

Prayer and the Word of God (Continued)

by E.M. Bounds

Prayer is essential for the success of the Word, and it begets a love for the Word of God, leading to obedience, joy, and spiritual growth.

Scripture: Psalm 19:7, Isaiah 55:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:1

Topics: "The Power of Prayer", "The Importance of Scripture"

Description

E.M. Bounds emphasizes the vital connection between prayer and the effectiveness of preaching the Word of God, asserting that prayer prepares the hearts of listeners and allows the Word to flourish. He illustrates this through the Parable of the Sower, highlighting how prayer cultivates good soil for the Word to take root and grow. Bounds argues that prayer not only enhances the reception of God's Word but also fosters a love for Scripture and a commitment to church attendance. He concludes that neglecting prayer and Bible reading leads to spiritual decline, while a life of prayer and engagement with the Word ensures spiritual vitality and victory. Ultimately, Bounds calls for a continuous dedication to both prayer and the Word as essential for a fruitful Christian life.

Transcript

PRAYER has all to do with the success of the preaching of the Word. This, Paul clearly teaches in that familiar and pressing request he made to the Thessalonians:

Finally, brethren, pray for us that the Word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified.

Prayer opens the way for the Word of God to run without let or hindrance, and creates the atmosphere which is favorable to the Word accomplishing its purpose. Prayer puts wheels under God's Word, and gives wings to the angel of the Lord "having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." Prayer greatly helps the Word of the Lord.

The Parable of the Sower is a notable study of preaching, showing its differing effects and describing the diversity of hearers. The wayside hearers are legion. The soil lies all unprepared either by previous thought or prayer; as a consequence, the devil easily takes away the seed (which is the Word of God) and dissipating all good impressions, renders the work of the sower futile. No one for a moment believes, that so much of present-day sowing would go fruitless if only the hearers would prepare the ground of their hearts beforehand by prayer and meditation.

Similarly with the stony-ground hearers, and the thorny-ground hearers. Although the word lodges in their hearts and begins to sprout, yet all is lost, chiefly because there is no prayer or watchfulness or cultivation following. The good-ground hearers are profited by the sowing, simply because their minds have been prepared for the reception of the seed, and that, after hearing, they have cultivated the seed sown in their hearts, by the exercise of prayer. All this gives peculiar emphasis to the conclusion of this striking parable: "Take heed, therefore, how ye hear." And in order that we may take heed how we hear, it is needful to give ourselves continually to prayer.

We have got to believe that underlying God's Word is prayer, and upon prayer, its final success will depend. In the Book of Isaiah we read:

So shall my word be that goeth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

In Psalm 19, David magnifies the Word of God in six statements concerning it. It converts the soul, makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes, endures eternally, and is true and righteous altogether. The Word of God is perfect, sure, right, pure. It is heart-searching, and at the same time purifying, in its effect. It is no surprise therefore that after considering the deep spirituality of the Word of God, its power to search the inner nature of man, and its deep purity, the psalmist should close his dissertation with this passage:

Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

James recognizes the deep spirituality of the Word, and its inherent saving power, in the following exhortation:

Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

And Peter talks along the same line, when describing the saving power of the Word of God:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.

Not only does Peter speak of being born again, by the incorruptible Word of God, but he also informs us that to grow in grace we must be like newborn babes, desiring or feeding upon the "sincere milk of the Word."

That is not to say, however, that the mere form of words as they occur in the Bible have in them any saving power. But the Word of God, be it remembered, is impregnated with the Holy Spirit. And just as there is a divine element in the words of Scripture, so also is the same divine element to be found in all true preaching of the Word, which is able to save and convert the soul.

Prayer invariably begets a love for the Word of God, and sets people to the reading of it. Prayer leads people to obey the Word of God, and puts into the heart which obeys a joy unspeakable. Praying people and Bible-reading people are the same sort of folk. The God of the Bible and the God of prayer are one. God speaks to man in the Bible; man speaks to God in prayer. One reads the Bible to discover God's will;

he prays in order that he may receive power to do that will. Bible-reading and praying are the distinguishing traits of those who strive to know and please God. And just as prayer begets a love for the Scriptures, and sets people to reading the Bible, so, also, does prayer cause men and women to visit the house of God, to hear the Scriptures expounded. Church-going is closely connected with the Bible, not so much because the Bible cautions us against "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is," but because in God's house, God's chosen minister declares his Word to dying men, explains the Scriptures, and enforces their teachings upon his hearers. And prayer germinates a resolve in those who practice it not to forsake the house of God.

Prayer begets a church-going conscience, a church-loving heart, a churchsupporting spirit. It is the praying people who make it a matter of conscience, to attend the preaching of the Word; who delight in its reading; exposition; who support it with their influence and their means. Prayer exalts the Word of God and gives it preeminence in the estimation of those who faithfully and wholeheartedly call upon the name of the Lord.

Prayer draws its very life from the Bible, and has no standing ground outside of the warrant of the Scriptures. Its very existence and character is dependent on revelation made by God to man in his holy Word. Prayer, in turn, exalts this same revelation, and turns men toward that Word. The nature, necessity and all-comprehending character of prayer, is based on the Word of God.

Psalms 119 is a directory of God's Word. With three or four exceptions, each verse contains a word which identifies, or locates, the Word of God. Quite often, the writer breaks out into supplication, several times praying, "Teach me thy statutes." So deeply impressed is he with the wonders of God's Word, and of the need for divine illumination wherewith to see and understand the wonderful things recorded therein, that he fervently prays:

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

From the opening of this wonderful psalm to its close, prayer and God's Word are intertwined. Almost every phase of God's Word is touched upon by this inspired writer. So thoroughly convinced was the psalmist of the deep spiritual power of the Word of God that he makes this declaration:

Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee.

Here the psalmist found his protection against sinning. By having God's Word hidden in his heart; in having his whole being thoroughly impregnated with that Word; in being brought completely under its benign and gracious influence, he was enabled to walk to and fro in the earth, safe from the attack of the evil one, and fortified against a proneness to wander out of the way.

We find, furthermore, the power of prayer to create a real love for the Scriptures, and to put within men a nature which will take pleasure in the Word. In holy ecstasy he cries, "O, how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day" And again: "How sweet are thy words to my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my taste."

Would we have a relish for God's Word? Then let us give ourselves continually to prayer. He who would have a heart for the reading of the Bible must not-dare not-forget to pray. The man of whom it can be said, "His delight is in the law of the Lord," is the man who can truly say, "I delight to visit the place of prayer." No man loves the Bible, who does not love to pray. No man loves to pray, who does not delight in the law

of the Lord.

Our Lord was a man of prayer, and he magnified the Word of God, quoting often from the Scriptures. Right through his earthly life Jesus observed Sabbath-keeping, church-going, and the reading of the Word of God, and had prayer intermingled with them all:

And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.

Here, let it be said, that no two things are more essential to a spirit-filled life than Bible-reading and secret prayer; no two things more helpful to growth in grace; to getting the largest joy out of a Christian life; toward establishing one in the ways of eternal peace. The neglect of these all-important duties, presages leanness of soul, loss of joy, absence of peace, dryness of spirit, decay in all that pertains to spiritual life. Neglecting these things paves the way for apostasy, and gives the evil one an advantage such as he is not likely to ignore. Reading God's Word regularly, and praying habitually in the secret place of the most high puts one where he is absolutely safe from the attacks of the enemy of souls, and guarantees him salvation and final victory, through the overcoming power of the lamb.

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