

Devotion: The Heart of Prayer

by E.M. Bounds

The sermon emphasizes the importance of devotion in prayer and worship, highlighting its role in promoting true worship and effective prayer.

Scripture: Psalm 42:1-2, Psalm 95:6, Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 6:6, Romans 12:11, Colossians 3:23-24, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Hebrews 10:22, James 5:16, Revelation 4:8

Topics: "The Power of Prayer", "Devotion"

Description

E.M. Bounds emphasizes that true devotion is the essence of prayer, characterized by a heart fully committed to God, reverence, and a serious spirit. He warns against the modern church's tendency to engage in religious activities without genuine devotion, leading to empty prayers and a lack of spiritual fervor. Bounds illustrates that devotion transforms all aspects of life, making even mundane tasks sacred and ensuring that prayer is heartfelt and effective. He calls for a return to a spirit of devotion that permeates both worship and daily life, highlighting that true prayer is fueled by a fervent love for God. Ultimately, he stresses that without devotion, prayer becomes a mere routine devoid of power and meaning.

Transcript

Devotion is the particular frame of mind found in one entirely devoted to God. It is the spirit of reverence, of awe, of godly fear. It is a state of heart which appears before God in prayer and worship. It is foreign to everything like lightness of spirit, and is opposed to levity and noise and bluster. Devotion dwells in the realm of quietness and is still before God. It is serious, thoughtful, meditative. Devotion belongs to the inner life and lives in the closet, but also appears in the public services of the sanctuary. It is a part of the very spirit of true worship and is of the nature of the spirit of prayer.

Devotion belongs to the devout man, whose thoughts and feelings are devoted to God. Such a man has a mind given up wholly to the Christian life and possesses a strong affection for God and an ardent love for his house. Cornelius was "a devout man, one that feared God with all His house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed always." "Devout men carried Stephen to his burial." "One Ananias, a devout man, according to the law," was sent unto Saul when he was blind, to tell him what the Lord would have him do. God can wonderfully use such men, for devout men are His chosen agents in carrying forward His plans.

Prayer promotes the spirit of devotion, while devotion is favorable to the best praying. Devotion furthers prayer and helps to drive prayer home to the object which it seeks. Prayer thrives in the atmosphere of

true devotion. It is easy to pray when in the spirit of devotion. The attitude of mind and the state of heart implied in devotion make prayer effectual in reaching the throne of grace. God dwells where the spirit of devotion resides. All the graces of the Spirit are nourished and grow well in the environment created by devotion. Indeed, these graces grow nowhere else but here. The absence of a devotional spirit means death to the graces born in a renewed heart. True worship finds congeniality in the atmosphere made by a spirit of devotion. While prayer is helpful to devotion, at the same time devotion reacts on prayer, and helps us to pray. Devotion engages the heart in prayer. It is not an easy task for the lips to try to pray while the heart is absent from it. The charge which God at one time made against his ancient Israel was that they honored him with their lips, while their hearts were far from him.

The very essence of prayer is the spirit of devotion. Without devotion prayer is an empty form, a vain round of words. Sad to say, much of this kind of prayer prevails, today, in the church. This is a busy age, bustling and active, and this bustling spirit has invaded the church of God. Its religious performances are many. The church works at religion with the order, precision and force of real machinery. But too often it works with the heartlessness of the machine. There is much of the treadmill movement in our ceaseless round and routine of religious doings. We pray without praying. We sing without singing with the Spirit. We have music without the praise of God being in it. We go to church by habit, and come home all too gladly when the benediction is pronounced. We read our accustomed chapter in the Bible, and feel quite relieved when the task is done. We say our prayers by rote, as a schoolboy recites his lesson, and are not sorry when the Amen is uttered. Christianity has to do with everything but our hearts. It engages our hands and feet; it takes hold of our voices; it lays its hands on our money; it affects even the postures of our bodies, but it does not take hold of our affections, our desires, our zeal, and make us serious, desperately in earnest, and cause us to be quiet and worshipful in the presence of God.

Why all these sad defects in our piety? Why this modern perversion of the true nature of the religion of Jesus Christ? Why is the modern type of Christianity so much like a jewel-case with the precious jewels gone? The great lack of the modern Church is the spirit of devotion. We hear sermons in the same spirit with which we listen to a lecture or hear a speech. We visit the house of God just as if it were a common place, on a level with the theater, the lecture-room or the forum. We handle sacred things just as if they were the things of the world. We need to put the spirit of devotion into Monday's business, as well as in Sunday's worship. We need the spirit of devotion to remind us of the presence of God, to be always doing the will of God, to direct all things always to the glory of God.

The spirit of devotion puts God in all things. It puts God not merely in our praying and church-going, but in all the concerns of life. "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The spirit of devotion makes the common things of earth sacred and the little things great. With this spirit of devotion, we go to business on Monday directed by the very same influence and inspired by the same influences by which we went to church on Sunday. The spirit of devotion makes a Sabbath out of Saturday, and transforms the shop and the office into a temple of God.

The spirit of devotion prevents Christianity from being a thin veneer and puts it into the very life and being of our souls. It ceases to be doing a mere work, and becomes a heart, sending its rich blood through every artery and beating with the pulsations of vigorous and radiant life. The ardor of devotion is in prayer. In the fourth chapter of Revelation, verse eight, we read: "And they rest not day nor night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." The inspiration and center of their rapturous devotion is the holiness of God. That holiness of God claims their attention, inflames their devotion. There is nothing cold, nothing dull, nothing wearisome about them or their heavenly worship. "They rest not day

nor night." What zeal! What unfainting ardor and ceaseless rapture! The ministry of prayer, if it be anything worthy of the name, is a ministry of ardor, a ministry of unwearied and intense longing after God and after his holiness.

The spirit of devotion pervades the saints in heaven and characterizes the worship of heaven's angelic intelligences. No devotionless creatures are in that heavenly world. God is there, and His very presence begets the spirit of reverence, of awe, and of real fear. If we would be partakers with them after death, we must first learn the spirit of devotion on earth before we get there. These living creatures, in their restless, tireless attitude after God and their devotion to His holiness, are the perfect symbols and manifestations of true prayer and its ardor. Prayer must be aflame. Its ardor must consume. Prayer without fervor is as a sun without light or heat, or as a flower without beauty or fragrance. A soul devoted to God is a fervent soul, and prayer is the creature of that flame. He only can truly pray who is all aglow for holiness, for God, and for heaven.

Activity is not strength. Work is not zeal. Moving about is not devotion. Activity often is the unrecognized symptom of spiritual weakness. It may be hurtful to piety when made the substitute for real devotion in worship. The colt is much more active than its mother, but she is the wheel-horse of the team, pulling the load without noise or bluster or show. The child is more active than the father, who may be bearing the rule and burdens of an empire on his heart and shoulders. Enthusiasm is more active than faith, though enthusiasm cannot remove mountains nor call into action any of the omnipotent forces which faith can command.

Activity is often at the expense of more solid, useful elements, and generally to the total neglect of prayer. To be too busy with God's work to commune with God, to be busy with doing church work without taking time to talk to God about His work, is the highway to backsliding, and many people have walked therein to the hurt of their immortal souls.

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