

St. Paul a Pendulum Between Praise and Prayer.

by Daniel Steele

The sermon explores the dynamic interplay of prayer and praise in St. Paul's life, emphasizing the joy and growth found in a relationship with God.

Scripture: Romans 8:26, 1 Corinthians 13:13, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 3:16, Ephesians 5:9, Philippians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, Hebrews 5:14, Jude 1:24

Topics: "Prayer And Praise", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the blending of prayer and praise in higher states of Christian experience, exemplified by St. Paul, where thanksgiving leads to prayer and prayer leads to praise. True prayer is not a burden but a joyous communion with God, contrasting with the practice of treating prayer as a punishment by some. The transformation of prayer from duty to delight is possible through a baptism of the Spirit and fullness of love, leading to unspeakable joy. Paul's prayer for the Philippians to abound in love, knowledge, and discernment emphasizes the continuous growth in love and the importance of spiritual perception in distinguishing good from evil.

Transcript

In the higher states of Christian experience, there is a blending of prayer and praise. This is noticeable in St. Paul. If he begins with thanksgiving, he ends in prayer; if he begins with prayer, he ends with praise. Phil. 1:3, 4, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy." There is no drudgery in true prayer. He to whom communion with God the Father is a task has not advanced far in grace. It is very evident that the fullness of the spirit of grace and supplication has not been poured upon him. All who through faith in Christ have boldness and access or introduction to God "make requests with joy." All who come in their own name approach the throne of grace with fear and servility. To them prayer is a sad necessity, and not a delight transcending all the pleasures of sense. Bishop Janes had full sympathy with St. Paul in the joyfulness of prayer. To his roommate who had slept an hour, and awakening saw the bishop still on his knees breathing out his silent supplications, and asked why he prayed so long, he replied, "I delight in prayer." It was the recreation of his soul and body after a day of toil in conference and cabinet. How far in the opposite extreme is the practice of the Papal priests to prescribe prayer as a penance and a penalty, imposing so many Pater Nosters and Ave Marias after the confession of sins.

There cannot be a more sad departure from the true spirit of prayer than to treat it as a punishment. We often feel like weeping over the millions of benighted souls to whom the gladness of prayer is perverted into sadness through sacerdotal despotism.

Yet young Christians to whom prayer is not a delight should be encouraged to persevere in the use of this means of grace, and to pray for such a baptism of the Spirit and fullness of love as will change its irksomeness into an unspeakable joy. Thousands can attest the possibility of such a sudden transformation. They have lived months and years in a state of communion with God so intimate and delicious that, whenever they bow the knee to pray, hallelujahs spontaneously burst from their lips. This shows that in the quality of their piety they are approaching the heavenly state where prayer will be completely lost in praise.

In verse 9 Paul says, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more in knowledge and in all discernment" (R. V.) There is one element of Christian character which can never exist in excess, yea, there can never be enough to satisfy its possessor. This is love. It may be perfect in kind, that is, free from all impurities. but it can never be perfect in degree.

"Insatiate to this spring I fly,

I drink and yet am ever dry;

Ah, who against his charms is proof?

Ah, who that loves can love enough?"

This capacity for growth in love will continue through life, leap over the grave, and unfold itself through the ceaseless cycles of eternity. Growth is one of the elements of heavenly bliss.

Yet it is not for an increase of their love absolutely as an end in itself that the apostle prayed, for love alone might become the sport of every impulse; but it was for its increase as the means to two important yet subordinate ends -- first a sound, certain and full knowledge (epignosis) of the truth, and secondly a keen, spiritual discernment to distinguish between things that are different, either between right and wrong, or between different degrees of good and their contraries. The whole force of temptation consists in the skill of the tempter to make evil appear in the guise of good. Triumph over temptation lies largely in the ability to pierce through the disguise, to discover the cloven foot in the patent-leather shoe. Beyond all price is a thorough knowledge of theoretical and practical truth. It is a coat of mail amid the arrows of temptation. Hence the most extended definition of Christian perfection is found in Heb. 5:14, "But solid food is for perfect men, even those who by reason of use [habit] have their [spiritual] perceptions exercised to discern good and evil."

Love is the medium through which the spiritual eye clearly discerns, if it be not that eye itself, as St. John intimates, "He that loveth not knoweth not God." Ever-increasing love is ever-increasing spiritual discernment of the true nature good or bad, of each circumstance, case, or object which experience may present. A sensitively correct moral perception cannot be too highly prized. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit improved and intensified by use. It is the opinion of Mr. Whewell, a distinguished English moral philosopher, that our power of moral discrimination may become so acute as to discern a moral element in acts now considered morally indifferent, such as the question shall I ride to town or walk; shall I wear boots or shoes, gloves or mittens; take an umbrella or run the risk of rain. If there is a moral element at the

bottom of all these apparently trivial choices, it is evident that it is the design of God that we should acquire a spiritual perspicacity sharp enough to discern it.

But spiritual perception is not an end in itself, but only a means to an ultimate end, right conduct and holy character, "that ye may be sincere and without offence against the day of Christ." The common explanation of the original word for "sincere" is pure and unsullied to such a degree as to bear examination in the full splendor of the solar rays. The same idea occurs in St. Jude's striking description, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from stumbling [sine peccato, without sin -- the Vulgate Version], and to present you faultless," not in some twilight region, "but before the presence of his glory." This is the aim of the gospel of Christ, to present us without defect or fault, spot or fleck, under the intense splendors of God's holiness; and it is the office of the Holy Spirit to complete such characters in this life, not in the hour of death, nor in purgatorial fires after death, as Dr. Briggs hints when he suggests that the believer's sanctification may be completed in the intermediate state. This intimates a slur upon the Pentecostal dispensation. "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness," the words "sincere and without offence" are a negative description of the workmanship of the Sanctifier. The positive side is now presented in its fullest and completest development. Righteousness is the originating cause of the fruits which richly adorn the character of the mature believer. They are essentially the same as the fruit of the Spirit, enumerated in Gal. 5:22, and the fruit of the light, Eph. 5:9, R. V. We are wild and worthless olive-trees, until we are engrafted into Christ, who by means of his living root renders us fruitful trees "unto the praise and glory of God." As the fruitless orchard is the shame and poverty of its owner, who has suffered the palmer-worm to devour it, so a fruitful orchard is the honor and wealth of its proprietor, attesting his patient care and toil. How ennobling and inspiring the thought that the declarative glory of the great God may be enhanced by us dwellers in houses of clay. With what dignity God has clothed us, that we should be reflectors on the earth of the glory of God that fills the heavens. Looking down upon sin from the summit of this great thought, how despicable it appears --

"A thing most unsightly, most forlorn, most sad."

This revenue of praise which flows upward to heaven from sanctified character on earth is "by Jesus Christ," by the indwelling and working of the Holy Spirit whom he sends from the Father. "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, Amen."

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