

Fourteenth Lesson. 'When Ye Stand Praying, Forgive;' Or, Prayer and Love

by Andrew Murray

The sermon emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and love in prayer, and how our daily life is the test of our prayer life.

Scripture: Matthew 5:23, Mark 11:25

Topics: "Forgiveness", "Prayer"

Description

Andrew Murray emphasizes the inseparable connection between prayer and love, teaching that our relationship with God is contingent upon our relationships with others. He highlights that forgiveness is essential for effective prayer, as harboring unforgiveness can hinder our communion with God. Murray draws from Jesus' teachings, illustrating that love and forgiveness must permeate our daily lives to ensure our prayers are heard. He encourages believers to embody God's forgiving nature, asserting that true faith is rooted in love for others. Ultimately, Murray calls for a life of love as the foundation for powerful and effective prayer.

Transcript

'And whosoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any one; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.'--Mark xi. 25.

THESE words follow immediately on the great prayer-promise, 'All things whatsoever ye pray, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them.' We have already seen how the words that preceded that promise, 'Have faith in God,' taught us that in prayer all depends upon our relation to God being clear; these words that follow on it remind us that our relation with fellow-men must be clear too. Love to God and love to our neighbour are inseparable: the prayer from a heart, that is either not right with God on the one side, or with men on the other, cannot prevail. Faith and love are essential to each other.

We find that this is a thought to which our Lord frequently gave expression. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. v. 23, 24), when speaking of the sixth commandment, He taught His disciples how impossible acceptable worship to the Father was if everything were not right with the brother: 'If thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.' And so later, when speaking of prayer to God, after having taught us to pray, 'Forgive us our debts, as we also have

forgiven our debtors,' He added at the close of the prayer: 'If you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.' At the close of the parable of the unmerciful servant He applies His teaching in the words: 'So shall also my Heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts.' And so here, beside the dried-up fig-tree, where He speaks of the wonderful power of faith and the prayer of faith, He all at once, apparently without connection, introduces the thought, 'Whosoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any one; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.' It is as if the Lord had learned during His life at Nazareth and afterwards that disobedience to the law of love to men was the great sin even of praying people, and the great cause of the feebleness of their prayer. And it is as if He wanted to lead us into His own blessed experience that nothing gives such liberty of access and such power in believing as the consciousness that we have given ourselves in love and compassion, for those whom God loves.

The first lesson taught here is that of a forgiving disposition. We pray, 'Forgive, even as we have forgiven.' Scripture says, 'Forgive one another, even as God also in Christ forgave you.' God's full and free forgiveness is to be the rule of ours with men. Otherwise our reluctant, half-hearted forgiveness, which is not forgiveness at all, will be God's rule with us. Every prayer rests upon our faith in God's pardoning grace. If God dealt with us after our sins, not one prayer could be heard. Pardon opens the door to all God's love and blessing: because God has pardoned all our sin, our prayer can prevail to obtain all we need. The deep sure ground of answer to prayer is God's forgiving love. When it has taken possession of the heart, we pray in faith. But also, when it has taken possession of the heart, we live in love. God's forgiving disposition, revealed in His love to us, becomes a disposition in us; as the power of His forgiving love shed abroad and dwelling within us, we forgive even as He forgives. If there be great and grievous injury or injustice done us, we seek first of all to possess a Godlike disposition; to be kept from a sense of wounded honour, from a desire to maintain our rights, or from rewarding the offender as he has deserved. In the little annoyances of daily life, we are watchful not to excuse the hasty temper, the sharp word, the quick judgment, with the thought that we mean no harm, that we do not keep the anger long, or that it would be too much to expect from feeble human nature, that we should really forgive the way God and Christ do. No, we take the command literally, 'Even as Christ forgave, so also do ye.' The blood that cleanses the conscience from dead works, cleanses from selfishness too; the love it reveals is pardoning love, that takes possession of us and flows through us to others. Our forgiving love to men is the evidence of the reality of God's forgiving love in us, and so the condition of the prayer of faith.

There is a second, more general lesson: our daily life in the world is made the test of our intercourse with God in prayer. How often the Christian, when he comes to pray, does his utmost to cultivate certain frames of mind which he thinks will be pleasing. He does not understand, or forgets, that life does not consist of so many loose pieces, of which now the one, then the other, can be taken up. Life is a whole, and the pious frame of the hour of prayer is judged of by God from the ordinary frame of the daily life of which the hour of prayer is but a small part. Not the feeling I call up, but the tone of my life during the day, is God's criterion of what I really am and desire. My drawing nigh to God is of one piece with my intercourse with men and earth: failure here will cause failure there. And that not only when there is the distinct consciousness of anything wrong between my neighbour and myself; but the ordinary current of my thinking and judging, the unloving thoughts and words I allow to pass unnoticed, can hinder my prayer. The effectual prayer of faith comes out from a life given up to the will and the love of God. Not according to what I try to be when praying, but what I am when not praying, is my prayer dealt with by God.

We may gather these thoughts into a third lesson: In our life with men the one thing on which everything depends is love. The spirit of forgiveness is the spirit of love. Because God is love, He forgives: it is only when we are dwelling in love that we can forgive as God forgives. In love to the brethren we have the evidence of love to the Father, the ground of confidence before God, and the assurance that our prayer will be heard, (1 John iv. 20, iii. 18-21, 23.). 'Let us love in deed and truth; hereby shall we assure our heart before Him. If our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God, and whatever we ask, we receive of Him.' Neither faith nor work will profit if we have not love; it is love that unites with God, it is love that proves the reality of faith. As essential as in the word that precedes the great prayer-promise in Mark xi. 24, 'Have faith in God,' is this one that follows it, 'Have love to men.' The right relations to the living God above me, and the living men around me, are the conditions of effectual prayer.

This love is of special consequence when we labour for such and pray for them. We sometimes give ourselves to work for Christ, from zeal for His cause, as we call it, or for our own spiritual health, without giving ourselves in personal self-sacrificing love for those whose souls we seek. No wonder that our faith is feeble and does not conquer. To look on each wretched one, however unloveable he be, in the light of the tender love of Jesus the Shepherd seeking the lost; to see Jesus Christ in him, and to take him up, for Jesus' sake, in a heart that really loves, --this, this is the secret of believing prayer and successful effort. Jesus, in speaking of forgiveness, speaks of love as its root. Just as in the Sermon on the Mount He connected His teaching and promises about prayer with the call to be merciful, as the Father in heaven is merciful (Matt. v. 7, 9, 22, 38-48), so we see it here: a loving life is the condition of believing prayer.

It has been said: There is nothing so heart-searching as believing prayer, or even the honest effort to pray in faith. O let us not turn the edge of that self-examination by the thought that God does not hear our prayer for reasons known to Himself alone. By no means. 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss.' Let that word of God search us. Let us ask whether our prayer be indeed the expression of a life wholly given over to the will of God and the love of man. Love is the only soil in which faith can strike its roots and thrive. As it throws its arms up, and opens its heart heavenward, the Father always looks to see if it has them opened towards the evil and the unworthy too. In that love, not indeed the love of perfect attainment, but the love of fixed purpose and sincere obedience, faith can alone obtain the blessing. It is he who gives himself to let the love of God dwell in him, and in the practice of daily life to love as God loves, who will have the power to believe in the Love that hears his every prayer. It is the Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne: it is suffering and forbearing love that prevails with God in prayer. The merciful shall obtain mercy; the meek shall inherit the earth.

'LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY.'

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Blessed Father! Thou art Love, and only he that abideth in love abideth in Thee and in fellowship with Thee. The Blessed Son hath this day again taught me how deeply true this is of my fellowship with Thee in prayer. O my God! let Thy love, shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Spirit, be in me a fountain of love to all around me, that out of a life in love may spring the power of believing prayer. O my Father! grant by the Holy Spirit that this may be my experience, that a life in love to all around me is the gate to a life in the love of my God. And give me especially to find in the joy with which I forgive day by day whoever might offend me, the proof that Thy forgiveness to me is a power and a life.

Lord Jesus! my Blessed Teacher! teach Thou me to forgive and to love. Let the power of Thy blood make the pardon of my sins such a reality, that forgiveness, as shown by Thee to me, and by me to others, may be the very joy of heaven. Show me whatever in my intercourse with fellowmen might hinder my fellowship with God, so that my daily life in my own home and in society may be the school in which strength and confidence are gathered for the prayer of faith. Amen.

Source:

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