

VIII

In God's name I beseech you let prayer nourish your soul as your meals nourish your body. Let your fixed seasons of prayer keep you in God's presence through the day, and His presence frequently remembered through it be an ever-fresh spring of prayer. Such a brief, loving recollection of God renews a man's whole being, quiets his passions, supplies light and counsel in difficulty, gradually subdues the temper, and causes him to possess his soul in patience, or rather gives it up to the possession of God.--Fenelon

Devoted too much time and attention to outward and public duties of the ministry. But this has a mistaken conduct, for I have learned that neglect of much and fervent communion with God in meditation and prayer is not the way to redeem the time nor to fit me for public ministrations.

I rightly attribute my present deadness to want of sufficient time and tranquillity for private devotion. Want of more reading, retirement and private devotion, I have little mastery over my own tempers. An unhappy day to me for want of more solitude and prayer. If there be anything I do, if there be anything I leave undone, let me be perfect in prayer.

After all, whatever God may appoint, prayer is the great thing. Oh that I may be a man of prayer.--Henry Martyn

That the men had quit praying in Paul's time we cannot certainly affirm. They have, in the main, quit praying now. They are too busy to pray. Time and strength and every faculty are laid under tribute to money, to business, to the affairs of the world. Few men lay themselves out in great praying. The great business of praying is a hurried, petty, starved, beggarly business with most men.

St. Paul calls a halt, and lays a levy on men for prayer. Put the men to praying is Paul's unfailing remedy for great evils in Church, in State, in politics, in business, in home. Put the men to praying, then politics will be cleansed, business will be thriftier, the Church will be holier, the home will be sweeter.

"I exhort, therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men; for kings and all that are in high place; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour ... I desire, therefore, that the men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and disputing (I Timothy iii. 1-3, 8).

Praying women and children are invaluable to God, but if their praying is not supplemented by praying men, there will be a great loss in the power of prayer--a great breach and depreciation in the value of prayer, great paralysis in the energy of the Gospel. Jesus Christ spake a parable unto the people, telling them that men ought always to pray and not faint. Men who are strong in everything else ought to be strong in prayer, and never yield to discouragement, weakness or depression. Men who are brave, persistent, redoubtable in other pursuits ought to be full of courage, unfainting, strong-hearted in prayer.

Men are to pray; all men are to pray. Men, as distinguished from women, men in their strength in their wisdom. There is an absolute, specific

command that the men pray; there is an absolute imperative necessity that men pray. The first of beings, man, should also be first in prayer.

The men are to pray for men. The direction is specific and classified. Just underneath we have a specific direction with regard to women. About prayer, its importance, wideness and practice the Bible here deals with the men in contrast to, and distinct from, the women. The men are definitely commanded, seriously charged, and warmly exhorted to pray. Perhaps it was that men were averse to prayer, or indifferent to it; it may be that they deemed it a small thing, and gave to it neither time nor value nor significance. But God would have all men pray, and so the great Apostle lifts the subject into prominence and emphasizes its importance.

For prayer is of transcendent importance. Prayer is the mightiest agent to advance God's work. Praying hearts and hands only can do God's work. Prayer succeeds when all else fails. Prayer has won great victories, and rescued, with notable triumph, God's saints when every other hope was gone. Men who know how to pray are the greatest boon God can give to earth--they are the richest gift earth can offer heaven. Men who know how to use this weapon of prayer are God's best soldiers. His mightiest leaders.

Praying men are God's chosen leaders. The distinction between the leaders that God brings to the front to lead and bless His people, and those leaders who owe their position of leadership to a worldly, selfish, unsanctified selection, is this, God's leaders are pre-eminently men of prayer. This distinguishes them as the simple, Divine attestation of their call, the seal of their separation by God. Whatever of other graces or gifts they may have, the gift and grace of prayer towers above them all. In whatever else they may share or differ, in the gift of prayer, they are one.

What would God's leaders be without prayer? Strip Moses of his power in prayer, a gift that made him eminent in pagan estimate, and the crown is taken from his head, the food and fire of his faith are gone. Elijah, without his praying, would have neither record nor place in the Divine legation, his life insipid, cowardly, its energy, defiance and fire gone. Without Elijah's praying the Jordan would never have yielded to the stroke of his mantle, nor would the stem angel of death have honored him with the chariot and horses of fire. The argument that God used to quiet the fears and convince Ananias of Paul's condition and sincerity is the epitome of his history, the solution of his life and work--"Behold he prayeth."

Paul, Luther, Wesley--what would these chosen ones of God be without the distinguishing and controlling element of prayer? They were leaders for God because mighty in prayer. They were not leaders because of brilliancy in thought, because exhaustless in resources, because of their magnificent culture or native endowment, but leaders because by the power of prayer they could command the power of God. Praying men means much more than men who say prayers; much more than men who pray by habit. It means men with whom prayer is a mighty force, an energy that moves heaven and pours untold treasures of good on earth.

Praying men are the safety of the Church from the materialism that is affecting all its plans and polity, and which is hardening the life-blood. The insinuation circulates as a secret, deadly poison that

the Church is not so dependent on purely spiritual forces as it used to be--that changed times and changed conditions have brought it out of its spiritual straits and dependencies and put it where other forces can bear it to its climax. A fatal snare of this kind has allured the Church into worldly embraces, dazzled her leaders, weakened her foundations, and shorn her of much of her beauty and strength. Praying men are the saviours of the Church from this material tendency. They pour into it the original spiritual forces, lift it off the sand-bars of materialism, and press it out into the ocean depths of spiritual power. Praying men keep God in the Church in full force; keep His hand on the helm, and train the Church in its lessons of strength and trust.

The number and efficiency of the labourers in God's vineyard in all lands is dependent on the men of prayer. The mightiness of these men of prayer increases, by the divinely arranged process, the number and success of the consecrated labours. Prayer opens wide their doors of access, gives holy aptness to enter, and holy boldness, firmness, and fruitage. Praying men are needed in all fields of spiritual labour. There is no position in the Church of God, high or low, which can be well filled without instant prayer. No position where Christians are found that does not demand the full play of a faith that always prays and never faints. Praying men are needed in the house of business, as well as in the house of God, that they may order and direct trade, not according to the maxims of this world, but according to Bible precepts and the maxims of the heavenly world.

Men of prayer are needed especially in the positions of Church influence, honour, and power. These leaders of Church thought, of Church work, and of Church life should be men of signal power in prayer. It is the praying heart that sanctifies the toil and skill of the hands, and the toil and wisdom of the head. Prayer keeps work in the line of God's will, and keeps thought in the line of God's Word. The solemn responsibilities of leadership, in a large or limited sphere, in God's Church should be so hedged about with prayer that between it and the world there should be an impassable gulf, so elevated and purified by prayer that neither cloud nor night should stain the radiance nor dim the sight of a constant meridian view of God. Many Church leaders seem to think if they can be prominent as men of business, of money, influence, of thought, of plans, of scholarly attainments, of eloquent gifts, of taking, conspicuous activities, that these are enough, and will atone for the absence of the higher spiritual power which much praying only can give. But how vain and paltry are these in the serious work of bringing glory to God, controlling the Church for Him, and bringing it into full accord with its Divine mission.

Praying men are the men that have done so much for God in the past. They are the ones who have won the victories for God, and spoiled His foes. They are the ones who have set up His Kingdom in the very camps of His enemies. There are no other conditions of success in this day. The twentieth century has no relief statute to suspend the necessity or force of prayer--no substitute by which its gracious ends can be secured. We are shut up to this, praying hands only can build for God. They are God's mighty ones on earth, His master-builders. They may be destitute of all else, but with the wrestlings and prevailings of a simple-hearted faith they are mighty, the mightiest for God. Church leaders may be gifted in all else, but without this greatest of gifts they are as Samson shorn of his locks, or as the Temple without the Divine presence or the Divine glory, and on whose altars the heavenly

flame has died.

The only protection and rescue from worldliness lie in our intense and radical spirituality; and our only hope for the existence and maintenance of this high, saving spirituality, under God, is in the purest and most aggressive leadership--a leadership that knows the secret power of prayer, the sign by which the Church has conquered, and that has conscience, conviction, and courage to hold true to her symbols, true to her traditions, and true to the hidings of her power. We need this prayerful leadership; we must have it, that by the perfection and beauty of its holiness, by the strength and elevation of its faith, by the potency and pressure of its prayers, by the authority and spotlessness of its example, by the fire and contagion of its zeal, by the singularity, sublimity, and unworldliness of its piety, it may influence God and hold and mould the Church to its heavenly pattern.

Such leaders, how mightily they are felt. How their flame arouses the Church! How they stir it by the force of their Pentecostal presence! How they embattle and give victory by the conflicts and triumphs of their own faith! How they fashion it by the impress and importunity of their prayers! How they inoculate it by the contagion and fire of their holiness! How they lead the march in great spiritual revolutions! How the Church is raised from the dead by the resurrection call of their sermons! Holiness springs up in their wake as flowers at the voice of spring, and where they tread the desert blooms as the garden of the Lord. God's cause demands such leaders along the whole line of official position from subaltern to superior. How feeble, aimless, or worldly are our efforts, how demoralised and vain for God's work without them!

The gift of these leaders is not in the range of ecclesiastical power. They are God's sifts. Their being, their presence, their number, and their ability are the tokens of His favour; their lack the sure sign of His disfavour, the presage of His withdrawal. Let the Church of God be on her knees before the Lord of hosts, that He may more mightily endow the leaders we already have, and put others in rank, and lead all along the line of our embattled front.

The world is coming into the Church at many points and in many ways. It oozes in; it pours in; it comes in with brazen front or soft, insinuating disguise; it comes in at the top and comes in at the bottom; and percolates through many a hidden way.

For praying men and holy men we are looking--men whose presence in the Church will make it like a censer of holiest incense flaming up to God. With God the man counts for everything. Rites, forms, organizations are of small moment; unless they are backed by the holiness of the man they are offensive in His sight. "Incense is an abomination unto Me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting."

Why does God speak so strongly against His own ordinances? Personal purity had failed. The impure man tainted all the sacred institutions of God and defiled them. God regards the man in so important a way as to put a kind of discount on all else. Men have built Him glorious temples and have striven and exhausted themselves to please God by all manner of gifts; but in lofty strains He has rebuked these proud worshippers and rejected their princely gifts.

"Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool: where is the house

that ye build unto Me? and where is the place of My rest? For all those things hath Mine hand made, and all those things hath been, saith the Lord. He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol." Turning away in disgust from these costly and profane offerings, He declares: "But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word."

This truth that God regards the personal purity of the man is fundamental. This truth suffers when ordinances are made much of and forms of worship multiply. The man and his spiritual character depreciate as Church ceremonials increase. The simplicity of worship is lost in religious aesthetics, or in the gaudiness of religious forms.

This truth that the personal purity of the individual is the only thing God cares for is lost sight of when the Church begins to estimate men for what they have. When the Church eyes a man's money, social standing, his belongings in any way, then spiritual values are at a fearful discount, and the tear of penitence, the heaviness of guilt are never seen at her portals. Worldly bribes have opened and stained its pearly gates by the entrance of the impure.

This truth that God is looking after personal purity is swallowed up when the Church has a greed for numbers. "Not numbers, but personal purity is our aim," said the fathers of Methodism. The parading of Church statistics is mightily against the grain of spiritual religion. Eyeing numbers greatly hinders the looking after personal purity. The increase of quantity is generally at a loss of quality. Bulk abates preciousness.

The age of Church organization and Church machinery is not an age noted for elevated and strong personal piety. Machinery looks for engineers and organizations for generals, and not for saints, to run them. The simplest organization may aid purity as well as strength; but beyond that narrow limit organization swallows up the individual and is careless of personal purity; push, activity, enthusiasm, zeal for an organization, come in as the vicious substitutes for spiritual character. Holiness and all the spiritual graces of hardy culture and slow growth are discarded as too slow and too costly for the progress and rush of the age. By dint of machinery, new organizations, and spiritual weakness, results are vainly expected to be secured which can only be secured by faith, prayer, and waiting on God.

The man and his spiritual character is what God is looking after. If men, holy men, can be turned out by the easy process of Church machinery readier and better than by the old-time processes, we would gladly invest in every new and improved patent; but we do not believe it. We adhere to the old way--the way the holy prophets went, the king's highway of holiness.

An example of this is afforded by the case of William Wilberforce. High in social position, a member of Parliament, the friend of Pitt the famous statesman, he was not called of God to forsake his high social position nor to quit Parliament, but he was called to order his life according to the pattern set by Jesus Christ and to give himself to prayer. To read the story of his life is to be impressed with its holiness and its devotion to the claims of the quiet hours alone with God. His conversion was announced to his friends--to Pitt and

others--by letter.

In the beginning of his religious career he records: "My chief reasons for a day of secret prayer are, (1) That the state of public affairs is very critical and calls for earnest deprecation of the Divine displeasure. (2) My station in life is a very difficult one, wherein I am at a loss to know how to act. Direction, therefore, should be specially sought from time to time. (3) I have been graciously supported in difficult situations of a public nature. I have gone out and returned home in safety, and found a kind reception has attended me. I would humbly hope, too, that what I am now doing is a proof that God has not withdrawn His Holy Spirit from me. I am covered with mercies."

The recurrence of his birthday led him again to review his situation and employment. "I find," he wrote, "that books alienate my heart from God as much as anything. I have been framing a plan of study for myself, but let me remember but one thing is needful, that if my heart cannot be kept in a spiritual state without so much prayer, meditation, Scripture reading, etc., as are incompatible with study, I must seek first the righteousness of God." All were to be surrendered for spiritual advance. "I fear," we find him saying, "that I have not studied the Scriptures enough. Surely in the summer recess I ought to read the Scriptures an hour or two every day, besides prayer, devotional reading and meditation. God will prosper me better if I wait on Him. The experience of all good men shows that without constant prayer and watchfulness the life of God in the soul stagnates. Doddridge's morning and evening devotions were serious matters. Colonel Gardiner always spent hours in prayer in the morning before he went forth. Bonnell practised private devotions largely morning and evening, and repeated Psalms dressing and undressing to raise his mind to heavenly things. "I would look up to God to make the means effectual. I fear that my devotions are too much hurried, that I do not read Scripture enough. I must grow in grace; I must love God more; I must feel the power of Divine things more. Whether I am more or less learned signifies not. Whether even I execute the work which I deem useful is comparatively unimportant. But beware my soul of lukewarmness."

The New Year began with the Holy Communion and new vows. "I will press forward," he wrote, "and labour to know God better and love Him more. Assuredly I may, because God will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, and the Holy Spirit will shed abroad the love of God in the heart. O, then, pray, pray; be earnest, press forward and follow on to know the Lord. Without watchfulness, humiliation and prayer, the sense of Divine things must languish." To prepare for the future he said he found nothing more effectual than private prayer and the serious perusal of the New Testament.

And again: "I must put down that I have lately too little time for private devotions. I can sadly confirm Doddridge's remark that when we go on ill in the closet we commonly do so everywhere else. I must mend here. I am afraid of getting into what Owen calls the trade of sinning and repenting ... Lord help me, the shortening of private devotions starves the soul; it grows lean and faint. This must not be. I must redeem more time. I see how lean in spirit I become without full allowance of time for private devotions; I must be careful to be watching unto prayer."

At another tune he puts on record: "I must try what I long ago heard

was the rule of E--the great upholsterer, who, when he came from Bond Street to his little villa, always first retired to his Closet. I have been keeping too late hours, and hence have had but a hurried half hour to myself. Surely the experience of all good men confirms the proposition, that without due measure of private devotions, the soul will grow lean."

To his son he wrote: "Let me conjure you not to be seduced into neglecting, curtailing or hurrying over your morning prayers. Of all things, guard against neglecting God in the closet. There is nothing more fatal to the life and power of religion. More solitude and earlier hours--prayer three times a day at least. How much better might I serve if I cultivated a closer communication with God."

Wilberforce knew the secret of a holy life. Is that not where most of us fail? We are so busy with other things, so immersed even in doing good and in carrying on the Lord's work, that we neglect the quiet seasons of prayer with God, and before we are aware of it our soul is lean and impoverished.

"One night alone in prayer," says Spurgeon, "might make us new men, changed from poverty of soul to spiritual wealth, from trembling to triumphing. We have an example of it in the life of Jacob. A foretime the crafty shuffler, always bargaining and calculating, unlovely in almost every respect, yet one night in prayer turned the supplanter into a prevailing prince, and robed "him with celestial grandeur. From that night he lives on the sacred page as one of the nobility of heaven. Could not we, at least now and then, in these weary earthbound years, hedge about a single night for such enriching traffic with the skies? What, have we no sacred ambition? Are we deaf to the yearnings of Divine love? Yet, my brethren, for wealth and for science men will cheerfully quit their warm couches, and cannot we do it now and again for the love of God, and the good of souls? Where is our zeal, our gratitude, our sincerity? I am ashamed while I thus upbraid both myself and you. May we often tarry at Jabbok, and cry with Jacob, as he grasped the angel?

"With thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day."

Surely, brethren, if we have given whole days to folly, we can afford a space for heavenly wisdom. Time was when we gave whole nights to chambering and wantonness, to dancing and the world's revelry; we did not tire then; we were chiding the sun that he rose so soon, and wishing the hours would lag awhile that we might delight in wilder merriment and perhaps deeper sin. Oh, wherefore, should we weary in heavenly employments? Why grow we weary when asked to watch with our Lord? Up sluggish heart, Jesus calls thee! Rise and go forth to meet the Heavenly Friend in the place where He manifests Himself."

We can never expect to grow in the likeness of our Lord unless we follow His example and give more time to communion with the Father. A revival of real praying would produce a spiritual revolution.
