

Praying in the Holy Spirit

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By H.A. Ironside

It is in Jude's brief letter—a fitting preface as it were to the book of Revelation—that we find the expression, “Praying in the Holy Spirit” (verse 20). We have a pentagonal Christian portrayed in verses 20 to 23. There are five sides to his character.

He must be *studious*—devoutly meditating on the word of God, if he would be building himself up on his most holy faith—that “faith once delivered to the saints,” found alone in the Book which the Spirit has inspired.

But he must also be *prayerful*—“praying in the Holy Spirit.” He must take time to speak to the One who speaks to him in the written Word.

He is to be *trustful*—abiding in the sunshine of the divine favor: “Keep yourselves in the love of God.”

He is also *hopeful*. “Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life,” which is to be realized in all its fullness at His coming again.

And, withal, he will be *compassionate*; he cannot forget his responsibilities to those still in their sins. “Of some have compassion, pulling them out of the fire.” It is as there is conscientious concern to obey the first two exhortations that the last three will be fulfilled in the life of a believer.

The word of God is the foundation on which we build. Prayer keeps the soul in touch with the power by which alone we build aright. Mere Bible knowledge may make one heady and doctrinal. Prayer alone, if unguided by Scripture, tends to fanaticism; but the Word and prayer together give a good, firm base on which to rear a sturdy Christian character.

To treat of each side of the pentagon at this time is however not my object. We are to meditate a little on prayer, and try to learn a few things about it from the word of God.

Prayer is almost universal in mankind. “O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come.” Unsaved men pray. All nations pray. It is the sense of need, of weakness, that leads men to cry out for help to a Higher Power; and it is wrong to say, as some have said, that the prayers of unconverted people are never heard. The man whom our Lord healed of his blindness said, “We know that God heareth not sinners.” This is true, in the sense that he meant it. But the cases of Hagar, in the wilderness, the heathen mariners mentioned in Jonah, and other similar instances must not be overlooked. It is wrong and foolish to try to set bounds to the mercy of God. He who hears the prayer of the young ravens when they cry for food, hears the agonized heart-cries of troubled men who are of

“more value than many sparrows” in His eyes. Both Scripture and history testify to prayers answered in wondrous grace, even when those who prayed were ignorant of the One to whom their entreaties were directed.

But it is not of prayer in this general sense that I desire to write. Our theme is “Praying in the Holy Spirit.” In this, unsaved people can have no part whatever, for no one can pray in the Spirit who is not indwelt by the Spirit. In Old Testament times people prayed according to the Spirit as they were controlled by Him, though He did not then indwell believers as He does now. “He hath been *with* you. He shall be *in* you.” This latter is the characteristic truth of the present dispensation. It is His abiding presence in the children of God that distinguishes this period from all that preceded it.

But though the Holy Spirit dwells in all believers now, all have not recognized this marvelous fact. To many it is only a theory, or a mere doctrinal statement. “I believe in the Holy Ghost,” thoughtless formalists repeat time after time, and many real Christians utter the words without the least understanding of their wonderful meaning.

“Upon your believing ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.” He, a divine person, dwells in you if a believer. Your body is His temple. He has come to reside, to make His permanent residence in you. Have you recognized Him? Have you welcomed Him? Do you seek to make Him at home there?

Observe: He is the *Holy Spirit*. He detests sin in all its forms—pride, lust, selfishness, worldliness, in every shape and of every degree. He is most sensitive to neglect, and is easily grieved. Yet how many of us have never seriously sought to “clean house” that we might be suited temples for His indwelling!

I was once received into a home the very memory of which still fills me with horror and disgust. I spent a week, with my family, in circumstances so filthy and unsanitary that I wonder now how we ever stood them. We remained for fear that, if we left, we might stumble two poor ignorant souls, groping after God. Coarseness, vulgarity and dirt grieved us constantly. We could not *enjoy* our visit, but we tried, by example and hard work, to clean up the place and to show the people living there a little of what refinement meant.

The Holy Spirit is more sensitive to moral filth, to spiritual defilement, than the most delicate and fastidious lady could be to vulgar and degrading living conditions; and the Word says, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed until the day of redemption!” (Ephesians 4:30).

The 31st verse suggests the kind of house-cleaning that is required if He would be made at home in our lives. “All bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil-speaking—with all malice,” must

be banished if He would be ungrieved. And, mark, only as He abides in us ungrieved can we really pray in the Holy Spirit.

This is the secret of so many unanswered prayers. This also explains why, so often, we try to pray and there is neither joy nor liberty. It is a wearisome form. The grieved Spirit of God is silent. He does not indite out petitions. Communion is broken. Our prayers are vain. The heavens seem as brass above, and the ground below is stayed from dew. Refreshing of soul there is none. For by our careless ways and lack of self-judgment we have so wounded our Holy Guest that He is, if I may so speak, in grieved retirement. He has not left us: He never leaves; He abides forever; but He cannot be at home in a heart where so much is tolerated that is disgusting and a grief to Him.

If any resent the term “disgusting,” and shrink from applying so strong a word to any habits or ways tolerated by them, let me remind you that to God pride is of all things most vile. By this sin Lucifer was transformed into Diabolus. And this is a sin most of us are slowest to detect in ourselves, while keen enough to observe it in others. From this mother-sin spring all kinds of other evils. “Only by pride cometh contention. “A proud look and a lying tongue” are each abominable in the sight of God.

How great the need then for a spiritual house-cleaning if we would pray aright; for only as the Divine Person living in the believer is ungrieved can we pray in the Holy Spirit.

In the second place, prayer in the Spirit must be in accordance with the word of God. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” “The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue.” “Which things we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth.” These are only a few quotations that distinctly affirm the Spirit’s authorship of the Holy Scriptures.

Manifestly then, the better I know my Bible, both theoretically and practically, the more intelligently I can pray. Mark, I have said, “practically,” not merely “theoretical.” I certainly need to learn all I can of the Book by careful, assiduous study. But I must not stop there. I must know my Bible *practically*. I am to “*know* the truth” but I must also “*walk* in the truth.” In fact, I do not really *know* any truth unless I walk in it. If ignorant of the word of God I am likely to pray for many things that are not in harmony with the Lord’s mind—things that are not suited to the dispensation in which we live, or that would not be helpful to my spiritual progress or honoring to God. The better I know my Bible, and the more careful I am to obey its precepts, the better I shall be able to pray.

I have already said, but I stress it here, that he who prays much but does not read his Bible is liable to fanaticism. This is an important consideration. Only recently a lady who had been deceived into the

most unscrupulous practices, said tearfully, “I do not understand it. I prayed for weeks that God would show me if this movement was right, and if so, that He would give me the experience I sought; and now I see it has all been a delusion. Why did God allow me to fall into such a snare? Why did He not preserve me from it by answering my prayer?” It was pointed out to her that though she prayed so earnestly she neglected the very means God had appointed by which to get the answer she sought. Her Bible lay unread while she prayed for light; she sought help by attending meetings where emotional experiences took the place of sober instruction from the Book.

God has never promised to guide any one into the truth who neglects the Word of truth. Therefore he who would *pray* in the Spirit must *walk* in the truth, for the Spirit and the Word agree.

It is only as we comply with these conditions, we can honestly sing;

“Oh, the pure delight of a single hour,
That before Thy throne I spend;
When I kneel in prayer, and with Thee, my God,
I commune as friend with friend.”

May the cry of our hearts be, “Lord, teach us to pray!”

Pray, Always Pray

“Men ought always to pray, and not to faint”
Luke 18:1

Pray, always pray; the Holy Spirit pleads
Within thee all thy daily, hourly needs.

Pray, always pray; beneath sin’s heaviest load
Prayer sees the blood from Jesus’ side that flowed.

Pray, always pray; though weary, faint, and lone,
Prayer nestles by the Father’s sheltering throne.

Pray, always pray; amid the world’s turmoil
Prayer keeps the heart at rest, and nerves for toil

Pray, always pray; if joys they pathway throng,
Prayer strikes the harp, and sings the angels’ song.

Pray, always pray; if loved ones pass the veil,
Prayer drinks with them of springs that cannot fail.

All earthly things with earth shall fade away:
Prayer grasps eternity: pray, always pray.

E. H. Bickersteth.