

- Is prayer merely psychological—a matter of the mind?
- Does God require that we pray because our prayer is essential?
- Can prayer in any sense help to determine the course of history?
- Is prayer indispensable to human living and destiny?
- Does man have genuine dialogue with God?

These and other matters relating to prayer are put forward by the author who sees prayer and worship as the two primary factors integrating all theology from the side of human experience and thought. Whilst all men and women pray, and pray constantly—not excluding the most militant of atheists—the author sees prayer as the richest and most powerful element for true living. To him prayer is the factor which establishes man in practical partnership with God. In Covenant relationship with the Father-Creator-Redeemer, man is able to participate significantly in the course of human history.

If this be so then the book is one we ought to read.

*Geoffrey Bingham is an Anglican minister. His experience as soldier, prisoner of war, farmer, writer, teacher and family man as well as theologian, has given him grounds for writing material which is Australian in tone, and relevant to the society in which we live. Some have found his books life-changing.*

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# COME LET US PRAY

*Geoffrey C. Bingham*



# COME LET US PRAY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Christ the Conquering King!  
Oh Father! Our Father!  
Sons of God Are the Servants of All (The)  
Person and Work of Christ (The)  
Christian Mediator (The)  
God Is a Goodly Guide  
Christ's People in Today's World  
Dry Bones Dancing!  
I Saw in the Night Visions

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Geoffrey Bingham

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# FOREWORD

It could be fairly claimed that enough—if not too many—books have been written on prayer. Even so each book may appeal to a certain mind, and prove helpful. Certainly the last word has not been written on the subject of prayer. Over two decades ago I wrote a book on prayer and am not sorry now that it did not reach publication. If I am alive two decades hence I may even have the same thought about this volume!

Prayer is so necessary a thing for the true outworking of history that its necessity—rightly understood—is mind boggling. We can say firstly that it is utterly essential for human living. Man must have dialogue with God. This is his highest and most satisfying experience and practice. Secondly, human prayer given to God and assisted by Him does in fact determine the course of history, for that is the way God has planned it should be. Man—so to speak—is His partner in history, and even though he may be the lesser partner of the working relationship, yet God has ordered things so that he—man—is His essential partner.

I personally have benefited greatly from writing this book. Any writer must receive some benefits for his writing unless he is a mindless person, in which case he is not really writing thoughtfully. The chief insight that came is that prayer is dialogue. God first speaks to man: man responds and talks with God. The dialogue is not religious

in nature, is not polite, but is most effective. Man is permitted to express his mind, allowed to talk from his heart, whether in anger or submissive understanding. When he truly worships, his dialogue is valuable. He shares with God his own heart, as God shares His mind and counsel for the world and history. At the same time the colloquy—the exchange of ideas in relationship—is intimately personal. God loves: man responds. God is concerned for his partner and shares with him, meeting needs, revealing His purposes, helping the other to become wiser.

I trust that some of the insights of the book will prove as valuable to others as they have become to me. A praying people can change a family, a nation, and even the course of the history of the world.

Geoffrey Bingham  
Coromandel, August 1987.

# 1

## ‘Come Let Us Pray’

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### **INVITATION TO PRAYER**

Is it true that we are invited by God to pray? We shall certainly see in our research on prayer that we are commanded, but then are we invited to pray? In Hebrews 4:16 the writer gives an invitation, ‘Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need’. He does this on the basis that Christ is our great high priest. God has been known to say, ‘Come now and let us reason together’. Even so such invitations happen from within covenant-living, i.e. being in God’s covenant.

Do others outside of God’s covenant have the right to pray to God? We know that Nebuchadnezzar prayed, for he talked to ‘the Most High’ and blessed him, confessing his own pride and the just treatment of him by God (Dan. 4:34-37). We know also-on another level-that there were godly men and women who knew God and prayed to Him, who were not within the covenant with Israel or the New Covenant. In one sense all nations are linked with the

covenant God made with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). Peter preached to Cornelius and his household who were known in those days as ‘god-fearers’ and Peter observed, ‘Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him’ (Acts 10:34-35). Paul told the Athenians, ‘What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you’ (Acts 17:23).

The truth is that all men may converse with God because He created them. Sinful, rebellious, foolish or atheistic, He is their Creator. In practical fact all human beings pray to God, although many would not recognize Him as God, that is they have dialogue with Him, whether in adoration and joy or in anger and rebellion. We may put it this way, ‘By creation all human creatures have union with God, the Creator-creature union, but only those who have the grace of redemption have communion with Him’.

We need to understand that prayer is a love-communion with God, by which (a) we have and develop our fellowship with Him (I John 1:3), (b) we come to know Him more-His being and will-out of which we worship, give thanks, make petition, and intercession. We are made for all this because we are made in His image, and so participate in His plan. Since God is the God of intercession (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:26-27), then so are we-by nature-intercessors.

## **ACCESS TO GOD FOR PRAYER**

Being creatures gives us some sort of access to God. We know that the murderer Cain talked to God, albeit

ungraciously and in anger. Even so he talked: he had dialogue. God’s mercy allowed this. To have true prayer in its appropriate meaning, man needs to have the union which covenant brings, and the communion which grace and the Spirit engender. Later we will see that we come to God through our Mediator Jesus Christ, and pray in his powerful name, by which our prayers are considered-so to speak-to be his very own. We will see this is so because Christ, his Gospel, and the Holy Spirit have given us access to the Father. ‘Access’ is an important word.

## **A PERSONAL EXPERIMENT**

If readers are persons of prayer, and even if they are not, let us try an experiment as we pause in reading this book. Let us think soberly and ask ourselves these questions, ‘Have I taken for granted the matter of prayer? Have I carelessly concluded that prayer depends upon me, my whims, desires and decisions? Do I approach God as though it is my right? Do I come to God with awe and reverence, or with a certain diffidence and indifference? Is my worship and prayer filled with praise, thanksgiving and adoration?’.

Having answered these questions then, let us pause and consider the wonder that we are permitted to pray, to enter the presence of the Most High-earthly, sinful and cold though we may be-and let us imagine that at this very moment we have come into that very Presence. What, then, are our feelings? Only when we do such exercises does our mind become humble, and our spirits open to true awe and humility.



If our experiment has not been carried out or it has failed for some reason or other, then we will always think along human lines, especially rational lines. We will think that prayer is an inner subjective exercise based perhaps on imagination or our willing. We will have those views of God which say, ‘What would be the point of prayer? God knows what He is about, and our prayers will make no difference. All things are planned and so will come to their predetermined end, or they are by fate—so what good would prayer be?’. This way of faulty but natural human thinking would make prayer seem absurd.

Only if we know God, and have awe and humility before Him would prayer appear to be a true and useful exercise.

## **THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER**

### **Prayer is Functionally and Emotionally Necessary for Us**

Human beings are not themselves when they are autonomous, i.e. seek to be self-ruling. They need God, and if they will not have Him then they will have another idol, lord or leader to whom they look. Converse with such is prayer. We expect returns from our lords, idols or leaders. They must give us something. We need to depend on them—at least to some degree, otherwise we are in-secure and emotionally deprived. In the face of the Stoics and similar socially solitary persons we say that emotional fulfilment is the main driving force in man. Even if all prayer could be shown to be without reality because God

or the gods do not exist we would nevertheless go on praying, even if the centre shifted to ourselves. We will develop this theme in chapter 3.

### **God Bids Us to Come and Pray to Him**

It would seem that the main reason for praying is because we are commanded to do so. We notice regarding the following references that they are basically addressed to those who live within covenant. If prayer is emotionally necessary then commands to pray are needed in the sense that commands to love one another are essential. They keep us within guidelines, and such does not mean an unhelpful and mere conformity but a release into what is essential to man, especially when he lives in the provisional state of sin. Were he living ontologically (i.e. essentially and without sin) then such commands would not be necessary. Scriptures to note are Exodus 20:3-4; Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 50:15; Matthew 26:41; Luke 18:1-8; 21:36, and there are also many apostolic injunctions, e.g. I Thessalonians 5:14-19 and Hebrews 11:6.

### **Prayer Is the Very Expression of Our Life**

We have indicated above that because prayer is dialogue with another beyond and above us, and because we are worshipping creatures, and nothing can alter that, then we must pray. This is seen in the Psalms where we have such devotional passages as Psalm 42:1-3; 63:1-8; 84:1-4, 10-12, for example statements such as ‘As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God’. Man must speak with God in holy and yearning dialogue. The

psalmist cries, ‘When shall I come and behold the face of God?’. In Psalm 63 he cries, ‘O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee in a dry and weary land where no water is’. It is doubtful whether more beautiful language of devotion can be found anywhere. This is prayer at its deepest.

If prayer can be deeper then it is found in Psalm 88 where Heman, one of the wise men of Israel, pours out his soul, telling God that everything-everything-is against him. He suffers deeply, and there appears to be no answer. If there is one, then it is that he is praying to God! We can only conclude that praying itself is the very truth of life. Our need, then, of Him is such that we profit by coming, need Him so much that we dare not not come. Our coming is in accordance with Hebrews 4:16 and 11:6, and we find help in time of need.

### **Prayer Turns Us From Ourselves**

Prayer prevents us becoming self-meditators, when our meditation should be on Him. In a later chapter (chapter 10) we will examine the matter of meditation, especially in the light of the systems of meditation which have come to the West from the East.

Prayer prevents us from working on our own, even where we seem to be doing God’s will. Whilst there is a place for personal and private prayer, yet when the suppliant turns in upon himself and meditates not so much on God as his own soul, not so much on what God is about as what he is about, then that prayer becomes a contradiction of its true meaning.

P.T. Forsyth in his book *The Soul of Prayer* (London:

Independent Press, 1951, pp. 11-12), speaks of this self-preoccupation:

The worst sin is prayerlessness. Overt sin, or crime, or the glaring inconsistencies which often surprise us in Christian people are the effect of this, or its punishment. We are left by God for the lack of seeking Him. The history of the saints shows often that their lapses were the fruit and nemesis of slackness or neglect in prayer. Their life at seasons, also tended to become inhuman by their spiritual solitude. They left men, and were left by men, because they did not, in their contemplation find God; they found but the thought or atmosphere of God. Only living prayer keeps loneliness humane. It is the great producer of sympathy. Trusting the God of Christ, and transacting with Him, we come into tune with men. Our egoism retires before the coming of God, and into the clearance there comes with the Father our brother. We realize man as he is in God and for God, his Lover. When God fills our heart he makes more room for man than the humanist heart can find. Prayer is an act, indeed the act of fellowship. We cannot truly pray even for ourselves without passing beyond ourselves and our individual experience. If we should begin with these the nature of prayer carries us beyond them, both to God and to man.

It is interesting to note that in Eastern religions-apart from Islam-religions and their meditation think in terms of one’s own advancement and betterment. Even the doing of good works-so-called-is a self-advancing exercise.

### **Prayer Relates to God’s Will in His Plan for His Creation**

It is not the point in our study of prayer to go into much detail regarding the widest perspective set for prayer.

Prayer always relates to the counsel of God, i.e. His will which in His eternal wisdom has set itself upon the creation, redemption and renewal of creation. In one sense creation is what matters most. This ‘faithful Creator’ proves Himself faithful when He finally glorifies that which He has created. This—as scholars well know—sets all history and ‘salvation history’. This is not a hidden history above or behind history but history its very self.

The amazing truth is that God has planned that the prayers of His people should be an aide in effecting the fulfilment of this plan. To plan for God is arrogance: not to pray within the plan and for it is sloth, and probably sloth that arises from ignorance, from not listening to what God has been saying to His creation prior to the Fall and posterior to it. When we recognize that it is prayer which not only helps us to enter into the fullness of communion with God, but which primarily functions for the fulfilment of His will and counsel, then prayer seems to us to be almost the very reason for living. It is union and communion with a purpose, or better still with the purpose for which God ordained prayer.

### **CONCLUSION TO ‘COME LET US PRAY’**

The reasons we have given above for coming to prayer do not cover all the reasons for prayer. It seems that because it is innate in us to pray, we therefore accept that prayer is integrally part of human living. We have our reasons for not praying, and these will emerge more and more—by contrast—as we pursue this subject.

## 2

# *The Fact and Nature of Prayer*



### **THE FACT OF PRAYER**

The Christian person knows of the fact of prayer. He is commanded to pray, and that is enough. Before him—in the Scriptures—he has a history of prayer. He sees the descriptions of prayer, reads the prayers men, women and children have made. Apart from his own inner drive to pray in the manner that ‘deep calls unto deep’, he can respond to the prayers of others that he hears and reads. If he wishes he can analyse intuitively the nature of those prayers. Prayer to him is an undeniable fact. More, it is part of the nature and process of living in this world. It has so many facets and aspects that it would take much time to nominate and describe them.

## **THE NATURE OF PRAYER**

Prayer is the dynamic dialogue which always ensues between God and man. God never ceases to speak to man, and man—when he wills to respond and speak from himself—is part of the unending dialogue. This is not mere conversation, or trifling relationship between God the Creator, Father, King and man the creature, son and subject. Whilst sinful man may deny this essential (ontological) state of being, and seek to reject God’s part in the dialogue, he cannot escape it. He may seek to turn God’s action into a monologue, or make his own a monologue, but the dialogue always ensues, and generally with unwilling man seeking to shut his ears against what he is hearing.

There are believers in God, and there are believers in gods. The primary god of the latter may be their own self, or it may be transmuted into another god or gods. The man of true faith will be impelled to speak to God, and the man of a god—or gods—will also be impelled to speak to his god. The atheist is in a painful position for he constantly speaks against the true God whom he denies is existent, but he carries on an unending dialogue with Him, at the same time denying there is any initiative or response from that God!

Prayer then is always dialogue, in which man comes increasingly to know God, or the gods. The dialogue aids him in knowing the one to whom he prays. It also assists him in knowing himself more, provided he does not refuse such available knowledge. The elements of prayer are many, such as recognition (of the god and himself), adoration, worship by serving, supplication for his own

needs, intercession for others with whom he is linked or for vindication against those who are his enemies. Thanks-giving is an essential part of prayer, and this proceeds from his fellowship or communion with the deity. Petition often constitutes the major part of prayer for some. This is because they are in great need, or because they see prayer as utilitarian, and they wish to obtain things from their god. These are some of the 897 components of prayer.

## **THE INDISPENSABLE NATURE OF PRAYER**

There is no escape from prayer. The nihilist and anarchist may scorn the matter of prayer. Such persons insist that man holds dialogue with none, not even with himself. This is demonstrably false. When man talks to himself in introspection he is at prayer, not realizing he is his own god. Nihilism is a form of perpetual suicide which cannot even be terminated by death, seeing one cannot kill oneself although one can kill one’s body. Nihilists say there is no audience, but they say it to themselves.

The reason for inescapable prayer is that man was made for communion with God, himself, and others, and in that order. The three relationships are indivisibly simultaneous. Take the case of the atheist. He is usually angry with the God he says does not exist. He holds angry dialogue with Him, and being angry with God is angry with man. He is, in himself, angry. To be angry with God is to patronize God since the atheist has set himself up as a judge of (the non-existent) God.

The regular idolater is also speaking to his god or gods.

The relational drive in created man is to have joy and peace through relationship with his true God. He demands this relational joy, peace and security from his idol. Since, as Paul said, ‘an idol has no real existence’ (I Cor. 8:4), then the worshipper can have no real (essential, ontological) peace or joy. No god or idol can supply that. The idolater is compulsorily and constantly in dialogue with his god, demanding that his ontological needs be fulfilled.

What few-if any-idolaters know is that demonic powers are linked with the idols and gods. Paul said, ‘. . . what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God’ (I Cor. 10:20). Evil powers then use the so-called gods and idols to work illusions-and delusions-in the worshipper. Be that as it may, the worshippers carry on their dialogue in desiring, petitioning, adoring, fawning, beseeching, protesting, criticizing, and the like. This-to them-is prayer and worship not to be denied to them. To have no one to cry to would be intolerable. Hence at Mount Carmel the prophets of Baal and of the sensuous female Asherah cried out-from morning until noon-in petition, ‘O Baal, answer us!’, only to have Elijah mock the impotence of Baal. This is the essence of Jesus’ statement about the Gentiles heaping up empty phrases, ‘. . . for they think they will be heard for their many words’ (Matt. 6:7).

We conclude then that prayer is dialogue between a person and his idol, even though that idol be himself, or he think that he has no idol-not even himself.

### 3

## *The Nature of Prayer and Worship*

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### THE NATURE OF WORSHIP

Worship in old English is the giving of worth to God, a person, an object or an endeavour. The verb used primarily in the Old Testament has a dual meaning of giving worship and serving. Likewise, in the New Testament to worship is to serve and to serve is to worship. Other verbs-in both the Old and New Testaments-often indicate modes of worship.

We generally think of prayer as part of worship. From one point of view that may well be true, but it is not possible to make prayer only a part of worship. All worship is in prayer. An indication of this is in the worship and prayer of Israel. In II Chronicles 7:15-16, God in speaking of Israel returning to Him says of the temple, ‘Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the



prayer that is made in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there for ever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time’. Of course the temple was the place of sacrifice, and sacrifice had many aspects to it, but ultimately it was communion and dialogue with God.

Jesus told his parents that the temple was ‘my Father’s house’ (Luke 2:49). In Mark 11:17 he quoted Isaiah 56:7, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’. Twice in Isaiah 56 the temple is called ‘the house of prayer’. If we look at Hebrews 13:15 and I Peter 2:5, we see there are ‘spiritual sacrifices’ which do not demand the offering of animals and birds. This means they are non-material offerings and so are part of the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, i.e. they constitute part of prayer. Romans 12:1, Hebrews 9:14 and Revelation 7:15 show worship of God to be of the lips and not of sacrificial victims. Hence we can conclude that all worship is prayer, and all true prayer is—rightly understood—worship.

## **THE LIFE OF PRAYER AND WORSHIP**

Every act of prayer and worship by man—even those recorded in Scripture—could possibly be suspect. Whilst this does not have to be so necessarily, yet some elements of motivation in worship may not be perfect. Therefore to see true worship is to view worship and prayer in the book of the Revelation of John. Since this worship was (is) in heaven, then it can be trusted to be pure.

Two of the primary elements common to true worship and true prayer are those of praise and thanksgiving.

Virtually they are the one. To pick out, to read, and to think upon the passages concerning worship is a rich and fruitful exercise. Because worship is both ‘giving worth to’ and ‘serving’, then worship can be no stronger than the serving one is presently doing. Likewise present serving can be no stronger and worthwhile than the prayer one is presently praying.

Thus if one is denying or refraining from prayer, then one does not truly worship. If one is not worshipping then one’s prayer is deficient. The most terrible thing a human being can do is to offer primary worship to himself, or to his idol. No one can assess the dimensions of his evil.

## 4

### *Coming to Prayer*

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#### **WHY MAN PRAYS**

It is inescapable that we pray: all must pray. Yet man—especially fallen man—always seeks for reasons and motives why he should do anything. Basic to man’s selfishness is the thought of what he will gain from prayer. The idolater—the one who does not worship the true God—is utilitarian in prayer. He is uneasy when he does not worship the true God, so he uses his idol as his object of spiritual love thus fulfilling the ontological thrust within him. He also uses his idol as a tool, trying to get from it the peace and joy and security he would get from God—if he were to worship Him. Because he is made to worship, he adores but does it illicitly, and so has the perverse

satisfaction of denying God His due.

The idols filch the gifts and glories of God as Creator, Father and King. In the Scriptures idolatry is likened to fornication and adultery because man is only in union with God when he loves Him. God is love, and man can only love others when he knows the love of God, in Christ. He can only know God as love through the Cross and Resurrection. When he understands these elements then he loves God, comes into union with Him, receives the gift of communion, and is drawn into true dialogue with the true God. He now comes to true prayer.

The idols do not love their devotees. Every idol at the beginning seems a thing of beauty and draws out passionate adoration from its worshippers, for this is how demonic powers display the idol—as a thing of beauty, to be desired above all things. Very soon a person becomes the slave of the thing which infatuates him. This is seen in Romans 1:18–32. Rejecting God and His glory, man turns corruptible things into his god, or gods. Because he has denied the true nature of God, creation and himself, he perverts all things—their meaning and their uses. He now becomes the slave of his gods.

The gods are ruthless. They create laws which their bondslaves must obey. The slaves in turn hate their gods but are compelled to serve their grim and unrelenting deities. Evil forces see to that. That intensifies the prayers of the idolaters, prayers for mercy, prayers for freedom, prayers for things the heart of the worshipper increasingly needs. The gods and idols can never get enough worship. This is seen in the drive of Satan to be worshipped by Christ, and, at the last, to give himself out in the temple of God—the church—to be God! The idolaters then are

commanded by their tyrannous idols to pray, to worship and to serve.

## **THE MAN OF FAITH COMMANDED TO PRAY**

We have said that by creation the man of faith is bound to pray. He cannot live without dialogue with God. He speaks as a creature to the Creator, as a son to the Father, as a subject to his King. But man is weak when his dependence upon God wavers. Through his guilt—even when forgiven and justified by grace—he tends to be self-critical, not thinking himself worthy to worship God, and so he needs to be commanded. There are many reasons why he dare not get out of dialogue with God, but God’s grace is such that he commands man to pray.

We will now look at some of the commands to prayer that are given to people of faith, but every command to worship is equally a command to pray. These are so numerous that our list would be too long to contain in this small book. Before looking at the list we are about to use, let us remind ourselves that the commands God gives are all given in and from grace. For example: in Exodus chapter 20 the Ten Commandments are pronounced, but they have an introduction, ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage’. Through this God is saying, ‘When you worship me as the true God, and do not worship images, and when you do not harm your family or your neighbours, then I command you to do that in the light of the fact that I am your Liberator, and your Lord’.

Now let us look at the commands to pray which God has given:

... and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me (Ps. 50:15).

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation (Matt. 26:41).

Ask and it will be given you . . . (Matt. 7:7–8; Luke 11:9; cf. Jer. 29:33–34).

But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man (Luke 21:36).

... pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God . . . (I Thess. 5:14–19).

Men ought always to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1).

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, inter-cessions and thanksgivings be made for all men (I Tim. 2:1).

See also John 14:15; 15:7; 16:23–24; James 1:5–6; 4:3; I John 3:22; 5:14–15.

What we must keep in mind is that all men have dialogue with God, much of which we might not call prayer, but it is prayer, even if perverse and angry prayer. Believers may also have an objection to being commanded to pray. They may have a preference for praying only when prayer comes spontaneously. This is as foolish as only loving when we feel like it, and not because we have been commanded to love. That God commands us is His good grace for us. We would not feel secure if we were not commanded. If we had to operate only upon our own understandings, whims and inclinations then we would

have little peace. Christ was glad his Father had commanded Him (John 10:17; 14:30-31). We then must be glad that we have been commanded to pray. It comports fully with what we are—essentially and functionally—by God’s creation of us.

## 5

### *Transformed for Prayer*

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#### **MAN’S ANTI-PRAYER**

We have seen that fallen man cannot live without his idol or idols. His worship of anything other than God means perverted prayer. It is also anti-God prayer. What we will see in our next chapter, ‘The Battle For Prayer’, is that the powers of evil fight for fallen man’s prayer, as we have already seen that Satan and his evil powers fight for the worship of humanity. Fallen man carries on a frightening prayer-dialogue with his masters, mentors and himself. It is the enslaving, debilitating and degrading dialogue of condemnation and fear.

In this dialogue man goes more deeply into sinful-ness—the very thing described in Romans 1:18-32—and so is forced into a reprobate, i.e. a base mind. Because he has to deal with an accusing conscience he has to quieten it, and he does this by one of two ways. The first is by

denying his conscience until it becomes a ‘seared conscience’ (I Tim. 4:2). This is really a hardened mind that produces a hardened conscience by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12-13). The second is by seeking constantly to justify himself. The more he feels guilt the more he tries to do deeds and works which will justify him. His prayer becomes a prayer of falsity, since the God of holy law is also the God of all grace. Law was not given for self-justification, and grace was given to free humanity from such a frightening endeavour.

Incessantly then man mutters to himself or to his idols, seeking to come to that peace and joy which is the lot of God’s redeemed children. His prayer is abortive, and this by nature of the case. He develops a dulled (seared) conscience or a conscience that is hypersensitive, i.e. morbid. States of resentment, bitterness and anger are built up. In all this the gods give no joy.

## **GOD’S POWERFUL TRANSFORMATION OF THE MIND**

One thing alone will turn man from false prayer and worship to the devotion which is true, and that is God’s love revealed in the atonement for man’s sins through the Cross and Resurrection of His Son. This actually deals with all man’s guilt—the entire guilt of his whole life—and evokes repentance from the one who now believes. This one not only sees the fact that God is love, but experiences God as love. His old dread of guilt with its consequent hatred of God and the anger and bitterness which accompany it now changes to love of God, and so to love of

his fellowman and himself. This love comes from God—‘We love because he first loved us’—and so that union and communion with God is established, out of which a man can truly pray and worship God and give honour where honour is due.

Repentance means, literally, ‘a change of mind’, i.e. a change of understanding, attitude and intelligence (thinking). It is, in fact, a renewal of the whole person so that the seared or evil or morbid conscience now becomes sweetly enlightened and cannot be used to debase the person or manipulate him into self-justifying works. He is now free! Prayer becomes a joyous thing, even if—at times—evil powers accuse him as being a condemned person for his atrocious sins of the past.

God’s justification, then, becomes the true basis and foundation of loving prayer. Believing man converses gladly with God, and so receives encouragement and true guidance. Passages such as Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:9-10 urge him to live in that habitual state of the renewing of the mind which was initiated through repentance—the original change of mind—and is required for true and wise living.

## **THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT FOR THE RENEWED MIND**

The transformed mind is constantly aided by the personal presence of the Holy Spirit. We will later look at ‘praying in the Spirit’, but here we may say that authentic prayer can only be that prayer which is in the Spirit—whatever various forms it may take. It is the ‘fruit of the Spirit’



(Gal. 5:22-23)-‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, [and] gentleness’, which are the foundation and only true aid of proper prayer. This fruit (or, harvest) is given by God, and not attained by human endeavour. The Spirit’s indwelling is the assurance that we may now pray without ceasing. The given fruit of the Spirit ensures us that we may have Christ’s mind and pray to the Father in and through both the Son and the Spirit of the Son.

## 6

### *The Battle For Prayer*



#### **GOD, SATAN AND THE IDOLS REQUIRE THE PRAYERS OF MANKIND**

In this chapter we will have to see that worship and prayer are inseparable. Part of true prayer is the endeavour to know the mind of God, i.e. His plan for His creation and its history. This is called ‘the counsel of God’, i.e. what He has planned in wisdom prior to creation which is now being worked out in the processes of time (Eph. 1:3-14; I Cor. 2:7; II Tim. 1:9-10; Rev. 7:1-10).

Correspondingly Satan and his world-system have another plan-that of evil. This plan seeks to dethrone God, His powers and redeemed mankind, setting up the kingdom of darkness in place of the Kingdom of God. As God requires the loyalty and worship (service) of His own people in the fulfilling of His plan, so the kingdom of evil requires every gift, talent and power of the members of the

evil kingdom—be they men or angels. God talks with His servants (angelic and human)—hence true prayer as they also talk with Him. Likewise Satan desires that co-operative dialogue which we call prayer. Such exists only in the context of worship—be that worship of God, or worship of the idols.

This, then, constitutes the battle of, and for, the mind of man.

### **SATAN’S PURSUIT OF EVIL WORSHIP AND PRAYER**

In this present book we cannot spare space and time to speak about the origin—so-called—of Satan and evil. There can be no essential or ontological origin of Satan and sin. God never created Satan as an evil creature or created evil itself. Satan—a high celestial creature—used his will to oppose God, and man—the only creature created in God’s image and likeness—was ‘good’ (cf. Gen. 1:26–31; 5:1–2; cf. Ps. 8:3ff.; I Cor. 11:7). Satan in his unfallen state was also ‘good’. Seeking to be autonomous, i.e. freed from God’s control, both Satan and man denied the need for prayer with God, and set up their own kingdoms. Satan—by separating man from God at the time of the Fall—gained control over man; hence John says, ‘the whole world is in the power of the evil one’ (I John 5:19; cf. Eph. 2:1–3). Fallen celestial creatures and fallen humanity constitute one kingdom in which worship and prayer are indispensable to the continuance of that kingdom. For some reason or other man’s worship and prayer are indispensable to the fullness and victory of any

kingdom, whether it be God’s Kingdom, or the kingdom of Satan. This we will later examine.

### **THE BATTLE OF GOD AND THE EVIL POWERS**

We do not understand history if we do not understand it to be an unremitting warfare between God’s Kingdom, and that of Satan. The idea that there is an unseen but not unfelt warfare proceeding between a personal God with a personal Devil and that both these have armies which clash against each other is almost totally foreign to the natural man who has no spiritual perception. This natural man sees everything simply as a process of causes and effects. Even peaceful members of Christian churches see this idea either as wildly unreal or just ‘spooky’. At the same time there are many who believe the history of the world can only be explained in terms of a spiritual battle between forces of good and evil. Certainly the Bible depicts history in these terms.

It is a fact of history that animists have always believed in the battle of the spirits, believing each spirit to have a territorial right such as the animals and birds have in their own kingdom. Religions such as Hinduism have many gods, each deity being responsible for something or other. Buddhism—which is basically philosophical atheism—has become debased to a form of animism, i.e. belief in spirits and their powers to control situations, circumstances and people. Many peoples have national gods, and see the triumph or defeat of their gods as part of the historical struggle. For example Muslims today see the struggle for

national and international supremacy to relate to their God-Allah.

Atheistic Communism, Fascism, Nazism and similar ideologies see their systems as the ideologies by which their devotees will sway the future of mankind. These may be called ‘hard’ humanism. The forms of ‘soft’ humanism come from modern optimism which believes that progress is inbuilt into history. Historic humanism believes in the innate good of man and that he will achieve ultimate control of all things for the good of the universe. In all of these forms and cults, worship and prayer play a large part. Humanism is the worship of man by man and constitutes a religion, for in fact it sees man as functionally divine, able to set the course of history without recourse to the God of the Judaic-Christian community. Other forms of religious worship—such as animism—are intended to placate or utilize the ‘gods’, and develop the best situations possible.

It would be simplistic of us to say that the various religious and ideological views are immaterial to us and to history. In some measure they shape history, and every person is responsible for what he believes and follows. Sincerity is not enough: each person must press on to the truth. In practice each of us is confronted with continuing moral choice.

### **THE BATTLE WITH THE IDOLS**

The Old Testament teems with criticisms of idolatry, the gods often being ridiculed as empty, dumb and useless since they fail to lead men to reality. Sometimes they are criticized as being evil, leading their devotees into personal

bondage and national slavery. The prophets tell of God’s anger against those in Israel who have been seduced from the worship of the true God and have given away to pagan worship, or who have mixed the worship of Yahweh with that of the idols. These prophets also speak of God’s wrath against those who give power to the gods of other nations, as though Yahweh were helpless against these particular deities of those other nations. It is biblically an historical fact that God punished Israel as a nation by delivering her over to such nations and their deities until Israel was humbled and returned to pure worship of Him.

### **NO DEMILITARIZED ZONE IN THE BATTLE**

Whilst the operations of modern western nations and their people proceed without regard to the supernatural, many members of their communities are puzzled in trying to understand life. They think of ‘fate’ and ‘luck’ rather than of God and/or the gods. The experiences of life such as birth, growing into adulthood, the mystery of sex, of marriage, vocation, love and death have no rationale. They puzzle—or refuse to puzzle—over these matters, refuse to face up to crime and evil, the perversity of various sexual expressions and encounters, along with the tragedies of rape, murder and war which seem endemic to the human race. The unbidden demonstrations of great love, of in-explicable sacrifices and sudden nobility in the midst of such degradation puzzle but do not draw them out to rich belief in God. Of course modern man rationalizes the existence of morality and immorality, but the sense of

being participators in a warfare and conflict of good and evil is foreign to him.

Perhaps modern man thinks, naturally, that he is in some demilitarized zone. He may recognize that some kind of warfare is going on, but because he is a naturalist he cannot accept the idea that it is supernatural warfare. Any thought of prayer is vague, an unconscious crossing of themselves as protection from personal danger. It is shaped in the terms of ‘fate’ or ‘luck’. Bereft of genuine dialogue with God, prayer—if it may be called that—is only for themselves. If they pray then prayer is vague, and at the best self-protective and self-extending. They have a shapeless and nameless hope that ‘things will turn out all right’. They have pet clichés such as, ‘No worries mate, she’ll be jake!’, and, ‘No sweat! It’ll all turn out O.K.!’. In the same situations the pessimists only see fate as hostile, implacable and ruthless. Nothing will turn out O.K.!

Where does the sort of thinking we have just stated place modern man? It places him in a false secular paradise of easy optimism, or a dreary no man’s land, where no hope is present to stir man to move towards a triumphant goal. To be void of rich dialogue with God because of baseless optimism, and fearful pessimism is the tragedy of so-called modern man.

### **THE NEED FOR POWERFUL PRAYER AND WORSHIP**

Some Christians—of a certain calibre—see prayer as un-essential to the Sovereign God. Why should He need our prayers? Others rationalize it as a psychological exercise

designed to reassure believers that they are not altogether useless in God’s service. God tolerates and accepts prayers, but beyond this acceptance prayer has no dynamic within itself. It constitutes—say these Christians—the chatter of children before their beneficent Father.

Prayer has to be more than that! It is more than that. God has designed prayer to be the rich opportunity for man to converse with Himself, and to discover His will and strategy in the ceaseless warfare which we call supernatural. This reassures the believer that he is working in co-operation with God, that his prayer is effective against the powers of evil, and is strengthening also for the brethren, many of whom are beleaguered by hostile forces. It is there to heal those wounded in spiritual warfare, to confound the vicious enemy, and to give understanding to the believer concerning himself, i.e. who he is, and where he is in his spiritual growth and the process of maturing. By prayer—along with reading the word of God—he learns how he can live, fight, revive when wounded, and be strong when and where required.

In this dynamic action of worship and prayer he is in union with God the Father, the Son who is the Lord and General of the battle, and the Spirit who constantly renews all warriors in power, helping them to hone their weapons to a fine edge and to fight with integrity and intrepidity. This prayer which is based upon covenant union with God increases personal communion with Him. How rich this is in the midst of the battle!

This battle is not merely some action conceived and played out only in the mind. The humblest believer who is apt in worship and adept in prayer can break down the citadels of evil powers, and gain their spoil for his Lord

and himself. He does this without hubris, i.e. without human pride in his abilities, and without trust in his own powers. This simple person is one with God, and-as such- 'not unaware of Satan's devices'. In prayer and worship he has weapons which transcend those of evil powers. This may be difficult to believe until we realize that holy love defeats the mindless evil of men and fallen celestial powers. Nothing, ultimately, can stand against holy and loving intercessory prayer.

# 7

## *Where Shall We Pray?*



### **THE PLACE OF PRAYER**

It may sound strange to modern ears to hear the question, 'Where shall we pray?' and then to hear talk about the 'place' of prayer, as though there exists geographical situations where prayer is permissible and effective. We do not doubt that prayer is geographically permissible anywhere and everywhere, and any kind of situation does not make prayer more or less effective. Why then do we talk about the 'place' of prayer? What we are indicating by the questions is that there may be a context of life where we alone may pray, and in which we may pray effectively. This place in the Old Testament was the house or temple



of God. The temple was not merely a building set on a certain location. It symbolized and signified the whole people of God—i.e. Israel—wherever it was. A material object in a geographical location, it was nevertheless a spiritual house without a geographical perimeter.

We have seen that Jesus called the temple ‘my Father’s house’, and ‘the house of prayer’. The woman of Samaria asked Jesus where one should pray and she was told that Jerusalem was the correct place for prayer since salvation was (only) of the Jews. At the same time Jesus indicated to her that that was all changing. He told her, ‘. . . the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth’. (John 4:23-24).

We see in this that the where of worship is linked with the Who of worship. To say that God is everywhere may well be true, but that is not what Jesus was saying. He was saying—in effect—that the only true worship was in Israel’s temple at Jerusalem. Now, however, that temple was about to be abrogated. Worship would not be limited to the old temple, even if it were possible to restore it. In the light of what Jesus understood the temple to be, i.e. the house of God, the Father’s house for Israel only, and thus the only house of prayer, he was really saying, ‘This temple of God will not be confined to one place, or to one nation. The new temple will be for Samaritans and “for all peoples” (Isa. 56:7). As the old temple had symbolized and epitomized the true worship of God’s true people, representing the twelve tribes of the covenant people of Israel, so now the new temple was not to be located

geographically but would represent the whole of the New Covenant people, i.e. the elect, the church drawn from ‘every nation, people, tribe and tongue’.

The New Testament shows us that Christ is the new temple, for his body is the true church, the true context of worship. The people of God—Christ’s body of which he is Head—are the people who now worship him ‘in spirit and in truth’. At Pentecost the Spirit came, and he was the Spirit of truth (John 16:12-15; I John 5:7). He thus enabled the new community to worship in truth, for this truth was the Spirit then imparted to them. They could now worship in spirit (Rom. 1:9; II Tim. 1:3) because the Spirit of worship (Phil. 3:3) and prayer (I Cor. 14:14-16; Eph. 6:18; Jude 20) was now both their gift and guide. I Peter 2:1-10 (cf. Heb. 13:15-16; I Tim. 3:15) confirms the truth that the church is the true household of the Spirit (cf. Eph. 2:19-22). All members of this living temple are living stones bonded into this remarkable house of worship and prayer.

We are now assured that where we ought to worship is in—and only in—the household of God. If we want confirmation of this then we need to read the worship of the patriarchs, who erected altars as places of prayer and worship. Jacob called the place where he had had a vision of God, and where God and he had held prayerful dialogue ‘Bethel’, i.e. ‘the house of God’. Israel in the wilderness had the ‘tent of worship’, and in Jerusalem the house of worship. Real as they were, they nevertheless were but a shadow of the great reality to come—the church of the living God’ which is ‘the household of God’, which is ‘the house of prayer for all peoples’ (I Tim. 3:15; Isa. 56:7).

## **THE PLACE, POWER AND PURPOSE OF PRAYER**

Was it impossible for anyone to pray outside the temple of Israel, i.e. did God listen only to those of Israel, and to none other? The answer must be that God listened to anyone and everyone who prayed to Him-if such were the case. In the widest sense all who were people of faith were then-as now-the children of faith, and in that sense the children of Abraham, and no less the children of God-a truth well set out in Galatians chapter 3. All people of faith have ever been-by grace-members of the household of God, of which Israel too, was part. It was Paul who saw that a Gentile could be spiritually a Jew, and that a Jew by blood-descent might prove to be-in effect-a Gentile! (see Rom. 2:24-3:2).

What then was-and is-the purpose and power of prayer? To understand the answer to this question we must see that whilst prayer is personal it is never merely individual. We mean that whilst God has personal re-relationships with each of His children, His children are members of the household of God, and are thus members one of another. The people of God may worship God-each one-personally, but primarily they worship together, i.e. corporately as a community to God. As a community they have dialogue with God and converse amongst themselves, thus together discovering the will of God. By knowing His purpose, i.e. His counsel and wisdom, they may order their lives in conformity with this known will. By worship they enrich their union and fellowship with God, which continually extends their understanding and constrains them to use the powers of

worship to defeat the purposes and operations of evil. God calls them to such prayer and for such a purpose. Indeed it is by His command that they worship! Prayer is not necessarily involuntary, and it is not arbitrary. It is guided by the Spirit of God and hence is effective.

## **THE PRAYERS OF ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH**

Whilst the thesis we have presented of God calling His people to be His fellow-workers in history by worship (service) and prayer may seem far-fetched to some readers, let such-indeed let us all-read the prayers of God's servants, throughout the Scriptures. What is their nature, what their requests, what their high confessions of God, and what their objectives? Such a reading will soon inform us of the power of prayer. This will help us further to understand that prayer is effective in the place or context of the people of God. In later chapters we will examine in more detail the prayers which God's people have offered. The few paragraphs below simply give us a bird's eye view of godly prayer through the centuries.

### **Prayer in the Old Testament**

In the Psalms we have confessions of the power of God, His greatness, His noble acts in delivering Israel, the giving to it of 'the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises . . . the Christ' (Rom. 9:5). These prayers speak of His great acts in delivering Israel from Egypt, of taking them through the

wilderness, establishing them in Canaan, of making them a nation in the face of all the other nations and all the other gods! They pray for deliverance from their enemies, saying that God is King over all the nations. They praise Him personally for delivering them as persons from evil men, and as a nation, from the nations which keep pressing in upon them.

Personal prayer is most intimate as the psalmists bare their hearts and show His love and care, His protection and comfort, His gifts of wisdom as also His gifts of prosperity. Some go down into the darkness of suffering and despair, but they pray for deliverance and receive it. Where some do not receive immediate deliverance they still live in hope, and even when they are despairing and seemingly unbelieving they still have the gift of prayer to prevent them being utterly forsaken. When they pray they are not talking to themselves: they are talking to God, and they know it. They have dialogue—often in anger and invective—but still they are praying! God is there to be spoken to so that they do not become atheists or nihilists or anarchists. They hammer away at God, believing He will hear them however charged with heat their dialogue with Him!

Nor are there only the prayers of psalmists. The patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, the judges, priests and the prophets—all pray to Him. Some of Moses' prayers are the most human and powerful recorded in man's history. The simple prayer of Hannah seems like a muted meditation, but it produces Samuel who is one of Israel's most dynamic priestly and prophetic judges. The prayers of Jeremiah, Nehemiah and Daniel—to name only a few—show their understanding of God's universal

purposes to be effected through and beyond the nation of Israel.

### Prayer in the New Testament

Such prayers are not confined to the Old Testament. The prayers and bidding prayers of Jesus tell us how he understood and worked within the Father's will. As we will see, his high-priestly prayer in John chapter 17 is by no means merely pietistic, but a prayer which called for and even now reinforces God's action for the church and through the church for all His salvation history. The 'Lord's Prayer', so-called, gives us the heart and essence of God's business in history, namely the coming of the Kingdom, especially through His praying people. The prayers of the church throughout Acts, the apostolic praying of Paul and others for the church, are of such calibre as to show us how miniscule are some of our lethargic prayers from time to time, and how dynamic our prayer can be if we will!

Finally there is the prayer of the Spirit and the church as they cry, 'Come! Come Lord Jesus!'.

We conclude then that worship and prayer are not 'by chance' or 'off the cuff'. There is nothing arbitrary, secular or sectarian about them when they are uttered and supplicated by the true people of God. When the church—the household and temple of God—is at prayer then the demonic legions may well tremble, and Satan grow pale with dread.

## 8

# *Prayer and the Will of God*

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### **‘THY WILL BE DONE’**

Paul said, ‘do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is’ (Eph. 5:17). In Romans 12:1-2, he shows that the yielding up of the body brings worship and transformation of one’s mind, so ‘that you may prove [test] what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect’. The reasons we have to know the will of God are, (a) that we may pray according to it, and (b) that we may live according to it. Jeremiah 10:23 teaches us that the way of a man is not in himself and man—from him-self-cannot know the way to walk. The book of Proverbs keeps saying that when man walks according to his own way he will end in death. We can conclude then that the

person of faith knows and walks in the will of God, and prays according to that will. We may speak of God’s will embracing all things and all time, whilst at the same time seeing it as personal to the believer in God. The person needs to know the general will of God for history, the working out of it in the contemporary situation, and the intimate personal working out of it in the life of the one who prays.

The words Christ directed his people to pray-‘Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’-certainly cover God’s will generally for all things, and particularly for those in His Kingdom. How, then, would we know His will in these ways?

### **KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD**

We primarily know God’s will by the Scriptures. They show us the nature of God insofar as we need to know Him. He shows us His righteousness in two ways: (a) Romans 3:21 speaks of God’s justifying righteousness and implies that, (b) we know His moral righteousness by the giving of the law, so that when we look at the law, then we can know the righteousness God demands of us. The law shows us that righteousness which is His will for us. God’s word—which is always identified with God’s law –also shows the way God works, i.e. by His works—the things He does—and what He will yet do according to His promises. The prophets predict the things He will do, and the fulfilment of His promises, and in the light of these elements they exhort people to walk according to this re-vealed will.

When we come to see the plan of God as it has already been accomplished in the midst of history—especially history linked with covenant—we can then recognize that God’s will has worked out in history. Because we see the prophecies which have been fulfilled at various points in history and mostly in the coming of Christ and the redeeming work he has done, then we further see His plan. Again because Christ—with his Father—is working out God’s will in history, we can see God’s will and know how He is working. We can then also come to understand something of our personal involvement in that will as it outworks itself. This is surely what Paul means by saying, ‘Do not be foolish but wise, understanding the will of the Lord’.

Of course we do not know every detail of His will, but we can apply to Him to know His present immediate will for us. This exercise may be more unconscious than conscious so that as we go, we know, and as we know, we go. Even so we need to ‘pray without ceasing’, for ‘men ought always to pray and not to faint’. In practice we must abide in Christ and walk in the Spirit so that we really have the mind of Christ, and so by means of these practices know the Father’s will.

### **PRAYER—CHRIST’S WAY OF KNOWING THE FATHER’S WILL**

This sort of talk may sound fairly general and even a bit abstract, yet the principle it sets out is wholly practical. Jesus came to his Father’s house—‘the house of prayer’—

to hear his Father talk. He had dialogue with God, and knew His will. We need to trace the principle of his praying to know the Father’s will.

If we look at the prayers of Jesus, we will see that each time he prayed he was seeking to know and do the Father’s will. He prayed during his baptism and this was because he fully understood he was to be anointed as Messiah and—as such—do God’s will for His people. He was at prayer in the wilderness where the Devil sought to waylay him from going to the Cross—i.e. from doing God’s will after God’s way or mode. He prayed all night before he chose the disciples, and by that prayer knew he must choose not only the eleven men who would remain loyal, but also Judas who would betray him, and thus fulfil the Scriptures. He was praying as he was transformed on the Mount of Transfiguration—for God’s will was that the Son should be transfigured in order to understand the coming disfigurement to be caused in the suffering of the Cross. He prayed for his own at the Last Supper, and wrestled with the will of God in Gethsemane in regard to the suffering of the Cross. He prayed on the Cross regarding the forgiveness of man, in his own terrible dereliction, when he cried out of a great abyss of sin—suffering—the will of God—and in his final surrendering up of himself to the Father in death. Doubtless the present intercessory prayer he is making at the right hand of God is also related to God’s will for us, and is connected with the defeat of the plan of the Evil One.

We conclude that since his sensitivity to the Father caused him to pray prior to, and in times of special crisis, we should have the same mind-set as Christ. This can be so because we abide in him (John 15:7).

## **PRAYING ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD**

How then does man pray according to the will of God? We have seen that man can—if he will—know the will of God through reading and listening to the word of God, i.e. through the Scriptures. God has spoken—and speaks — through various media such as creation, His own acts, angelic visitants and theophanies, the prophets, His covenants, His law, His Son, the Spirit of God, and the church. The deposit of truth and wisdom is with us in the Scriptures if we will seek it out and endeavour to know it. Even so it is a case of, ‘He who has an ear to hear, let him hear!’. Man will not know the will of God if he wills not so to do, since to know it is to be bound to do it.

We have seen that prayer is man having dialogue with God, and that this is a dialogue which God initiates (cf. John 4:23). As he reads God’s word and is subject to God’s Spirit he comes to know God’s will. As we have said, God’s will can be described in one way as ‘general’, and in another as ‘personal’. His general will covers His purposes and actions relating to His creating the world, redeeming man, and ultimately bringing about the re-generation of the creation, in which also, He glorifies man. Of course by means of all these things He glorifies Himself, and this glorification is the goal of His will. By His personal will we mean His will which is His plan for each of His elect. This will operates by means of detailed actions.

The believer must know God’s general will for it is in that context that His personal and detailed will for the believer will also be made known. The general will of God

can be prayed for under, ‘Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’ (cf. I Chron. 29:10–13). His personal will for the believer will come: (a) from knowing God, His nature, His principles of action and His goals by means of the written (inscripturated) word of God, and, (b) by being ready to do God’s will whatever it may be—John 7:17, i.e. ‘if any man’s will is to do his will, he shall know . . . the teaching’, and thus seek to do it. The simple principle is as we have stated above, ‘As you go, you know, and as you know, you go’.

One of the reasons for the exercise of prayer is the dialogue we have with God that we may know that will and act accordingly. It is in union with God that we know, and by the power of that relationship we go. If our dialogue is with men and their natural thinking then we will not know the will of God. If our dialogue is with the Christian brethren then it ought to confirm what God has revealed to us. We must always make provision that we may keep a ‘hidden agenda’ in our minds and so not truly hear Him, or the brethren to whom He has spoken about us. We are only ever safe when we abide genuinely in Christ, come to know his mind and so genuinely pray ‘in his name’.

## **PRAYING IN ‘THE NAME’**

Praying in God’s name or ‘for thy name’s sake’ was an ancient practice in Israel. Psalm 25:11 has it, ‘For thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great’. Psalm 79:9 repeats the thought. Idolaters prayed in the name of their gods, and true Israelites by their faith in the



name of the Lord (cf. Isa. 26:13). The name of course meant the authority, power, person and character of the one named. The more one knew the name, and lived in and under it, the more one could use the resources of the person, lord or idol named.

In Matthew 18:18-20 Jesus says-in effect-that in the exercise of disciplining a member of the church, the executives can only do what is permissible in and by the name, ‘For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them’. In Matthew 28:19-20 the disciples are to preach the Gospel and baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Notice the one name covers the entire Godhead. In John 17:6 Jesus says he has manifested God’s name- ‘Father’-to his disciples. He says twice that he has kept the disciples ‘in thy name’. Later, in the book of Acts, the Epistles and in the book of the Revelation the principle of ‘the name’, and prayer ‘in the name’ is used many times.

This then, brings us to the statements of Jesus in John 14:13, 15:16, and 16:23ff. regarding ‘in my name’. In John 14:9-14 he says in effect, ‘Everything I have done has been in the Father’s name, for the Father dwells in me and I in Him. I have done great works, yet primarily not I, but the Father, for He has done the works. You will do greater works than I have done because I go to the Father. The works that you will do will not be your own works, but my works. Yet these works will be primarily from the Father. When you pray in my name-something you have not done up to this point in time-then those works will happen. Even so it will not be you doing them, but it will be I who will do them to glorify the Father (cf. Matt. 5:16), and for this reason you should ask in my name, and

it will happen’.

One classic example of this principle is in Acts chapter 3 where Peter and John heal the lame man at the Gate Beautiful of the temple. The people are amazed at the event but Peter tells them, ‘Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus . . . and his name, by faith in his name has made this man strong’.

We may conclude then that the name of God, or of Christ is the power for true and effective prayer. To pray in His name is to pray true prayer. It is, in fact, as though Christ himself were praying. This is the meaning of abiding in him (John 15:7).

### **ABIDING IN GOD AND PRAYING IN HIS NAME**

The problem we face is the same as that which we will discuss in chapter 12, under the title of ‘The Prayer of Faith’. There we will see the teaching of Mark 11:12-14, 20-25, where Jesus had said, ‘Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer believe that you have received it, and it will be yours’. This ‘whatever’-as in John 14:14, ‘if you ask anything in my name, I will do it’- seems to be the result of every prayer whether indiscriminate or discriminate. If any and every prayer is received and answered as requested then we face a problem.

This problem is solved if we understand the statement, ‘in my name’. To pray in the name of the Son or the Father

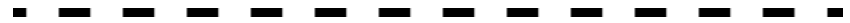
is to pray ‘in the Spirit’, and at the same time means to abide in Christ, to abide in love, to abide in the Father, to have the Father, the Son and the Spirit living, i.e. abiding in one’s self (see Eph. 6:18; John 14:15-23; 15:1-11, 16; 16: 23-24; I John 3:23-24; 4:13, 16).

To abide in Christ and the Father, and to walk in the Spirit is to know and have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5; I Cor. 2:16), the mind of the Spirit (Rom. 8:26-27) and thus the mind of the Father. Indeed it is to know the will of God, and so to be able to pray according to the will of God. If at any point we do not know God’s will in any matter then we ought not pray explicitly for anything to happen. Indeed in no case dare we trust our own wisdom, or tempt God to do what we think is best. It is here, most of all, that we should first seek to know the mind of the Father, otherwise ‘thy will be done’ is an empty, lazy or presumptuous prayer. We are trying to get God to do what we want done. This is tempting God: it is proceeding without the dialogue of true prayer, and an example of this is seen in Psalm 106:15, ‘he gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them’.

Summing up, we may say that to be in Christ, in the Spirit, and in the Father is to know the will of God as He chooses to reveal it. To pray-knowing that will-in the name of Christ means we are praying according to His will, and whatever the outcome that is what matters.

# 9

## *Praying in the Spirit*



### **GOD, MAN AND THE SPIRIT**

When man fell he became spiritless. We mean by this that he died. His death at that point was not biological, but relational. The Bible shows that he became dead (Gen. 2:17; 3:1-10; cf. Rom. 5:12ff.; Eph. 2:1, 5; Heb. 9:14; I Tim. 5:6). Man, from being a living creature, became merely an existent. He was dead in his trespasses and sins, and refused to retain God in his knowledge (Rom. 1:28; cf. Ps. 14:1-2). Even so the Spirit of God was (is) also the Spirit of creation and providence, so that the Spirit worked to keep man in biological existence, even though man had descended to become ‘the natural man’ (I Cor. 2:14; Jude 19). In the time prior to the Flood, God said, ‘My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh’. Fallen man, then, is not as the man of the Spirit but is of his own fallen

humanity. This state is shown in relation to Cain, who had to go out of the presence of God (Gen. 4:16).

Spiritless man does not pray to God, but he does pray to his idols for they are of the same evil spirit (cf. Eph. 2:1-3). Man-in-Christ is a spiritual being, i.e. has the Spirit. Fallen man is also a spiritual creature, though not a holy spiritual creature. Likewise Satan is also a ‘spirit’ (Eph. 2:2), has and is an unholy spirit. Redeemed man is holy because he has the Holy Spirit. Thus he can-and does-pray.

In John 4:21-24 Jesus tells the woman at the well that true worship is impossible without the Spirit. This true worship, of course, includes true prayer.

### **THE SPIRIT BRINGS TO LIFE AND PRAYER**

We have said that prayer is dialogue with God. The Spirit brings fallen man to life by applying the work of the atonement. This is by ‘the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit’ (Titus 3:4-7; John 3:3ff.). The Spirit thus sets man free (Rom. 8:1-3; II Cor. 3:6, 17; Gal. 5:1). It is by this that man can pray or have dialogue with God.

Jesus prayed by means of the Spirit. Luke 10:21 says, ‘In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth . . .” ‘ In the light of this event we understand Galatians 4:6 where Paul says, ‘And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying “Abba! Father!”’ We may then pray as Jesus prayed-in and by the Spirit.

We address God as ‘Father’ and can now converse with Him.

### **ACCESS BY THE SPIRIT TO THE FATHER**

What we have said in these last two paragraphs will not be fully understood if we do not see that ‘we have access in one Spirit to the Father’ (Eph. 2:18). To have access to God the Father is an awesome thing. Indeed it is near to unbelievable when we think of the worship structure of Israel’s temple. There God was secluded in the ‘holy of holies’ and only once in a year could one-the high-priest-come into His presence. Through Christ and the Gospel, via the Holy Spirit we can come to the Father, and worship and pray to Him as His sons! Thus praying in the Spirit is our privilege because the Spirit has brought us- through the Son-to the Father.

### **RIGHT STATE OF MIND BY THE SPIRIT**

The fruit of the Spirit as stated in Galatians 5:22-23 makes the true conditions for prayer. Our attitude to God, fellow-man, and ourselves is determined by this beautiful gift of God-the fruit of the Spirit. Dialogue, i.e. prayer, is richest when we live in the Spirit. Living in the Spirit is really an attitude of life-expressing love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, by which we have the true basis of prayer.

By nature we are weak, and our weakness qualifies us for true prayer. Romans 8:26-27 ought to be clearly understood, ‘Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God’. From this we conclude that the Spirit works intimately within us helping us to pray aright. God who searches our hearts knows what we would pray-if we knew-and takes the mind of the Spirit to be the very utterance of our own hearts. This tender and powerful Interceder, the Holy Spirit, sets our minds and hearts in the true state of prayer.

We must also note that we can pray for strength. God commanded His Messiah, ‘Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession’(Ps. 2:8). In Christ we, too, can be bold (I John 5:14-15).

### **THE SPIRIT HIMSELF HAS DIALOGUE WITH MAN**

Just as Jesus was set up for true prayer by the Spirit (Luke 10:21f.), so he-the Holy Spirit-speaks to the church. He spoke intimately to Philip (Acts 8:29) which pre-supposes the evangelist was ‘in the Spirit’. In Acts 13:1-3 whilst the church was praying and fasting the Spirit had dialogue with the worshippers out of which guidance was given for Paul and Barnabas to take the Gospel to the Asia Minor of that day. We take it that Paul and Silas also had

dialogue with the Holy Spirit for in Acts 16:6-10 they are forbidden by the Spirit to speak the word in Asia. The apostles and others were led to do certain acts by the enablement of the Spirit, and this presupposes that they were hearing God through the Holy Spirit, as also God was hearing them.

### **PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT**

We have seen that we pray by the Spirit, for when the Spirit came at Pentecost a new era of worship opened up. Jesus taught this in John 4:20-24 (cf. Phil. 3:3). The Spirit is the one who brings us to the Father, and indwells us as the very Spirit of the Son (Gal. 4:6) and the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20). He is also the one who aids us to pray (Rom. 8:26-27).

#### **I Corinthians 14:6-19**

In a number of passages we see that we worship in the Spirit. Jude 20 speaks of ‘praying in the Holy Spirit’, whilst Ephesians 6:18 enjoins, ‘Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication’. These statements are straightforward, but in I Corinthians 14:6-19 Paul takes up the issue of speaking or praying in tongues. This is quite a complex passage. He talks of praying ‘with the spirit’ and ‘with the mind’. He seems to mean that although tongues are unintelligible something is happening in his spirit by the Holy Spirit which is edifying. As such he-the tongues speaker-profits. Even so Paul suggests that it is better to pray with the mind which utters

intelligible prayers so that anyone listening can affirm that prayer with an ‘amen’. He does not mean that a prayer with the mind is less spiritual than one made ‘in the spirit’. ‘In the spirit’ seems to mean, ‘in one’s own spirit’, and would appear to be expressed in tongues. This would surely mean that the Holy Spirit in the worshipper’s spirit makes an edifying prayer, but that in public worship tongue-praying is not immediately as profitable as conscious praying, in a known tongue. ‘With the mind’ seems to mean conscious and intelligible prayer, but does not mean it is less spiritual than it would be if it were spoken in a tongue. What, then, should be kept in mind as primary is that kind of praying in the Spirit which is intelligible to hearers.

#### **Ephesians 6:18**

In Ephesians 6:18 Paul said, ‘Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication’. This injunction followed the exhortation to put on the whole armour of God including the sword of the Spirit. Without that armour we cannot rightly pray in the Spirit. When we don the armour and begin to pray in the Spirit then the tide of the battle changes radically. Such praying in the Spirit is not optional. It is indispensable to spiritual warfare.

#### **Jude 20**

The context of this verse should be carefully read. Jude’s injunction, ‘Pray in the Holy Spirit’, should be seen in the light of the whole Epistle in which heretics, loose-living persons, and similarly rebellious people refuse to

accept the authority of the truth and persons set over them in the church. Jude has very much in mind what we call ‘the last days’.

#### **Zechariah 12:10; Romans 8:26–27; I Corinthians 2:6–10**

These three Scriptures should be read together for they all refer to things which are eschatological, i.e. that deal with the last days. Zechariah 12:10 said, ‘And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion [or, grace] and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born’. This Scripture is surely referring to the last days, and the Spirit is clearly concerned with those days.

Romans 8:26–27 is written in the context of the creation longing for the end-time. Both the creation and members of the church are living in hope, and the latter want to know what to pray for in this particular regard. The Holy Spirit takes them beyond their conscious knowledge into the realm of God’s plan, and helps them to share in effective prayer for that plan in which hope is the primary personal factor.

I Corinthians 2:6–10 also looks to the end time—the eschaton. This will be the time of glorification. Because there is no precedent or any object for comparison by which to describe the future personal glorification of the believer, Paul tells us that in essence the Spirit has communicated the glories to come, thus stimulating hope for the future, in the believer.

It is to be noted that these three Scriptures speak of what the Spirit is doing within us, and not what we are doing in the Spirit. In this case praying in the Spirit means mainly that we are in the Spirit and he thus enables us to pray.

### **CONCLUSION AS TO PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT**

The short introduction we have given to praying through and in the Spirit will only be profitable to us when they are our living experience, and constitute the mode by which we pray. It is both awesome and intimate to have prayer with the living God, knowing His mind and seeking to do His will. For this reason we must go on being filled with the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, and being kept in the Father-son relationship through living in the Spirit. There is no true prayer which is not first prayer by and in the Spirit.

## 10

### *Dialogue and Meditation*



#### **DIALOGUE-GOD AND MAN**

Because God made man in his own image, the two can - and must-converse. We take it from the statement in Genesis 5:3- 'When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth'-that Adam and his son would have had constant dialogue. Having that affinity they would speak to each other. When a father and mother have converse with their children, the children generally learn both knowledge and wisdom, and receive guidance, advice, as also rebuke and encouragement. If there is no converse (dialogue) then the natural affinity lies dormant and unexplored.



Likewise—because God and man have the Father-son relationship—they hold converse. In the beginning God breathed into man the breath of life, and man became a living being (Gen. 2:7). God’s breath is related in the Scriptures to both His word (utterances) and His Spirit (Ps. 33:6, 9; 148:5-6; Ps. 104:29-30; Job 33:4). It would be reasonable then to say that when God breathed into man that He spoke into him. That was creative utterance indelibly imprinted. The pattern of affinity was set as an undeniable ontological reality. God was man’s Creator, his Father, and his King. Thus the Creator-creature, Father-son, and King-subject relationship called for dialogue. Man would hear the sound of God in the garden.

We know that following the Fall, God spoke to the primal man and woman, and both responded even if only in self-justification. There was certainly a dialogue but the shape of it was a sad one. In fact the primal couple had tried to escape conversation by hiding themselves. Likewise there was dialogue with God and Cain, God taking the initiative. God is recorded as having dialogue with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and countless others. Indeed He has always had dialogue with His children, as also with His enemies.

In Isaiah 1:18 is the classical statement regarding dialogue, ‘“Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord’. In Isaiah 43:26 God says, ‘Put me in remembrance, let us argue together; set forth your case, that you may be proved right’. Job also says (13:3), ‘I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God’. There is also a prophetic dialogue such as Samuel uses (I Sam. 12:7ff.), ‘Now therefore stand still, that I may plead with you before the Lord concerning all the saving

deeds of the Lord which he performed for you and for your fathers’.

## HUMAN AND DIVINE DIALOGUE

When humans have conversations they have a number of conditioning elements. They seek to assess the nature of the other person. They will speak according to that knowledge, to express their ideas, feelings, relationships—and so on. They may wish to show themselves in a good light, to justify themselves, to gain some advantage or lovingly to impart affection. There may be many intentions and motives.

When man speaks with God he first wishes to know the nature of God, so that his dialogue will be useful, whether in hating God and trying to put Him down, or in seeking Him in order to know Him for Himself. The one special source of knowing God is the Scriptures. The man who has enmity with God will rarely seek this kind of revelation, but the man seeking or knowing God will read the Scriptures avidly. In any case man-as-enemy will meditate, i.e. think over what he knows of God, seeking to come to conclusions, or use a certain strategy in talking to Him, or at Him. In such cases meditation is with a view to dialogue, but the problem is that the mind of fallen, hostile man is ‘senseless and darkened’. Paul said, ‘Claiming to be wise they became fools’ (Rom. 1:21-23). Because the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit (I Cor. 2:14), any true dialogue with God must be one issuing from love. The dialogue of the natural man is one of defiance. Fallen man meditates upon himself and

his idols but he cannot truly know himself or the idols. To properly meditate and pray he is locked up to knowing God.

With the believer also it is not otherwise. Knowing God he can know himself in the presence of God.

## **THE NATURE OF TRUE MEDITATION**

### **The Exercise of Meditation**

For the Hebrew, meditation was a speaking in the mind, a whispering in the heart, an expression of murmuring (speaking to oneself, and God), and even speaking out what one has thought. It is contemplation upon many things which give further understanding and wisdom concerning God, His actions, His word and His law. True meditation is applying one's heart unto wisdom, out of which one comes to know the counsel, i.e. the wisdom and will of God, and that knowledge increases wisdom in the meditator and leads to obedient action. Thus meditation forms the basis for informed prayer.

### **Objects of Biblical Meditation**

As we have said meditation is an exercise of taking time to contemplate. A life without meditation will soon become barren. Not to contemplate is never to catch up with one's own experiences, or take full notice of God, fellowman, and the marvellous creation of God. This whole matter of meditation is covered more fully in my little book *The Christian Meditator* (Blackwood, Adelaide: NCPI, 1986),

and I propose here to use the material of pages 39 to 45, namely 'The Objects of True Meditation'.

### **The first object of meditation is God**

Psalm 63:1-8 says, 'O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is'. He adds, 'My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat, and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips, when I think of thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the watches of the night; for thou has been my help, and in the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to thee; thy right hand upholds me.' Psalms 4:4; 16:7-8; 19:14; 42:8; 104:34; and 119:55 give insights on the fact of thoughtful contemplation and the way of meditation.

### **The second object of meditation is God's works**

The following are quotes from Psalms 8:3; 111:2; 77:11-12; 145:5; and 119:27: 'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers . . .', 'Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who have pleasure in them', 'I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord; yea, I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate on all thy work, and muse on thy mighty deeds', 'On the glorious splendour of thy majesty, and on thy wondrous works I will meditate', 'Make me understand the way of thy precepts, and I will meditate on thy wondrous works'.

### **The third object of meditation is God's Word and His law**

The following are quotes that fit our heading: '. . . his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night', 'I will meditate on thy precepts

and fix my eyes on thy ways’, ‘Even though princes sit plotting against me, thy servant will meditate upon thy statutes’, ‘I revere thy commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on thy statutes’, ‘Let the godless be put to shame, because they have subverted me with guile; as for me, I will meditate on thy precepts’, ‘O, how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day’, ‘I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation’, ‘My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate upon thy promise’ (see Ps. 1:2; 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148).

## **CONCLUSION ON DIALOGUE AND MEDITATION**

We can see, now, that the only one who can have true dialogue with God is the one who has been redeemed from his fallen state, has a new heart and mind, an understanding of God, one whose sins have been forgiven and whose person has been justified, and who lives in the context of the Father and God’s people in faith, hope and love, under the Lordship of Christ, and led by the Holy Spirit.

We do not mean that the ungodly cannot have dialogue with God, but it will be a hostile, accusing and complaining dialogue because all meditation has not been upon His true nature and wisdom. Because guilt always brings a sense of alienation from God-as though He does not love the person-the one conversing with God cannot utter true prayer, and so cannot expect answers from God, although God as Creator-Father-King may well answer prayer, even

if not in the way the petitioner demands.

Dialogue, then ideally, is that conversing with God which has been preceded by, and follows prayer. Prayer likewise issues from meditation, and promotes further meditation. Another way of saying this is that true prayer is that dialogue we have with God when in union with Him. We know more and more of God as we contemplate Him, but such contemplation without the actions of obedience is merely lazy thinking, self-meditation and useless pious thinking. Our union with Him through grace develops into communion where there is both meditation and dialogue.

# 11

## *Prayer and the Cross*

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### **THE CROSS AND PRAYER: CHRIST AND HIS LOVING SACRIFICE**

At the Cross we see prayer in its richest form. Prayer has been called dialogue or colloquy, and in the Crucifixion we have displayed before our eyes the relationship of the Father and the Son. We will not fully understand this unless the Cross is placed in the context of the things which happened prior to, as well as in, the Passion Week. In Luke 10:21f., and Luke 11:1 we read of that praying which the disciples witnessed and out of which they desired, similarly, to pray. In one sense that praying was preparatory for the great event of his atonement, as was indeed his praying on the Mount of Transfiguration –along with his conversations with the glorified Moses and Elijah. Yet what moves us most was his high-priestly prayer of John chapter 17. Given in all this, it was his prayer under deep stress which touches us most, i.e. the

prayer he uttered on the Cross.

When a person is under great stress he is unable to privatize his thoughts and feelings. Suddenly faced with intense suffering we often cry out our great distress. Jesus uttered seven cries on the Cross. His first cry, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’, was uttered as the nails were driven in and the timber cross socketed into the ground. We know that terrible jeering, blaspheming and spitting were the order of that horrific event. It was love which caused him to pray to the Father. His later frightening cry came out of the limbo of dark-ness-the place of the lost and the damned, ‘My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?’. His cry in exhaustion was, ‘I thirst!’, indicating his resources were drained. His triumphant cry, ‘It is finished!’, was the cry of victory. He had completed the exercise of bearing the sins of the world. The utterance following this was, ‘Father! Into your hands I commit my spirit!’ This too was a cry of triumph because his life was not taken from him, for he had authority to lay it down, and surely lay it down he did.

### **THE CROSS BRINGS US TO LOVE**

Paul, in a remarkable passage (Rom. 5:5-11) and John in an equally remarkable passage (I John 4:7-19) show us that our experience of love issues from the Cross. Both passages show that when the Spirit reveals God’s action of love in the atonement of His Son, then at that point, and by that revelation, God’s love pours into our hearts. Love is shown in the suffering of propitiation. We love because He first loved us. If we fail to see the vast love of the

Godhead in the act of the Cross—the act of Father, Son and Spirit—then we will always be defective in our knowledge of God, our relationship with Him, and so our dialogue of prayer. Prayer will always be deficient. Jesus’ saying, ‘If you love me you will keep my commandments’, will remain a puzzle to us unless we are gripped by God’s love. Paul said, ‘The love of Christ constrains [controls] me’.

Let us repeat that if we do not see that love at full blaze in the Cross, then our prayer will always be deficient. The heart of prayer is that our dialogue with God is constrained by His love for us, and our reflexive, responsive love for Him. Here our covenant union with Him becomes practical communion with Him. Because of this love, proper dialogue can ensue.

### **APPROACHING PRAYER WITHOUT LOVE**

If we approach God with slavish fear then all elements of prayer such as access, confession, adoration, petition, meditation and intercession will be coloured by lack of love. Access will be a craven approach to God, and what should be penitence will be remorse. Confession then will be a sickening admission of failure; adoration will lack freedom; meditation will be without assurance and void of attraction. What should be dynamic and effective intercession will be an anguished appeal to a remote, austere and detached Deity.

This latter kind of prayer is the reflection of a life lived without the grace and freedom of the Cross. Access lacks

boldness, confession lacks the joy of liberation where sins are freely acknowledged. Love is required for the exercise of true prayer. Prayer—as worship and other elements—must spring from a cleansed conscience and a liberated spirit. To be reconciled to God by the Cross and Resurrection (Col. 1:19-21; Rom. 5:10-11; II Cor. 5:19-21) is to flow into genuine prayer from the source and fountain of God’s love. This love is what warms us into being true children of God.

### **THE CRUCIFIED HEART PRAYS CRUCIFIED PRAYERS**

Galatians 2:20 tells us we have been crucified with Christ. Numerous passages confirm this. We have been crucified to the law, to its judgements, to sin, to death, to the flesh and to the world. Had this death to these things not taken place then there would have been no true prayer. We need first to be delivered from ourselves, and so come under the constraint of love, for love is at the heart of every true prayer. Insofar as we live crucified lives by faith—for we cannot live them by sight—thus far can we be at one with the Father and His plan for His elect, and His creation. Insofar also we can see and share His love for sinners. Paul sought to live in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of others (Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24) for the constraint of love had already and permanently taken hold of him.

It is no little thing to be gripped by love for the world of sinful men and so to become people of prayer who intercede for the lost. To understand the tension, fear and personal awryness of those who hate God, and fear Him

with a slavish fear, is no small thing. Bearing guilt and pollution makes life to be misery to a man, and we do not easily identify with such. Only in the Cross has this ever happened, for Christ ‘was numbered with the transgressors’. Whilst not making the Cross to be a mystical abstraction we can so be one with Christ in it, that we can be one with man who is apart from God and identify with him in love. When this happens we are most powerfully in the exercise of proclaiming the Gospel.

It is at this point, and by this method, that we become true intercessors. We pray with men and women as we pray for them. We pray not only for the lost but also for those in God’s processes of salvation (Phil. 2:12-13). We pray in detail for our families, for our brethren, for our neighbours, and for our enemies. We become one with Christ and the Spirit in intercession for the world.

## **CHRIST AND MAN CRUCIFIED**

We conclude our study by saying in simple terms that fellowship between God and man—true fellowship that is—effected at the Cross. All true relationships by human beings with other human beings must come via God. As He relates to us in grace, mercy and love, so we then respond by loving Him, and through Him we thus relate to others. Crucifixion with Christ—sometimes called ‘co-crucifixion’—gives us the mind of Christ. We are one with him in the power of his Resurrection, the fellowship of his sufferings, and the ‘shape’ or form of his death (Phil. 3:10). Had we not been crucified, and if in his work of the atonement he had not drawn us into himself, we

would each be as another person. Being one with him in his death we have become one with man and God, as partners with Him in His work.

Thus, without the Cross and our crucifixion with him prayer would be of another nature and ilk. Crucified prayer is the most powerful of all.



# 12

## *The Prayer of Faith*

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The term ‘prayer of faith’ is primarily used in James 5:15, ‘the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up’. This statement is used in regard to the healing of sickness as the context shows. The following passages also relate to the principle of prayer in or with faith: James 5:15-18; Matthew 5:7-14; 7:7; Mark 9:23-29; 11:22-25; John 15:16; and I John 5:14-15.

### **THE NATURE OF FAITH**

What then is meant by ‘faith’ and ‘the prayer of faith’? In Mark 11:12-14, 20-26 Jesus gives teaching on the prayer of faith. The incident is that of cursing the fig tree which gave promise of fruit but bore none. The disciples were amazed at the sight of the withered tree next morning. Jesus said to them, ‘Have faith in God’. He then added

that if a man says a certain thing and does not doubt in his heart, but believes what he says will come to pass, then it will be done for him. He said, ‘. . . whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours’. It is necessary then to discover the meaning of ‘faith’.

We ought to study the whole of this passage. Verse 23 speaks not of praying but of saying—in faith. That is when a seemingly impossible act happens through us, it comes from saying, and not praying, for praying—as such—is not actually mentioned in this verse. In verse 24 he speaks of praying with belief so that which you have believed will be received, and it will be yours. Doubtless Jesus is not excluding the prayer of the one who says, but it would seem that prayer comes prior to the effective saying.

Notice also that the attitude or mindset of the one praying has to be right. Prayer here—as in Matthew 5:7-14—relates to total forgiveness of others. In other words there is no point in saying or praying unless our record is clear before God. If our minds are caught up in unforgiveness, bitterness and the like, then we will neither say nor pray with effectiveness. Related to this event of the cursing and withering of the fig tree is the fact that Jesus did not pray at the time of his miracles. If we trace the miracles and work that he did, we must conclude that he prayed at times other than the healing event. That is, he lived constantly in holy dialogue with his Father so that he knew the mind of God and was strengthened and sustained by this habitual converse. Doubtless, too, he had special seasons of prayer by which he kept understanding the will of God, and so was not caught in surprise or bewilderment when confronted by unusual events.

### Faith, Prayer and Fasting

An illustration of the above principle is found in the failure of the disciples to exorcise a deaf and dumb spirit from a boy (Matt. 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43). The Gospel accounts show that the disciples were helpless to do anything. Christ immediately healed the boy and the downhearted disciples asked Christ why they could not cast out the demon. If we conflate Christ's answer from the three synoptic Gospels it would be something like this, 'You could not cast out the demon because you had little faith. This difficult kind of demon demands strong prayer—the prayer of true faith'. An old manuscript of Matthew 17:21 has, 'But this kind never comes out except by prayer and fasting'. It is obvious that when confronted with a difficult case for exorcism and healing, one would not then commence prayer and fasting. Jesus must have meant, 'If you pray and fast regularly and habitually, then your faith will be strong and you will be prepared to meet any difficult situation or contingency', for this was how it was with him.

A slightly different way of putting this is to say that when we use the exercise of prayer—and if needed, fasting—then we keep ourselves disciplined and alert, and this is the climate for effective faith.

#### God's Faithfulness: Our Faith

Faith has been given various meanings, but generally our faith is based on the faithfulness of God. The meanings given derive from the truthfulness or faithfulness of God. What He is, does, and promises, is the basis of faith

and *there is no other* basis. Faith is belief in, trusting and resting upon God, union with Him, feeding upon Him, receiving what God gives, reliance upon and obedience to Him. Only in that context can one know the will of God, and pray according to it. Faith is not something originating in man for it is a gift of God. It is not something man can summon up from his own resources. It is not operative through mere positive thinking or possibility thinking, but derives from God, and from true personal knowledge of Him.

### THE PRAYER OF FAITH

In Mark 9:23 Jesus told the father of the demoniac boy, 'If you can! All things are possible to him who believes'. The man responded, 'I believe; help my unbelief!'

Throughout John's Gospel the noun 'faith' is not present but the verb 'to believe' is used many times. Often it indicates different stages of believing. The prayer of faith is that prayer of asking by one who believes at a certain point that it is not only what God can do, but will do, i.e. that this is God's immediate will. There are, of course, some things for which one may pray knowing them generally from God's word to be authentic objects for prayer. So James (1:5-8) admonishes those who pray with a 'double mind', 'let him ask in faith, with no doubting'.

#### Praying the Prayer of True Faith

Praying in faith is essential to God answering our prayer. I John 5:14-15 shows that we can and *must* know

God’s will (cf. Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:17), ‘And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him’. The statement in John 14:13-14 and 16:23-24, ‘ask in my name’, is linked with ‘If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you’ (John 15:7), and these references add up to, ‘You abide in me, and you will be one with me, and you will know His will because I know what is His will for I constantly walk in it, so that thus knowing His will and asking according to it (cf. I John 5:14-15) whatever you ask will be done’. This, then, will be the prayer of faith.

#### **Faith is Born by the Word, the Spirit Who Utters it, and the Nature of God Revealed by the Word Through the Spirit**

Faith in God comes by a revelation of God through the word of the Gospel (Rom. 10:17), ‘faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ’. It is by the Spirit that this word is uttered to the listener (I Pet. 1:12) so that faith is born. To believe is to obey (Rom. 10:16). It is to obey the Gospel. A believer can be weak or strong in faith (see Rom. ch. 14; I Cor. ch. 8), or be weak in conscience (I Cor. ch. 8). When one has a full-bodied revelation of God-by the word and the Spirit-then one knows the nature of God, and thus knows His will, (a) in a general sense because the Scriptures reveal it, and (b) in a specific sense by seeking His will at a certain point, or better still-living in that

will so that ‘as you go you know, and as you know you go!’.

When a believer does not really know God and His Word, he may think that ‘such-and-such’ is God’s will when it is not. I John 5:14-15 are key verses to praying the prayer of faith. Look at these words again, ‘And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him’. We have concluded above that the prayer of faith is that prayer which is prayed according to the known (revealed) will of God. Now we know how to discover and walk in his will, thus completing the true situation for holy dialogue-the prayer of man with God, as God talks to man, revealing His will and intentions.

#### **The Principle of God’s Will For Action**

What we need to keep in mind is that God’s will relates, (a) to His full salvation plan, (b) to the life and action of the community of believers, and (c) to each believer and his need. In John 7:17 Jesus gives a condition for knowing the will of God, i.e. ‘if any man’s will is to do his [God’s]will, he shall know . . .’ It is then (and thus) that the prayer of faith is prayed. Again see James 5:15 regarding the prayer of faith for the sick man. Whose is the prayer of faith-the prayer of the sick man, or the elders, or both? Surely it commences with the sick man, who believing what God has said in regard to the healing of illness then calls the elders, and they trusting both on the faith of the sick man and the promise God has given, set

about praying in the will of God. For a development of this element see chapter 8 of this book under the heading ‘Prayer and the Will of God’.

### **All True Prayer is the Prayer of Faith**

Some folk represent the ‘prayer of faith’ as a separate thing from what they may call ‘ordinary prayer’, and thus elevate it to a higher bracket of praying. Some who have received the gift of faith (cf. Rom. 12:6) may appear to be special people in prayer, but this is not so. We have described above what is the nature of faith, and in accordance with this every prayer ought to be a prayer of faith. We must not make the prayer of faith to be one which prompts God to move. God always moves in response to genuine prayer. Prayer which is not genuine is not the prayer of faith.

## 13

### *Prayer as Intercession*

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#### **PERSONAL PRAYER AND PETITION**

Personal prayer is dialogue with God. In this dialogue God is the Prime Mover. He seeks, invites, encourages and informs praying man. He teaches what is the truth and what is not. He reveals His will and encourages co-operation in prayer. Prayer is that which He has deliberately included in the action of His plan for the fulfilment of that intention. Hence, by prayer we are co-workers with God. There is room in this praying for us to fellowship with God, praise and adore Him, give Him thanks, and make our personal petitions. None of this ought to be regarded as selfish, or self-seeking. It is when we pray only for ourselves that selfishness comes into prayer. This, then,

brings us to the matter of intercession, since intercession relates to others.

## PRAYER AS INTERCESSION

Intercession is pleading or mediating on behalf of another. John tells us that we have ‘an advocate with the Father’ (I John 2:2) who is Jesus. Paul also tells us we have one—Christ—interceding for us at the right hand of God (Rom. 8:34), and the writer of Hebrews similarly sets Christ out as always living to make intercession for men (7:25). Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit making intercession within us (Rom. 8:26–27). If intercession is part of the work of the Persons of the Godhead, then it ought to be part of the work of redeemed manhood. Being in the image of God, man—especially redeemed man—should experience intercessory prayer as a natural drive.

### Intercession is Intervention

The idea of mediation, pleading and advocacy by one for another would seem to make the intercessor a person without power as such. He would seem to be at the mercy or whim of the one to whom he appeals. That is not true. The advocate at law has the whole law to support him. He speaks from the law. Christ speaks not only from the law – which in any case he has fulfilled for mankind—but from the heart of God’s mercy and love. He never—so to speak—paints God into a corner in order to prompt Him to action, and thereby achieve his goal. He does not even confront God with His own mercy and love, for God is not

so foolish that He has to be reminded of His own work in Christ to redeem sinners and protect believers from the forces of darkness. The intercessor is working on known factors; hence his success. Christ intercedes out of his love for us, as also his finished work of salvation achieved in the Cross and Resurrection. Likewise the Spirit intercedes on the basis of Christ’s completed work. So, in Christ do we. We have no other grounds for intercession.

It is Isaiah 59 which gives us a deep understanding of intercession. The reader needs to ponder this chapter thoughtfully and in detail. It paints a picture of man’s separation from God, and in particular the evil that flourishes within Israel. It is as though God expected a man or leader to rise up in the midst of the evil and intercede:

The Lord saw it, and it displeased him  
that there was no justice.  
He saw that there was no man,  
and wondered that there was no one to intervene.

In some translations the word *intervene* is *intercede*. Thus to *intercede* is to *intervene on the behalf of another, utilizing the powers, rights and abilities which one, i.e. the interceder/intervener, possesses*. Why and how then would one become an interceder? The answer must be that be—cause of God’s love to us we love others and pray for them. Because Christ lives in us and we have his ‘mind’, therefore we pray within the framework of the will of God for another. The person matters and the will of God is primary. We dare not neglect the responsibility given to us, nor fail to participate in this effective way in the will of God.

What we have to keep in mind is that the intercessor is

doing something which the person for whom he is interceding is unable to do. Discernment, sensitivity and understanding call the prayer warrior to intervene.

## THE MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION

### Intercession in the Old Testament

In Ezekiel 14:12-20 the Lord tells Ezekiel that Israel's situation of evil and idolatry is such that 'even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness'. In other words they are named as three great intercessors, but their greatness in intercession could not save Israel. Incidentally (for this is not our subject here), although Noah was a righteous man he is not spoken of anywhere as an intercessor. By his righteousness he did-unconsciously-intervene for his family, saving them. Doubtless too he was a man of prayer. Daniel is most clearly an intercessor, and whilst we might not think this of Job, yet Job 42:7-10 shows that God saw Job as a righteous man, and therefore an acceptable intercessor, hence He said to Job's counsellor, Eliphaz, 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has . . . my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly'. The use of the term 'righteous' is interesting in the light of James 5:16, 'The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects'.

That these three men were godly intercessors is revealing. Yet intercession neither began nor ended with

them. Abraham (Gen.18:16-33) was an intercessor for the city of Sodom. Moses (Exod. 5:22-23; 8:8; 32:11-14; etc.) interceded for Israel both in its terrible plight in Egypt, its idolatry and complainings in the wilderness, and was even prepared to have his own name blotted out of the book of life. Exodus 32:30-34 is a most moving plea by Moses to God. Samuel, also, so often prayed for his people (I Sam. 7:5-9; 12:16-17, 23; 15:11). David was a fervid intercessor on occasions. He prayed for the child of his adultery, that it might not die (II Samuel 12:15ff.), and in II Samuel 24:10-25 he prayed for the plague to cease upon his people when he himself had sinned by numbering them.

Jeremiah was an exceptional intercessor for Israel, so much so that he has been called 'the sorrowful prophet', and this is especially seen in the book of Lamentations. His identification with his people in Jeremiah 9:1f., is very moving:

O that my head were waters,  
and my eyes a fountain of tears,  
that I might weep day and night  
for the slain of the daughter  
of my people!

Daniel, too, was a powerful intercessor, and Daniel chapter 9 shows that he was stirred by Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the exile of Israel for 70 years, and he identified with the sinfulness of his people and so prayed. His prayer was of great effect as we see in chapter 10. If we were to sum up the intercessions of prophets, kings and priests in the Old Testament, we would find them to be considerable, and if we added to these the intercessions of



the Psalms, we would discover that Israel looked much to God’s aid through intercession.

### Intercession in the New Testament

In the New Testament there is also much intercession. The Gospels speak of Christ’s intercessory ministry (see ch. 19), for he is the true Intercessor. In turn the early church prayed powerfully for the persecuted apostles (Acts 4:23-30), for Peter in prison (Acts 12:12), and for Paul as he went on to Jerusalem and then to Rome (Acts 21:5).

### Paul’s Intercessory Ministry

Paul stands out exceptionally both as a teacher of intercession, and as an intercessor himself. In Romans 1:9, Ephesians 1:16, Philippians 1:9, I Thessalonians 1:2 and many other places he speaks of his intercessory prayers for others. Indeed his prayers are now regarded as classical for they were prayers of intercession on a practical level and at the same time deep and enriching as they related to God’s plan for His people and His creation. Paul could speak of himself as striving (Greek: *agona*) for a church he had never even seen (Col. 2:1-2). In Romans 9:1-5 (cf. Rom. 10:1) he identifies himself as passionately with Israel, as did Moses for his wayward people in the desert (Exod. 32:30-34).

For those who would find intercession a difficult exercise he teaches in Romans 8:26-27 that the Spirit not only aids in intercession, but that he actually identifies with the heart of man so intimately, that God reads that heart as the mind of the Spirit himself. Paul also teaches his readers

to have a wide range for intercession. His injunction of I Timothy 2:1-4 urges ‘supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men’. He sees the ministry of widows as related to ‘supplications and prayers night and day’ (I Tim. 5:5). Incidentally we should note that supplications are closely linked in many places with intercessions. Paul is concerned that intercessions be made for ‘all the saints’. ‘To that end’, he says, ‘keep alert with all perseverance, making supplications for all the saints’ (Eph. 6:18). No one could accuse him of not doing what he requested.

Paul understands what we might call ‘the network’ of intercessions, and covets such prayers to be made on behalf of himself, and for this reason he requests such prayer. Romans 15:30 is a particularly interesting request, ‘I appeal to you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive [verb is *agonizomai*] together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf’. In II Corinthians 1:11 he says, ‘You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us in answer to many prayers’. It is clear that Paul knows the power of the prayers of God’s people. He had, of course, been couched in the power of intercessory prayer in Israel, when the course of history had been altered through ‘the fervent prayers of righteous men’. For Paul’s requested or required prayer, see also Philippians 1:19, I Thessalonians 5:25, II Thessalonians 3:1-2 and Colossians 4:3.

We should note that much intercessory prayer is used for the proclamation of the Gospel. We saw Paul’s request for that in Ephesians 6:18-19, but in Acts 6:2-4 the apostles desire time for prayer in order to preach the word.

In Acts 4:30 the church prays for the apostles to have power for proclamation, and this prayer is immediately answered as we see in verse 33.

## CONCLUSION TO INTERCESSORY PRAYER

For this section to be complete we would need to include much more of the history of intercessory prayer in the Scriptures. We have merely touched the edge of that great ministry. We would also need to describe the process of history since the apostolic era. Christian history has been, in fact, a history of prayer and praying people. Prayer has shaped history, as it has also personally shaped the saints. God's true people are a praying people.

The prayer which is intercessory cannot be perfunctory. It requires the whole heart and soul of a person to perform. It requires the true agape of God. No less it requires the true wisdom of God. Intercessors must understand those for whom they pray, but even more Him to whom they pray, for out of knowledge of Him they learn to intercede. This is why we see the True Intercessor in the man of Isaiah 53:12 who, being called 'the Suffering Servant':

... poured out his soul to death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

With him ranks the Great Intervener of Isaiah 59, for in fact he is the same as the Suffering Servant, for both these pictures present the true or archetypal 'Righteous Man'. He—who in fact is the Messiah—is the archetype and

paradigm for all true intercessors and intercession. He holds the key to this love-suffering intercession, and he gives the key to all who are righteous men and women of God.

# 14

## *Things That Prevent and Promote Prayer*

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### **PRAYER AS HOLY DIALOGUE**

We have already stated that prayer is dialogue, and this suggests that we do not have a monologue with God, nor He with us. One of the terms used by older scholars was ‘colloquy’. This is the word from which we derive the adjective ‘colloquial’ used once for colloquy but now for ordinary conversation or common speech.

#### **Old Testament Colloquy**

Examples of prayer as colloquy between God and man are Abraham and his many conversations with God; Moses continually speaking with God regarding Israel, the ten plagues, and the things of leading his people, especially in the time of the forty days on Mount Sinai. Exodus 32:30-35 is undoubtedly a colloquy between God

and Moses. Elijah’s conversation in the wilderness after fleeing from Jezebel is also a holy dialogue. Job’s constant conversation with God is perhaps the classic colloquy.

We have seen that it is the righteous man who can prevail with God. Jacob might not be thought of as righteous, as he wrestled with the angel of the Lord, had a sharp dialogue and prevailed. Even so Jacob was a ‘righteous’ man in that he was elected as ‘prince of God’. The prophets, too, were righteous men and had specific dialogues with the Lord. It is even suggested that they may have stood in ‘the council of the Lord’ (Jer. 23:18, 22).

#### **New Testament Colloquy**

In the New Testament something of the nature of dialogue changes. Jesus said that the hour was even now breaking open when God would take the initiative in drawing people to pray and to worship (John 4:19-24). He intimated that the disciples were to address God as Father (Luke 11:1f.; Matt. 6:5-15), which thus put prayer on a new level. Pentecost brought the Spirit so that now all prayer would be ‘in Spirit [or, ‘the spirit’, i.e. man’s own spirit] and in truth’. In Philippians 3:3 we see this new prayer and worship was (is) by the Holy Spirit, hence—as we saw—the new mode of ‘praying in the Spirit’.

The heart and essence of praying in the Spirit is in the realm of crying, ‘Abba! Father!’. We have access to the Father (Eph. 2:18) by the Spirit and we cry by the Spirit (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15-17). Such understanding promotes prayer, for the old awe of the Holy of Holies in which God was especially present, gives way to the new colloquy through Christ and His Spirit to One who is called ‘Father’.

Prayer then is familial dialogue, a colloquy between the Father and His child, and an intimate dialogue with His holy Family.

## THE HINDRANCES TO TRUE PRAYER

What is the point of seeking out things which hinder prayer? That would seem at first to be a negative approach to the matter of holy dialogue. To the contrary: it is because the relevant Scriptures—once taken into ourselves—become part of a warning system, for they tell us how we can lose that reassuring dialogue with God which we so much need. They are also valuable since their opposites become the things which positively promote prayer. For example unforgiveness prevents effective prayer, but forgiveness promotes it. The hindrances could be many, and we seek to discover some of them:

(i) **Unforgiveness Prevents Effective Prayer.** In Matthew 6:9–15 Jesus gives his prayer—the Lord’s Prayer—to his disciples and tells them to pray after its pattern and principles. He adds, ‘For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses’. The prayer assumed that in fact we have already forgiven the trespasses of others, i.e. ‘Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors’. In Matthew 18:21–35 this principle of forgiving others is fully described. In I Timothy 2:8 Paul says, ‘I desire then that in every place the men should

pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling’. This has the idea that those who pray have forgiven the sins of others against themselves, hence there is no cause for quarrelling. Mark 11:24–25 directly links answer to prayer with forgiveness of others, ‘Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses’.

(ii) **Being Not Righteous But Unrighteous.** The healed blind man said simply (John 9:31), ‘We know that God does not listen to sinners’. Whilst the prayer of a righteous man is powerful in its effects, the opposite is true of the deliberate sinner, ‘If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the voice of my prayer’ (Ps. 66:18–19; cf. Prov. 15:29; 28:9; John 9:31). How can one have holy dialogue with God when his hands and heart are unclean? This is so clearly seen in Isaiah 1:15, ‘When you spread forth your hands, [in prayer and petition] I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood’ (Isa. 1:15). The same thought is expressed in Jeremiah 14: 10–12 when those who were wayward presumptuously expected God to hear their prayer.

No less powerful is the strongly worded passage of James 4:1–2, ‘What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war. You do not have, because you do not ask’.

(iii) **Wrong Motives Make Useless Prayer.** James 4:3-4 carries on the theme, ‘You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions’. This is seen in the case of Acts 8:18-24 where Simon Magus the magician-in Samaria-wished to buy the power to give the Holy Spirit to others. Simon wished to be ‘a great one’. He was told by Peter to pray to God so that he-Simon-might be saved from destruction.

(iv) **Faithlessness Hinders True Prayer.** We have seen the term ‘the prayer of faith’ (ch. 12). The opposite of faith is sin, and in particular the sin of doubt. To pray to God when we do not have faith means we do not think He is faithful. This is a form of tempting God. I John 5:14-15 bids us come with assurance and confidence. James (1:5-8) says the double-hearted (double-minded) man will receive nothing. This is the case seen in Hebrews 11:6, for there faith is absent.

(v) **Wrong Relationships Are a Hindrance to Prayer.** In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus advises that before prayer and worship, any person who knows his brother has something against him should go to his brother and make things right, and then return to make true prayer. In I Peter 3:7 Peter urges full and tender relationships in marriage ‘in order that your prayers be not hindered’. Many of the New Testament Epistles are given to urging full relationships in love, and correction of those which have gone wrong. The principle is, of course, that when we do not relate to others it is because we are not truly relating to God. When we do not truly relate to God in love, then our prayers cannot be colloquy or comport with God’s will.

(vi) **Refusal to Be Obedient.** Proverbs 28:9 says, ‘If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination’. The same thought is voiced in Proverbs 15:8, ‘The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight’. This might well be applied to Cain and Abel in their attitudes (cf. Lam. 1:7-9).

(vii) **Failure in the Practice of Love.** In the passages of I John 3:16-22, the author of the Letter has a proposition to set before his readers. He says-in effect - ‘True love is laying down your life for your friend, i.e. putting him first. For example, if you see a brother in need and you have sufficient goods to be able to help him but you deliberately do not help, then you are not truly loving. Your heart will condemn you because you have not loved, and God-more than your heart-will condemn you. When we love by helping the brother in need then our hearts do not condemn us and we have confidence in the presence of God, knowing that we can pray to the Father and He will both hear and answer us’. He is implying that our prayers will be greatly hindered if we refuse to love in practice.

(viii) **Self-justifying Pride Also Hinders True Prayer.** In Luke 18:9-14 two men pray, one a self-vindicating Pharisee and the other a breast-beating repentant tax gatherer. The first one ‘trusted in himself that he was righteous and despised others’, and his prayer was not heard by God. Luke 16:15 tells the reason, ‘You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God’.

These hindrances—outlined above—cover a vast area of human living, and—sadly enough—of Christian practice, that is of practice which seems to be Christian. We need sensitively to be on the alert against such hindrances. The principle is clearly stated in Isaiah 29:13:

And the Lord said:

‘Because this people draw near with their mouth  
and honour me with their lips,  
while their hearts are far from me,  
and their fear of me is a commandment of men  
learned by rote;  
... the wisdom of their wise men shall perish,  
and the discernment of their discerning men  
shall be hid’.

## THE THINGS WHICH PROMOTE PRAYER

As we have briefly observed, the things which hinder prayer have their opposites, such as the forgiveness of others, righteous living, the pure motivation or constraint of holy love, genuine faith, true relationships and the correct practice of love towards others. All act as elements which promote prayer, and effect results because God listens to us. Whilst many of our prayers may not achieve the results we have hoped for, they will have been heard, and God alone is the One who knows how to answer them for our good, and the further fulfilling of His great plan.

# 15

## *The Things We Pray For*

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### MAN AT PRAYER WITH GOD

The man of prayer sees God as Creator, and knows that God is concerned with the material and functional life of His creatures. Jesus gave an excellent exposition of God as the Fatherly Creator which we can read in Matthew 6:26–34. The key to our creaturely needs, security and growth lies in understanding *God as loving Father*. In order to live what we call the moral life we need to understand the same thing, namely that God is our Father and we are His children. He will assist us where we seek first His kingdom (Matt. 6:1–15). In the midst of all of this helpful teaching is the prayer Jesus taught his people. Thirdly, the man of prayer understands *God as Redeemer* (Isa. 63:16) which links with his true understanding of *God as King*, i.e. the King of the Kingdom in which is



‘plenteous redemption’. The prayerful man, then-in the face of his Creator-Father-Redeemer-King will feel free to offer praise and adoration, thanksgiving and rejoicing, in the midst of which he can also make petition for his and others’ needs.

### **THE SUBSTANCE OF HUMAN PRAYER**

Corresponding to God as Creator, Father, King and Redeemer, man is a creature, a son and a subject. He correlates with God in this ontological or essential structure. He is made to function in these three categories, i.e. of being a creature, a son and a subject. He has all the gifts of creation and they are indispensable to him. Prayer or communion with God-involving incessant dialogue-is inescapable. Because man has fallen, he needs to receive the gift of redemption and the gifts that accompany it. These two elements are not options but are indispensable to him. If we ask why he needs the gifts of creation and redemption then the answer must be that he is so structured by creation, and so renewed by redemption that he cannot dispense with these gifts. They enable him to live.

### **HUMAN PRAYER IN THE FACE OF EVIL AND ITS POWERS**

Man is never at home in his universe. Whereas once all things were ‘very good’, the fall of man has made much to seem ‘very bad’. The inner turmoil man knows as an existent person who has fallen from his ‘good’ estate

cannot be fully comprehended by man, so far-reaching and horrific it is. His personal awryness, dislocation and displacement from his primal (ontological) being is such that man is never in complete tranquillity of being. Hence his need of prayer. Even if he is angry at God, wilfully -and wrongly-blaming Him for all of these things, he needs to be able to oppose God and at least have angry dialogue with Him.

Man’s deep troubles arise not so much from the reality and presence of God as from the presence of Satan and evil powers. Every day man-whether fallen or redeemed -faces the opposition of evil. If he goes with evil he faces the inner guilt of doing so, and the guilts which result from his sins and crimes. If he does not go with evil he faces its malignant hatred of him. These are the things which make prayer so essential to man. If we understand this state of nature, then we understand the things man requires in his being for his well-being, and for which he prays to his particular deity.

### **The Things For Which the Ungodly Pray**

They pray for personal security, an assurance that all will be well, for luck and good fortune in all their doing, for ascendancy in the battle so that they may continue to live even in the face of competition, for pleasure and success to drown the abysmal doom and gloom wrought inwardly by conscience, the fear of death, and the fear of judgement. They are bound to seek after emotional fulfilment, and the love, joy and peace that are essential to true human living. Even where man’s humanism assures him he can achieve all things, he lives in fear of the success

of others, and the possibility of failure. These fears always haunt him. He can never wholly escape the confrontation of the truth, the knowledge of which always inheres within him. To pray for reality is to pray against the thing that he is, and the way that he exists. When he says, ‘reality’, he is going against the lie, i.e. the unreality in which he lives.

### **The Things For Which the Godly Pray**

One of the greatest resources for knowledge of prayer are the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Of these the Psalms would be primary, for they tell us not only how the godly think, live and pray, but also how it is with the ungodly. In Israel the worship and sacrificial cultus was a special gift of God (Rom. 9:4; Deut. 4:5-8; 10:12-15). The ungodly had to devise their own cultus. In the structure of their laws and worship the godly could remain secure, hence the high praise of law, word and worship in Psalms 1, 19 and 119. In the Psalms there is an enormous variety of prayers, moods, approaches to God and things prayed for, so much so that it is doubtful whether we could analyse, collate, nominate, interpret and evaluate them all.

Roughly speaking, we meet a vast variety of moods in which those who pray address themselves to God asking for help, understanding and the power to persist. There is penitence, anger, outrage because of injustice, fear because of enemies and circumstances. There is relief, praise and joy because of God’s gifts, His steadfast love and longsuffering, His sovereign acts and His great deliverances. In almost all cases there is the sense of relief in being able to talk to God whether in anger or joy,

bewilderment or understanding. Even Heman’s Psalm 88—the Psalm of utter desolation—commences with ‘O Lord, my God’.

The things for which the godly pray are generally linked with the covenant in which, and by which, the petitioners live. They pray for Israel, for the temple, the welfare and prosperity of the nation, the defeat of enemies, vengeance upon those who persecute them—the covenant people— and in this they pray with the worship of God in mind, especially in regard to His temple and during His festivals. They pray for things personal, the situations in which they are, the enemies they face, the friends who are under misery. They go into their own hearts, and the hearts of others telling of the miseries of their sinfulness and their groaning by reasons of their guilts, the joys of deliverance, the relief of forgiveness, their high hopes for holiness and even for the glory beyond the grave. Petitionary prayer mingles with penitence, shame, praise and adoration, especially in the knowledge of God’s sovereignty. The prayers of gratitude and thanksgiving become almost classic in their utterance.

Sometimes they are asking to know the will of God, sometimes glad that His word and law has shown them the mind of Yaweh. Their desire for communion is based upon their covenant—union with God, but they desire communion with that union. What is endemic to Job and the Psalms is the evidence of dialogue, for they often quote what God has said or is saying to them. Sometimes it is not easy to know who is the speaker or Speaker in any colloquy, since they so blend into one another’s thinking.

This, then, is a brief assessment of the things for which the ungodly and the godly pray.

## **JESUS' TEACHING ON HOW AND FOR WHAT WE SHOULD PRAY**

In the next section of our book we will look at the praying of Jesus, and the example he set for our prayer. At this point we will simply observe the things he taught in regard to what we call 'The Lord's Prayer':

(i) He taught us to pray to God as Father, and direct our prayers to heaven, i.e. not to that which is earthly.

(ii) He taught us the nature of God as Heavenly Father, i.e. that His Fatherhood is beyond human father-hood and other than it. That is, God's resources are above those in us.

(iii) He taught us the holy nature of God.

(iv) He showed that all basic prayer is to do with the Kingdom of God.

(v) He revealed that one day everything will overtly come under the will of God, i.e. God will be King throughout all creation.

(vi) He told us to pray for all that will sustain us in every department of our living, and this in the face of the enmity of evil.

(vii) He taught us that forgiveness to others is essential for true prayer, and that we can claim God's forgiveness when we have already forgiven others.

(viii) We are taught to acknowledge our dependence upon God in the time of testing, and must pray that He will deliver us from the Evil One.

This whole prayer, rightly understood, covers the parameters of true prayer.

## **CONCLUSION TO 'WHAT MEN PRAY FOR'**

Whilst we have dealt briefly with man's petitions for his own needs and the needs of others, we realize there are different classes and schools of prayer. In Israel we have the prayers of the patriarchs, of leaders, of the people, of prophets, priests and kings, prayers in time of peace and plenty, prayers in war and times of famine, suffering, judgements, exile, restoration and many other situations. Outstanding are the prayers of the destitute, of children and of the great women who pleaded for babies, shaped their children and through their praying motherhood, changed their generations and even history itself.

What we can see is that similar situations arise today, and whilst in these situations we rarely pray as do others, the prayers of others who have suffered similarly are a great help to us when we read them, especially if they relate to our present situations.

We need to keep in mind that praying-in all its forms-is essential to human living at its worst and at its best. When P.T. Forsyth said that the worst sin is that of prayerlessness, he was truly speaking of that part of humanity which is going, or has gone beyond the pale. 'Ask and it shall be given you', is an amazing offer and its

scope magnificent. ‘You have not because you ask not’, puts us to shame. ‘Shall not your heavenly Father give good gifts to them that ask him?’, encourages us beyond measure.

‘How good is the God we adore!’

## 16

### *The Prayer of Persistence*

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#### **THOSE WHO FAINT IN PRAYING**

‘And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart [not to faint, AV]’. This statement of Jesus in Luke 18:1 is the preamble to his story of the importunate widow. She literally nagged the unjust judge, and put him in fear that something terrible would happen if he did not hear her, and grant justice. Judges were notorious for taking bribes and the judge regarded no one, unless perhaps, there was good money in it. Literally he said, ‘She will blacken my eyes’, and he did not care for that!

For her part she was unremittingly persistent. Jesus said that is how we ought to be. To be laconic in prayer is sin. To despair that God will answer is faithless. To pray without persistence means that we are not deeply interested, or that we think God will not answer. There is

also something of tempting God in the exercise. We say, ‘Maybe He will answer: maybe not’.

Prayer being dialogue means that we are in converse with God. How then can we be laconic, faithless, despairing or ‘trying our luck’? Jesus was saying that God was not a false Judge, that if a secular person would give justice because of the petitioner’s persistence, then how much more would God ‘speedily avenge his elect’.

Of course this does seem to be one area of prayer, namely the question of vindication. God assures that He will do justly, but when the matter of vindication arises He will act quickly. Even so He has warned us against ‘vain repetition’ or ‘heaping up empty phrases’ (Matt. 6:7). The Father does not need sermons given about Himself, or advice directed to Him. Thus in Luke 18:7-8 He says, ‘And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily’.

In saying this He is not rejecting a crying to Him day and night. That shows the earnestness and concern these petitioners have, but God hears all, and answers as quickly as possible. Of course God’s ‘speedily’ and man’s ‘speedily’ will differ! In Revelation 6:9-11 the martyrs under the altar cry to God, ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?’. Paraphrased, God answers, ‘In good time. The time is set. Take your rest and trust me’.

This, then, brings us back as we have been brought back, time and again, to see that the answer to our prayers depends upon the will of God, and the timing of His events. We should be encouraged by His sovereignty.

## THE THINGS THAT MAKE US FAINT

In Gethsemane Jesus told his disciples, ‘Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak’ (Matt. 26:41). He meant, ‘A great time of testing is about to take place. The way to be prepared for it would be to spend time in prayer. Spiritually you want the very best, and you need this prayer in order to overcome the tendency that all human beings have, i.e. to give way to the flesh’. Doubtless there was some reference to their physical weariness, but this was not primary. The disciples were ‘fainting’, i.e. not living in important and importunate prayer. We saw that the disciples could not cast out the demon from the boy because they did not keep up their ‘spiritual levels’ by constant prayer and-perhaps-fasting.

Jesus gave another example of importunate prayer. According to dictionaries, ‘importuning’ means to burden, trouble, worry, pester, annoy, solicit pressingly and to beset with petitions. We can understand this in the case of the widow and the judge, but the importuning Jesus de-scribed in Luke chapter 11 is seen in the story of a man who comes to a friend at midnight for another friend, who has come to him at midnight. It is quite commendable to importune a friend for a friend. A less earnest person might throw up his hands, or be too timid to help his starving visitor-at midnight!

The man in his bed-and all his family in the same bed - was reluctant but gave bread because of the importunity of his friend. Jesus was saying God has no difficulty whatever in giving, but He does appreciate our insistent prayer. From our point of view God is ever ready to hear.

We should not be afraid to knock at midnight! We should not be reluctant to rouse God up, for He says, ‘Ask, and you shall receive’. Surely, however, we need to see that we are serious about the asking, and confident about the receiving. As we have said laconic or ‘off the cuff’ prayer is dishonouring both to us and to God. Whilst we can always assume God’s hearing and His goodness we should never presume upon it, i.e. take it for granted.

The constraint that was upon the man who knocked up his first friend for his second friend may have been simply a matter of Eastern hospitality. Certainly in the east it is a matter of honour to care for a guest, but was it not love which really compelled him? If so, then we have the key to true prayer. We pray because we love! We might miss the simplicity of this and so miss the power for prayer-love. Where there is no love, prayer becomes a duty of sorts, but duty without the warmth of love, in which case it becomes a repetitive ritual.

What then, are the things which make us faint? They are the things which lack love to God and our fellow-creatures and which break our intimate converse with God. Idolatry is a matter always confronting us, for it is love for something or someone other than God. Wearying in well-doing is another. We will reap if we faint not but again it is love which compels and assists us to persist in the face of pressures and difficulties. On the one hand we know prayer is being with God and conversing, but on the other hand we have to rouse ourselves up to do this. The flesh of us does not relish encounter with God. This is what Jesus really means by saying, ‘The flesh is weak’. We need in our spirits to battle against the fainting flesh.

One example of ‘fainting’ is the story in the Song of

Solomon (5:2-9). She-his beloved-was in bed, having bathed. Doubtless she was in a mood of delicious drowsiness, and when she heard his knocking did not become immediately alert. She needed to dress, and knew she would have to wash her feet afresh if she walked to the door. When she finally yielded and went to the door he was gone. She was roused to a frenzy of love, but she was too late. She had taken him for granted. Her venturing out into the city was disastrous.

Our Lord should be glorious to us. The riches of His grace should continually entrance us. Under these conditions we know Him as the adorable Lord, the Centre of our lives. It is surprising however that we can take lesser things, and even things that are gross and be drawn away from the heart of the true things-God Himself. In Gethsemane-where one of history’s greatest dramas was played-it seems a thing unbelievable that the disciples could drowse.

## **PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER**

There is a persisting in prayer to God, and there is persistence with prayer. Paul said, at least twice, ‘be constant in prayer’ (I Thess. 5:17; Rom. 12:12), and ‘Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving’ (Col. 4:2). ‘Constantly’ means ‘unceasingly’, and ‘steadfastly’ means ‘persevering’. Obviously this persistence is not merely a duty but a personal necessity. We have seen that persistence does not prompt God to move, but that it reveals to us our sense of its importance, and our own earnestness. It does not mean that persistent

prayer causes God to give good answers, but sharpens our dialogue with God and so extends our knowledge of Him.

Take for example the three times Christ prayed in Gethsemane that if possible the cup of death be taken from him. He did not give up after the first petition. By the third petition he knew his prayer was answered. An angel came to strengthen him to go on, and he realized he would not die in the garden, but on the Cross—which some believe –he earnestly desired to do. The prayer for God to take away the cup (of death) so that he would not have to drink it in the garden but on the Cross was—many of us believe – properly answered (Heb. 5:7-8).

Again, let us take Paul praying to the Lord three times to remove the ‘thorn [stake] in the flesh’ (II Cor. 12:7-10). Paul asked three times, and by the third time he realized that his prayer was answered. It was not even that God was saying, ‘No!’, so much as God was telling him the stake in his flesh was necessary! Where prayer is genuine dialogue, then it recognizes the true dialogue. The ‘No!’ is as much an answer, and as valuable as any ‘Yes!’ might have proved, had that been God’s proper answer.

The same principle operated with David’s prayer to the Lord that the son born to him by Bathsheba—Uriah the Hittite’s wife—should not die. Nathan the prophet had told him the child would die, but David fasted and lay upon the ground, doubtlessly His form of prayer to God, to spare the child’s life. When the child died David accepted this as the will of the Lord, and immediately went on with the business of living (II Sam. 12:14-23). That time of prayer had surely been converse with God and David was satisfied with the wisdom of God.

Another example of persistence and importunity was

the case of blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52) who was a beggar. When he heard Jesus was approaching he cried out, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’. Although rebuked by others he kept crying out, being persistent in prayer. Jesus heard him and made them bring the petitioner to him. His word to the beggar was, ‘Go your way; your faith has made you well’. Of course it was the grace of healing that had made him well, but he had placed his faith in it. Men ought always to pray and not to faint.

## CONCLUSION

To keep on praying, to be persistent in prayer, to importune—these are commanded elements, and not mere options. However, such prayer is not heaping up vain repetition as the Gentiles did before their impotent and unresponding idols. To keep praying, to live in constant colloquy—this is valuable. In this relationship the children come to know the will of God and accept it. Accepting the will of God also means we do it, and that is the gracious and powerful outcome of all true prayer.



# 17

## *Jesus at Prayer–I*

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### **INTRODUCTION: JESUS' PURPOSE IN PRAYER**

In seeking to understand the purpose of Jesus in prayer, we would of course, have to understand his purpose for coming to earth. We will see later in this chapter the occasions on which he prayed and perceived why and for what he prayed. Because we have said that prayer is holy dialogue with God, then we can perceive that it was this for Jesus, i.e. constant colloquy with His Father, especially regarding the task for which He had set him, and in which the Father Himself was a participator. No less-though in other modes-was the Holy Spirit also a participator.

### **JESUS WAS ALWAYS A PERSON OF PRAYER**

Whatever Jesus' life of prayer prior to his baptism proved to be, the temple was for him 'the house of prayer'. This term must not be quickly passed over for it is highly significant. In Luke 2:49 Jesus spoke to his parents of the temple as 'my Father's house'. In John 2:16 when he cast out those who had turned the temple-courtyard into a place of commerce he spoke of the temple as 'my Father's house'. The twofold use of this term showed that he saw prayer as relating to the Father and the significance of the temple. This revealed his own unique relationship with God as Father-his Father. To imply this unique relation-ship-'I and the Father are one'-angered the Jews. Later in his ministry he again cleansed the temple (cf. Mark 11:17) and on this second occasion called it the 'house of prayer for all the nations' (Isa. 56:7). Whilst no one could deny the truth of the prophetic utterance, its implications for this one called 'Jesus the Christ' were intolerable.

It is here-in his connection with God as Father and the temple being for all nations-that we see the true purpose of his coming and, indeed, penetrate into his very prayer life. He was oriented to 'all the nations', and this reveals to us his wide survey of prayer. If we link Mark 11:17 with Isaiah 56:7 passim and then look at Genesis 49:10; Psalm 2:8-9; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Romans 15:18; 16:26; Revelation 7:14-15; and 21:22-22:2, then something awesome in its significance begins to emerge, for these Scriptures draw us to the conclusion that-in one way or another-his prayer was directed to winning the nations.

All prayer within the scope of his earthly ministry had its aim and ultimate goal in this.

## **PRAYER IN HIS LIFE AND MINISTRY**

The account of his prayer-ministry is set out briefly below, but in being interested in it we should not miss the point that it was the prayer of one who was—and still is—a man, and truly man. His entrance into manhood has not been reversed or abolished. On this earth he was both God and man, and in heaven remains those—given in that his humanity now is wholly glorified. In his humanity he needed to speak with his Father, i.e. hold colloquy. Whilst our list will by no means cover all his prayer—for an account of it all has not been written—nevertheless we can see the significance of that prayer on the occasions when he spoke to his Father. The value of tracing these times of prayer is that whilst we may not have occasions equivalent to his, yet some of our situations will have similarities, in which case we can learn from his example.

### **Prayer at His Baptism**

This occasion, of course, was immensely important. In his submission to John for baptism by which he identified himself with the people of Israel and sinful mankind (Luke 3:21), we see that he was in prayer. That he was in the will of God is evident by the Father's affirmation, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased'. This paternal statement was a conflation of Psalm 2:8-9 and Isaiah 42:1-2, indicating his special Sonship and was

attestation of his Messiahship. This visitation came as he prayed and the Spirit of prayer (Zech. 12:10) came upon him. Later he claimed this validation given by God Himself, saying, 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me . . .' (Isa. 61:1).

### **Prayer Prior to the Temptation (Matt. 4:2ff.)**

Prayer is not mentioned as such, yet note the link with fasting, the leading of the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God. This was a principal testing of him which has reference to the fact that once Adam had been tested and failed. Adam should have held to the word of God and not listened to his wife's word and thus the word of the serpent (Gen. 3:1-6, 17). Jesus pointed to the truth that he heard only God's word, i.e. 'It is written . . .'

### **Prayer Relating to His Ministry**

He was not able to minister apart from fellowship with the Father as we see in Luke 4:42, 'And when it was day he departed and went into a lonely place'. It may well be that some—if not all—of the results of that prayer are rightly seen in Luke 5:17 where the unusual statement is made, 'and the power of the Lord was with him to heal'. Elsewhere in this book we have pointed out that Jesus did not pray at the point of his miracles, healings and teaching.

### **Prayer Prior to Choosing His Disciples**

In the light of the acts following his Resurrection and Ascension, the choosing of his disciples was a truly sig

nificant event. It was most important that he should know who were to be his disciples, considering that one of them was to be his betrayer and he must prayerfully choose him (Luke 6:12-16; John 15:16). He deliberately chose him- in accordance with the will of God. Even if this was to be to his harm it was nevertheless to fulfil prophecy. Certainly such a thing required intimate prayer and it teaches us that in principle similar answers may be given to our prayers.

### **Prayer Prior to Questioning His Disciples as to Whom They Thought Him to Be**

Again this question was of great significance. Not only was it to prove a revelation of his office to Peter and the others by ‘my Father’ (Matt. 16:17), but it was to be the occasion when he would tell them of the coming Crucifixion and Resurrection. We may well wonder whether Jesus thought the revelation might even prove too much for them, and was praying that it would not be so. See Luke 9:28 and Matthew 16:13-19.

### **Prayer on the Mount of Transfiguration**

The text says, ‘Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered and his raiment became dazzling white’ (Luke 9:28f.). Even today this event is not understood fully by many, for it was no chance happening but one essential to the death of

the Cross. Certainly the disciples did not understand it, but it was in fact a necessary preparation for going to the Cross. Elijah and Moses who also appeared with him in glorified form, spoke to him of ‘his exodus which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem’, and in essence the event means that he was transfigured that he might be disfigured, so that we who are disfigured might become transfigured. Notice that whilst he was praying the transfiguration of him took place. We might even say-in sanctified imagination or with theologically poetic licence, ‘Prayer transfigures!’.

### **Prayer During and Relating to His Ministry**

In Luke 10:21ff., following the sending forth of his disciples on mission (Luke 9:1-8; 10:1-21) and their return to him, he burst into Spirit-inspired prayer. Prior to this he had not sent them on their own, and the result was a matter of joy to him. It was no small thing to have done, and doubtless he had the future sending of them in mind.

During his ministry there were prayers related to blessing (e.g. Matt. 19:13), and to thanksgiving (John 6:11; Luke 22:19; 24:30). As regards healings prayer is not explicitly said to have happened at the point of such events, although there may be a partial exception to this principle in Mark 7:34 where he looked up to heaven and sighed at the time of healing the deaf and dumb person. Some claim that the laying on of hands implies prayer, and this could well be so. Even so he is rarely recorded as taking this kind of action. We take it nevertheless that Jesus prepared himself for healing occasions some time before they happened.

## **PRAYER AT THE RAISING OF LAZARUS**

Whilst this seems to contradict what we have just said (above), i.e. he did not pray specifically at the time of his healings and miracles, yet here—at this point—in his prayer to the Father (John 11:41–42), ‘I thank thee that thou hast heard me. I knew that thou hearest me always, but I said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me’, Jesus made it clear that he spoke for the people’s sake, so that the event was not for a demonstration of power but a revelation of himself being sent by the Father, and thus an aid to their believing in him as the Messiah the Son of God, and so having life in his name.

That God always heard him is a marvellous thing, and should motivate us so to live and pray that we too will always be heard. Our motives could be quite other than to bring salvation to people. We are forced to conclude that the failure of some of our prayer to be ‘always heard’ and effective could lie in the deficient motives we have behind our praying.

In Luke 22:31–32, Jesus prayed for Peter that he might not fail in the great test. We wonder how Peter would have survived without this prayer. It was another of the occasions when we realize how detailed was Jesus in his prayer, how concerned he was for his own and how powerful is prayer itself. Peter’s faith itself did not fail, even though he did. Later he saw the fruit of Jesus’

prayer, wept in penitence, and was eventually fully restored as we see in John 21:15–19.

### **Prayer Prior to the Cross as in John 17**

This great prayer which we shall contemplate in our next chapter was for the disciples and the whole church, and not only for then, but for the church down through the centuries. That prayer, too, has had many wonderful answers and confirmations, not only at the time of his Death and Resurrection, but down through all the Christian centuries. We simply note here how detailed it was.

### **Prayer for the Gift of the Spirit to the Church**

In John 14:16 (cf. John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 2:33) Jesus said he would make intercession with the Father so that He would send the Spirit, ‘I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth’. Many of the prophecies had talked about God giving His Spirit to His people, indeed pouring it out upon them, but the actual giving awaited the prayer of Christ. We do not know when this prayer was made, but we know it was made, and we do know the outcome of the prayer (cf. Acts 2:33), ‘Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear’. What a glorious answer to his prayer! What a wonderful era that commenced—this era of the Spirit.

### **Prayer to the Father in Gethsemane**

In Matthew 26:36-46 we see one of the most moving prayers of Christ as the Son. It is the only place where the Aramaic word *Abba* is literally used, though doubtless Jesus used it on other occasions. It is thought by some that Jesus was desiring to withdraw from the ordeal or happening of the Cross. Personally I-and others with me- believe that Hebrews 5:7-9 is the key to this event. He was, it could be shown, crushed down to death in the garden (cf. Matt. 26:37-38. ‘even to death’) and thought he would expire there if his prayer for help was not answered. Luke 22:43 seems to be the answer to his prayer, for ‘there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him’.

Even so this must be one of the most fearful and memorable of all Jesus’ prayers. It seems to be a monologue and not a dialogue, but the gift of the strengthening angel, and his physical escape from death at that point prove that it was indeed a colloquy.

### **His Prayers on the Cross**

The first of these prayers was in Luke 23:34, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ This was a prayer not only of compassion, but one of deep understanding of the sinners and not only of those who were crucifying him, but of all sinners in all ages. His second prayer (Matt. 27:46), ‘My God, My God, Why has thou forsaken me?’ was part of a dreadful colloquy with God, much of which had not been uttered audibly. A terrible battle had raged in his soul as he went out into some

horrendous limbo away from all human and divine contact because of the sins he bore. His final audible prayer (Luke 23:46), ‘Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!’ was a prayer which was not simply of resignation, but of trust and of hope for the future and this we can clearly see in both Psalm 31:6 and Psalm 16:9-10.

Whilst noting that Jesus-as Lord-still prays for us as we see in Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25, yet it is his earthly prayers which move us deeply at this point of our thinking and meditation. Rightly read, depthed and studied, we discover the true nature of prayer through the one who knew prayer as never had-or has-any other man. He understood and experienced it as the breath of his life, as the blood in his arteries, as the food which sustained him. As also we keep in mind what we have seen are the reasons for his praying in each of those situations de-scribed above, i.e. the time-wide, world-wide and history-wide purposes of God, together with the immediate, local and personal purposes. Then we more richly understand for ourselves the nature, the power and the true purpose of prayer.

We note also that Jesus gave teaching regarding prayer-Luke 11:1-13; Mark 11:20-26; John 14:12-14; 15:7-11; 16:23-24-but his practical example of prayer is to us the greatest element in our continuing quest to under-stand prayer and pray as the Father would have us pray.

# 18

## *Jesus at Prayer-II*

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### **JESUS' UNDERSTANDING OF PRAYER**

#### **Prayer is Always To and In the Father**

All Jesus' understanding of his incarnation, ministry, Death, Resurrection and Ascension was that God was his Father and that with his Father, he was doing the will or counsel which they had both planned before time, so that in the light of this, Jesus prayed to Him-the Father. Thus in Luke 10:21-22, he prayed in the Holy Spirit and said, 'Father, Lord of heaven and earth . . .' If we read the parallel prayer in Matthew 11:20-30, then we see that he had just been reproaching the cities of Galilee for their rejection of himself.

To have done so many great works, and to have taught

so clearly only to be rejected and misunderstood must have been a trial to him. Yet without complaint he prayed, 'yea Father, for such was thy gracious will'. By this he meant that what happened was within the will of the Father. This dialogue confirms to us what was always at the back of his mind, namely that the Father had sent him for these very things.

In John's Gospel Jesus says some forty times that he was sent by the Father, that he came to do the Father's will, that he worked with the Father 'the works of God', that God's works were to go on, that the disciples would be involved in these. Thus his view of prayer and its operations can be seen in all that he does. John chapter 17 is almost a summary of what he and the Father had done, and intended yet to do.

What we could miss easily is Christ's personal and intimate relationship with the Father. For human sons it is difficult to work with a remote and detached father. There is no joy for it lacks intimacy. Many times in John's Gospel Jesus speaks of loving the Father and the Father loving him. Prayer, then, must have been a great delight for him. 'The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand' (John 3:35). This is a moving statement. Doubtless as sons by adoption and regeneration all believers must know this warm and loving colloquy which was his. Not only is it emotionally satisfying but it explains how 'the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord', so that 'he delights in his way'.

We conclude then that working with the Father without prayer was impossible for Christ. So, also, must it be for all genuine disciples of the Son. We all need to pray through the Son to the Father.

### **His Followers Must Pray To and In the Father**

The prayer that Jesus gave to his disciples sets out not only the way his followers should pray, but it also informed them as to what should be the substance of their prayer. We should again ponder Luke 11:1-4, with Matthew 6:9-15 and notice that our-as their-prayer must be to the Father. We conclude that the Father and prayer are closely linked. The apostles did not forget that prayer was to be to the Father as we can see from their Epistles. They write in their Letters as those who know personal fellowship with the Father, and expect all believers to be in warm and intimate relationship with the Father, and thus to pray to Him with love and confidence.

### **Prayer-As Commanded by God and Christ-is Universally Indispensable**

In our previous chapter we saw that Jesus regarded prayer as universally indispensable. The temple was ‘the house of prayer for all nations’ and also ‘my Father’s house’ (Luke 2:49). Whilst Christ affirmed this, he also spoke of the new worship which was to come, and which in fact had already come in part. After his Resurrection it awaited the gift of the Spirit, i.e. the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost (John 4:19-24; cf. Phil. 3:3). Until the coming of the Spirit the temple at Jerusalem remained the centre of worship for ‘salvation is from the Jews’ (John 4:22). As we previously saw, that is why he purged it twice (John 2:13-22; Mark 11:15-18; Matt. 21:12-13), i.e. because of what it represented in its holiness and its centrality to

human need, for it was to be the pattern also for the New Temple-Christ.

We have also read Isaiah 56:6-8 and kindred references (Micah 4:1-2; Isa. 2:2f.; Zech. 2:11; 14:16) which show that Christ as the New Temple (Eph. 2:20-21; I Cor. 3:16; cf. I Pet. 2:4-10; Rev. 7:14-15; 11:19; 15:5; 21:22) is the only one in whom or, in whose name, man may offer true prayer to God. This understanding of the New Temple was always in the Son’s mind, linked as it was with the wider view-redemption of the nations.

### **Jesus Saw Prayer as God’s Means of Working Out His Plan For the Nations**

Jesus saw prayer linked with the will of the Father, not only in his (Jesus’) incarnation and earthly ministry but in the widest possible operation, i.e. His plan for all creation and salvation history. It is this wider view which reveals the enormous significance of his incarnation, ministry, Death, Resurrection and Ascension. Whilst prayer is certainly personal, it is primarily for the fulfilling of this total plan, in which He has ordered man to participate. In modern terms we would say that prayer is personal, that it is national and that it is universal, i.e. for all tribes and nations, so that ultimately every knee shall bow to the Son, and in him (Phil. 2:10-11) to the glory of the Father. This is what Jesus always had in mind.

### **SOME OF JESUS’ PRAYERS**

In chapter 12 we briefly examined the nature and occasions of Jesus’ prayers. There were, (a) the prayers Christ



prayed to his Father, (b) the prayers he prayed in preparation for the events of his ministry, and (c) the prayers he prayed for his people. The Lord’s given prayer, as set out in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4 has been called ‘the Lord’s given liturgy’. It was given to us to pray, and to use as a paradigm of prayer. We can be sure it is not the kind of prayer we would have devised, but once seen and understood it opens the door to understand the true materials of prayer.

### The Lord’s Prayer—the ‘Given Liturgy’

In Matthew’s Gospel the context of the prayer is strong teaching on how not to pray as also how to pray. Men must not make a display of their prayer. True prayer is in private, to the Father, who Himself will reward those who pray. God is not interested in heaped up phrases—perhaps as the worshippers of Baal on Mount Carmel—but the understanding that He knows what we need before we ask. The prayer is immediately followed by the admonition to forgive others if we expect the Father’s forgiveness. In Luke’s Gospel Jesus was praying and the disciples urged him to teach them to pray, as John had also taught his disciples to pray—this in face of the fact that all Israelites learned prayer in their homes and synagogue schools. Following the prayer, Jesus gave special teaching—in parables—regarding the nature of prayer. It is good to know this setting, although the Lord’s prayer fits any setting.

**Our Father.** Jesus had caught them up into the Abba! relationship which he had with God. Galatians 4:4-6 and Romans 8:14-17 both show the natural cry of one who prays Abba!, as he is aided in prayer by the Spirit. The

**Our** shows the corporate nature of the praying family. To be a son or daughter of God means all others in Christ are members of the same family. That is why the Lord’s prayer has often been called ‘The Family Prayer’. We may say that God’s Fatherhood is ontological, and not merely metaphorical. Who wants to have a fatherliness rather than the genuine Fatherhood? Human fatherhood is fallible, and often disappoints and even enrages us. The Sermon on the Mount speaks more of His Fatherhood than anything else. It is the true hearing, caring and giving Fatherhood. It is in this Sermon that the Lord’s Prayer is firmly embedded. If there is no Abba! (Father!) cry in the heart, there is no true prayer on the lips.

**Which (who) art in heaven.** The Kingdom is of heaven, i.e. above earth, of God and not of man (Matt. 23:9). It is supra-human although involving humanity. God’s Fatherhood is not understood or approached through ideas of human fatherhood. God is uniquely Father as King of the Kingdom, and is revealed as such by the Son (Matt. 11:27). If He is not high and holy (‘in heaven’) then his Fatherhood is weak. If His nature is not Father, then His loftiness is detached, remote and even terrifying. The phrase ‘in heaven’ denotes its unsullied, incorruptible and reliable nature.

**Hallowed be thy name.** God is not simply Father but Holy Father. This is how Jesus addressed him in his last prayer (John 17:11). He also called Him righteous Father. Had the Father not been holy there would have been no Cross. The hope of a sinful and polluted world lies in that Cross. It was to propitiate wrath caused by man’s insolence, scorn and opposition to God’s holiness that Jesus died. Wrath is against unholiness. The polluted shall

ultimately be destroyed if they refuse to repent (Rev. 21:8; 22:11). To see and revere God as holy is what gives man true dignity. Israel had to be holy, and so too, subsequently, the church has to be (I Pet. 1:15-17; Lev. 11:44; Exod. 19:5-6). God only calls the pure His children (II Cor. 6:14-7:1; cf. I John 3:1-3).

**The Name** signifies the authority, position, ability, character and person of the one named. It is the mighty name of God which reveals His Being. Here-in this prayer-Father signifies utter holiness. It is impossible to pray outside the Name. It is to address no one. It is to speak a monologue. It is to refuse to depend upon the resources of God. The petition ‘Hallowed be thy name’, sets the mind of the petitioner, as it pleads to the Father.

**Thy kingdom come.** The Kingdom of God (or, of heaven) is the basic theme of all Scripture. It is the reign (or rule) and realm of God, whatever its form and modes may take from time to time. God is King over all, i.e. all creation and all the nations, albeit there be rebellion in them. Christ was pronounced Messiah (King) of the Kingdom, and proved his rule. He set the Kingdom in victory by the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension. God reigns now in the midst of His enemies, by His Sovereign Son, and will bring things to their climax through him (I Cor. 15:24-28; Rev. 11:15-18; 12:10). To pray ‘Thy kingdom come’, shows that the Kingdom has not come in fullness and means that the one who prays is involved in this battle of the Kingdom. He is one who ‘suffers for the kingdom’ (II Thess. 1:5). What one looks forward to in this world and time is the ultimate coming of the Kingdom when God’s triumph will be evident to all, and history shall climax in the revelation of His glory, at which time the

saints will enter and inherit the Kingdom. All that we have said is in the mind of the petitioner.

The Lord’s prayer cannot be understood unless this matter of the Kingdom is seen to be paramount, for the other petitions of the prayer naturally follow this one, and are in firm relationship with it. The fruits of this petition will be the coming of the Kingdom.

**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.** A simple prayer with enormous affects and effects. The Messianic statement of Psalm 40:8 (cf. Heb. 10:5-7), ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart’, speaks of us being one with God the Father in His will and His plan for all things. It is thus almost a repetition of the previous petition. Obedience in heaven, although interrupted by the revolt of Lucifer and his angels, is a state of obedience to God by all celestials, and such obedience will one day also obtain on the earth as it is in heaven.

The prayer is corporate (‘Our Father’), and also personal. It envisages again the whole plan of God, the triumph of the love of the Cross, and the new age. God’s will is working now, but as we have seen God has given us the opportunity to pray and thus take part in His eternal plan.

**Give us this day our daily bread.** The whole earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof. Everything is His, and He can provide. The prayer in one sense is a confession of our dependence upon Him. In another it is a direct petition to the Father of the children. ‘Bread’ here is undoubtedly physical bread but it is also the symbol of life, and Christ is the heavenly bread, and has told us not to labour only for physical bread (John ch. 6), so that it must embrace all that creatures need-if not want!

In the Sermon on the Mount, it is also made clear that they who are of the Kingdom will be persecuted and may be tempted to wonder how they will live if the world so fiercely opposes and persecutes them. The Father’s re-assurance is that He will supply the needs of those who are of the Kingdom, ‘Your heavenly Father knows you have need of these things’. The sons of the Kingdom may enjoy the good things and be replete but not only for enjoyment’s sake, but to be enabled to get on with the matters of the Kingdom.

**Forgive us our trespasses for we have forgiven them their trespasses.** Forgiveness is one of the signs of the Kingdom of God which is ‘righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’. Having been forgiven by God those of the Kingdom forgive, and not only their neighbours and friends but also their enemies. We need to study Matthew 18:21-35 thoughtfully, applying its message to ourselves. We must remember that in the Gospels the event of the Cross had not taken place when these statements were made. There is an even greater constraint, since then, to forgive. We ought to note the translation above, Forgive us . . . for we have forgiven.

Some have arrived at the idea that God will not forgive until we forgive. The truth is that He has already forgiven believers all their sins. The constraint of His love in forgiveness urges us to forgiveness. Having been forgiven all, it is right and necessary that we should forgive all who sin against us. Our sin against God was (is) enormous. By comparison the sin of others against us is small. How can we be forgiven so much and not forgive so little?

**Lead us not into temptation.** This for human rational thinking must be the most difficult of all the petitions.

Does God lead into temptation? Obviously, or the petition would not be made. James says (1:13), ‘Let no one say . . .”I am tempted by God”, for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one’. James must mean God never tempts to evil, even though He tests (tempts) man in and by other things. James (1:2-4) says that it is profitable for us to be tempted, i.e. tested. There are then testings from God which are heavily demanding, but they are not such as appeal to us to do evil. Satan of course tempts in seductive, deceptive and threatening ways but we do not have to buckle under what evil may seek to do to us! Jesus was led by the Spirit to be tested (tempted) by the Devil. Satan’s temptations to him may even be called laughable, for God’s Word showed their evil and stupidity to the Son. The prayer-‘lead us not into temptation’-is asking the Father not to allow us to go into such situations which will be beyond our capacity to handle. Even so, I Corinthians 10:13 tells us that God will not allow testing beyond our capacity, for He will provide a way out of such a testing if we cannot bear it.

Lead us not may mean that under certain circumstances we may need to go under certain stresses for reasons best known to God. The prayer may be prophylactic as follows, ‘Lord so keep me that I may never need special testing situations to bring me back to my senses, or so to chastise me that I may become obedient, i.e. may I never need such testings!’.

**But deliver us from evil.** This prayer seems to confirm our interpretation above. The word evil can also be properly translated the evil one, i.e. Satan. The Devil certainly seeks to destroy or seduce the members of the Kingdom. Romans 8:35-39 shows the attempts of evil to destroy

us-’For thy sake we are being killed all the day long, we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered’. Because we are of the Kingdom, such testings may suddenly come upon us and we will need to be delivered by God’s grace from these situations. Of course the work of the Cross has given us deliverance from evil, and this power we must use in times of testing.

The added ascription, **For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever**. Amen was added by the early church and is not strictly part of the biblical text. It is a fitting conclusion, even if added later, since praise is a part of prayer and all the elements used in it are consonant with the text of the prayer. The substance of the ascription appears to derive from I Chronicles 29:11:

Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all.

We see that this is a prayer to be prayed as believers are ‘on the march’, for it prays for what is now happening, and everything as related to the Kingdom-and so-to the King. It is prayer for action by God couched in the sub-mission, obedience and co-operating action of the supplicant. It is at once corporate, personal, filial and familial, present and eschatological.

It is surely a prayer we ought not to pray lightly, over-familiarly, carelessly or with indifference. The King, the Son, has given it to us to teach us how to pray for-and in-all situations. We must prize it highly and use it effectively.

## 19

### *Jesus at Prayer-III*



#### **JESUS’ HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER OF JOHN CHAPTER 17**

We have said that prayer is dialogue between man and God. Properly speaking it is holy dialogue, complete colloquy. We have also said it is communion between God and man. One observation is that it is possible to have union-e.g. covenant union-yet lack the communion that comports with it. In what has long been known as ‘Christ’s high-priestly prayer’ we see true holy dialogue, complete colloquy and that communion which fits the true union of the Father and the Son, the true Man with the true God. If the Lord’s prayer is pitched highest in man’s regular petitionary life, then the prayer of John chapter 17 is a glimpse into the richest fellowship between the Father and the Son, not excluding the love of both for the church. In fact it is so holy an occasion that we should tremble merely to use it as a paradigm for prayer. This was very prayer itself in its most beautiful and moving form. The

true child of God will come—time and again—to this veritable fount of prayer and drink deeply.

So well recorded is this intimate session of the Son with His heavenly Father, that we know it must have had a great impact upon its hearers the apostles, both at that time and in the later times when they recalled it. We are not sure where the prayer was offered, but it seems not to have been in the upper room for in John 14:31 Jesus said, ‘Rise, let us go hence’. In 18:1 Jesus and the disciples go across the Kidron Valley into the garden. It does seem the prayer was offered in some place of quietness. Behind it are the long passages of teaching, exhortation, warning and encouragement already given to the disciples in John chapters 13 to 16.

With this slight introduction we will now look at the prayer itself.

### Verses One to Five

Jesus enters into his final audible holy dialogue before the events of his apprehension, judgement, suffering and Crucifixion. His profound communion with the Father was immediate as he lifted up his eyes to heaven and spoke to the Father. It is Father and Son together, intimately and yet on the business of the Kingdom. At last Jesus’ hour has come and he asks that he—as the Son of the Father —may be glorified. For his own glory as Son to be shown he must be especially Fathered by God so that he may show forth the Father in His own glory. He acknowledges the great authority the Father has given him over the elect people of God. He has authority to give eternal life and true eternal life is the very knowledge—relational and

experiential—of both Father and Son. One cannot know the true God and His Son and not have this intimate life which is eternal.

In verse four Jesus says calmly and steadily that he has accomplished the work which the Father had given him to do. This remarkable claim is evidently not refuted and he continues to speak. In verse one he has asked for glorification in order to glorify the Father. In verse five he who has sought to fulfil the Father’s will now asks for glorification. If we have been following John’s Gospel closely up to this point, we will know the glorification of the Father has been the aim of the Son (John 11:40; 12:28; 13:31–32), and that has been accomplished by the Son truly being the glory of the Father. Now he asks for the same glory which he had with the Father before the world began.

Some scholars think that Jesus was asking for something far beyond the Cross, indeed for the time of his Ascension and glorification, but others—correctly I believe—assert that Jesus wanted the glory to be seen on the Cross. Leon Morris in his Commentary on the Gospel of John (U.S.A. Eerdmans, 1971, p. 721) enlarges this idea, ‘And now as men are about to do their worst to Him, He looks for the Father to glorify Him . . . It is the Father who will glorify Him with true glory in the cross, and, in what follows’. It is worth our while here to take up this point and ponder it, for it could be lost for want of understanding how Jesus faced the Cross.

In Hebrews 2:9 we read (RSV), ‘But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one’. This reading would imply that Jesus was crowned with glory because he had suffered death,

but the statement ‘so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one’ still places the glorification prior to the death. It is in order that he might taste death for every man that he is glorified. This is how many exegetes see it. The AV (King James Version) translates, ‘But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man’. The natural order and sense of the verse in Greek seems to vindicate the AV. It is possible that certain translators might not have seen the Cross as the situation of being with glory and honour and so they felt the meaning of the text to be as it is in the RSV. If Leon Morris’ interpretation of John 17:5 is correct then Hebrews 2:9 well accords with it. This also adds to—or discovers—the richness of John 17:5.

### Verses Six to Nineteen

The text in this passage is so clear that we scarcely need to comment. The essence of it is that Jesus is looking ahead with the welfare of ‘the little flock’ in mind (cf. Luke 12:32; 22:28–30). He has told them he will not leave them as orphans, and now his love for them is shown in his deep concern. He does not pray for the world but for them. He says, ‘I am praying for them’. They belong at once to both the Father and the Son, and are beloved. Jesus is glorified in them. He has kept them in the Father’s name, and now asks the Father to keep them, Himself. He—Jesus—has lost none of them. Because *he has given*

*them the Word of God* they are hated by the world. Since they must face the world, the Son asks that they be kept in the world from the evil one (the devil). He prays that God’s Word will sanctify them in the truth since that word is the very truth. They are ‘set apart’ for the very truth itself. He sends them into the world, and sets himself apart that they may be made holy (i.e. also set apart) in the truth, for the truth.

Christ, then, had them intimately in mind, and as they heard those words he prayed, they—the words—must have been burned indelibly on their memories. This intercessory prayer reminds us of the intercession of the saints in the book of Acts and in the Epistles.

### Verses Twenty to Twenty–Three

Jesus has his eyes on all the elect for all have been given to him. What will happen when the new believers join the old? Will there be differences when Jew, Samaritan and Gentiles become members of the one body? Now comes the prayer for unity. For various reasons this has been abstracted by many from the entire prayer—as though it were not in vital organic and strong relationship with it—and a special emphasis has been made upon it. It must, however, be seen in the perspective of the whole prayer.

It is a very rich section, for Christ is now concentrating on the unity of the church. This part of the prayer was surely answered at Pentecost (Acts ch. 2) when Jewish believers became one in love. Again, it was answered in Samaria (Acts ch. 8) when the Spirit came to the Samaritans with the Gospel. Yet again, it was answered at Caesarea (Acts ch. 10) when Gentiles became believers,

and—even further—it was beautifully demonstrated in Acts chapter 11 when Jews and Greeks—at Antioch in Syria – became one in Christ for the first time. It has been answered down through the centuries where the unity of believers is recognized and practised.

The unity of the Godhead is the power that unites believers in one body and in true relationships. Jesus said to the Father (v. 22), ‘The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one’. This glory must be the glory of his love, and from this the world knows a miracle has happened in human affairs, i.e. that the coming of the Son has brought into being the true love community. He makes the amazing statement, ‘that the world may know thou hast . . . loved them even as thou hast loved me’. Of course none of this happens—or could happen—apart from the love of the Cross, i.e. the Father, the Son and the Spirit effecting the atonement, thus reconciling man to God, and so man to man.

### **Verses Twenty–Four to Twenty–Six**

This section of the prayer deals with the future of the future. When the flock has been gathered into one fold, the elect have been saved and the unity has been achieved – what then? Jesus’ desire is that they see his glory, that glory which was before the ages, the gift of the Father’s love to him (cf. John 17:5; John 3:35; Col. 1:13). It is the Father’s righteousness which promises and accomplishes this, and fulfils His promise to the Son. At the end of time—i.e. the new beginning, eternity for mankind—the elect will behold the glory of the Son, and the love of the

Father and the Son, and that very love will become their own possession, for that is the essential glory of the Godhead. Jesus prays that the love of the Father may be in them, and he—the Son—may also be in them.

What will happen to all the saints when this comes to pass? Doubtless they will know even as they have been known. They will dwell in the mansions of which Jesus spoke in John chapter 14. Most of all they will see Him face to face. For the disciples to hear this prayer must have been an experience to lay up for the crisis of the Cross and for the rich but tempestuous years beyond. It must have shaped their own principles of living—especially of praying—and kept the plan of God firmly planted and strongly effective in their minds.

What it did for them, it does also for us. He prayed not only for them, but also for us. Every day, indeed every hour and minute and second the Father is working out the answer to that prayer of His Son, the Son who never ceases to intercede for us.

### **OUR GREAT INTERCESSOR**

We have mentioned before a number of times, the statements of Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25 that Christ is at the right hand of God, making intercession, and that the purpose of his session there is to make perpetual intervention for us. Doubtless the substance of that prayer may not greatly differ from this profound high priestly prayer in John chapter 17. He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God—as does the Holy Spirit within us. He intervenes against the powers of



darkness as they accuse us, as they regard us as sheep for the slaughter and so would seek to kill us all day long. Whilst the great red dragon (that old serpent the devil) makes endless accusations—'fiery darts of the wicked one'—the saints are assured that he that is in them—and for them—is greater than he that is in the world.

So the elect people of God who believe 'do not make haste'. They do not become anxious or frantic. Our Great High Priest has prayed for us the prayer of John chapter 17 and that is ever before the Father, being fulfilled, but awaiting its final fulfilment. The Son and Spirit pray on.

## CONCLUSION TO 'JESUS AT PRAYER'

When we look at the rich ministry of Christ in prayer to his Father, and interceding for his people, then we are delighted and strengthened to know that this One lives within the hearts of all his people, in the true church—his body, and the prayer that he prays is the prayer that we pray via the indwelling Holy Spirit.

We know then that holy dialogue with God—the true colloquy—is the highest privilege of the Father's children, as also their true joy and strength.

# 20

## *The Father and Prayer*

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### PRAYING TO THE FATHER

Folk are bewildered—often—as to whom they should pray, i.e. to which Member of the Godhead. Jesus solved that matter for us. He said, 'When you pray, say: "Father . . ."' We ought to pray under the inspiration and aid of the Holy Spirit, and through the Son, i.e. in his name, the name of Christ. This teaching can be clearly seen in chapters 14 to 17 of John's Gospel. This does not mean that Christ ought not to be worshipped or addressed on any occasion—as well Revelation 5:8–14 shows us. We can say that a person such as Paul had dialogue with Christ, not only on the road to Damascus but also after his conversion, especially at times of visions. Likewise the Spirit spoke with the early church (cf. Acts 8:29; 10:19–20; 13:2; 15:28; 16:7), and whilst dialogue does not

appear, as such, it may well have happened. There seems to be no reason why we should not—as the occasion may arise—talk to the Holy Spirit. Certainly in its historic hymnody the church has done this. In ancient liturgies of the Eucharist there was the ‘Epiclesis’, i.e. the calling down of the Holy Spirit prior or during the prayer of Consecration.

There are many things which convince us we can and ought to pray to the Father. It is He to whom we have access both by the Son and the Spirit, ‘for through him [Christ] we [the New Man] both [Jew and Gentile] have access in one Spirit to the Father’.

### **THE NEW ACCESS AND PRAYER**

Jesus told the woman at the well in Samaria that worship would be of the Father, ‘But the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him’. If we do not greatly separate prayer and worship then we will see that prayer now and for all time is to the Father. We ask ourselves why this should be.

Some of the answer must lie in the fact that Adam—by inference—is called ‘the son of God’ (Luke 3:38). To be made in God’s image (Gen. 1:26; 5:1–2; 9:6; I Cor. 11:7) may mean that because God is essentially (ontologically) Father, then man as man is closest to Him and may be seen as a son. In Acts 17:28 Paul quotes with approval the Athenian poet who said of men, ‘For we are indeed his [God’s] offspring’. He then contrasts the idols with the Father. On this basis some theologians would say that man

is essentially a son of God, but others would contest that. We can certainly say that if man was essentially a son, then he has abdicated his sonship and lost it. One theologian has said that God is the Father of all men, but that not all men are the children of God.

Pertinent then is John 1:12–13, which shows us that Christ’s coming brought with it the authority of men and women becoming children of God by the new birth. To receive Christ, i.e. to believe on him, brings man to new birth (cf. John 3:3–6). Later Paul speaks from another angle when he speaks about the gift of sonship (adoption) which accompanies salvation (Gal. 4:4–6). Adoption comes to mankind through the Cross via the Holy Spirit. The first uttered ‘Abba!’ or ‘Dear Father!’ is that which brings recognition of one’s new sonship.

The God of Israel was ‘Yahweh’ dwelling remotely in the silent and sacred Holy of Holies. At the Cross the veil between the Holy of Holies and the rest of the worshipping temple was rent. Now Christ is the new and living way to the Father, and worship and prayer are carried on in this filial and familial way. The new worship of the new Israel is to the Father by the sons and by the corporate family.

### **THE ELECT HAVE TRUE SONSHIP BEFORE THE FATHER**

Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:5–6, ‘He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved’. In Galatians 4:4–7,

he says that Christ was sent from the Father to become incarnate and to redeem man from the law so that ‘we might receive adoption as sons’, and adds that the Spirit of the Son has been sent into our hearts crying ‘Abba!’. This means we now have the disposition and category of sons.

The point is more emphasized in Galatians 3:26-29. Here Paul tells us that we are sons of God through faith in Christ and that in baptism we put on Christ, i.e. we are participators in Christ’s sonship. In one sense we are personally sons, and in another our sonship is derived from Christ’s, and in this corporately, we constitute one sonship. We constantly derive our personal sonship from his Sonship, i.e. our sonship of God is a derived one. This means that as he is to God, so through him we too are to God. This deeply affects our prayer experience. It is as though in Christ we pray, i.e. in the Son to the Father as sons. This leads us to our next consideration, i.e. sons praying to the Father in the Son.

### **SONS PRAYING TO THE FATHER IN THE SON**

In Chapter 8 ‘Prayer and the Will of God’, we devoted some attention to praying in the name of the Trinity (Matt. 28:18-20), and to praying in the name of Christ or Jesus, as also to doing works in Christ’s name. We will need to repeat a little of this material, although not wholly along the same lines. We will take John’s Gospel, chapters 14 to 16.

In John 14:13-14, Jesus said, ‘Whatever you ask in my name I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it’. In 15:7

and 16 he said, ‘If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you’. ‘You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you’. In 16:23, 24, 26 and 27 we read, ‘In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name. Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask and you will receive that your joy may be full’. ‘In that day you will ask in my name; and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father’.

We gather the following from the above quotations: The disciples have prayed directly to God prior to this moment in time. Now they are to abide in the Son (I John 3:24; 4:13, 16), to speak to the Father in his name, i.e. his person, power and authority, and the Father will hear them and grant their requests. In one sense what they ask of the Father the Son will do and by doing it glorify the Father, and in another sense it will all come to them because the Father has answered. These are simple ways of saying the sons will be in the Son and thus relate to the Father who will treat them in the Son as His sons.

This sort of teaching is also found in the Sermon on the Mount. In this Sermon the word most often used is Father, i.e. the name of the heavenly Father (cf. John 17:26-‘I made known to them thy name’). There one prays to the Father and as one asks one receives—as a son. In other places this is also found

A reader may find this section a little tortuous or

complicated reading, but it boils down to this that we may now have the relationship of a son to the Father, and in this relationship speak as freely, and even more freely as when speaking to an earthly father. One of Jesus’ great sayings is (see above), ‘the Father himself loves you’. How intimate that is and what warming encouragement to pray!

### **THE FAMILY TOGETHER THROUGH THE FATHER**

The idea of God’s elect, His true people and His family are all of the one piece. There has always been a people of God. In the Old Testament it roughly equated being God’s family, but in the New Testament the idea is far more dynamic. Christ has to die so that ‘all the children scattered abroad may be gathered into one family’. It is interesting to see in Revelation 14:1 that the 144,000 who have been loyal to God have the Father’s name written on their foreheads–this as against those who have the mark (name) of the beast written on theirs. In Revelation 22:4 the name of God the Father is written on their foreheads, denoting total intimacy with Him (John 11:52 *passim*). Christ’s giving of the Lord’s prayer (see ch. 18) was then most appropriate, as they pray, ‘Our Father who art in heaven’. Prayer is made corporately as the family (cf. Heb. 3:1–7; I Tim. 3:16; Eph. 2:18f.), and personally, and intimately to the Father (cf. Matt. 6:6, 18, 32). Thus in every way prayer is a family thing, a heart-warming thing, an intimate thing and an encouraging thing. We remember again, ‘The Father himself loves you’. He is waiting with

love for our prayer and our fellowship. Indeed He seeks it (John 4:23).

### **PRAYER TO THE FATHER**

The nature of corporate prayer to the Father is seen in the pattern of the Lord’s prayer. Jesus speaks of intimate prayer to the Father in Matthew 6:6 where he says, ‘But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you’. Keeping in mind that He loves us, such prayer can be from ‘the secret heart’ about which David speaks in Psalm 51.

Paul’s statement in Ephesians 5:20 (cf. Col. 3:17) though relating to a corporate worship situation must also derive from the intimate and personal one, ‘always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father’. It is a rich privilege to pray to Him and the rewards are great. When as in Ephesians 4:6 we read ‘one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all’, we can see that everything is in the Father. Then we know that all true dialogue is in Him as we address Him with the spontaneous and faith-insistent, ‘Oh, Father!’, then true and effective prayer proceeds from us to Him.

All of this means we are in the family of God under His Fatherhood. Our prayer which is directed vertically–up to Him–is also related horizontally, out to the members of the holy family and even further out to what we can call ‘the Adamic family’, that from their midst may be drawn those who are His elect, now ‘the called and the coming’.

# 21

## *God's People At Prayer-I*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This section of our prayer research would have to be large if we were to seek to cover the history of God's people. From the dialogue of the primal couple in Eden with God to the prayer of the Spirit and the church in the last chapter of the Revelation, there is presented a vast range of prayer within the entire community of God. For this reason we will have to treat the coverage of such prayer most briefly. Also we will need to repeat some of the many elements which we have already described, such as communal worship, the reasons for prayer and some of its modes, as also the basic contents of prayer especially as they touch the matter of intercession. I must admit that having read many of the prayers of the saints in both Old and New

Testaments, I am strongly tempted to write about these people of prayer in detail—so much benefit have I received from their intimate relationship with God, their yearnings, love, expressions of anger, loneliness and fear, along with deep adoration and shalom—the genuine peace of God.

The value of such a review of prayer—limited as it must be—lies in the reasons for prayer which we can recognize and emphasize, as also the ways in which we may—and ought to—pray. Such insights will thus be a valuable aid to proper praying.

### **PRAYER AND THE OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS**

#### **The Patriarchs at Prayer**

‘At that time men began to call upon the name of the Lord.’ The birth of Seth (Gen. 4:26–5:1) is shown to provide Eve a substitute for the murdered Abel. Seth had a son, Enosh, and at that point men began to call on the name of the Lord. Such appear to be those later called ‘the sons of God’ (cf. Gen. 6:2). Men then had begun to pray to God.

The deterioration of man's history from the time of Enosh to the time of the Flood is probably why prayer is not explicitly mentioned, but God's dialogue with Noah before and after the Flood shows us the intimacy of prayer that continued to exist. We might speak of a refusal to pray—certainly in a holy manner—by men such as Nimrod and his descendants since these desired to be independent of God.

Prayer seems to take on a distinct and even a new character with God's revelation of Himself to Abraham (Acts 7:2; Gen. 12:1-3, and later references). Here we see God's initiative in the dialogue, as He discloses progressively and insistently His purposes not only for Abraham, but for the history of the human race. In fact Abraham's prayers disclose a special relationship between God and the patriarch who was called 'the friend of God' (Isa. 41:8; Gen. 17:18; 18:23-32; 20:7). Abraham interceded for Sodom. Eliezer (Gen. 24:12-14) his steward-also a man of prayer-prayed for guidance in the selection of a wife for Isaac. Isaac would have grown in this atmosphere of prayer, especially in Genesis chapter 22 where he was prepared as a sacrifice to God, submitting to being bound upon the altar. He heard the dialogue between his father (Abraham) and God. Jacob-Isaac's son-was also a man who prayed to the point of wrestling in prayer with God (Gen. 32:22-32). These three great patriarchs saw God's intention for His covenant people, and for the other nations. No less was Joseph a person of prayer, standing in Egypt as a man between the time of Jacob's waning life, and the coming era when God's people would be released from that land.

### Israel—the People of Prayer

#### MOSES

Moses stands out as one of the greatest of praying men. This man lived close to God, and had frequent colloquys with Him. God spoke to him 'mouth to mouth' (Num. 12:8), and 'face to face' (Exod. 33:7-11). His first great

dialogue was at the burning bush (Exod. 3:1-12) where he discovered the holiness of God. In times of difficulty he would have personal prayer (Exod. 5:22; Num. 11:11-15). Elsewhere in this book we have touched upon this man as a great intercessor for his people (e.g. Exod. 32:30-34), but behind all his ministry-in action and prayer-lay his recognition of God's great acts for His people, and also His plans for them and the nations. He knew God had taken the initiative with the patriarchs and for their sake continued to do so (Exod. 2:23-25; 3:7-12). The man Moses was not simply an outstanding leader, but a shepherd of the flock. He was a priestly prophet, carrying the people on his heart. To exercise all this ministry he had to be a man who understood prayer and practised it in the presence of God and His people.

#### JOSHUA, JUDGES AND SAMUEL

God had significant dialogue with Joshua (Josh. 1:1-9; 6:1-7; 7:6-15), with the various Judges of Israel and especially with Samuel prior to the establishment of the monarchy, for Samuel was the last of the Judges. Samuel's mother-Hannah-prayed in a way which could now be called 'immortal' so strong and beautiful it was, and we can recognize much of the same thinking in the Magnificat which Mary uttered at the coming of the angel in the Annunciation (cf. I Sam. 1:9-18; 2:1-10). Samuel himself was a powerful man of prayer, and on reflection we see that all the prophets were persons of prayer. Samuel was always in need of prayer because of his roles as judge, priest and prophet. Visited personally by God in his childhood, Samuel as judge, priest and prophet sought to do the will of God.



### DAVID AND SOLOMON

David as a youth, a harpist and singer, a prince-elect, a warrior and as the king of Israel is well-known for his praise and his prayer. He was a man who held colloquy with God. His Psalms-if we can accept as his those generally accorded to him-are superb. They are prayers and praise of various moods which reflect our own states of mind and heart so beautifully. Indeed the Psalms are a treasury of material for all men everywhere, since little of what we think, feel and dream is absent from this vast collection. Few human beings bare their heart so publicly and let us know what they say to God, and what God says to them.

Solomon too, was a man who had high dialogue with God. His prayers regarding the wisdom which he desired, the temple he wished to build, and the petitions and praise he expressed at the opening of the new house of the Lord are some of the richest jewels in the biblical treasury. Sadly enough Solomon's passion for his many foreign wives brought tragedy and disaster to Israel-a warning to us that prayer can begin well, but without continual personal application and living closely to God can deteriorate until the heart no longer holds sweet and strong converse with God.

### THE PSALMS

We know that whilst a significant portion of the Psalms can rightly be attributed to David, yet many other psalmists in the biblical Psalter of 150 psalms brought their prayers to God, unveiling their hearts, crying out in joy or depression, faith or fear, blessing God or cursing their

enemies before Him. We call such prayers truly human- the heart cries of men of faith or the petitions and complaints of the lonely and the bewildered. Something of the mystery of prayer becomes known as we read such psalms and recognize in them the states of our own hearts.

On the one hand we hear men's pleas for forgiveness and gratitude for God's mercy, and on the other their fierce denunciation of their enemies, with petitions requesting vengeance upon them. Where the praying person has come into calamity he recognizes that happening originates with God, even though calamity may come through his human enemies. God controls all-for good or ill. At times the psalmist upbraids God. At other times he persists in demanding good and not evil from Him. Sometimes he petitions for the good of the community and at other times for his own good.

It would seem from a psalm such as 88-the prayer of the wise man Heman-that just to be before God and pour out one's sufferings and woes is enough, even if no solution to one's problems results. All in all the psalms have been beloved down through many centuries. They assure us that prayer, petitions, praise and intercession are not useless. Indeed they draw us closer to the mystery of prayer which we have followed-chapter after chapter- namely that God has ordered our prayers because they play a dynamic and vital part in the fulfilment of His plan, i.e. His 'salvation history' which springs from His holy love, and will ultimately have His way.

### THE LATTER PROPHETS

We have already looked at two of the greatest of the prophets, i.e. Moses and Samuel. The books from Joshua



to Nehemiah were called ‘the former prophets’ in the Jewish canon because to the writers of those books history is not merely an account of happenings, but their contents constitute God’s prophetic word and action. The prophets from Isaiah to Malachi are known as ‘the latter prophets’, which does not mean they surpass the former prophets, but that they record their own prophecies in writing -which was not the case with the former prophets. Of course all prophets are concerned with both prediction and exhortation, although prediction has to do primarily with exhortation.

God generally called a prophet into His presence before He sent him out to prophesy to Israel and the nations. **Isaiah’s** dialogue with God in Isaiah chapter 6 came out of a powerful vision of God, which prompted the prophet’s conviction of his own impurity and the pollution of God’s people. We can trace the high view of holiness which this prophet received, and to which from that point he always adhered. Whilst many scholars do not think the prophecies of the book Isaiah all came from Isaiah himself, yet a oneness in seeing and knowing the holiness of God pervades the entire book. The loftiness of God (Isa. 57:15; 66:2) is both transcendent and immanent, for He who dwells in the uttermost heights, also dwells in the heart of the humble and contrite person.

Again it is Isaiah who speaks of ‘the house of prayer for all nations’ (Isa. 56:6-8; cf. 2:1-4). This brilliant view of prayer to God being for all the peoples of the earth within the new temple of God is wonderful. Of course it receives special mention in the New Testament in John 4:20f., I Corinthians 3:16 and I Peter 2:4-10.

**Jeremiah** had a special calling (cf. Jer. 1:4-11), and as

a youth this prophet had a colloquy with God. From then on we hear-time and again-his personal prayers as he wrestles with God, or rather, with his own inner thoughts, his passion for his people and his strong intercessions for them. Because he had an understanding of the helplessness of man within creation (Jer. 10:23-24) and knew at the same time the deceit and corruption of the human heart (Jer. 17:9-10), he was driven to pray prayers of mitigation for his people who ought to have been destroyed by their covenant God for their rebellion, idolatry and evil ways. As he faced the opposition of those who were angered by his prophecies he wished to withdraw from his prophetic calling but was unable. God’s word was a fire in his bones. Probably no other person in the Old Testament is so transparent as this man of prayer and prophecy, and his sufferings have been an example to others who find pain in ministry, and yet comfort of prayer in their times of anguish. It is this prophet who pronounces the promise of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34)-the result of his constant dialogue with God-and the promise resolves the anguish of his heart in view of Israel’s evil. God’s good grace resolves the seeming dilemma, for grace holds within it both judgement and liberation. Perhaps more than anywhere else we find the word of God and prayer as being firmly of the one piece.

**Ezekiel** is the prophet who takes up the concept of the new temple, and he does so with great detail, but his own personal situation did not so much consist of prayer as it did of given prophecy. Even so that demanded dialogue between God and the prophet, and probably no man ever saw more of God and his glory by vision than did Ezekiel. This view of the glory of God affected the prophet deeply,

and gave power to his prophetic word.

In our chapter on intercessory prayer we looked at Daniel, the great exilic prophet, i.e. the prophet in Babylon who maintained constant prayer with God, both for the situation in which he was called upon by kings to give godly advice in the interpretations of their dreams, and his own witness to the Most High God. His intercessory ministry for the nation of Israel sprang from his knowledge of God and His judgements, as well as from his own heart of love for the nation. It was precisely for this prayer that he was so strongly opposed by enemies. They hated his loyalty to the God of Israel, and feared him, seeking to destroy him.

### **The Minor Prophets**

This is a title given to the prophets from Hosea to Malachi, but this does not mean they were minor in importance. Some of these were pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic and they spoke to the situation of their own times. Hosea and Habakkuk both held dialogue with God, Hosea representing the loving God who would unconditionally love his vagrant nation. Habakkuk was occupied with the coming judgement of God upon the nation. Ezra and Nehemiah—though not prophets as such, were both men of prayer and occupied in private and public prayer for the returned remnant of the nation. In fact theirs seems to be the beginning of liturgical prayer and worship even before the building of the new temple. Nehemiah stands out as a man of prayer, especially in his tender love for the Jewish exiles who had returned to Judea, and for his concern for ruined Jerusalem and its temple. Joel calls for a solemn fast and assembly by the priests (1:13-14;

2:12-16; cf. Neh. 9:1). Amos was an intercessory prophet as is seen so clearly in chapter seven of his prophecy (cf. Jer. chs. 14 and 15).

Much more regarding prayer could be adduced from the latter prophets, but what matters is that all the prophets were concerned with God's covenant with Israel, Israel's relationship with the nations, and the future which God had planned and which was to culminate in 'the day of the Lord'. As we will see in our later summary of prayer (see chapter 23) knowing and doing God's will is really the primary matter of prayer.

# 22

## *God's People At Prayer-II*



### **PRAYER AND THE NEW TESTAMENT SAINTS**

#### **Introduction: Praying People Who Anticipated the Coming of Messiah**

In the opening chapters of Luke are messages to Zechariah the father of John the Baptist, and to Mary the mother of Jesus, and as a result both express rich praise. Two persons of prayer were linked with the expectation of the coming of the Messiah, namely Simeon who was called ‘righteous and devout’, and Anna who was 84 years of age. Simeon is described as a man upon whom was the Holy Spirit, and who was led into the temple by the Spirit to give blessing to the baby Jesus. Of Anna it was said, ‘She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer day and night’, and ‘coming up at that

very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem’.

John the Baptist was undoubtedly a man of prayer. Filled with the Spirit from his mother’s womb he certainly had dialogue with God, and tells us that God pointed to Jesus as the one who would baptize men and women in the Holy Spirit, as also he would take away the sin of the world. Luke 11:1 informs us that John taught his disciples to pray, a fact which was noted not only by the two of his disciples who left him (cf. John 1:35-37), but by others also.

#### **Jesus’ Disciples and Prayer**

Not much is spoken about the disciples and prayer. In Luke 11:1 the disciples ask to be taught to pray. At Gethsemane they failed to pray with Christ in his hour of need, so that they needed to be told, ‘Watch and pray . . .’ Jesus taught them much concerning prayer, as we see in Luke 11:5-9; 18:1-14; Matthew 5:44; 6:5-8; 7:7-11; 9:38; 17:21; 18:19; 21:22; 24:20; 26:41; and Mark 11:20-25. We know he taught them that prayer is to the Father, that the Father seeks such prayer and worship, and that He requires intimate personal prayer in the privacy of a room. Prayer to the Father was undoubtedly a new and inspiring teaching, especially as it insisted that persons of faith come to the Father as His children. We would have no doubt that women such as Mary of Bethany and his other followers (Luke 8:1-3) would have been persons of prayer.

We also know that he taught—for the first time—a coming in prayer which was not through a priest or a public liturgy. It was coming in the person and name of

Christ the Son. This was a new and powerful revelation of the immediate effectiveness of prayer. The witness of Christ in his own life of prayer must have been the most powerful way of teaching them.

### **The Church at Prayer**

#### **PRAYER IN THE BOOK OF ACTS**

Prior to Pentecost we see God's people at prayer (Acts 1:14), 'All these [120 persons: Acts 1:15] with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers'. The assembly discussed filling up the apostolate since Judas Iscariot had left a vacancy in it, and it was with prayer they elected Matthias to that position. Acts 2:1 says they were altogether on the day of Pentecost, and were filled with the Spirit. Acts 2:42-47 indicates that they came together for meals, shared fellowship, the new apostolic teaching and 'the prayers', probably meaning that they went to the temple at the hours of prayer. They witnessed to the power of God in signs and wonders and the coming of thousands to Christ. From that time onwards we see the church constantly at prayer.

In particular we see the whole church praying for the apostles (Acts 4:24-31) after their rejection by the Jewish Sanhedrin (parliament of the 70 elders); the apostles insisting that their time must be given to prayer and the Word of God (6:2), and praying over the new assistants in the daily distribution (6:6); Peter praying for the raising of Dorcas from the dead (9:36-42); prayer for Peter who had been imprisoned by Herod (12:5ff.); Peter on the house-

when he had the vision of unclean animals, and was sent to Caesarea to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles (10:9; cf. 11:5); the church at Antioch in Syria worshipping the Lord and hearing the Holy Spirit commission Saul and Barnabas for ministry after which they prayed further for the two men as they set out to proclaim the Gospel elsewhere (13:1-3); prayer and fasting for the selection and commissioning of elders for the churches in Asia Minor (14:23); prayer and singing at midnight by Paul and Silas in the gaol at Philippi after having been persecuted (16:25); prayer with the elders of the Ephesian church when Paul was about to depart to Jerusalem and Rome (21:5); and the healing of the father of Publius at Malta (Acts 28:8).

Whilst these events are mentioned in the Book of the Acts, yet prayer would have related to all the acts, life and ministry of the church, and this we can see from the Letters.

### **Prayer in the Epistles**

We have spoken elsewhere in this book on the understanding and teaching of the apostles, especially in their Letters. Since we will look at Paul and his practice and teaching of prayer we will not trace it under our present heading. We have also dealt with James', John's and Jude's teaching in prayer, and partly with that given by Peter, especially in I Peter 3:7. For the rest, Peter urges sobriety and watchfulness in the matter of prayer (I Pet. 4:7). The writer of Hebrews speaks of the access we have to God, the throne of grace which we approach in time of need (7:25; cf. 10:22) and finally asks for prayer for himself and his companions (13:18). Certainly there is much to learn in regard to prayer, but teaching regarding

prayer is not extended since believers pray reflexively, having obtained the grace of God, and the leading of the Spirit through the Gospel.

### Prayer in the Book of the Revelation

We might not expect to find much concerning prayer in this Book but that is not exactly the case, especially if we link prayer and praise together. The four living creatures, the elders, and all the angelic powers are occupied in praise. From Daniel chapters 9 to 12 we see that angelic powers respond to the prayers of man, being sent by God to attend to them. What we have to keep in mind is that prayer within heaven would have a different context to that upon earth.

In 5:8 we are told that the elders have ‘golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints’ and in 8:3-5 that ‘. . . another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne; and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, voices, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake’. The importance of this passage is that it shows the prayers of the saints as never lost, but of great importance in the plan of God since they are kept, offered to God, and cause the signs and activity of judgement to happen (v. 6). In 6:10 we do have a prayer from the saints who have been martyred for God to avenge them, but they are told that the time for fulfilment of their prayer is not yet, but that it will come.

Whilst prayer is not largely mentioned praise certainly is, and since praise is part of the colloquy or dialogue, doubtless the praise also can be examined in relation to the nature and incidence of prayer.

### Paul's Teaching and Practice of Prayer

God's word to Ananias in Acts 9:11 is, ‘Rise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying’. Paul was undoubtedly a man of much prayer. In Acts 22:17 Paul says in passing, ‘When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance . . .’

It is from his Epistles that we learn most about Paul's praying. There we can see (a) Paul's personal prayers concerning himself, (b) his prayers for others, i.e. petitions for the enrichment of believers and special intercessions, (c) his requests for the prayers of others for himself, and the acknowledgement of the prayers of others, and (d) his teaching about prayer itself.

(i) *Paul's personal prayers concerning himself.* These are very few. In II Corinthians 1:3-11 Paul speaks of some severe suffering he and his companions had endured in Asia, and whilst he does not mention his own prayers he tells the church at Corinth, ‘You also must help us by prayer,’ so that we assume he had prayed. In II Corinthians 12:1-10 we read of Paul's experience of the thorn in the flesh which God gave to him. He says, ‘Three times I besought the Lord about this’. His threefold prayer was heard, but the thorn was not removed.

(ii) *Paul's prayers for others.* These are many and reveal the nature of Paul's love and concern for his converts and

others whom he had not even seen. In the following references Paul assures his readers of his constant prayer for them: Romans 1:8-9; I Corinthians 1:4; Philippians 1:3-4; Colossians 1:3-5, 9; I Thessalonians 1:2; 3:9; II Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13; Philemon 4-6.

His main prayers (Rom. 15:5-6, 13; Eph. 1:16-20; 3:14-19; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-12; I Thess. 3:11-13; 5:23; II Thess. 1:11-12; 2:16-17; 3:16)-as indeed all his prayers-have a rich content. He prays positively for the growth and maturation of the believers, the desire being that they should not so much be learners as teachers, not so much be helped as to be helpers. Along with these things he prays for their comfort (II Cor. 1:3-4), for joy and peace (Rom. 15:13; II Thess. 3:16), for growth in grace and sanctification (Rom. 15:13; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-11; I Thess. 3:12-13; 5:23; II Thess. 1:11; 2:17; 3:5, 16), for the discernment of believers (Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9), the living of life as worthy of Christ (Col. 1:10). There are many other elements which we have not mentioned.

(iii) *His requests for the prayers of others for himself and acknowledgement of prayers prayed for him.* Such are seen in Romans 15:30; II Corinthians 1:11; Philippians 1:19; I Thessalonians 5:25; 3:1-2; Ephesians 6:18-19; and Colossians 4:3. His requests for prayer are most moving, and his gratitude for such prayers prayed is genuine. As we have said previously, Paul sees a network of prayer across this world, defeating the powers of darkness and effecting the will of God.

(iv) *His teaching about prayer.* Paul first teaches the Gospel which brings men to grace and love (II Cor. 5:14) so that the constraint of grace and love to pray is upon believers. He teaches that the initiative in prayer is taken by

the ascended Son of God (Rom. 8:34) and the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:26-27). He also teaches that prayer is to the Father, by the Spirit (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:14-17) so that thanksgiving should be made to the Father (Eph. 3:14-15; 5:20; Col. 1:12). One must not be anxious when one prays (Phil. 4:6), one must depend upon God for all needs (Phil. 4:19), having joy and peace. One must intercede for others, pray for all people (I Tim. 2:1-5), and especially for the saints (Eph. 6:18-19), and pray in the Spirit, for indeed all prayer is in the Spirit (Rom. 8:26-27; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 3:3; cf. I Cor. 14:14-16).

What we note about Paul is that he sees prayer as that which is part of fulfilling the will of God, not only in the immediate churchly situations, but for the ultimate triumph of the Gospel over all the nations (cf. Rom. 1:5; 15:18-20; 16:25-27).

#### THE CHURCH PRAYS FOR THE WILL OF GOD

##### TO BE DONE

The Lord's Prayer is really given over to the whole matter of the Kingdom, of God's will being done on earth as in heaven. This is not a prayer for ultimate obedience as a common level of moralism, but God's will for redeeming His people, and renewing the universe, thus bringing the people of God to full resurrection, glorification, and making them into a people of priests and kings, reigning and serving for ever. All intercession is set for that end as we have seen in the Book of the Revelation in a number of places.

This fulfilment will inevitably come to pass, which is why both the Spirit and the Bride (the church) cry, 'Come!

Come Lord Jesus!’ to which he—the Bridegroom and Lord—replies, ‘Surely I am coming soon!’.

## 23

### *Prayer Accomplishes Things*

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#### **INTRODUCTION: THE POWERFUL PRAYERS OF CHRIST JESUS**

Human rationalizations of prayers are numerous. Some see imagination playing a large part. One visualizes certain things, thinks positively, sets the mind on a goal, and works towards it, so that prayer is simply ‘possibility thinking’ or ‘positive thinking’, or the use of psychic abilities to influence non-human and human elements which are thought to surround us. Others see prayer as attributing to a special figure the powers to accomplish things for us, and that faith in this figure will bring our ‘prayers’ to pass. Whether we call that figure a god, an idol, or even God does not really matter. Prayer is virtually ‘psychological’.



Christians think otherwise. They believe God to be Creator, King and Father, and as such One who cares for His creation and human beings who themselves are part of that creation. His care is not only for human beings who love Him and serve Him, but for all (Matt. 5:43-48).

Christ's prayers proved powerful. He had a way of so keeping in touch with his Father that he knew His will continually. In a moment he could instantly understand what God was about and pray according to that will. He prayed for Peter that his faith should not fail and Peter did not lose faith although he may well have lost face! In Gethsemane he prayed that he might be delivered from immediate death—there in the garden—and his prayer was answered (Matt. 26:38-39; Heb. 5:7). He prayed on the Cross for sinners to be forgiven and millions have found forgiveness. In the great prayer of John chapter 17 he prayed for his disciples to stand fast, for their converts to stand fast and for all his followers to be one, to love one another and finally to see his glory, and that prayer has been answered in many ways, is still being answered, and one day will have its final fulfilment.

Christ too, prays for his own continually, intervening at the right hand of God. It is certain that but for those prayers many believers would have been overcome by evil powers. We must conclude that as 'The prayer of a righteous man has great powers in its effects', then it was so in Jesus' case and can work similarly in our own case, especially when we pray in his name. According to what we saw in John 14:10-14 and 15:7, to pray in Christ's name is to be so in him that our prayer is really his prayer and so is as effective as if he had prayed it.

## **A SURVEY OF EFFECTIVE PRAYER**

Sometimes when we pray, we do not know what it is for which we are petitioning. When Israel in Egypt simply cried out in its pain, 'And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob', God's answer was, 'I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt; and I promise I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt'. God did more for them than they had dreamed.

In Acts chapter 4 the people prayed for boldness for the disciples and God's doing of signs and wonders. The answer was to shake the place in which they were and to fill all of them with the Holy Spirit. The rest then followed, but the shaking of the house and the infilling of the Spirit had not been prayed for specifically.

It would not be possible to describe all the answers to prayers prayed from the beginning of time until now. The Bible does not purport to have recorded all such successful petitions. If we were to base our belief on the fact that God has answered many prayers, then that would not be a good thing.

We need to see God as the One who listens, and judges how He ought to answer prayer. An example of this is the occasion when Israel loathed the manna God had sent them and desired meat. God gave them meat indeed (Num. 11:31ff.; Ps. 106:13-15), 'he gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them'.

### **Petitions Made to God**

There are many petitions recorded in the Psalms. Indeed they are multitudinous but not platitudinous. Rarely do we hear of the results of those prayers. Some have said that God answers all prayers, some with a ‘Yes!’ and some with a ‘No!’. This is not necessarily so. We have seen that God does not even listen to those petitions made in deliberate sinfulness, waywardness, selfishness and un-faithfulness. This would account for many prayers not having outward answers. Again in many cases for God to do what we ask Him to do could in some instances bring great harm to the petitioners. In Acts 21:7-14 we read of Paul’s intention to go to Rome. It appears that the believers wished he would not, but their final statement was, ‘The will of the Lord be done,’ as it undoubtedly was. Had they prayed in an opposite direction their prayers would not have been wise.

Since we cannot trace the outcome of many prayers which asked for definite answers, let us look at prayers prayed and answers given. In Psalms 40:1f. and 118:5-6 - for example-the petitioners cried out in distress and God heard and clearly answered. In Isaiah 58:9 God says there is a time to cry out to Him, and He will answer. Samson did this in a special crisis and pulled down the temple of Dagon. Elijah prayed that the widow’s dead son might be restored and he was. He cried out on Mount Carmel and God answered with fire. He prayed that it would not rain for a certain period, and it did not. Then he prayed that it would rain and it did. Jonah cried out of the belly of the whale for deliverance and God heard him.

Do we take it that when Jesus told us to pray the Lord’s

prayer that its various petitions are fulfilled? Were the requests which the apostles often made for their churches and converts left unheard and unanswered? We think not. When James enjoins prayer to be made for the sick do they remain unhealed? Surely not when that prayer is made in the obedience of faith. Paul and Silas sang and prayed at night and the prison doors were opened. When prayer was made by the church for the imprisoned Peter, was the result of that prayer the opening of the doors of his prison?

So we could multiply the occasions when prayer was evidently successful. Yet God is not merely One who wants to help to make life easier, but One who knows when help will be beneficial, and when not. That is why often some of the prayers appear to have been ignored, but God knows the time of His own moving, and we must await that.

### **EFFECTIVE PRAYER IN GOD’S PLAN**

If we continue to look at instances of God’s answers to prayer we will be like a scientist examining the phenomenology of certain things and actions, and developing a reliable principle which could then be applied. We think that if we examine the contexts of answers to prayer and learn from them-so to speak-how to pull the right strings, then God will answer either gladly, reluctantly or just perforce! Thus prayer will be effective. In taking such a view, we may then see prayer as a sort of manipulative force which may in turn be related to God’s character and nature!

Whilst prayer will always be effective when prayed in

true spirit-’The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects’-yet we must note that the righteous man prays only within the will of God. To get to know that will demands much time, and often occupies most of the period we spend in prayer. To pray the prayer of faith may take little or no time because it is in the will of God. Thus we adduce the following principle regarding effective prayer:

Effective prayer is that prayer which is based upon a relationship with God, knowledge of His person and character, and most of all a knowing the mind of God in relation to the purpose of His will. We will pray many prayers along the way, some of them for (seemingly) minor causes and reasons, and others relating to the entire plan of God for the ages, until this age passes and the new age has come. Along the way there will be many answers, as also-many times-no obvious answers to certain prayers, though often-later-we will realize that many of these were answered in a way and at a time other than what we realized.

This takes us back to the Lord’s Prayer. This prayer we pray is not simply the paradigm for prayer because the Lord gave it, but because it has within it the one true purpose, namely to glorify God, and to see His will for the Kingdom work out. For example when we see our prayers in the golden bowls held by the celestial elders (Rev. 5:8-’golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints’), we see nothing as yet effected. In Revelation 8:3-5 we see how effective are the prayers of the saints. I wonder, however, whether we see that these prayers are helping to effect the Kingdom of God in history! Do we realize that God has called us to pray for all things-so to speak-’along the way’?

If so then we will be able to catch the real meaning of prayer. It will fit with what we have written above. The idea is not merely to pray effective prayer. It is not that we should pray according to God’s will in order to accomplish certain things. True prayer is to pray for God’s will to be accomplished, whether we see direct results or not. There may be innumerable things for prayer along the way, but the primary purpose in all praying is that God’s will be done. This does not mean that men will merely keep to the best moral levels of conduct or even to useful acts of love and compassion, but that the entire will of God be done, i.e. His wisdom, counsel, purposes and ultimate goal, which is the redemption of the elect, the regeneration of the heavens and the earth, the glorification of man and so the fullness of the new age. This is the age which will totally glorify Him.

24

## *'Behold He Prayeth'*

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### **AN ESSAY ON PERSONAL PRAYER**

#### **This Man of Prayer**

We watch this man. Equally it could be a woman, so now when we use the word 'man' it will stand for her as for him. We watch this man go in to pray in privacy. As he closes the door-or finds his way to the heart of the woods or finds himself alone on a beach or plain-we watch him come to prayer. We know how it is with him for he is as I am, as anyone is.

We watch him come with wonder. He is at the throne of grace, and it is to this grace that he has access and that is why he has wonder. He has confidence because of this access in which he stands, and he has confidence with the access. This is because he is meeting His Father, because he comes in the name of Christ who is his unseen High Priest, and because he is aware that the only true prayer

that he can utter is because the Spirit is with him and in him.

Whilst he has confidence and boldness he nevertheless is not arrogant or self-confident. In fact he is so conscious of his weakness that he wonders whether he dare pray. Only the grace of God urges him forward. Perhaps he unconsciously knows that his personal weakness is his true strength. What he consciously knows is that he needs such times of prayer. No matter how much he prays in the rush and bustle of life he needs this quiet time of withdrawal.

#### **How Does the Man Pray?**

He comes knowing that God has sought him to pray to him under the cry, 'Abba! Father!'. Father and a son will now have dialogue together. We watch the man of prayer and he bows-not just sits-and the very posture of his heart and mind releases him from the human arrogance which we so easily hold in life. His 'fear and trembling' is not that of a slavish and anxious spirit, but of a loving and sound mind. Awe befits the man of prayer, assists him in creatureliness, his filial reverence, and his spirit of being a servant before the Most High God who is also his loving Father.

He comes knowing that meditation and contemplation of the Holy Father-whether by Scripture reading or the remembered Word of God-all combine to give him a true spirit of worship. He may think on creation, on the works of God in both creation and redemption. He may ponder the Law and the Word of God and so dissolve the worldly mind that presses in upon him from every side. This

contemplating brings newness to his mind, and a sharp recovery from the conditioning of evil powers.

When he begins to praise God out of his meditation, then his heart leaps up. As his inner sight traverses the dimensions of God's nature, God's works and His gifts, then he realizes the giving that flows from God incessantly, and his own heart responds with thanksgiving, and with understanding of the stresses and pressures which have come upon him in oppressive forms, but which have strengthened and matured him, and been elements in God's hands to shape him as a useful vessel.

Gradually his mind becomes renewed in the mind of the Spirit and the mind of the Son until it is freshened as to the mind of the Father. Praise heaps up praise and adoration further adoration. The spirit enlarges and runs the way of His commandments. Most of all he begins to see the sense of all things—God's things, the things of creation and redemption, the history God is working out.

The sense of his own immediate needs, the problems he has counted to be serious, now diminish as he looks at the range of life, sinful mankind, and the sovereignty of God which holds all things in His power and working.

He knows the need of prayer, of withdrawing from the pressures and stresses long enough to let the triumph and victory of God pervade his being and give him a fresh mindset towards all things. For this moment it is not petitions he is making but a renewed understanding that he is receiving.

### **This Man Is Sober and Vigilant**

The man of prayer knows that before prayer he must don the armour of God. No armour: no true prayer. The

whole armour of God is evil-proof. It is God's armour. We are equipped and protected in God. The constant warning of the Scriptures to be sober, vigilant and alert tells us that we are constantly in a cosmic battle, high authorities and princes fighting their evil counterparts, and Satan seeking to seduce, deceive and threaten God's warriors. Battles are won in prayer. Alertness before the coming of evil staves off the sin which would otherwise defeat the man of prayer. Almost all sin happens because we have lost our vigilance so many hours before. Hand-to-hand wrestling is the prayer of striving against evil, and is known only to the prayer warrior.

### **Union and Communion**

The man is praying because he is assured he is in union with God. God has always brought His people into covenant whether we would call this 'Old' or 'New'. By covenant this man has union with God. We might also call this 'access' or 'abiding'. The man of prayer knows that the most fearful happening in life would be to lose this union, but whilst he must never presume upon that union he must assume it will never be dissolved. This is what inspires and sustains confidence.

Even so the praying man knows that with union there shall be communion. Communion is at once an awesome matter and a thing of delight, but its reality and experience results from the art of prayer. 'He that believes shall not make haste; shall not be disappointed'. To come with an anxious heart is to fend off the peace of God. To be troubled is to insulate oneself against the most precious

thing of all-communion with the Eternal Father. The psalmist cried,

*I meditate on thee in the watches of the night;  
for thou hast been my help,  
and in the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy.  
My soul clings to thee; thy right hand upholds me.*

As the psalmist sees the mercies of God he is set free from self-advancing prayer. His petitions take a different shape. He is now on the edge of true petitions and intercessions, and this is because he has meditated upon God and realized something of the counsel of His will, in the midst of a world which has innumerable needs. His mind is now thinking along with God's mind, and sometimes joy flows at the wonder and power of the Father's sovereignty.

### **For What Does He Pray?**

As the Word has bidden so does he pray. He prays for the world, for all men, and for all women and children, for rulers and leaders, for peace to proclaim the Gospel, and for all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He prays specifically for the men, women, young people and children whom he knows, and whose needs he knows. He prays as a son of his parents, as a member of his family, a parent of his children, as one in the centre of a great network of relationships. He prays for those who take the Gospel to the ends of the world or pastor and teach the people of God. He understands the statement, 'supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all men'. His intercessions are ruled by his

knowledge of the Father's plan, the Son's compassion, the Spirit's yearning and so he prays.

This may seem to be idealistic as we watch the person at prayer—I, you, us, him—and yet we know that however feeble our petitions and intercessions, however limited in number and striving they may be, yet they go into the golden bowls of the elders and are there in the bowl—with incense—that is offered before the throne.

God bids all His children to pray. They come to prayer primarily out of commandment. God is not a beggar that He needs our prayer. He is the King who requires His subjects to fight in His war. He is the Father who calls the children to be about the Family task. He is the Creator who bids His creatures take part in His saving crusade for His creation. He is the Redeemer who would give us a share in bringing that redemption to mankind. The man we see praying there is a man under orders, but then a man under privilege, and a man grateful for the grace of ministry. In his worship of God he grows stronger, increasing in spiritual stature and maturing in the truth of God. As he has the compassion of God within his heart he becomes aware powerfully of the vast network of prayer across the nations, as he also becomes aware of the anguish in which the human heart lives because of its sin, along with the cruelty and selfishness of the human race.

### **How Must This Man Live?**

He must be human as it is to be human in Christ. This will mean he must be a righteous man. By that we mean a man who has been justified by the grace of God as it is in the blood of Christ. He is the man who has believed God,

and understood Him as the God of all grace because of the suffering of Calvary. His guilt being taken from him he can come clear-eyed to God. Being accounted righteous he hungers and thirsts after practical righteousness of life. ‘The prayer of a righteous man has great power in effects’, is why this man must live in this way. He does not regard sin in his heart, therefore the Lord hears his prayer.

He is a man of faith for without faith it is impossible to please God. He cultivates the faith God has given him, and habituates it by being in the presence of God, believing Him. We might say, ‘Believing Him more and more’. He has this confidence in God that if he ‘asks anything according to His will then He hears him’. This means the man does not come in his own name, but in the name of Christ. He has no well-spring of prayer that issues from himself but the Holy Spirit makes him overflow. He thus seeks the will of God in prayer before presenting his petition. He cultivates abiding in Christ so that he may ‘ask what he will and it will be given to him’.

The person we watch has clean hands and a pure heart and thus receives the blessing from the Lord. This means that in his heart he does not retain bitterness, anger, resentment, and in his life he does not hold hurts, or deepen his wounds by means of self-pity. He has learned to forgive instantly, not to gossip about or slander another. He always stands forgiving. His own conscience cleansed from the past and in the present for the future, he can pray and worship with quiet confidence.

He also is a man of love and compassion. Seeing his brother has certain needs he seeks to fulfil them insofar as he can, and thus his heart does not condemn him. The needs of others may be material, vocational, emotional or

redemptional. Only this kind of man can at once hear the heartbeat of God and man at the same time. Only this one can pray accordingly, and thus, effectively.

### **For What Does This Man Live?**

In one sense he lives to pray. He needs to hold colloquy with God. To do this is the privilege of the human race. How high a thing and how dignified an exercise to commune with the Living God! The man who talks with God has unceasing dialogue, and against, through and by the Word (and words) of God he knows himself and God more and more. The things which do not belong to him are shown for their wrongness or uselessness or their rightness and usefulness. He grows as he prays, and as he prays he grows.

He is astonished that prayer is not merely inward meditation or soliloquy which is helpful, but is God-initiated dialogue which is also commanded by God who desires to use it beyond other elements he has given to a person. The man of prayer sees that God insists on this prayer, for He long ago planned to use it in the outworking of His counsel and active will in time. This man then lives for the future, for the coming of the Kingdom, for the revelation of God's glory. He lives within the context of God's people, and shares with them in the hope of glory.

### **With Whom Ought the Man to Pray?**

We have seen that the man of prayer prays alone to his Father, in secret. Yet this is not the only manner in which he prays, i.e. alone. He knows the Dominical Word, ‘If



two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’.

We see then that when a man prays in secret, he is blessed to pray in the worship of the community, and when he prays together with others, then his time of personal prayer in private is also enriched. Living in this kind of polarity makes him to be-more and more-the man that he is essentially in prayer, and which he is, in fact, by both creation and regeneration. He is filling up what he really is. No wonder that the theologian said, ‘The worst sin is prayerlessness’. He might have added, ‘The highest act of obedience is prayerfulness’.

### **Always the Man of Prayer**

We withdraw, and leave the man of prayer to His Father and his God. We have witnessed enough to know what it is to be in colloquy with the very God of Heaven, Him-self, to have dialogue with the Most High. Inconceivable as it is, this is part of the high privilege man has by the grace and love of God.

Equally inconceivable is it that man should be called in by God-nay, commanded by Him-to be a partner (many partners) in the plan and will of God for time and eternity.

It is good for us then, to learn the art and vocation of prayer, and to know that as the outcome of this we will have the praise of God, if not the praise of men. We will hear His voice say in that day, ‘Well done, you good and faithful servant’, as also we hear the voice of His Son

saying, ‘Come beloved of my Father, enter into the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’. Then it is we will enter into those eternal mansions, i.e. the Holy City of God to hold perpetual colloquy with the Eternal Father, His Son and His blessed Holy Spirit.

## *Epilogue on Prayer*



### **THE ENDLESS BOOK**

A book on prayer can go on endlessly. As a writer, a theologian, a person and a child of God you think of another facet of prayer, you read what others have written, ideas are evoked, memories come, and in the middle of the night you come to the conclusion that with all you have ever written you have not yet grasped the substance of the matter, the great mystery of prayer. Even so you refuse doggedly to say that you do not understand prayer. Because it has been an experience with you for decades you insist that you know what is prayer. You are both right and wrong. You know the essence of the matter but its outworking and its dimensions you know only in part. Even so you know!

### **PRAYER AND THE PRACTICE**

What has struck me forcibly is that every man, woman and child has a history of prayer, indeed his own particular history of prayer. No one is exempt. We have seen that the atheist is compulsive in prayer, denying dialogue, thrusting from him any hint of colloquy, horrified that God may

come. He must mutter and cheep to himself to fend off the unwelcome but wearying visitations of prayer. God does not remain silent and unseeking, so the atheist is compelled to protest and argue—one of the most dynamic forms of prayer.

Leave aside the atheist and what do you have? People talking to God! There was the man who told me that during the Great Depression he had been starving, he and his family. Wandering on the beach one day he cried out of his angry and ungodly heart, ‘Oh God! Help me!’. There was a great roaring in the surf and the tide rushed in upon the sand, and when it rushed back there were fish flapping all over the sand. He scurried about in a frenzy of joy picking them up and throwing them further up the beach so they could not be caught again by the next rush of the surf. ‘Oh’, he said to me with a strong nod of his head, ‘I believe in God all right. He heard me that day!’.

People often tell me similar stories. I nod my head and am not surprised. Nor am I cynical since I myself know the warm and loving heart of God. Some stories of course are angry ones; they are about when God did not answer. I think, then, to myself, ‘Ah we have not come to the last chapter of this tale’.

If all the stories were put in books they would form a vast library, but then who would put them in a book-or books?

I just think of myself. I think back to when I was a child and talked to God about a thousand things. I might blush now to reveal those prayers—the ones that were informal, and not at all like my evening prayers when I knelt at my bedside.

I even knew the things He would not answer such as

the occasion when we were caught in the rain and my small sister held up a dry eucalyptus stick and said, ‘Please God turn this into an umbrella!’. Neither of us took it badly when it remained a stick. We never lost what faith we had.

I can scarcely remember when there was not dialogue. As a young man I once clung to a clingless cliff face, and should have slipped down to my death on the rocks below. Forty years later one of my brothers showed he had never forgotten.

I vividly remember hundreds of days of danger, sad-ness, anguish and depression. Prayer was in them all, and that is why I understand the psalmists in their dangers, their emotions and their moods. I remember the night we were camped by a lake in the midst of war, and my whole being sweated unnaturally and unbidden—perhaps with unspoken premonition. Hours later I was lying wounded on the side of a road with mortars bursting about me, and my blood flowing down the road. I was unusually calm, and prayer was not a protest but a quiet soliloquy with God somewhere around.

There were the nights of pain and no morphia, the days of no sedatives. Once it seemed I was within a breath of death and faithful Alf walking up and down the attap roofed verandah. That time it must have been his prayer. In yet later years there was the prayer that was said to God and into the ear of a Greek husband in a coma whilst his wife nodded as she knew he was hearing, and coming into life even as he was dying.

There were prayers in the dark days. Prayer shared with the good woman, the faithful wife, or the naive prayers of the children who asked for needed things, never question-

ing. There were prayers in a foreign country where we preached the Gospel and knew the fierce reactions of dark spirits and occult powers. Two daughters in the grip of fearsome diseases and a young woman locking herself in until she prised them away from evil powers and on-coming death.

Prayer for a woman who claimed she had a thousand demons, and her body muscles crawled and reflexed with their possession. Prayer for the sick, prayer for the troubled, prayer for the inwardly wounded. Prayer for the angry. Prayer for the new-born of the Word and the Spirit. Prayer for persecutors, and for angry enemies. Prayer when dark clouds gathered over a church or churches.

Prayer when my wife was close to dying according to expert prognosis, and praise for a miracle. Prayer when you seemed to be dying on another—and another occasion—of being close to death yourself. Prayer when the second youngest was a shrivelled up baby from a sickness which had dehydrated and when intravenous equipment was absent. Prayer many years later for the family when she was killed before you knew when to pray. Prayer for your children when you knew—as parents—that they had passed beyond your immediate protection out to where dark forces seek to destroy the human race they so fiercely hate and so cruelly torment. Prayer for the minds of your own children, and the children of others.

Prayer in the thousands of times when someone was laid by Someone on your heart and mind, and drew out suffering in your spirit; prayer that later you knew had been necessary, or later when you did not know for whom or what it had been necessary.

Prayer for you that others told you they had been bound

to pray by some touch or pressure of God when you needed it, or did not know you had needed it. The mysterious interlinking and interfacing of prayer across the body of Christ for those in your own family, community, country or countries that we scarcely knew. One great Divine Instructor and Lord who directs the prayers of His people for His other people.

Prayer when everything comes rushing in upon you, and you cannot think—so tired is your mind, and so weary your body. The comfort that flows into your veins, and steals about your body; or the terror when you face the matter of evil and it seems you must break under it, only to revive and find power you had thought you had lost forever. Sudden refreshment in the proclamation of the word when the hearers seemed not to hear, their eyes stony and their spirits steeled against you.

No wonder prayer is a terror to the powers of darkness and a strange dynamic to the weak and the timid ones of God.

No wonder much of prayer is praise as the heart realizes the responses of God to the very prayers He has initiated. No wonder our lips seem insufficient for adoration and wonder, but our hearts articulate what words cannot express.

### **THE TERROR OF ‘NO PRAYER’**

I remember eighteen months of my life—in a prison camp—when my anger at injustice changed my mind towards God. At least I thought it had. I was in some dreadful limbo, sternly disregarding God, refusing dialogue with

frozen lips, but not knowing it was just this. I do not recommend that to anyone.

Not to talk to God, indeed trying not to talk to Him is a self-destructive mindset. The barrenness of our own deserts and the dryness of our self-made wastes make the ecological wastelands to seem like flourishing gardens.

Suppose the day should come when it is only darkness, wailing and gnashing of teeth and the inner worms of endless guilts and dry remorse. It would seem there is no dialogue there. This must be the place out of which he cried his dereliction, ‘My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?’.

Whilst we live there is still the hour of hope. Yet if we live and are dead to Him then our dialogue is dead, our colloquy collapsed, and there is—nothing! To perpetuate that is to perpetuate death.

### **THE GRACE OF PRAYER**

Flee to Him. Cry out! Scream! Refuse His silence. Say, ‘You are my God. You made me. You must speak to me. You must speak into me again Your Breath. Leave me not prayerless either in the hour of life or the hour of endless death. You are my voice to me. Your Voice calls me to life. Speak and I shall live!’.

That is the grace of prayer. Self-mumbling is vain, and self-dialogue is mouthless and earless.

The grace of prayer is His greatest grace when all is said and done; prayer, heard, answered and the dialogue goes on. In colloquy with God man is truly man; only then is truly himself, herself.

## PRAYER—THE BEST OF ALL

In the twelfth century Bernard of Clairvaux sang his love song to Christ:

Jesu, the very thought of Thee  
With sweetness fills the breast;  
But sweeter far Thy face to see,  
And in Thy presence rest.

But what to those who find? Ah! this  
Nor tongue nor pen can show:  
The love of Jesus, what it is  
None but His loved ones know.

In the sixteenth century the great missionary Francis Xavier cried out his love for God:

My God, I love Thee—not because  
I hope for heaven thereby,  
Nor yet because who love Thee not  
Are lost eternally.

E'en so I love Thee, and will love,  
And in Thy praise will sing;  
Because Thou art my loving God  
And my eternal King.

‘Since he looked upon me, my heart is not my own; he hath run away to heaven with it.’ So spoke Samuel Rutherford in the seventeenth century. His love letters to Christ are a source of wonderment to some of us whose love for God seems to fall so far short of such saints. In the same century Johann Scheffler wrote his most beautiful hymn of devotion:

Thee will I love, my strength, my tower,  
Thee will I love, my joy, my crown,  
Thee will I love with all my power,  
In all Thy works, and Thee alone;  
Thee will I love, till the pure fire  
Fill my whole soul with chaste desire.

In the eighteenth century George Whitefield breathed out his passion for Christ and thousands waited on that word of love. No less did the Wesleys write their thousands of hymns of love. The walls of John Knox’s prayer room were stained with the hot breathings he had after God, and he wept for his home country and its people.

So has it ever been when men and women come to their heavenly Father in the secret closet and speak to Him in their most intimate prayer. How much of it is weeping for failure, but then how much of it is a loving of the one who redeemed the failure. Whitefield said, ‘He loved me freely, he prevented me by his grace; he chose me from eternity, he called me in time, and I am persuaded will keep me till time shall be no more—this consideration makes my faith to work by love.’

If we can speak about the ultimate in prayer, then it is this—to be with Him. It is to come because love has moved us to do so. It is His love we think about, and in it we live. Our sense of it may wax or wane from time to time, but it is our life to live and move and act in that love. Surely it is that His love draws out ours for Him, and then prayer is the true meeting place of love.

As we meet Him then we come not with our ‘shopping list’, and not with our hearts overcome by their own

“COME LET US PRAY”

sinfulness and worthlessness but into His presence for His sake and ours. We talk with Him, we worship Him, we come more to know Him, we come more to open our hearts and cry out-whether in misery or triumph, whether in the restlessness that this present evil age causes as it seeks to oppress, or in the sweet joy of being in His presence-in all these things we know and live the heart of prayer.

Love begets prayer and prayer begets love, so that as love is the best and greatest of all, then no less is prayer. Yes, no less is prayer.