

III. THE NECESSITY FOR PRAYING MEN

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."--Ephes. 6:18.

"Withal praying for us also that God would open unto us a door of utterance to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in bonds: that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak."--Col. 4:3.

One of the crying things of our day is for men whose faith, prayers and study of the Word of God have been vitalized, and a transcript of that Word is written on their hearts, and who will give it forth as the incorruptible seed that liveth and abideth forever. Nothing more is needed to clear up the haze by which a critical unfaith has eclipsed the Word of God than the fidelity of the pulpit in its unwavering allegiance to the Bible and the fearless proclamation of its truth. Without this the standard-bearer fails, and wavering and confusion all along the ranks follow. The pulpit has wrought its mightiest work in the days of its unswerving loyalty to the Word of God.

In close connection with this, must we have men of prayer, men in high and low places who hold to and practice Scriptural praying. While the pulpit must hold to its unswerving loyalty to the Word of God, it must, at the same time, be loyal to the doctrine of prayer which that same Word illustrates and enforces upon mankind.

Schools, colleges and education considered simply as such cannot be regarded as being leaders in carrying forward the work of God's kingdom in the world. They have neither the right, the will nor the power to do the work. This is to be accomplished by the preached Word, delivered in the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, sown with prayerful hands, and watered with the tears of praying hearts. This is the divine law, and so "nominated in the bond." We are shut up and sealed to it--we would follow the Lord.

Men are demanded for the great work of soul saving, and men must go. It is no angelic or impersonal force which is needed. Human hearts baptized with the spirit of prayer, must bear the burden of this message, and human tongues on fire as the result of earnest, persistent prayer, must declare the Word of God to dying men.

The Church, today, needs praying men to execute her solemn and pressing responsibility to meet the fearful crisis which is facing her. The crying need of the times is for men, in increased numbers--God-fearing men, praying men, Holy Ghost men, men who can endure hardness, who will count not their lives dear unto themselves, but count all things but dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Saviour. The men who are so greatly needed in this age of the Church are those who have learned the business of praying,--learned it upon their knees, learned it in the need and agony of their own hearts.

Praying men are the one commanding need of this day, as of all other days, in which God is to have or make a showing. Men who pray are, in reality, the only religious men, and it takes a full-measured man to pray. Men of prayer are the only men who do or can represent God in this world. No cold, irreligious, prayerless man can claim the right. They misrepresent God in all His work, and all His plans. Praying men are the only men who have influence with God, the only kind of men to

whom God commits Himself and His Gospel. Praying men are the only men in which the Holy Spirit dwells, for the Holy Spirit and prayer go hand-in-hand. The Holy Spirit never descends upon prayerless men. He never fills them, He never empowers them. There is nothing whatever in common between the Spirit of God and men who do not pray. The Spirit dwells only in a prayer atmosphere.

In doing God's work there is no substitute for praying. The men of prayer cannot be displaced with other kinds of men. Men of financial skill, men of education; men of worldly influence--none of these can possibly be put in substitution for the men of prayer. The life, the vigour, the motive-power of God's work is formed by praying men. A vitally diseased heart is not a more fearful symptom of approaching death than non-praying men are of spiritual atrophy.

The men to whom Jesus Christ committed the fortunes and destiny of His Church were men of prayer. To no other kind of men has God ever committed Himself in this world. The Apostles were preeminently men of prayer. They gave themselves to prayer. They made praying their chief business. It was first in point of importance and first in results. God never has, and He never will, commit the weighty interests of His kingdom to prayerless men, who do not make prayer a conspicuous and controlling factor in their lives. Men never rise to any eminence of piety who do not pray. Men of piety are always men of prayer. Men are never noted for the simplicity and strength of their faith who are not preeminently men of prayer. Piety flourishes nowhere so rapidly and so rankly as in the closet. The closet is the garden of faith.

The Apostles allowed no duty, however sacred, to so engage them as to infringe upon their time and prevent them from making prayer the main thing. The Word of God was ministered by apostolic fidelity and zeal. It was spoken by men with apostolic commissions and whose heads the fiery tongues of Pentecost had baptized. The Word was pointless and powerless without they were freshly endued with power by continuous and mighty prayer. The seed of God's Word must be saturated in prayer to make it germinate. It grows readier and roots deeper when it is prayer-soaked.

The Apostles were praying men, themselves. They were teachers of prayer, and trained their disciples in the school of prayer. They urged prayer upon their disciples not only that they might attain to the loftiest eminence of faith, but that they might be the most powerful factors in advancing God's kingdom.

Jesus Christ was the divinely appointed leader of God's people, and no one thing in His life proves His eminent fitness for that office so fully as His habit of prayer. Nothing is more suggestive of thought than Christ's continual praying, and nothing is more conspicuous about Him than prayer. His campaigns were arranged, His victories gained, in the struggles and communion of His all-night praying. His praying rent the heavens. Moses and Elijah and the Transfiguration glory waited on His praying. His miracles and His teaching had their force from the same source. Gethsemane's praying crimsoned Calvary with serenity and glory. His prayer makes the history and hastens the triumphs of His Church. What an inspiration and command to prayer is Christ's life! What a comment on its worth! How He shames our lives by His praying!

Like all His followers who have drawn God nearer to the world and lifted the world nearer to God, Jesus was the man of prayer, made of

God a leader and commander to His people. His leadership was one of prayer. A great leader He was, because He was great in prayer. All great leaders for God have fashioned their leadership in the wrestlings of their closets. Many great men have led and moulded the Church who have not been great in prayer, but they were great only in their plans, great for their opinions, great for their organization, great by natural gifts, by the force of genius or of character. However, they were not great for God. But Jesus Christ was a great leader for God. His was the great leadership of great praying. God was in His leadership greatly because prayer was in it greatly. We might just well express the wish that we be taught by Him to pray, and to pray more and more.

Herein has been the secret of the men of prayer in the past history of the Church. Their hearts were after God, their desires were on Him, their prayers were addressed to Him. They communed with Him, sought nothing of the world, sought great things of God, wrestled with Him, conquered all opposing forces, and opened up the channel of faith deep and broad between them and heaven. And all this was done by the use of prayer. Holy meditations, spiritual desires, heavenly drawings, swayed their intellects, enriched their emotions, and filled and enlarged their hearts. And all this was so because they were first of all men of prayer.

The men who have thus communed with God and who have sought after Him with their whole hearts, have always risen to consecrated eminence, and no man has ever risen to this eminence whose flames of holy desire have not all been dead to the world and all aglow for God and heaven. Nor have they ever risen to the heights of the higher spiritual experiences unless prayer and the spirit of prayer have been conspicuous and controlling factors in their lives.

The entire consecration of many of God's children stands out distinctly like towering mountain-peaks. Why is this? How did they ascend to these heights? What brought them so near to God? What made them so Christ-like? The answer is easy-prayer. They prayed much, prayed long, and drank deeper and deeper still. They asked, they sought, and they knocked, till heaven opened its richest inner treasures of grace to them. Prayer was the Jacob's Ladder by which they scaled those holy and blessed heights, and the way by which the angels of God came down to and ministered to them.

The men of spiritual mould and might always value prayer. They took time to be alone with God. Their praying was no hurried performance. They had many serious wants to be relieved, and many weighty pleas they had to offer. Many large supplies they must secure. They had to do much silent waiting before God, and much patient iteration and reiteration to utter to Him. Prayer was the only channel through which supplies came, and was the only way to utter pleas. The only acceptable waiting before God of which they knew anything was prayer. They valued praying. It was more precious to them than all jewels, more excellent than any good, more to be valued than the greatest good of earth. They esteemed it, valued it, prized it, and did it. They pressed it to its farthest limits, tested its greatest results, and secured its most glorious patrimony. To them prayer was the one great thing to be appreciated and used.

The Apostles above everything else were praying men, and left the impress of their prayer example and teaching upon the early Church. But

the Apostles are dead, and times and men have changed. They have no successors by official entail or heirship. And the times have no commission to make other apostles. Prayer is the entail to spiritual and apostolical leadership. Unfortunately the times are not prayerful times. God's cause just now needs very greatly praying leaders. Other things may be needed, but above all else this is the crying demand of these times and the urgent first need of the Church.

This is the day of great wealth in the Church and of wonderful material resources. But unfortunately the affluence of material resources is a great enemy and a severe hindrance to strong spiritual forces. It is an invariable law that the presence of attractive and potent material forces creates a trust in them, and by the same inevitable law, creates distrust in the spiritual forces of the Gospel. They are two masters which cannot be served at one and the same time. For just in proportion as the mind is fixed on one, will it be drawn away from the other. The days of great financial prosperity in the Church have not been days of great religious prosperity. Moneyed men and praying men are not synonymous terms.

Paul in 1 Tim. 2, emphasizes the need of men to pray. Church leaders in his estimation are to be conspicuous for their praying. Prayer ought and must of necessity shape their characters, and must be one of their distinguishing characteristics. Prayer ought to be one of their most powerful elements, so much so that it cannot be hid. Prayer ought to make Church leaders notable. Character, official duty, reputation and life, all should be shaped by prayer. The mighty forces of prayer lie in its praying leaders in a marked way. The standing obligation to pray rests in a peculiar sense on Church leaders. Wise will the Church be to discover this prime truth and give prominence to it.

It may be laid down as an axiom, that God needs, first of all, leaders in the Church who will be first in prayer, men with whom prayer is habitual and characteristic, men who know the primacy of prayer. But even more than a habit of prayer, and more than prayer being characteristic of them, Church leaders are to be impregnated with prayer--men whose lives are made and moulded by prayer, whose heart and life are made up of prayer. These are the men--the only men--God can use in the furtherance of His kingdom and the implanting of His message in the hearts of men.