

IX. PRAYER-EQUIPMENT FOR PREACHERS

"Go back! Back to that upper room; back to your knees; back to searching of heart and habit, thought and life; back to pleading, praying, waiting, till the Spirit of the Lord floods the soul with light, and you are endued with power from on high. Then go forth in the power of Pentecost, and the Christ-life shall be lived, and the works of Christ shall be done. You shall open blind eyes, cleanse foul hearts, break men's fetters, and save men's souls. In the power of the indwelling Spirit, miracles become the commonplace of daily living."--Samuel Chadwick.

Almost the last words uttered by our Lord before His ascension to heaven, were those addressed to the eleven disciples, words which, really, were spoken to, and having directly to do with, preachers, words which indicate very clearly the needed fitness which these men must have to preach the Gospel, beginning at Jerusalem: "But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem," says Jesus, "till ye be endued with power from on high."

Two things are very clearly set forth in these urgent directions. First, the power of the Holy Ghost for which they must tarry. This was to be received after their conversion, an indispensable requisite, equipping them for the great task set before them. Secondly, the "promise of the Father," this "power from on high," would come to them after they had waited in earnest, continuous prayer. A reference to Acts 1:14 will reveal that these same men, with the women, "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication," and so continued until the Day of Pentecost, when the power from on high descended upon them.

This "power from on high," as important to those early preachers as it is to present-day preachers, was not the force of a mighty intellect, holding in its grasp great truths, flooding them with light, and forming them into verbal shapeliness and beauty. Nor was it the acquisition of great learning, or the result of an address, faultless and complete by rule of rhetoric. None of these things. Nor was this spiritual power held then, nor is it held now, in the keeping of any earthly sources of power. The effect and energy of all human forces are essentially different in source and character, and do not at all result from this "power from on high." The transmission of such power is directly from God, a bestowal, in rich measure, of the force and energy which pertains only to God, and which is transmitted to His messengers only in answer to a longing, wrestling attitude of his soul before his Master, conscious of his own impotency and seeking the omnipotency of the Lord he serves, in order more fully to understand the given Word and to preach the same to his fellow-men.

The "power from on high" may be found in combination with all sources of human power, but is not to be confounded with them, is not dependent upon them, and must never be superseded by them. Whatever of human gift, talent or force a preacher may possess it is not to be made paramount, or even conspicuous. It must be hidden, lost, overshadowed by this "power from on high." The forces of intellect and culture may all be present, but without this inward, heaven-given power, all spiritual effort is vain and unsuccessful. Even when lacking the other equipment but having this "power from on high," a preacher cannot but succeed. It is the one essential, all-important vital force which a messenger of God must possess to give wings to his message, to put life into his preaching, and to enable him to speak the Word with acceptance

and power.

A word is necessary here. Distinctions need to be kept in mind. We must think clearly upon this question. "Power from on high" means "the unction of the Holy One" resting on and abiding in the preacher. This is not so much a power which bears witness to a man being the child of God as it is a preparation for delivering the Word to others. Unction must be distinguished from pathos. Pathos may exist in a sermon while unction is entirely absent. So also, may unction be present and pathos absent. Both may exist together; but they are not to be confused, nor be made to appear to be the same thing. Pathos promotes emotion, tender feeling, sometimes tears. Quite often it results from the relation of an affecting incident, or when the tender side is peculiarly appealed to. But pathos is neither the direct nor indirect result of the Holy Spirit resting upon the preacher as he preaches.

But unction is. Here we are given the evidence of the workings of an undefinable agency in the preacher, which results directly from the presence of this "power from on high," deep, conscious, life-giving and carrying, giving power and point to the preached Word. It is the element in a sermon which arouses, stirs, convicts and moves the souls of sinners and saints. This is what the preacher requires, the great equipment for which he should wait and pray. This "unction of the Holy One" delivers from dryness, saves from superficiality, and gives authority to preaching. It is the one quality which distinguishes the preacher of the Gospel from other men who speak in public; it is that which makes a sermon unique, unlike the deliverance of any other public speaker.

Prayer is the language of a man burdened with a sense of need. It is the voice of the beggar, conscious of his poverty, asking of another the things he needs. It is not only the language of lack, but of felt lack, of lack consciously realized. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," means not only that the fact of poverty of spirit brings the blessing, but also that poverty of spirit is realized, known and acknowledged. Prayer is the language of those who need something--something which they, themselves, cannot supply but which God has promised them, and for which they ask. In the end, poor praying and prayerlessness amount to the same thing, for poor praying proceeds from a lack of the sense of need, while prayerlessness has its origin in the same soil. Not to pray is not only to declare there is nothing needed, but to admit to a non-realization of that need. This is what aggravates the sin of prayerlessness. It represents an attempt at instituting an independence of God, a self-sufficient ruling of God out of the life. It is a declaration made to God that we do not need Him, and hence do not pray to Him.

This is the state in which the Holy Spirit, in His messages to the Seven Churches in Asia, found the Laodicean Church and "the Laodicean state" has come to stand for one in which God is ruled out, expelled from the life, put out of the pulpit. The entire condemnation of this Church is summed up in one expression: "Because thou sayest, I have need of nothing," the most alarming state into which a person, or church or preacher can come. Trusting in its riches, in its social position, in things outward and material, the Church at Laodicea omitted God, leaving Him out of their church plans and church work, and declared, by their acts and by their omission of prayer, "I have need of nothing."

No wonder the self-satisfied declaration brought forth its sentence of punishment--"Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." The idea conveyed is that such a backslidden state of heart is as repulsive to God as an emetic is to the human stomach, and as the stomach expels that which is objectionable, so Almighty God threatens to "spue out of His mouth" these people who were in such a religious condition so repulsive to Him. All of it was traceable to a prayerless state of heart, for no one can read this word of the Spirit to this Laodicean Church and not see that the very core of their sin was prayerlessness. How could a Church, given to prayer, openly and vauntingly declare, "I have need of nothing," in the face of the Spirit's assertion that it needed everything, "Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked"? In addition to their sin of self-sufficiency and of independence of God, the Laodiceans were spiritually blind. Oh, what dullness of sight, what blindness of soul! These people were prayerless, and knew not the import of such prayerlessness. They lacked everything which goes to make up spiritual life, and force, and self-denying piety, and vainly supposed themselves to need nothing but material wealth, thus making temporal possessions a substitute for spiritual wealth, leaving God entirely out of their activities, relying upon human and material resources to do the work only possible to the divine and supernatural, and secured alone by prayer.

Nor let it be forgotten that this letter (in common with the other six letters) was primarily addressed to the preacher in charge of the church. All this strengthens the impression that the "angel of the church" himself was in this lukewarm state. He himself was living a prayerless life, relying upon things other than God, practically saying, "I have need of nothing." For these words are the natural expression of the spirit of him who does not pray, who does not care for God, and who does not feel the need of Him in his life, in his work and in his preaching. Furthermore, the words of the Spirit seem to indicate that the "angel of the church" at Laodicea was indirectly responsible for this sad condition into which the Laodicean Church had fallen.

May not this sort of a church be found in modern times? Is it not likely that we could discover some preachers of modern times who fall under a similar condemnation to that passed upon the "angel of the church" of Laodicea?

Preachers of the present age excel those of the past in many, possibly in all, human elements of success. They are well abreast of the age in learning, research, and intellectual vigour. But these things neither insure "power from on high" nor guarantee a live, thriving religious experience, or righteous life. These purely human gifts do not bring with them an insight into the deep things of God, or strong faith in the Scriptures, or an intense loyalty to God's divine revelation.

The presence of these earthly talents even in the most commanding and impressive form, and richest measure do not in the least abate the necessity for the added endowment of the Holy Spirit. Herein lies the great danger menacing the pulpit of today. All around us we see a tendency to substitute human gifts and worldly attainments for that supernatural, inward power which comes from on high in answer to earnest prayer.

In many instances modern preaching seems to fail in the very thing which should create and distinguish true preaching, which is essential to its being, and which alone can make of it a divine and powerfully aggressive agency. It lacks, in short, "the power from on high" which alone can make it a living thing. It fails to become the channel through which God's saving power can be made to appeal to men's consciences and hearts.

Quite often, modern preaching fails at this vital point, for lack of exercising a potent influence which disturbs men in their sleep of security, and awakens them to a sense of need and of peril. There is a growing need of an appeal which will quicken and arouse the conscience from its ignoble stupor and give it a sense of wrong-doing and a corresponding sense of repentance. There is need of a message which searches into the secret places of man's being, dividing, as it were, the joints and the marrow, and laying bare the mysterious depths before himself and his God. Much of our present-day preaching is lacking in that quality which infuses new blood into the heart and veins of faith, that arms it with courage and skill for the battle with the powers of darkness, and secures it a victory over the forces of the world.

Such high and noble ends can never be accomplished by human qualifications, nor can these great results be secured by a pulpit clothed only with the human elements of power, however gracious, comfortable, and helpful they may be. The Holy Spirit is needed. He alone can equip the ministry for its difficult and responsible work in and out of the pulpit. Oh, that the present-day ministry may come to see that its one great need is an endowment of "power from on high," and that this one need can be secured only by the use of God's appointed means of grace--the ministry of prayer.

Prayer is needed by the preacher in order that his personal relations with God may be maintained and that because there is no difference between him and any other kind of a man in so far as his personal salvation is concerned. This he must work out "with fear and trembling," just as all other men must do. Thus prayer is of vast importance to the preacher in order that he may possess a growing religious experience, and be enabled to live such a life that his character and conduct will back up his preaching and give force to his message.

A man must have prayer in his pulpit work, for no minister can preach effectively without prayer. He also has use for prayer in praying for others. Paul was a notable example of a preacher who constantly prayed for those to whom he ministered.

But we come, now, to another sphere of prayer, that of the people praying for the preacher. "Brethren, pray for us," This is the cry which Paul set in motion, and which has been the cry of spiritually minded preachers--those who know God and who know that value of prayer--in all succeeding ages. No condition of success or the reverse of it must abate the cry. No degree of culture, no abundance of talents, must cause that cry to cease. The learned preacher, as well as the unlearned, has equal need to call out to the people they serve, "Withal, praying also for us." Such a cry voices the felt need of a preacher's heart who feels the need there is for sympathies of a people to be in harmony with its minister. It is but the expression of the inner soul of a preacher who feels his insufficiency for the tremendous responsibilities of the pulpit, who realizes his weakness and his need

of the divine unction, and who throws himself upon the prayers of his congregation, and calls out to them, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication, in the Spirit, and for me, that utterance may be given me." It is the cry of deep felt want in the heart of the preacher who feels he must have this prayer made specifically for him that he may do his work in God's own way.

When this request to a people to pray for the preacher is cold, formal and official, it freezes in-stead of fructifies. To be ignorant of the necessity for the cry, is to be ignorant of the sources of spiritual success. To fail to stress the cry, and to fail to have responses to it, is to sap the sources of spiritual life. Preachers must sound out the cry to the Church of God. Saints everywhere and of every kind, and of every faith speedily respond and pray for the preacher. The imperative need of the work demands it. "Pray for us," is the natural cry of the hearts of God's called men--faithful preachers of the Word.

Saintly praying in the early Church helped apostolic preaching mightily, and rescued apostolic men from many dire straits. It can do the same thing today. It can open doors for apostolic labours, and apostolic lips to utter bravely and truly the Gospel message. Apostolic movements wait their ordering from prayer, and avenues long closed are opened to apostolic entrance by and through the power of prayer. The messenger receives his message and is schooled as to how to carry and deliver the message by prayer. The forerunner of the Gospel, and that which prepares the way, is prayer; not only by the praying of the messenger himself, but by the praying of the Church of God.

Writing along this line in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul is first general in his request and says, "Brethren, pray for us." Then he becomes more minute and particular:

"Finally, brethren, pray for us," he goes on, "that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you. And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for all men have not faith."

The Revised Version has for "free course" the word "run." "The Word" means doctrine, and the idea conveyed is that this doctrine of the Gospel is rapidly propagated, a metaphor taken from the running of a race, and is an exhortation to exert one's self, to strive hard, to expend strength. Thus the prayer for the spread of the Gospel gives the same energy to the Word of the Lord, as the greatest outlay of strength gives success to the racer. Prayer in the pew gives the preached Word energy, facility, and success. Preaching without the backing of mighty praying is as limp and worthless an effort as can be imagined. Prayerlessness in the pew is a serious hindrance to the running of the Word of the Lord.

The preaching of the Word of the Lord falls to run and be glorified from many causes. The difficulty may lie with the preacher himself, should his outward conduct be out of harmony with the rule of the Scriptures and his own profession. The Word lived must be in accord with the Word delivered; the life must be in harmony with the sermon. The preacher's spirit and behaviour out of the pulpit must run parallel with the Word of the Lord spoken in the pulpit. Otherwise, a man is an obstacle to the success of his own message.

Again, the Word of the Lord may fail to run, may be seriously

encumbered and crippled by the inconsistent lives of those who are the hearers thereof. Bad living in the pew will seriously cripple the Word of the Lord, as attempts to run on its appointed course. Unrighteous lives among the laity heavily weights down the Word of the Lord and hampers the work of the ministry. Yet prayer will remove this burden which seriously handicaps the preached Word. It will tend to do this in a direct way, or in an indirect manner. For just as you set laymen to praying, for the preacher or even for themselves, it awakens conscience, stirs the heart, and tends to correct evil ways and to promote good living. No man will pray long and continue in sin. Praying breaks up bad living, while bad living breaks down prayer. Praying goes into bankruptcy when a man goes to sinning. To obey the cry of the preacher, "Brethren, pray for us," sets men to doing that which will induce right living in them, and will tend to break them away from sin. So it comes about that it is worth no little to get the laity to pray for the ministry. Prayer helps the preacher, is an aid to the sermon, assists the hearer and promotes right living in the pew.

Prayer also moves him who prays for the preacher and for the Word of the Lord, to use all his influence to remove any hindrance to that Word which he may see, and which lies in his power to remove.

But prayer reaches the preacher directly. God hears the praying of a church for its minister. Prayer for the preached Word is a direct aid to it. Prayer for the preacher gives wings to the Gospel, as well as feet. Prayer makes the Word of the Lord go forward strongly and rapidly. It takes the shackles off of the message, and gives it a chance to run straight to the hearts of sinners and saints, alike. It opens the way, clears the track, furnishes a free course. The failure of many a preacher may be found just here. He was hampered, hindered, crippled by a prayerless church. Non-praying officials stood in the way of the Word preached, and became veritable stumbling blocks in the way of the Word, definitely preventing its reaching the hearts of the unsaved.

Unbelief and prayerlessness go together. It is written of our Lord in Matthew's Gospel that when He entered into His own country, "he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Mark puts it a little differently, but giving out the same idea: "And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folks and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief."

Unquestionably the unbelief of that people hindered our Lord in His gracious work and tied His hands. And if that be true, it requires no undue straining of the Scriptures when we say that the unbelief and prayerlessness of a church can tie the hands of its preacher, and prevent him from doing many great works in the salvation of souls and in edifying saints. Prayerlessness, therefore, as it concerns the preacher is a very serious matter. If it exists in the preacher himself, then he ties his own hands and makes the Word as preached by him ineffective and void. If prayerless men be found in the pew, then it hurts the preacher, robs him of an invaluable help, and interferes seriously with the success of his work. How great the need of a praying church to help on the preaching of the Word of the Lord! Both pew and pulpit are jointly concerned in this preaching business. It is a copartnership. The two go hand in hand. One must help the other, one can hinder the other. Both must work in perfect accord or serious damage will result, and God's plan concerning the preacher and the preached Word be defeated.

