

Prayer and Communion

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By H.A. Ironside

*“If you abide in Me and my words abide in you, ask what you will,
and it will be done unto you”*

John 15:7

“Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart”

Psalm 37:4

We are now to consider prayer as the expression of the soul's communion with God. It is as the heart is finding its perfect satisfaction the Lord Himself and delighting in His Word, that the Holy Spirit dwelling within the believer incites those petitions which, because they are in accordance with the mind of God, cannot fail of an answer. And if we stop to consider what is involved in this statement, it will perhaps begin to dawn upon us that true prayer is a great deal more than some of us have thought. It is certainly far more than going lightly into the presence of God with some request upon the lips that is possibly dictated by the selfishness of one's own heart rather than for the desire of the glory of God Himself. It is to those who consciously abide in Him that He promises to grant their every request. If, therefore, I pray and there seems to be no answer, it would be well for me to remember the Word of the Lord, “When thou prayest enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door pray to thy Father in secret.” Thus removed from all human interruption or worldly distraction, let there be a period of honest self-examination in the quiet presence of God. Ask yourself, for instance, such questions as the following, and do not fear to answer each one faithfully and honestly:

1. Am I truly desirous that God's will should be done in me at whatever cost?
2. In presenting this particular request which I have been bringing to God, am I seeking His glory or my own pleasure?
3. Is there anything in my life with which God has a controversy?
4. Have I been guilty of any known sin which lies unconfessed and unjudged upon my conscience?
5. Am I consciously yielded to God and endeavoring to walk in obedience to His Word?
6. Have I availed myself of the instruction which I might have had in this Word of God, by meditating upon it carefully day by day that thus I may learn His will?
7. If my own heart condemns me along any of these lines, do I now honestly judge in myself everything that He by the Spirit through the Word shows me to be contrary to His mind?

I do not, of course, mean that such an introspective catechism must be gone over question by question literally and in just such an order as I have here indicated. I have rather sought to put before the reader an outline of the method which I myself have employed for many years, though not always using the same terms, but what I do earnestly desire to press is the importance of some such definite facing of conditions in order that one may take stock, so to speak, of his own actual state of soul. It may be that conscience does not condemn on any point, but even then it is well to remember that God, who “is greater than our heart and knoweth all things,” may detect something in us which we ourselves fail to recognize. The Apostle Paul said on one occasion, “I know nothing by or against, myself, but He that judgeth me is the Lord.” Therefore the importance of a lowly mind even when not conscious of failure.

After such a season of self-examination as I have indicated, weigh carefully the petition which you feel God has not answered. Look at it squarely, and see if you can honestly present it again in the light of all that has transpired between your soul and God. Perhaps you will realize that you cannot consistently press your claim lest, in doing so, you try to take yourself out of the hand of God. Perhaps it may be the very opposite. You will have your faith strengthened, and you will realize more clearly than before that your request was such an one as you were entitled to present with confidence, and you will see that the temporary delay in answering was not a denial, but rather a test of faith. You will then spread the matter before the Lord, but leave it to Him as to the time and the manner in which He is to answer your cry and give you your heart’s desire.

Undoubtedly, many times the Lord purposely waits, when His loving heart would gladly give us at once that for which we yearn but He would make us more dependent upon Himself, and more appreciative of His mercies when we receive them. The waiting season may become to our souls a time of rich spiritual blessing and of real growth in grace, as we learn to say, “My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him.” Others have pointed out that the Hebrew word here translated “expectation” is exactly the same as the word translated “cord” in Joshua 2:15. Think of the spies suspended by a cord from the window of the house of Rahab, and think of your own soul linked by expectation with the very throne of God! What a cord is this to draw your heart out to Himself as you wait upon Him to fulfill His Word in His own way and time!

As the soul enters more deeply into communion, the form of the petition may itself become changed, and that almost unconsciously, so that instead of definiteness there may be seeming indefiniteness, but this does not necessarily indicate lack of faith, but rather fuller confidence in the unchanging love and wisdom of Him who delights to have us address Him as “Our Father.” We read in Philippians 4:6-7: “Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with

thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” How blessed is this! The soul in communion with God knows no anxiety, but is enabled to bring everything that might otherwise fret or distress the heart to God Himself by prayer and supplication, not forgetting thanksgivings for past mercies as well as for present blessings; and the heart rests in quietness garrisoned by the very peace of God, a peace which passes understanding, because the human mind knows nothing of it. It is something of a purely spiritual character, not to be in any way confounded with stoical resignation or a mere human determination to make the best of circumstances. It is the very calm that dwells in the heart of the Eternal as He sits in peace upon His throne far above all the storms of earth, keeping the hearts and minds of those who believe in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and commit everything to Him in prayer, at rest amid all earth’s changing scenes.

A few years ago I was a guest in a Christian home in a Western city. I sat one day at my desk with an open window before me. A beautiful child of perhaps eight years old was disporting herself upon the lawn, and made a lovely picture in that garden of roses. Shortly my attention was attracted by the voice of another child who had come up to the gate and called to my little friend in the garden. “Annie,” she said, “we are going to have a picnic on Saturday, and a lot of us will be there, and we want you to come along. Will you?” “I will ask my mother,” replied the other, and immediately ran around the house to make inquiry. In a little while she returned and reported: “Mother says she will think about it.” “Oh,” exclaimed the other in an annoyed voice, “don’t leave it like that. Go and tease her until she says yes.” “it isn’t necessary to tease my mother,” said little Annie; “if she thinks it is best for me I know she will let me go and if she doesn’t let me go, she probably has something nicer in her mind any way.” Darling, trustful child, I thought in my heart, what a lesson you may teach to many of your elders in regard to trusting implicitly the loving heart of our Father above!

Prevailing prayer is not to be confounded with the fretful teasing of a restless heart, unhappy and dissatisfied, crying out rebelliously for changed circumstances that its own comfort may be increased. It is rather the trusting petition of a soul at perfect peace, resting in the very center of the will of God, asking in happy confidence for what the blessed Holy Spirit knows will bring added glory to God. It is thus as we learn to delight in the Lord for what He is in Himself, not merely because of what he gives to us, that we have the assurance that when we pray in faith, we shall receive the desires of our heart. That it would, in fact, be positively hurtful to our own souls to give us such desires, if not finding our delight in Christ and not abiding in Him, our next paper will attempt to make clear.

The Way to be Calm

When we have knelt at Jesus' feet in prayer
When we have quaffed the water of the Word (Ephesians 5:26),
When we have looked to Heav'n and seen Him there (Acts 7:56)
And when His well-known voice our hearts have heard (John 19:27)
Then we are calm.

The Word has power to lift our minds above (1 Peter 1:13)
Distracting scenes of earth and earth's distress.
Its beauties captivate, it wins our love
Its wisdom and its grace our spirits bless,
Then we are calm.

And when we pray, we speak to One Who Knows
And loves us still; Whose feet this earth have trod;
Who, when He puts us forth, before us goes (John 19:4),
And will, till he has led us home to God.
So we are calm.

To walk with Him gives courage, rest and joy;
A hidden Source refreshes all our ways (Psalm 87:8),
No circumstances can our peace destroy,
Although with trials are beset our days,
But we are calm.

When silent satisfaction fills the heart,
When full our little cups are to the brim,
THEN they will overflow; a blessed part (Psalm 23:5)
Will be for others; and will be for HIM.

Eleanor Van Winkle.