and the good seed is the Word of God. Whether the Word be spoken or written, it is the power of God unto salvation. In our work of evangelism, the whole world is our field, every creature the object of effort and every book and tract, a seed of God." -- DAVID FANT, JR.

GOD'S Word is a record of prayer -- of praying men and their achievements, of the Divine warrant of prayer and of the encouragement given to those who pray. No one can read the instances, commands, examples, multiform statements which concern themselves with prayer, without realizing that the cause of God, and the success of His work in this world is committed to prayer; that praying men have been God's vicegerents on earth; that prayerless men have never been used of Him.

A reverence for God's holy Name is closely related to a high regard for His Word. This hallowing of God's Name; the ability to do His will on earth, as it is done in heaven; the establishment and glory of God's kingdom, are as much involved in prayer, as when Jesus taught men the Universal Prayer. That "men ought always to pray and not to faint," is as fundamental to God's cause, today, as when Jesus Christ enshrined that great truth in the immortal settings of the Parable of the Importunate Widow.

As God's house is called "the house of prayer," because prayer is the most important of its holy offices; so by the same token, the Bible may be called the Book of Prayer. Prayer is the great theme and content of its message to mankind.

God's Word is the basis, as it is the directory of the prayer of faith. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom," says St. Paul, "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

As this word of Christ dwelling in us richly is transmuted and assimilated, it

issues in praying. Faith is constructed of the Word and the Spirit, and faith is the body and substance of prayer.

In many of its aspects, prayer is dependent upon the Word of God. Jesus says:

"If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

The Word of God is the fulcrum upon which the lever of prayer is placed, and by which things are mightily moved. God has committed Himself, His purpose and His promise to prayer. His Word becomes the basis, the inspiration of our praying, and there are circumstances under which, by importunate prayer, we may obtain an addition, or an enlargement of His promises. It is said of the old saints that they, "through faith obtained promises." There would seem to be in prayer the capacity for going even beyond the Word, of getting even beyond His promise, into the very presence of God, Himself.

Jacob wrestled, not so much with a promise, as with the Promiser. We must take hold of the Promiser, lest the promise prove nugatory. Prayer may well be defined as that force which vitalizes and energizes the Word of God, by taking hold of God, Himself. By taking hold of the Promiser, prayer reissues, and makes personal the promise. "There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of Me," is God's sad lament. "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me," is God's recipe for prayer.

By Scriptural warrant, prayer may be divided into the petition of faith and that of submission. The prayer of faith is based on the written Word, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." It receives its answer, inevitably -- the very thing for which it prays.

The prayer of submission is without a definite word of promise, so to speak, but takes hold of God with a lowly and contrite spirit, and asks and pleads with Him, for that which the soul desires. Abraham had no definite promise that God would spare Sodom. Moses had no definite promise that God would spare Israel; on the contrary, there was the declaration of His wrath, and of His purpose to destroy. But the devoted leader gained his plea with God, when he interceded for the Israelites with incessant prayers and many tears. Daniel had no definite promise that God would reveal to him the meaning of the king's dream, but he prayed specifically, and God answered definitely.

The Word of God is made effectual and operative, by the process and practice of prayer. The Word of the Lord came to Elijah, "Go show thyself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth." Elijah showed himself to Ahab; but the answer to his prayer did not come, until he had pressed his fiery prayer upon the Lord seven times.

Paul had the definite promise from Christ, that he "would be delivered from the

people and the Gentiles," but we find him exhorting the Romans in the urgent and solemn manner concerning this very matter:

"Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea, and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints."

The Word of God is a great help in prayer. If it be lodged and written in our hearts, it will form an outflowing current of prayer, full and irresistible. Promises, stored in the heart, are to be the fuel from which prayer receives life and warmth, just as the coal, stored in the earth, ministers to our comfort on stormy days and wintry nights. The Word of God is the food, by which prayer is nourished and made strong. Prayer, like man, cannot live by bread alone, "but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord."

Unless the vital forces of prayer are supplied by God's Word, prayer, though earnest, even vociferous, in its urgency, is, in reality, flabby, and vapid, and void. The absence of vital force in praying, can be traced to the absence of a constant supply of God's Word, to repair the waste, and renew the life. He who would learn to pray well, must first study God's Word, and store it in his memory and thought.



The Necessity of Prayer

Edward M. Bounds

RTFToC18

XIII. PRAYER AND THE WORD OF GOD (Continued)

"Some years ago a man was travelling in the wilds of Kentucky. He had with him a large sum of money and was well armed. He put up at a log-house one night, but was much concerned with the rough appearance of the men who came and went from this abode. He retired early but not to sleep. At midnight he heard the dogs barking furiously and the sound of someone entering the cabin. Peering through a chink in the boards of his room, he saw a stranger with a gun in his hand. Another man sat before the fire. The traveller concluded they were planning to rob him, and prepared to defend himself and his property. Presently the newcomer took down a copy of the Bible, read a chapter aloud, and then knelt down and prayed. The traveller dismissed his fears, put his revolver away and lay down, to sleep peacefully until morning light. And all because a Bible was in the cabin, and its owner a man of prayer." -- REV. F. F. SHOUP.

PRAYER has all to do with the success of the preaching of the Word. This, Paul clearly teaches in that familiar and pressing request he made to the Thessalonians:

"Finally, brethren, pray for us that the Word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified."

Prayer opens the way for the Word of God to run without let or hindrance, and creates the atmosphere which is favourable to the word accomplishing its purpose. Prayer puts wheels under God's Word, and gives wings to the angel of the Lord "having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." Prayer greatly helps the Word of the Lord.

The Parable of the Sower is a notable study of preaching, showing its differing effects and describing the diversity of hearers. The wayside hearers are legion. The soil lies all unprepared either by previous thought or prayer; as a consequence, the devil easily takes away the seed (which is the Word of God) and dissipating all good impressions, renders the work of the sower futile. No one for a moment believes, that so much of present-day sowing would go

fruitless if only the hearers would prepare the ground of their hearts beforehand by prayer and meditation.

Similarly with the stony-ground hearers, and the thorny-ground hearers. Although the word lodges in their hearts and begins to sprout, yet all is lost, chiefly because there is no prayer or watchfulness or cultivation following. The good-ground hearers are profited by the sowing, simply because their minds have been prepared for the reception of the seed, and that, after hearing, they have cultivated the seed sown in their hearts, by the exercise of prayer. All this gives peculiar emphasis to the conclusion of this striking parable: "Take heed, therefore, how ye hear." And in order that we may take heed how we hear, it is needful to give ourselves continually to prayer.

We have *got* to believe that underlying God's Word is prayer, and upon prayer, its final success will depend. In the *Book of Isaiah* we read:

"So shall My word be that goeth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

In Psalm 19, David magnifies the Word of God in six statements concerning it. It converts the soul, makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes, endures eternally, and is true and righteous altogether. The Word of God is perfect, sure, right, pure. It is heart-searching, and at the same time purifying, in its effect. It is no surprise therefore that after considering the deep spirituality of the Word of God, its power to search the inner nature of man, and its deep purity, the Psalmist should close his dissertation with this passage:

"Who can understand his errors?" And then praying after this fashion: "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."

James recognizes the deep spirituality of the Word, and its inherent saving power, in the following exhortation:

"Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."

And Peter talks along the same line, when describing the saving power of the Word of God:

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."

Not only does Peter speak of being born again, by the incorruptible Word of God, but he informs us that to grow in grace we must be like new-born babes, desiring or feeding upon the "sincere milk of the Word."

That is not to say, however, that the mere form of words as they occur in the Bible have in them any saving efficacy. But the Word of God, be it remembered, is impregnated with the Holy Spirit. And just as there is a Divine element in the words of Scripture, so also is the same Divine element to be found in all true preaching of the Word, which is able to save and convert the soul.

Prayer invariably begets a love for the Word of God, and sets people to the reading of it. Prayer leads people to obey the Word of God, and puts into the heart which obeys a joy unspeakable. Praying people and Bible-reading people are the same sort of folk. The God of the Bible and the God of prayer are one. God speaks to man in the Bible; man speaks to God in prayer. One reads the Bible to discover God's will; he prays in order that he may receive power to do that will. Bible-reading and praying are the distinguishing traits of those who strive to know and please God. And just as prayer begets a love for the Scriptures, and sets people to reading the Bible, so, also, does prayer cause men and women to visit the house of God, to hear the Scriptures expounded. Church-going is closely connected with the Bible, not so much because the Bible cautions us against "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is," but because in God's house, God's chosen minister declares His Word to dying men, explains the Scriptures, and enforces their teachings upon his hearers. And prayer germinates a resolve, in those who practise it, not to forsake the house of God.

Prayer begets a church-going conscience, a church-loving heart, a church-supporting spirit. It is the praying people, who make it a matter of conscience, to attend the preaching of the Word; who delight in its reading; exposition; who support it with their influence and their means. Prayer exalts the Word of God and gives it preeminence in the estimation of those who faithfully and wholeheartedly call upon the Name of the Lord.

Prayer draws its very life from the Bible, and has no standing ground outside of the warrant of the Scriptures. Its very existence and character is dependent on revelation made by God to man in His holy Word. Prayer, in turn, exalts this same revelation, and turns men toward that Word. The nature, necessity and all-comprehending character of prayer, is based on the Word of God.

Psalm 119 is a directory of God's Word. With three or four exceptions, each verse contains a word which identifies, or locates, the Word of God. Quite often, the writer breaks out into supplication, several times praying, "Teach me Thy statutes." So deeply impressed is he with the wonders of God's Word, and of the need for Divine illumination wherewith to see and understand the

wonderful things recorded therein, that he fervently prays:

"Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law."

From the opening of this wonderful Psalm to its close, prayer and God's Word are intertwined. Almost every phase of God's Word is touched upon by this inspired writer. So thoroughly convinced was the Psalmist of the deep spiritual power of the Word of God that he makes this declaration:

"Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee."

Here the Psalmist found his protection against sinning. By having God's Word hidden in his heart; in having his whole being thoroughly impregnated with that Word; in being brought completely under its benign and gracious influence, he was enabled to walk to and fro in the earth, safe from the attack of the Evil One, and fortified against a proneness to wander out of the way.

We find, furthermore, the power of prayer to create a real love for the Scriptures, and to put within men a nature which will take pleasure in the Word. In holy ecstasy he cries, "O, how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day." And again: "How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my taste."

Would we have a relish for God's Word? Then let us give ourselves continually to prayer. He who would have a heart for the reading of the Bible must not -- dare not -- forget to pray. The man of whom it can be said, "His delight is in the law of the Lord," is the man who can truly say, "I delight to visit the place of prayer." No man loves the Bible, who does not love to pray. No man loves to pray, who does not delight in the law of the Lord.

Our Lord was a man of prayer, and He magnified the Word of God, quoting often from the Scriptures. Right through His earthly life Jesus observed Sabbath-keeping, church-going and the reading of the Word of God, and had prayer intermingled with them all:

"And He came to Nazareth where He had been brought up, and as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath Day, and stood up to read."

Here, let it be said, that no two things are more essential to a spirit-filled life than Bible-reading and secret prayer; no two things more helpful to growth in grace; to getting the largest joy out of a Christian life; toward establishing one in the ways of eternal peace. The neglect of these all-important duties, presages leanness of soul, loss of joy, absence of peace, dryness of spirit, decay in all that pertains to spiritual life. Neglecting these things paves the way for apostasy, and gives the Evil One an advantage such as he is not likely to

ignore. Reading God's Word regularly, and praying habitually in the secret place of the Most High puts one where he is absolutely safe from the attacks of the enemy of souls, and guarantees him salvation and final victory, through the overcoming power of the Lamb.



The Necessity of Prayer

Edward M. Bounds

RTFToC19

XIV. PRAYER AND THE HOUSE OF GOD

*"And dear to me the loud 'Amen,' Which echoes through the blest
abode -- Which swells, and sinks, then swells again, Dies on the walls
-- but lives with God! "*

PRAYER stands related to places, times, occasions and circumstances. It has to do with God and with everything which is related to God, and it has an intimate and special relationship to His house. A church is a sacred place, set apart from all unhallowed and secular uses, for the worship of God. As worship is prayer, the house of God is a place set apart for worship. It is no common place; it is where God dwells, where He meets with His people, and He delights in the worship of His saints.

Prayer is always in place in the house of God. When prayer is a stranger there, then it ceases to be God's house at all. Our Lord put peculiar emphasis upon what the Church was when He cast out the buyers and sellers in the Temple, repeating the words from Isaiah, "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer." He makes prayer preeminent, that which stands out above all else in the house of God. They, who sidetrack prayer or seek to minify it, and give it a secondary place, pervert the Church of God, and make it something less and other than it is ordained to be.

Prayer is perfectly at home in the house of God. It is no stranger, no mere guest; it belongs there. It has a peculiar affinity for the place, and has, moreover, a Divine right there, being set, therein, by Divine appointment and approval.

The inner chamber is a sacred place for personal worship. The house of God is a holy place for united worship. The prayer-closet is for individual prayer. The house of God is for mutual prayer, concerted prayer, united prayer. Yet even in the house of God, there is the element of private worship, since God's people are to worship Him and pray to Him, personally, even in public worship. The Church is for the united prayer of kindred, yet individual believers.

The life, power and glory of the Church is prayer. The life of its members is dependent on prayer and the presence of God is secured and retained by prayer. The very place is made sacred by its ministry. Without it, the Church is

lifeless and powerless. Without it, even the building, itself, is nothing, more or other, than any other structure. Prayer converts even the bricks, and mortar, and lumber, into a sanctuary, a holy of holies, where the Shekinah dwells. It separates it, in spirit and in purpose from all other edifices. Prayer gives a peculiar sacredness to the building, sanctifies it, sets it apart for God, conserves it from all common and mundane affairs.

With prayer, though the house of God might be supposed to lack everything else, it becomes a Divine sanctuary. So the Tabernacle, moving about from place to place, became the holy of holies, because prayer was there. Without prayer the building may be costly, perfect in all its appointments, beautiful for situation and attractive to the eye, but it comes down to the human, with nothing Divine in it, and is on a level with all other buildings.

Without prayer, a church is like a body without spirit; it is a dead, inanimate thing. A church with prayer in it, has God in it. When prayer is set aside, God is outlawed. When prayer becomes an unfamiliar exercise, then God Himself is a stranger there.

As God's house is a house of prayer, the Divine intention is that people should leave their homes and go to meet Him in His own house. The building is set apart for prayer especially, and as God has made special promise to meet His people there, it is their duty to go there, and for that specific end. Prayer should be the chief attraction for all spiritually minded church-goers. While it is conceded that the preaching of the Word has an important place in the house of God, yet prayer is its predominating, distinguishing feature. Not that all other places are sinful, or evil, in themselves or in their uses. But they are secular and human, having no special conception of God in them. The Church is, essentially, religious and Divine. The work belonging to other places is done without special reference to God. He is not specifically recognized, nor called upon. In the Church, however, God is acknowledged, and nothing is done without Him. Prayer is the one distinguishing mark of the house of God. As prayer distinguishes Christian from unchristian people, so prayer distinguishes God's house from all other houses. It is a place where faithful believers meet with their Lord.

As God's house is, preeminently, a house of prayer, prayer should enter into and underlie everything that is undertaken there. Prayer belongs to every sort of work appertaining to the Church of God. As God's house is a house where the business of praying is carried on, so is it a place where the business of making praying people out of prayerless people is done. The house of God is a Divine workshop, and there the work of prayer goes on. Or the house of God is a Divine schoolhouse, in which the lesson of prayer is taught; where men and women learn to pray, and where they are graduated, in the school of prayer.

Any church calling itself the house of God, and failing to magnify prayer; which does not put prayer in the forefront of its activities; which does not teach the

great lesson of prayer, should change its teaching to conform to the Divine pattern or change the name of its building to something other than a house of prayer.

On an earlier page, we made reference to the finding of the Book of the Law of the Lord given to Moses. How long that book had been there, we do not know. But when tidings of its discovery were carried to Josiah, he rent his clothes and was greatly disturbed. He lamented the neglect of God's Word and saw, as a natural result, the iniquity which abounded throughout the land.

And then, Josiah thought of God, and commanded Hilkiah, the priest, to go and make inquiry of the Lord. Such neglect of the Word of the Law was too serious a matter to be treated lightly, and God must be enquired of, and repentance shown, by himself, and the nation:

"Go enquire of the Lord for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book."

But that was not all. Josiah was bent on promoting a revival of religion in his kingdom, so we find him gathering all the elders of Jerusalem and Judah together, for that purpose. When they had come together, the king went into the house of the Lord, and himself read in all the words of the Book of the Covenant that was found in the house of the Lord.

With this righteous king, God's Word was of great importance. He esteemed it at its proper worth, and counted a knowledge of it to be of such grave importance, as to demand his consulting God in prayer about it, and to warrant the gathering together of the notables of his kingdom, so that they, together with himself, should be instructed out of God's Book concerning God's Law.

When Ezra, returned from Babylon, was seeking the reconstruction of his nation, the people, themselves, were alive to the situation, and, on one occasion, the priests, Levites and people assembled themselves together as one man before the water gate.

"And they spake unto Ezra the scribe, to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law."

This was Bible-reading Day in Judah -- a real revival of Scripture-study. The

leaders read the law before the people, whose ears were keen to hear what God had to say to them out of the Book of the Law. But it was not only a Bible-reading day. It was a time when real preaching was done, as the following passage indicates:

"So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

Here then is the Scriptural definition of preaching. No better definition can be given. To read the Word of God distinctly -- to read it so that the people could hear and understand the words read; not to mumble out the words, nor read it in an undertone or with indistinctness, but boldly and clearly -- that was the method followed in Jerusalem, on this auspicious day. Moreover: the sense of the words was made clear in the meeting held before the water gate; the people were treated to a high type of expository preaching. That was *true* preaching -- preaching of a sort which is sorely needed, today, in order that God's Word may have due effect on the hearts of the people. This meeting in Jerusalem surely contains a lesson which all present-day preachers should learn and heed.

No one having any knowledge of the existing facts, will deny the comparative lack of expository preaching in the pulpit effort of today. And none, we should, at least, imagine, will do other than lament the lack. Topical preaching, polemical preaching, historical preaching, and other forms of sermonic output have, one supposes, their rightful and opportune uses. But expository preaching -- the prayerful expounding of the Word of God is preaching that *is* preaching -- pulpit effort *par excellence*.

For its successful accomplishment, however, a preacher needs must be a man of prayer. For every hour spent in his study-chair, he will have to spend two upon his knees. For every hour he devotes to wrestling with an obscure passage of Holy Writ, he must have two in the which to be found wrestling with God. Prayer and preaching: preaching and prayer! They cannot be separated. The ancient cry was: "To your tents, O Israel!" The modern cry should be: "To your knees, O preachers, to your knees!"

