

IV. GOD'S NEED OF MEN WHO PRAY

"We do what He commands. We go where He wants us to go. We speak what He wants us to speak. His will is our law. His pleasure our joy. He is, today, seeking the lost and He would have us seek with Him. He is shepherding the lambs and He wants our cooperation. He is opening doors in heathen lands, and He wants our money and our prayers."--Anon.

We proceed now to declare that it demands prayer-leadership to hold the Church to God's aims, and to fit it for God's uses. Prayer-leadership preserves the spirituality of the Church, just as prayerless leaders make for unspiritual conditions. The Church is not spiritual simply by the mere fact of its existence, nor by its vocation. It is not held to its sacred vocation by generation, nor by succession. Like the new birth, "It is not of blood, neither of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

The Church is not spiritual simply because it is concerned and deals in spiritual values. It may hold its confirmations by the thousand, it may multiply its baptisms, and administer its sacraments innumerable times, and yet be as far from fulfilling its true mission as human conditions can make it.

This present world's general attitude retires prayer to insignificance and obscurity. By it, salvation and eternal life are put in the background. It cannot be too often affirmed, therefore, that the prime need of the Church is not men of money nor men of brains, but men of prayer. Leaders in the realm of religious activity are to be judged by their praying habits, and not by their money or social position. Those who must be placed in the forefront of the Church's business, must be, first of all, men who know how to pray.

God does not conduct His work, solely, with men of education or of wealth or of business capacity. Neither can He carry on His work through men of large intellects or of great culture, nor yet through men of great social eminence and influence. All these can be made to count provided they are not regarded as being primary. These men, by the simple fact of these qualities and conditions, cannot lead in God's work nor control His cause. Men of prayer, before anything else, are indispensable to the furtherance of the kingdom of God on earth. No other sort will fit in the scheme or do the deed. Men, great and influential in other things, but small in prayer, cannot do the work Almighty God has set out for His Church to do in this, His world.

Men who represent God and who stand here in His stead, men who are to build up His kingdom in this world, must be in an eminent sense men of prayer. whatever else they may have, whatever else they may lack, they must be men of prayer. Having everything else and lacking prayer, they must fall. Having prayer and lacking all else, they can succeed. Prayer must be the most conspicuous and the most potent factor in the character and conduct of men who undertake divine commission. God's business requires men who are versed in the business of praying.

It must be kept in mind that the praying to which the disciples of Christ is called by Scriptural authority and enforcement, is a valorous calling, for manly men. The men God wants and upon whom He depends, must work at prayer just as they work at their worldly calling. They must follow this business of praying through, just as they do their secular pursuits. Diligence, perseverance, heartiness, and courage,

must all be in it if it is to succeed.

Everything secured by Gospel promise, defined by Gospel measure, and represented by Gospel treasure are to be found in prayer. All heights are scaled by it, all doors are opened to it, all victories are gained through it, and all grace distills on it. Heaven has all its good and all its help for men who pray.

How marked and strong is the injunction of Christ which sends men from the parade of public giving and praying to the privacy of their closets, where with shut doors, and in encircling silence they are alone in prayer with God!

In all ages, those who have carried out the divine will on the earth, have been men of prayer. The days of prayer are God's halcyon days. His heart, His oath, and His glory are committed to one issuance--that every knee should bow to Him. The day of the Lord, in a preeminent sense, will be a day of universal prayer.

God's cause does not suffer through lack of divine ability, but by reason of the lack of prayer-ability in man. God's action is just as much bound up in prayer at this time, as it was when He said to Abimelech, "Abraham shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live." So also it was when God said to Job's friends, "My servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept."

God's great plan for the redemption of mankind is as much bound up to prayer for its prosperity and success as when the decree creating the movement was issued from the Father, bearing on its frontage the imperative, universal and eternal condition, "Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thy inheritance and the uttermost part of the earth for thy possession."

In many places an alarming state of things has come to pass, in that the many who are enrolled in our churches are not praying men and women. Many of those occupying prominent positions in church life are not praying men. It is greatly to be feared that much of the work of the Church is being done by those who are perfect strangers to the closet. Small wonder that the work does not succeed.

While it may be true that many in the Church say prayers, it is equally true that their praying is of the stereotyped order. Their prayers may be charged with sentiment, but they are tame, timid, and without fire or force. Even this sort of praying is done by a few straggling men to be found at prayer-meetings. Those whose names are to be found bulking large in our great Church assemblies are not men noted for their praying habits. Yet the entire fabric of the work in which they are engaged has, perforce, to depend on the adequacy of prayer. This fact is similar to the crisis which would be created were a country to have to admit in the face of an invading foe that it cannot fight and have no knowledge of the weapons whereby war is to be waged.

In all God's plans for human redemption, He proposes that men pray. The men are to pray in every place, in the church, in the closet, in the home, on sacred days and on secular days. All things and everything are dependent on the measure of men's praying.

Prayer is the genius and mainspring of life. We pray as we live; we live as we pray. Life will never be finer than the quality of the

closet. The mercury of life will rise only by the warmth of the closet. Persistent non-praying eventually will depress life below zero.

To measure and weigh the conditions of prayer, is readily to discover why men do not pray in larger numbers. The conditions are so perfect, so blessed, that it is a rare character who can meet them. A heart all love, a heart that holds even its enemies in loving contemplation and prayerful concern, a heart from which all bitterness, revenge and envy are purged--how rare! Yet this is the only condition of mind and heart in which a man can expect to command the efficacy of prayer.

There are certain conditions laid down for authentic praying. Men are to pray, "lifting up holy hands"; hands here being the symbol of life. Hands unsoiled by stains of evil doing are the emblem of a life unsoiled by sin. Thus are men to come into the presence of God, thus are they to approach the throne of the Highest, where they can "obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Here, then, is one reason why men do not pray. They are too worldly in heart and too secular in life to enter the closet; and even though they enter there, they cannot offer the "fervent, effectual prayer of the righteous man, which availeth much."

Again, "hands" are the symbols of supplication. Outstretched hands stand for an appeal for help. It is the silent yet eloquent attitude of a helpless soul standing before God, appealing for mercy and grace. "Hands," too, are symbols of activity, power and conduct. Hands outstretched to God in prayer must be "holy hands," unstained hands. The word "holy" here means undefiled, unspotted, untainted, and religiously observing every obligation. How far remote is all this from the character of the sin-loving, worldly-minded, fleshly disposed men, soiled by fleshly lusts, spotted by worldly indulgence, unholy in heart and conduct! "He who seeks equity must do equity," is the maxim of earthly courts. So he who seeks God's good gifts must practice God's good deeds. This is the maxim of heavenly courts.

Prayer is sensitive, and always affected by the character and conduct of him who prays. Water cannot rise above its own level, and a spotless prayer cannot flow from a spotted heart. Straight praying is never born of crooked conduct. The men, what men are, behind their praying, that gives character to their supplication. The craven heart cannot do brave praying. Soiled men cannot make clean, pure supplication.

It is neither words, nor thoughts nor ideas, nor feelings, which shape praying, but character and conduct. Men must walk in upright fashion in order to be able to pray well. Bad character and unrighteous living break down praying until it becomes a mere shibboleth. Praying takes its tone and vigour from the life of the man or the woman exercising it. When character and conduct are at a low ebb, praying can but barely live, much less thrive.

The man of prayer, whether layman or preacher, is God's right-hand man. In the realm of spiritual affairs, he creates conditions, inaugurates movements, brings things to pass.

By the fact and condition of their creation and redemption, all men are under obligation to pray. Every man can pray, and every man should pray. But when it comes to the affairs of the Kingdom, let it be said, at once, that a prayerless man in the Church of God is like a paralyzed organ of the physical body. He is out of place in the communion of

saints, out of harmony with God, and out of accord with His purposes for mankind. A prayerless man handicaps the vigour and life of the whole system like a demoralized soldier is a menace to the force of which he forms part, in the day of battle. The absence of prayer lessens all the life-forces of the soul, cripples faith, sets aside holy living, shuts out heaven. Between praying saints and non-praying men, in Holy Scripture, the line is sharply drawn. Of Fletcher of Madeley--one of the praying saints--it is written that

"He was far more abundant in his public labours than the greater part of his companions in the holy ministry. Yet these bore but little proportion to those internal exercises of prayer and supplication to which he was wholly given up in private, which were almost uninterruptedly maintained from hour to hour. He lived in the spirit of prayer, and whatever employment in which he was engaged, this spirit of prayer was constantly manifested through them all.

"Without this he neither formed any design, nor entered upon any duty. Without this he neither read nor conversed. Without this, he neither visited nor received a visitor. There have been seasons of supplications in which he appeared to be carried out far beyond the ordinary limits of devotion, when, like his Lord upon the Mount of Transfiguration, while he continued to pour out his mighty prayer, the fashion of his countenance has been changed, and his face has appeared as the face of an angel."

O God, raise up more men of praying like John Fletcher! How we do need, in this our day, men through whom God can work!