

## PRAYER AND FERVENCY

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

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

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

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

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

God wants warm-hearted servants. The Holy Spirit comes as a fire, to dwell in us; we are to be baptized, with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Fervency is warmth of soul. A phlegmatic temperament is abhorrent to vital experience. If our religion does not set us on fire, it is because we have frozen hearts. God dwells in a flame; the Holy Ghost descends in fire. To be absorbed in God's will, to be so greatly in earnest about doing it that our whole being takes fire, is the qualifying condition of the man who would engage in effectual prayer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"A travailing spirit, the throes of a great burdened desire, belongs to prayer. A fervency strong enough to drive away sleep, which devotes and inflames the spirit, and which retires all earthly ties, all this

belongs to wrestling, prevailing prayer. The Spirit, the power, the air, and food of prayer is in such a spirit."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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