

PRAYER—ITS USE AND ABUSE

**"And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought
always to pray and not to faint." "Pray without ceasing."**

—[Luke 18:1](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#).

IN THE first text under consideration, we see that our Lord used a parable to point out the lessons He designed to give. A parable is a word-picture designed to illustrate some truth, but is not necessarily a statement of facts. On the contrary, it seems very rarely to be a statement of facts, but is merely a suppositional case. More than this, in a parable the thing *said* is never the thing *meant*, literally. The wheat and the tares of one of Jesus' parables were not literal wheat and tares, but were the children of the Kingdom and the children of the Adversary. So the parable here is of an unjust judge, who had no appreciation of justice. Notwithstanding this, a poor widow came to him again and again importuning for help. To get rid of her he finally gave her the relief desired.

The Lord uses this parable as an illustration of our coming to the Heavenly Father—not that the Heavenly Father is an unjust Judge nor that the Church is a widow, but that the parable is merely an illustration of the reward of importunity in prayer. The woman's persistency in continually coming to the judge illustrated what Jesus wished to emphasize. In concluding the parable, He says that if an unjust judge would grant this poor widow her petition because of her continued asking, what might we expect of our Heavenly Father? When His children cry unto Him day and night, He is sure to hear their prayers. This implies that the prayers are proper ones for the Lord to answer. We cannot think that God would do anything but that which is just and right and proper, and in harmony with this thought the instruction to the Lord's people is that in coming to the Lord in prayer we should make sure that we ask only for the things pleasing to Him. Therefore Christians who live near to God are the best qualified to offer prayer that would be acceptable and would be answered.

"ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN YOU"

Our Lord Jesus was thoroughly informed regarding proper prayer. We have His own testimony, "I know that thou hearest Me always." He never had a refusal, because he always asked the things in harmony with the Father's will. There must be two conditions met in order that our prayers may be answered. We must first have accepted Jesus as our Savior, and then have made a consecration to God in His appointed way. These steps must both be taken before we can be in Christ at all. When accepted of the Heavenly Father in Christ Jesus, we become New Creatures in Him. It is to the New Creature that all God's promises apply. Whoever has not become a New Creature by being begotten of the Holy Spirit is outside of all these promises—but not outside of hope; for we see that, in God's Plan, there is a broad hope for all the world. But in this "acceptable time," none can offer acceptable prayer except in this special appointed way.

There is but one sheep-fold in the present time. Only those who are in this fold are in God's favor. These have a right to pray. But there is a second consideration, after consecration has been made; namely, Are these *abiding* in Christ or are they going out of harmony with Him? God's Word must *abide* in us—not merely that we should once have read the Bible through, or that we read so many verses or chapters each day—but the Word must *remain* in us, its teachings and principles must be assimilated and incorporated into our lives. Thus we shall be able to see what God's mind is, what is pleasing to Him, what we should ask for and what we should not ask for, under His terms. All who thus abide in Christ, and in whom His Word abides, may ask "what they will." They may ask anything that is guaranteed in God's Word, and this means that they may ask whatsoever they will; for His Word dwells in them richly, and they would not think of asking anything not authorized therein.

BLESSINGS EASILY GAINED NOT APPRECIATED

Our lesson teaches continuity in prayer—not merely that we pray once, and then say, "I have prayed about this matter, and now I will leave it." But the question may arise, "Why *continue* to ask? God knows every need. Why not leave the entire matter with Him?" The Scriptures seem to answer this question by showing us that we need to ask for our own benefit, that we may be ready to appreciate the answer when it comes. If we get things without our realization of our need of them, they would come to us so easily that in our fallen condition they would be unappreciated.

Indeed it is true that the majority of people receive daily many, many blessings that they are never thankful for; they do not appreciate them. God sends the sunshine and the rain, as our Lord Jesus told us, upon the evil and the good; and He intimates that these are great blessings from God. Yet how few people really appreciate the rain as a blessing from God! How few, when they see the sunshine, appreciate the blessing God is sending to them through the sunshine! Because these blessings are very common, and come without the asking, they are very little appreciated by the majority.

But the Christian, having the eyes of his understanding opened, appreciates more and more all these blessings as from the Lord. Therefore as he comes to realize his needs, and what is promised in the Lord's Word, he knows that he may advantageously go to the Lord in prayer that these needs may be supplied. His heart has come into that receptive attitude where he is ready to receive God's blessings thankfully and profit by them.

What, then, should we ask for as God's children? What do the Scriptures tell us to ask for? In the first place, they tell us *not* to use "vain repetitions." How should we understand this? Our Lord explains that we should not use vain repetitions "as the heathen do," who think that they will be heard on account of the number of times they repeat the prayer. The Chinese, for instance, have praying wheels, by which they can say a hundred prayers a minute. Thus they save time, voice, etc. But such prayers are only vain repetitions. Many professed Christians, we believe, practice vain repetitions; they say many prayers, which we fear often do not come from the heart, but are said over and over from an imaginary sense of duty or obligation.

NOT FOR OLD CREATURE, BUT FOR NEW

The proper heart condition would be one in which we would feel the need of the Lord's blessing and assistance, and would go to Him in a trustful attitude, presenting our petition, and waiting for His time and way to answer. As to the things that we should ask for, the Master points out in one of His discourses that the heathen, the people of the world in general, all not believers, ask for earthly blessings—"What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" So might a child pray for these earthly things in its innocence of mind. But children of God should pray for earthly blessings only to the extent that they would minister to the growth or usefulness of the New Creature.

As the Christian grows in grace and in knowledge he should come to realize more and more that he is a *New Creature*, and that the New Creature is to pray for itself and not for the old creature. The New Creature must take into consideration the needs of the mortal body which is its tabernacle and its servant, but must ask for this body only what will be necessary that the New Creature may properly develop, and may accomplish the work given him to do by the Lord. He may ask nothing merely that the old creature may be gratified; for the old creature is reckoned as dead. He may ask the Lord to supply his real needs according to His unerring Wisdom.

We should pray for strength to overcome the flesh, for wisdom to know how to deal with ourselves, for strength of character and for the development of the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. We should pray for spiritual food, for grace and wisdom to keep our garments unspotted from the world and to put on the whole armor of God. We should ask for wisdom as to how to understand the Word of God, and how to appreciate the Spirit of the Truth. All these things would be proper subjects of prayer, because they are part and parcel of what goes to make up the New Creation.

In these prayers for the higher things, we are not ignoring the body and its needs, though we are not to seek after the things that the Gentiles seek (the name Gentiles including all those who are not in covenant relationship with God). Those who are in this covenant relationship with God should not ask as do those who are not in such relationship. God does not hear the prayers of those who have never come into His family. They have not been instructed to pray. And we are to pray for things different from those for which they would pray. In all the words that Jesus spoke there is no suggestion that His disciples should pray for better shoes or dress or better home or how to pay off the mortgage. Jesus and the Apostles never prayed for such things. What they prayed for is a suggestion of what we should pray for.

We are to distinguish between prayer, petitions to God, and adoration. *Anyone* may worship God, may bow down and adore Him. But in the matter of prayer there is a *limitation*. Only certain persons may pray to the Lord with any assurance of being heard. And these are they who have become His people by a definite covenant. Any who have come into such covenant relationship with God have the privilege of prayer. This was true of the Jews under the Law Covenant arrangement; and it is true of us who have made a Covenant of Sacrifice with the Lord through Jesus Christ. But even when privileged to pray, we must note the conditions of acceptable prayer.

The conditions are that we should pray in harmony with the Divine will and not seek to bend the Divine will to ours. This would lead us to study the Word of God to find out the things which the Lord has promised us, and we should not ask outside of the Divine promises.

BODY CARED FOR AS PROPERTY OF NEW CREATURE

We should appreciate the fact that throughout the Gospel Age the Lord deals with His children as New Creatures in Christ, and that all His promises to us are to the New Creature. The New Creature is interested in the old body, because this body is its property. The body's interests are ours as New Creatures only in so far as these interests are beneficial to us in making our calling and election sure to our Heavenly inheritance, in so far as their consideration will in no wise interfere with our spiritual interests—but no farther. We are not, therefore, to tell the Lord what we prefer, but are to take what He sees best to give; for this will be what is for our best interests. This does not mean that we are not to mention to God our bodily needs. But we are to do so in the way that our Lord indicates to us in His sample prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread," our daily provisions, acknowledging that the daily food comes from Him, whether it is fine or common, bountiful or not. It will all be for the best interests of the New Creature.

The prayer of one who asks only in harmony with the Lord's Word is certain to be answered. Good earthly parents are pleased to give good gifts to their children, gifts that they see are for their children's real interests. But if they see that the child is unappreciative of favors received, they might the next time withdraw the favors until proper appreciation is manifested. And so it is with our Heavenly Father. In bestowing His best gifts He waits for us to become really hungry for them. He does this that His blessings may do us the more good when they are granted.

PRAYER FOR SPIRIT-BEGETTING UNNECESSARY

In respect to the giving of the Holy Spirit some people have a wrong conception. Many not consecrated pray that the Lord would give them the Holy Spirit; but they have not studied the Scriptures enough. The Lord gives the Holy Spirit without our asking for it specifically, just as with the disciples at Pentecost: they presented themselves before the Lord and waited. They were praying, but they did not know enough about the Holy Spirit to pray for it. But the Lord gave the proper thing at the right time. And so it is with us, irrespective of prayer for the Spirit, provided we meet the required conditions. When we make our consecration to God through Christ, we do not need to *ask* for the begetting of the Holy Spirit—no more than a child in its natural conception. The child does not ask for its own begetting. How could it? But after we have received the spirit-begetting, we should pray that we may have God's sentiment, God's mind, God's will, as our sentiment, our mind, our will.

God loves righteousness and hates iniquity. So we, realizing that we are surrounded by evil and selfishness, need to cultivate the spirit of love, that we may have that spirit which would appreciate and love righteousness. We are to learn gradually to love righteousness and to hate

injustice and iniquity in large things and in small. We are to hate unrighteousness so much that we would scorn to do an injustice or an injury knowingly to anybody. The New Creature sees these things but dimly at first—what are just and what are unjust things, what are righteous and what are unrighteous things. We wish to have the Lord's sentiment as our sentiment in everything. Thus by studying the Lord's character as revealed in His Word, and striving day by day to be conformed thereto, we are "changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord." And thus we become more and more filled with the Spirit.

EVIDENCES OF POSSESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

As the child of God develops, the possession of the Holy Spirit is more and more evidenced in his meekness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly-kindness, love. These are the elements of character, of disposition, that God wishes us to have. These are to rule in our hearts, in our thoughts, and more and more in our outward lives. Anger, malice, hatred, strife, evil-speaking, envy, jealousy, all these are evidences of the unholy spirit, the spirit of the world and the Adversary, which we as children of the Heavenly King are to put away. They are the works of the flesh and the Devil.

Since all of us have a measure of the unholy spirit in our flesh, some more and some less, it is right to pray daily for a larger measure of the Spirit of the Lord, more and more of the spirit of harmony with His perfect will. But we must *cooperate* with these prayers; for the Lord never arbitrarily fills any heart with His Spirit, even after the begetting has taken place. By coming to the Lord in sincere prayer for these blessings continually, by asking along these lines, we shall be preparing ourselves to look for the evidences of the Holy Spirit in our life. We shall be enabled to see whether we have more meekness than we once had, or whether we still lack in meekness. We shall perceive whether we are more gentle and more patient, whether we have more self-control, and in what respects we especially need to develop more in spiritual fruitage. Undoubtedly all of these qualities are lacking to a greater or less extent; but as we watch and pray, we shall learn to find the answer to our prayers; and as we grow in knowledge, in love, in Christlikeness, we grow in likeness also to our Father in Heaven.

IMPROPER VIEWS OF PRAYER

Prayer, as we have shown, is very essential, absolutely indispensable, to Christian growth, yea, to spiritual existence. Yet we have never thought of praying in the extreme way that some do. We have never thought of telling the Lord all about His Plan and of our wishes as to how He shall govern the Universe, and when and how to bring to pass our own will. We think there is far too much praying along this line. The sooner it is stopped the better. In answer to the request of His disciples, the Master gave them a sample prayer, which was surely very different from the prayers that the majority of people offer, who seemingly do not heed the example at all.

The proper thing is to hearken to the Word of the Lord and not do too much speaking to Him. We are to do a great deal of listening, while He speaks to us. The poet has well expressed this important thought:

"Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,
Waiting for Thy gracious Word,
Longing for Thy voice that cheereth,
Master, let it now be heard!
I am listening, Lord, for Thee!
What hast Thou to say to me?"

We understand that the Bible is the Divine presentation of the Divine will, purpose, plan, concerning us as His children. It is the Truth that the Lord designs shall sanctify us. "Sanctify them through Thy Truth; Thy Word is Truth." So declares our Master. He does not say, Sanctify them through prayer! The Master's prescription is that we study the Word and become sanctified thereby. And who is wiser than He? If we have not written a volume on prayer, it is because we find no Scriptural authority or precedent for so doing.

While prayer is absolutely indispensable to the Christian, as we have said, yet it is the Word of God which teaches us God's will and Plan and which points out the way for us to go. We believe it is the failure to see this that has been largely responsible for the great want of faith of many professed children of God. No amount of praying will make up for a neglect of the study of the Lord's Word, which is the only Lamp to our feet given us as our Guide in this long, dark night in which sin has reigned in the world. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."—[*Psalm 119:105*](#).

We are to "pray without ceasing." We are to do this in the sense of not being discouraged when the good things promised us and asked for do not come quickly. We are to remember that the Word of Promise is sure. We are to rest in these promises and to continue to ask and to wait for their fulfilment—patiently, hopefully. Thus we pray unceasingly, "Thy Kingdom come," not by repeating the words every moment or every hour, but by continuing the thought, the expectation, the waiting for it, and by laboring in the interests of that Kingdom and in the preparation of our characters in order that we may have a share in it. We have known some to fall into difficulty by supposed communion with God—remaining on their knees for some time beside an empty chair on which they tried to imagine the Lord to be seated, etc., etc. We believe that they were in danger of falling into a snare of the Adversary by such unscriptural proceedings.

For our part we feel that the Lord has already granted so many blessings that we would be ashamed to ask for many more. Our own requests, therefore, must be few. The Editor's presentations at the Throne of Heavenly Grace are thank-offerings, praise-offerings, indications of his devotion to the Lord and trust in Him, petitions for wisdom and grace to guide in life's affairs. We recall the Divine promises all the time, and not merely when on our knees. We seek to live in harmony with our prayers, and would encourage others to do the same. However, we are not all constituted alike; and having stated the matter from the Bible viewpoint, as we

believe, also as viewed in the SCRIPTURE STUDIES and in other WATCH TOWER articles, we must leave it, trusting that the Lord's providence will guide His people aright.

THE HOLY SPIRIT THE SPECIAL OBJECT OF PRAYER

The reason why the prayers of so many Christians are unanswered is that their prayers are for things God has not told us to pray for or that they were not offered in sincerity. They have asked for wealth or temporal blessings, or perhaps for the conversion of a specified number of souls at their revival meeting, or something else unauthorized, or they have not really desired what they asked for, if it was for spiritual blessing. The Lord *might* grant a request for some temporal thing to a babe in Christ who prayed in his ignorance, not being properly instructed. But it would be different with an advanced Christian. The little child at the table might ask for something improper and violate the rules of etiquette without blame; while a person of mature age, advanced in education and in knowledge of etiquette, should know better. The things for which the Lord's children should especially pray are specified in His Word. The holy Spirit is the special gift of God to His children.

When we come to know that the Holy Spirit is the influence, the disposition of God, then we know what we are praying for. We want more and more of the holy Spirit of God, that it may make us more gentle, more kind, more loving; we want more and more of the mind of Christ (mind and Spirit being used here interchangeably). We realize that we must strive to have this mind of Christ. If we day by day cultivate the spirit of the Devil, we cannot expect ever to attain the mind of Christ. If we determinedly cultivate the Spirit, the mind, of Christ, then the spirit of the Adversary can gain no entrance into our hearts; and we shall become more and more sound in mind. We come to know more and more the perfect will of God as we are filled with His Spirit. Thus we are being prepared for an abundant entrance into the everlasting Kingdom.

PRAY IN FAITH, NOTHING DOUBTING

The Lord in the lesson under consideration, tells us that we must not "faint," the word faint being used in the sense of faint-heartedness—"Consider Jesus,...lest ye be weary and faint in your minds"; "for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." We may ask for more of the Holy Spirit, feeling that we need grace along some particular line. For instance, we may feel that we need more patience. While praying for patience, we should not say, "I shall never be patient; I was not born that way!" But we are to expect our prayer along this line to be *answered*. We are to ask and then wait for the patience, continuing our petition, knowing that the patience will come, if we strive for it in harmony with our prayers. An excellent and practical way to assist in this is to impose a punishment upon ourselves for every outbreak of impatience.

The Lord's people have long been praying, "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth." This prayer has been offered for more than eighteen hundred years, and God's children have not yet seen His Kingdom established. Shall we cease to pray? Ah, no! We are assured that it will indeed come. Even now it is at the very doors! God's Kingdom shall be fully set up; and

the time will come when there will be no disloyalty in all the earth, as now there is none in Heaven. Our prayers will not bring God's Kingdom one minute sooner than He has planned, but we pray by way of assuring the Lord that we are waiting for the Kingdom and expecting it in harmony with His sure promise. By so praying and not fainting, the children of the Lord are strengthening themselves. God's glorious Kingdom will be manifested—and *soon!* Then all who have attained the character-likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be exalted to reign with Him in this Kingdom.