

Prayer, in its proper place.

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There is a strong tendency in the human mind to take a one-sided view of things. This should be carefully guarded against. It would ever be our wisdom to view things as God presents them to us, in His holy word. We should put things where He puts them, and leave them there. Were this more faithfully attended to, the truth would be much more clearly understood, and souls much better instructed. There is a divine place for everything, and every thing should be in a divine place. We should avoid putting right things in wrong places, just as carefully as we would avoid setting them aside altogether. The one may do as much damage as the other. Let any divine institution be taken out of its divinely-appointed place, and it must necessarily fail of its divinely-appointed end. This, I imagine, will hardly be questioned by any enlightened or well-regulated mind. It will be admitted, on all hands, to be wrong to put things in any place but just where God intended them to be.

Now, in proportion to the importance of a right thing is the importance of having it in its right place. This remark holds good, in an especial manner, with respect to the hallowed and most precious exercise of prayer. It is hard to imagine how any one, with the word of God in his hand, could presume to detract from the value of prayer. It is one of the very highest functions, and most important privileges of the Christian life. No sooner has the new nature been communicated, by the Holy Ghost, through faith in Christ, than it expresses itself in the sweet accents of prayer.

Prayer is the earnest breathing of the new man, drawn forth by the operation of the Holy Ghost, who dwells in all true believers. Hence, to find any one praying, is to find him manifesting divine life in one of its most touching and beautiful characteristics, namely dependence. There may be a vast amount of ignorance displayed in the prayer, both in its character and object; but the *spirit* of prayer is, unquestionably, divine. A child may ask for a great many foolish things; but, clearly, he could not ask for anything, if he had not life. The ability and desire to ask are the infallible proofs of life. No sooner had Saul of Tarsus passed from death unto life, than the Lord says of him, "*Behold, he prayeth!*" (Acts 9) Doubtless, he had, as "a Pharisee of the Pharisees," said many "long prayers;" but, not until he "saw that Just One, and heard the voice of his mouth," could it be said of him, "behold, *he prayeth.*" (Acts 22: 14)

Saying prayers, and praying, are two totally different things. A self-righteous Pharisee may excel in the former; none but a converted soul can enjoy the latter. The spirit of prayer is the spirit of the new man; the language of prayer is the distinct utterance of the new life. The moment a spiritual babe is born, into the new creation, it sends up a cry of helpless dependence toward the source of its birth. Who would dare to hush that cry? Let the babe be gently satisfied, not rudely silenced. The very cry which ignorance would seek to stifle, falls like sweetest music on a parent's ear. It is the proof of life. It evidences the existence of a new object around which the affections of a parent's heart may entwine themselves.

All this is plain enough. It commends itself to every renewed mind. The man who could think of hushing the accents of prayer must be wholly ignorant of the precious and beautiful mysteries of the new creation. The understanding of the praying one may need to be instructed; but oh! let not the spirit of prayer be quenched. Let the beams of divine revelation, in all their emancipating power, shine in upon the struggling conscience, but let not the breathings of the new life be interrupted.

The newly-converted soul may be in great darkness. The chilling mists of legalism may enwrap his spirit. He may not, as yet, be able to rest fully in Christ, and His accomplished work. His awakened conscience may not, as yet, have found its peace-giving answer in the precious blood of Jesus. Doubts and fears may sorely beset him. He may not know about the important doctrine of the two natures, and the continual conflict between them. He is bowed down beneath the humiliating sense of indwelling sin and sees not, as yet, the ample provision which redeeming love has made for that very thing, in the sacrifice and priesthood — the blood and advocacy of the Lord Jesus Christ. The joyous emotions which attended upon the first moments of his conversion have passed away. The beams of the Sun of Righteousness are hidden by the heavy clouds which arise from within and around him. It is not with him as in days past. He marvels at the sad change which has come over him and well nigh doubts if he were ever converted at all.

Need we wonder, though such an one should cry mightily to God? Yea, the wonder would be if he could do aught else. How, then, should we treat him? Should we teach him not to pray? God forbid. This would be to do the work of Satan, who, assuredly, hates prayer most cordially. To drop a syllable which could even be understood as making little of an exercise so entirely divine, would be to fly in the face of the entire book of God, to deny the very example of Christ, and hinder the utterance of the Holy Ghost in the new-born soul.

The Old and New Testament Scriptures literally teem with exhortations and encouragements to pray. To quote the passages, would fill a volume. The blessed Master Himself has left His people an example as to the unceasing exercise of a spirit of prayer. He both prayed Himself and taught His disciples to pray. The same is true of the Holy Ghost in the apostles. (See the following passages: Luke 3: 21; Luke 6: 12; Luke 9: 28, 29; Luke 11: 1-13; Luke 18: 1-8; Acts 1: 14; Acts 4: 31; Rom. 12: 12; Rom. 15: 30; Eph 6: 18; Phil. 4: 6; Col. 4: 2-4; 1 Thess. 5: 17; 2 Thess. 3: 1, 2; 1 Tim. 2: 1-8; Heb. 13: 18; James 5: 14, 15.)

If my reader will look out and ponder the foregoing passages, he will have a just view of the place which prayer occupies in the Christian economy. He will see that disciples are exhorted to pray; and he will note that it is only disciples who are exhorted. He will see that prayer is a grand prominent exercise of the house of God; and he will note that he must be in the house of God to engage in it. He will see that prayer is the undoubted utterance of the new life; and he will note that the life must be there to utter itself. He will see that prayer is an important part of the Christian's privilege; and he will note that it enters, in no wise, into the foundation of the Christian's peace.

Thus, he will be able to put prayer in its proper place; and how important it is that it should be so put. How important it is that the anxious enquirer should see that the deep and solid foundations of his present and everlasting peace were laid in the work of the cross, eighteen centuries ago! How important that the blood of Jesus should stand out before the soul in clear and bold relief, and in its own solitary grandeur, as the alone foundation of the sinner's rest! A soul may be earnestly seeking and crying for salvation, and, all the while, be ignorant of the great fact that it is ready to his hand—that he is actually commanded to accept a free, full, present, personal, and eternal salvation—that Christ has done all—that a brimming cup of salvation is set before him, which faith has only to take and drink for its everlasting satisfaction. The gospel of God's free grace points to the rent veil — the empty tomb — the occupied throne above. (Matt. 28; Heb. 1 and Heb. 10) What do these things declare? What voice do they utter in the anxious sinner's ear? Salvation! salvation! salvation! The rent veil, the empty tomb, the occupied throne, do all cry out, salvation!

Reader, do you really want salvation? Then why not take it, as God's free gift? Are you looking to

your own heart or to Christ's finished work for salvation? Is it needful, think you, to wait another moment in order to know that you are fully and for ever saved? If so then Christ's work was not finished; the ransom was not paid; something yet remains to be done. But Christ said, "*It is finished,*" and God says, "I have found a ransom." (Job 33; John 19) If you have to do, say, or think aught, to complete the work of salvation, then Christ would not be a whole, a perfect Saviour.

And, further, it would be a plain denial of Rom. 4: 5, which says, "To him that *worketh not*, but believeth on him that *justifieth the ungodly*, his faith is counted for righteousness." Take heed that you are not mixing up your poor prayers with the glorious work of redemption, completed by the Lamb of God on the cross. Prayer is most precious; but, remember, "without faith it is impossible to please God;" (Heb. 11) and if you have faith, you have Christ, and having Christ, you have ALL. If you say you are crying for mercy, the word of God points you to mercy's copious stream flowing from the finished sacrifice. You have all your anxious heart can want in Jesus, and He is God's free gift to you just as you are, where you are, *now*. If you had *to be* aught else but what you are, or *to go* anywhere else from where you are, then salvation would not be "by grace, through faith." (Eph. 2) If you are anxious to get salvation, and God desires you should have it, why need you be another moment without it? It is all ready. Christ died and rose again. The Holy Ghost testifies. The word is plain. "*Only believe.*"

Oh! may the Spirit of God lead anxious souls to find settled repose in Jesus. May He lead them to look away from all beside, straight to an all-sufficient atonement. May He give clearness of apprehension, and simplicity of faith to all; and may He especially endow all who stand up to teach and preach with ability, "rightly to divide the word of truth," so that they may not apply to the unregenerate sinner, or the anxious enquirer, such passages of scripture as refer only to the established believer. Very serious damage is done both to the truth of God, and to the souls of men, by an unskilful division and application of the word.

There must be spiritual life, before there can be spiritual action; and the *only* way to get spiritual life is by *believing* on the name of the Son of God.* (John 1: 12, 13; John 3: 14-16, 36; John 5: 24; John 20: 31.) If, therefore, the precepts of God's word be applied to persons who have not spiritual life to act upon them, confusion must be the result. The precious privileges of the Christian are formed into a heavy yoke for the unconverted. A strange system of half-law, half-gospel, is propounded, whereby true Christianity is robbed of its characteristic glory, and the souls of men are plunged in mist and perplexity. There is urgent need, just now, for clearness in setting forth the true ground of a sinner's peace. Hundreds and thousands of souls are being convicted of sin. They have gotten life, but not liberty. They are quickened, but not yet emancipated. They want a full, clear, unclouded gospel. The claims of a divinely awakened conscience can only be answered by the blood of the cross. If anything, no matter what, be added to the finished work of Christ, the soul must be filled with doubt and darkness.

{*When the gaoler at Philippi enquired of Paul and Silas "What must I do to be saved?" they, simply, replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thine house." (Acts 16: 30, 31) It would, surely, be well if this method of dealing with an anxious inquirer were more faithfully adopted.}

May God grant us to know, more fully, the true place and value of simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and of earnest prayer in the Holy Ghost.

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