

PRAYER AND THE WORD OF GOD

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

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

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

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

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

As this word of Christ dwelling in us richly is transmuted and assimilated, it issues in praying. Faith is constructed of the Word and the Spirit, and faith is the body and substance of prayer.

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

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

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

Jacob wrestled, not so much with a promise, as with the Promiser. We

must take hold of the Promiser, lest the promise prove nugatory. Prayer may well be defined as that force which vitalizes and energizes the Word of God, by taking hold of God, Himself. By taking hold of the Promiser, prayer reissues, and makes personal the promise. "There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of Me," is God's sad lament. "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me," is God's recipe for prayer.

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

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

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

Paul had the definite promise from Christ, that he "would be delivered from the people and the Gentiles," but we find him exhorting the Romans in the urgent and solemn manner concerning this very matter:

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

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

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

When we consult God's Word, we find that no duty is more binding, more exacting, than that of prayer. On the other hand, we discover that no privilege is more exalted, no habit more richly owned of God. No

promises are more radiant, more abounding, more explicit, more often reiterated, than those which are attached to prayer. "All things, whatsoever" are received by prayer, because "all things whatsoever" are promised. There is no limit to the provisions, included in the promises to prayer, and no exclusion from its promises. "Every one that asketh, receiveth." The word of our Lord is to this all-embracing effect: "If ye shall ask anything in My Name, I will do it."

Here are some of the comprehensive, and exhaustive statements of the Word of God about prayer, the things to be taken in by prayer, the strong promise made in answer to prayer:

"Pray without ceasing;" "continue in prayer;" "continuing instant in prayer;" "in everything by prayer, let your request be made known unto God;" "pray always, pray and not faint;" "men should pray everywhere;" "praying always, with all prayer and supplication."

What clear and strong statements are those which are put in the Divine record, to furnish us with a sure basis of faith, and to urge, constrain and encourage us to pray! How wide the range of prayer, as given us, in the Divine Revelation! How these Scriptures incite us to seek the God of prayer, with all our wants, with all our burdens!

In addition to these statements left on record for our encouragement, the sacred pages teem with facts, examples, incidents, and observations, stressing the importance and the absolute necessity of prayer, and putting emphasis on its all-prevailing power.

The utmost reach and full benefit of the rich promises of the Word of God, should humbly be received by us, and put to the test. The world will never receive the full benefits of the Gospel until this be done. Neither Christian experience nor Christian living will be what they ought to be till these Divine promises have been fully tested by those who pray. By prayer, we bring these promises of God's holy will into the realm of the actual and the real. Prayer is the philosopher's stone which transmutes them into gold.

If it be asked, what is to be done in order to render God's promises real, the answer is, that we must pray, until the words of the promise are clothed upon with the rich raiment of fulfilment.

God's promises are altogether too large to be mastered by desultory praying. When we examine ourselves, all too often, we discover that our praying does not rise to the demands of the situation; is so limited that it is little more than a mere oasis amid the waste and desert of the world's sin. Who of us, in our praying, measures up to this promise of our Lord:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to My Father."

How comprehensive, how far reaching, how all-embracing! How much is here, for the glory of God, how much for the good of man! How much for the manifestation of Christ's enthroned power, how much for the reward of abundant faith! And how great and gracious are the results which can be made to accrue from the exercise of commensurate, believing prayer!

Look, for a moment, at another of God's great promises, and discover

how we may be undergirded by the Word as we pray, and on what firm ground we may stand on which to make our petitions to our God:

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

In these comprehensive words, God turns Himself over to the will of His people. When Christ becomes our all-in-all, prayer lays God's treasures at our feet. Primitive Christianity had an easy and practical solution of the situation, and got all which God had to give. That simple and terse solution is recorded in John's First Epistle:

"Whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in His sight."

Prayer, coupled with loving obedience, is the way to put God to the test, and to make prayer answer all ends and all things. Prayer, joined to the Word of God, hallows and makes sacred all God's gifts. Prayer is not simply to get things from God, but to make those things holy, which already have been received from Him. It is not merely to get a blessing, but also to be able to give a blessing. Prayer makes common things holy and secular things, sacred. It receives things from God with thanksgiving and hallows them with thankful hearts, and devoted service.

In the First Epistle to Timothy, Paul gives us these words:

"For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving. For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

That is a statement which gives a negative to mere asceticism. God's good gifts are to be holy, not only by God's creative power, but, also, because they are made holy to us by prayer. We receive them, appropriate them and sanctify them by prayer.

Doing God's will, and having His Word abiding in us, is an imperative of effectual praying. But, it may be asked, how are we to know what God's will is? The answer is, by studying His Word, by hiding it in our hearts, and by letting the Word dwell in us richly. "The entrance of Thy word, giveth light."

To know God's will in prayer, we must be filled with God's Spirit, who maketh intercession for the saints, and in the saints, according to the will of God. To be filled with God's Spirit, to be filled with God's Word, is to know God's will. It is to be put in such a frame of mind, to be found in such a state of heart, as will enable us to read and interpret aright the purposes of the Infinite. Such filling of the heart, with the Word and the Spirit, gives us an insight into the will of the Father, and enables us to rightly discern His will, and puts within us, a disposition of mind and heart to make it the guide and compass of our lives.

Epaphras prayed that the Colossians might stand "perfect and complete in all the will of God." This is proof positive that, not only may we know the will of God, but that we may know all the will of God. And not only may we know all the will of God, but we may do all the will of God. We may, moreover, do all the will of God, not occasionally, or by a mere impulse, but with a settled habit of conduct. Still further, it

shows us that we may not only do the will of God externally, but from the heart, doing it cheerfully, without reluctance, or secret disinclination, or any drawing or holding back from the intimate presence of the Lord.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

chosen minister declares His Word to dying men, explains the Scriptures, and enforces their teachings upon his hearers. And prayer germinates a resolve, in those who practise it, not to forsake the house of God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here, let it be said, that no two things are more essential to a spirit-filled life than Bible-reading and secret prayer; no two things more helpful to growth in grace; to getting the largest joy out of a Christian life; toward establishing one in the ways of eternal peace. The neglect of these all-important duties, presages leanness of soul, loss of joy, absence of peace, dryness of spirit, decay in all that pertains to spiritual life. Neglecting these things paves the way for apostasy, and gives the Evil One an advantage such as he is not likely to ignore. Reading God's Word regularly, and praying habitually in the secret place of the Most High puts one where he is absolutely safe from the attacks of the enemy of souls, and guarantees him salvation and final victory, through the overcoming power of the Lamb.