

Prayer and the Word of God

by E.M. Bounds

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 (*of no force or effect*). 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 thee [me]," is God's sad lament (Isa. 64:7). "Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me" (Isa. 27:5), 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 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 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, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth" (I Kings 18:1). 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 Judea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints

(Rom 15:30,31).

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 any thing in my name, I will do it" (John 14:14).

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 fulfillment.

God's promises are altogether too large to be mastered by desultory (*lacking in consistency*) 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 unto my Father (John 14:12).

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 (John 15:7).

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:

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight (I John 3:22).

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 (I Tim. 4:4,5).

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, 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.

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