

THE HOLY SPIRIT OUR HELPER IN PRAYER

By E.M. Bounds

We must pray in the Spirit., in the Holy Ghost, if we would pray at all. Lay this, I beseech you, to heart. Do not address yourselves to prayer as to a work to be accomplished in your own natural strength. It is a work of God, of God the Holy Ghost, a work of His in you and by you, and in which you must be fellow-workers with Him—but His work notwithstanding.—ARCHBISHOP TRENCH

ONE of the revelations of the New Testament concerning the Holy Spirit is that He is our helper in prayer. So we have in the following incident in our Lord's life the close connection between the Holy Spirit's work and prayer:

“At that time Jesus rejoiced in spirit and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for it seemed good in thy sight.”—Luke 10:21.

Here we have revelations of what God is to us. Only the child's heart can know the Father, and only the child's heart can reveal the Father. It is by prayer only that all things are delivered to us by the Father through the Son. It is only by prayer that all things are revealed to us by the Father and by the Son. It is only in prayer that the Father gives Himself to us, which is much more every way than all other things whatsoever.

The Revised Version reads: “At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit.” This sets forth that great truth not generally known, or if known, ignored, that Jesus Christ was generally led by the Holy Spirit, and that His joy and His praying, as well as His working, and His life, were under the inspiration, law and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Turn to and read this passage:

Romans 8:26—*“Likewise the spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought.”*

This text is most pregnant and vital, and needs to be quoted. Patience, hope and waiting help us in prayer. But the greatest and the divinest of all helpers is the Holy Spirit. He takes hold of things for us. We are dark and confused, ignorant and weak in many things, in fact in everything pertaining to the Heavenly life, especially in the simple service of prayer. There is an “ought” on us, an obligation, a necessity to pray, a spiritual necessity upon us of the most absolute and imperative kind. But we do not feel the

obligation and have no ability to meet it. The Holy Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, gives wisdom to our ignorance, turns ignorance into wisdom, and changes our weakness into strength. The Spirit Himself does this. He helps and takes hold with us as we tug and toil. He adds His wisdom to our ignorance, gives His strength to our weakness. He pleads for us and in us. He quickens, illumines and inspires our prayers. He indites and elevates the matter of our prayers, and inspires the words and feelings of our prayers. He works mightily in us so that we can pray mightily. He enables us to pray always and ever according to the will of God.

In 1 John 5:14 we have these words:

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us:

“And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”

That which gives us boldness and so much freedom and fullness of approach toward God, the fact and basis of that boldness and liberty of approach, is that we are asking “according to the will of God.” This does not mean submission, but conformity. “According to” means after the standard, conformity, agreement. We have boldness and all freedom of access to God because we are praying in conformity to His will. God records His general will in His Word, but He has this special work in praying for us to do. His “things are prepared for us,” as the prophet says, who “wait upon him,” How can we know the will of God in our praying? What are the things which God designs specially for us to do and pray? The Holy Spirit reveals them to us perpetually.

“The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

“And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the spirit because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” Combine this text with those words of Paul in 1 Cor. 2:8 and what follows:

“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

“But God hath revealed them unto us by his spirit; for the spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

“For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the spirit of God.

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

“Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

“But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

“For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”

“Revealed to us by the Spirit.” Note those words. God searches the heart where the Spirit dwells and knows the mind of the Spirit. The Spirit who dwells in our hearts searches the deep purposes and the will of God to us, and reveals those purposes and that will of God, “that we might know the things which are freely given to us of God.” Our spirits are so fully indwelt by the Spirit of God, so responsive and obedient to His illumination and to His will, that we ask with holy boldness and freedom the things which the Spirit of God has shown us as the will of God, and faith is assured. Then “we know that we have the petitions that we have asked.”

The natural man prays, but prays according to his own will, fancy and desire. If he has ardent desires and groanings, they are the fire and agony of nature simply, and not that of the Spirit. What a world of natural praying there is, which is selfish, self-contented, self-inspired! The Spirit, when He prays through us, or helps us to meet the mighty “oughtness” of right praying, trims our praying down to the will of God, and then we give heart and expression to His unutterable groanings. Then we have the mind of Christ, and pray as He would pray. His thoughts, purposes and desires are our desires, purposes and thoughts.

This is not a new and different Bible from that which we already have, but it is the Bible we have, applied personally by the Spirit of God. It is not new texts, but rather the Spirit’s embellishing of certain texts for us at the time.

It is the unfolding of the word by the Spirit’s light, guidance, teaching, enabling us to perform the great office of intercessors on earth, in harmony with the great intercessions of Jesus Christ at the Father’s right hand in Heaven.

We have in the Holy Spirit an illustration and an enabler of what this intercession is and ought to be. We are charged to supplicate in the Spirit and to pray in the Holy Spirit. We are reminded that the Holy Spirit “helpeth our infirmities,” and that while intercession is an art of so Divine and so high a nature that though we know not what to pray for as we ought, yet the Spirit teaches us this Heavenly science, by making intercession in us “with groanings which cannot be uttered.” How burdened these intercessions of the Holy Spirit! How profoundly He feels the world’s sin, the world’s woe, and the world’s loss, and how deeply He sympathises with the dire conditions, are seen in His groanings which are too deep for utterance and too sacred to be voiced by Him. He inspires us to this most Divine

work of intercession, and His strength enables us to sigh unto God for the oppressed, the burdened and the distressed creation. The Holy Spirit helps us in many ways.

How intense will be the intercessions of the saints who supplicate in the spirit. How vain and delusive and how utterly fruitless and inefficient are prayers without the Spirit! Official prayers they may be, fitted for state occasions, beautiful and courtly, but worth less than nothing as God values prayer.

It is our unfainting praying which will help the Holy Spirit to His mightiest work in us, and at the same time He helps us to these strenuous and exalted efforts in prayer.

We can and do pray by many inspirations and in many ways which are not of God. Many prayers are stereotyped in manner and in matter, in part, if not as a whole. Many prayers are hearty and vehement, but it is natural heartiness and a fleshly vehemence. Much praying is done by dint of habit and through form. Habit is a second nature and holds to the good, when so directed, as well as to the bad. The habit of praying is a good habit, and should be early and strongly formed; but to pray by habit merely is to destroy the life of prayer and allow it to degenerate into a hollow and sham-producing form, Habit may form the bank for the river of prayer, but there must be a strong, deep, pure current, crystal and life-giving, flowing between these two banks. Hannah multiplied her praying, “but she poured out her soul before the Lord.” We cannot make our prayer habits too marked and controlling if the life-waters be full and overflow the banks.

Our divine example in praying is the Son of God. Our Divine Helper in praying is the Holy Spirit. He quickens us to pray and helps us in praying. Acceptable prayer must be begun and carried on by His presence and inspiration. We are enjoined in the Holy Scriptures to “pray in the Holy Ghost.” We are charged to “pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.” We are reminded for our encouragement, that “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” “And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”

So ignorant are we in this matter of prayer; so impotent are all other teachers to impart its lessons to our understanding and heart, that the Holy Spirit comes as the infallible and all-wise teacher to instruct us in this divine art. “To pray with all your heart and all your strength, with the reason and the will, this is the greatest achievement of the Christian warfare on earth.” This is what we are taught to do and enabled to do by the Holy Spirit. If no man can say that Jesus is the Christ but by the Spirit’s help; for the much greater reason can no man pray save by the aid of God’s Spirit. Our mother’s lips, now sealed by death, taught us many sweet lessons of prayer; prayers which have bound

and held our hearts like golden threads; but these prayers, flowing through the natural channel of a mother's love, can not serve the purposes of our manhood's warring, stormy life. These maternal lessons are but the A B C of praying. For the higher and graduating lessons in prayer we must have the Holy Spirit. He only can unfold to us the mysteries of the prayer-life, its duty and its service.

To pray by the Holy Spirit we must have Him always. He does not, like earthly teachers, teach us the lesson and then withdraw. He stays to help us practise the lesson He has taught. We pray, not by the precepts and lessons He has taught, but we pray by Him. He is both teacher and lesson. We can only know the lesson because He is ever with us to inspire, to illumine, to explain, to help us to do. We pray not by the truth the Holy Spirit reveals to us, but we pray by the actual presence of the Holy Spirit. He puts the desire in our hearts; kindles that desire by His own flame. We simply give lip and voice and heart to His unutterable groanings. Our prayers are taken up by Him and energised and sanctified by His intercession. He prays for us, through us and in us. We pray by Him, through Him and in Him. He puts the prayer in us and we give it utterance and heart.

We always pray according to the will of God when the Holy Spirit helps our praying. He prays through us only "according to the will of God." If our prayers are not according to the will of God they die in the presence of the Holy Spirit. He gives such prayers no countenance, no help. Discountenanced and unhelped by Him, prayers, not according to God's will, soon die out of every heart where the Holy Spirit dwells.

We must, as Jude says, "Pray in the Holy Ghost." As Paul says, "with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Never forgetting that "the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Above all, over all, and through all our praying there must be the Name of Christ, which includes the power of His blood, the energy of His intercession, the fullness of the enthroned Christ. "whatsoever ye ask in my name that will I do."
