

A Discourse on Prayer.

by John Gill

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer, praying with the Spirit, and addressing the throne of God's grace with faith and dependence.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 14:15, Ephesians 1:16

Topics: "The Power of Prayer", "The Role of the Holy Spirit"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the significance of prayer in the life of a believer, highlighting the necessity of praying both with the Spirit and with understanding. He explains that prayer should be directed solely to God, acknowledging Him as the only true object of worship, and that it should be done in a manner that is comprehensible to others. Gill also discusses the various components of prayer, including adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication, while stressing the importance of the Holy Spirit's role in guiding and assisting believers in their prayers. Ultimately, he encourages the church to engage in prayer as a means of drawing closer to God and experiencing His grace.

Transcript

A DISCOURSE

ON PRAYER.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:15; former Part.

What is it then ? I will pray the Spirit, and will pray with the understanding also.

The design of this epistle is chiefly to reprove the Church at Corinth for the divisions and contentions, which were there fomented and kept up on account of their ministers; some being for Paul, some for Apollo, and others for Cephas; and to remove some irregular practices from among them, which were either openly avowed, or connived at by them; such as continuing a wicked person in their communion, going to law with one another before heathen magistrates, and the disorderly attendance of many of them at the Lord's table.

The apostle having finished this part of his design, does, in the twelfth chapter, largely insist on the subject of spiritual gifts; where he gives an account of the diversity of them, of their author, and of their various usefulness in the church of Christ; for which reason he exhorts the members of this church to covet them earnestly, though he would not have them depend on them, since they are not saving. In the thirteenth

chapter, he prefers charity, or love, to them, and shews, that without this they are useless and unprofitable to those who have them.

In this fourteenth chapter, he presses them to follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather, says he, that ye may prophesy. He proves, by many arguments, and especially by that taken from edification, that prophesying in a known language, in the mother tongue, which is understood by the people, is preferable to the gift of speaking in an unknown language, not understood by the people, and so unedifying to them. It is evident, that by prophesying, he means not only preaching, but praying, since he instances in it, and argues, in the words preceding my text, thus: For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful; that is, when I pray in an unknown language, being under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, I make use of that extraordinary gift which he has bestowed upon me, and my own spirit is indeed refreshed by it: But what I myself conceive, understand, and express, is useless and unprofitable to others, who do not understand the language in which I pray; therefore, says he, in the words of my text, What is it then?

What is to be done in this case? What is most prudent and advisable? What is most eligible and desirable? Must I not pray with the Spirit at all? Shall I not make use of that extraordinary gift which the Spirit has bestowed upon me? Shall I entirely neglect it, and lay it aside? No, I will pray with the Spirit; I will make use of the gift I have; but then it shall be in such a way and manner, as that I shall be understood by others, I will pray with the understanding also. In these words may be considered, I.

The work and business of prayer, which the apostle resolved in the strength of Christ, and, by the assistance of his Spirit, to be found in the performance of; I will pray, &c. II. The manner in which he is desirous of performing this duty; with the Spirit, and with the understanding also. I. I shall consider the work and business of prayer, which the apostle resolved, in the strength of Christ, and by the assistance of his Spirit, to be found in the performance of. It will not be amiss, under this head to enquire into the object of prayer, the several parts of it, and its different kinds, I shall begin, 1.

With the object of prayer, which is not any mere creature. Prayer is a part of religious worship, which is due to God only. To address a creature in such a solemn manner is idolatry. This is a sin the Gentiles have been notoriously guilty of, who have paid their devours this way, both to animate and inanimate creatures. The idolatrous Heathen is thus described by the prophet; (Isa. 45:17) He maketh a god his graven image; he falleth down unto it, and worshipped it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me, for thou art my god.

Such a practice as this, is an argument of great ignorance and stupidity; (Isa. 45:20) They have no knowledge, that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. It is no wonder that their prayers should be in vain, since their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands: They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear (Ps. 115:4-6) not, They are insensible of the wants of their votaries, and unable to help them; they are not in a capacity to give them the least relief, or bestow the least temporal mercy on them: Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain?

Or can the heavens give showers? Art not thou he, O Lord, our God? Therefore we will wait upon thee; for thou hast made all these things. (Jer. 14:22) The Papists have followed the Pagans in their idolatrous prayers to angels, the virgin Mary, and other saints departed, and even to many that were not saints; but it may be said to them, what Eliphaz said to Job, (Job 5:1) in another case; Call now, if there be any that will

answer thee; and to which of the saints wilt thou turn?

God only is, and ought to be the object of prayer. My prayer, says David, shall be unto the God of my life. (Ps. 42:8) God has a right to this part of worship from us, as he is the God of our lives, in whom we live, move, and have our being; who grants us life and favour, and whose visitation preserves our spirits; who daily follows us with his goodness, and loads us with his benefits; to whom we are obliged for every mercy, and on whom the whole support and continuance of our beings depend: and we are under greater obligation still, as well as have greater encouragement, to address the throne of his grace, as he is the God of all grace, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus; all which may assure us, that his eyes are upon us, his ears are open to our cries, that he has both a heart and a hand to help and relieve us; he is a God that hears and answers prayer, to whom all flesh shall come, who are sensible of their need of him, and dependence upon him; his arm is not shortened, that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that he cannot hear; nor did he ever say to any of the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain.

Though the Lord our God is but one Lord; there is but one God, which, with the Scriptures, we assert, in opposition to the polytheism of the Gentiles, who had gods many, and lords many; yet there is a plurality of persons in the Deity, which are neither more nor fewer than Three, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, which Three are One; the Father is God, the Word is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God. Though the Persons in the Godhead are more than One, yet the Godhead itself is single and undivided.

Now God in either and each of the Three divine Persons, may be prayed unto. It is lawful for us to address in prayer either God the Father, or God the Son, or God the Holy Ghost distinctly, though not any of them to the exclusion of the others, This I mention, to disentangle the minds of some, who may have some scruples and hesitations about praying to the distinct Persons in the Deity. Now it is easy to observe, that there are petitions directed to each of the three Persons distinctly; of which I shall give some few instances from the Scriptures.

God the Father is sometimes singly and distinctly prayed unto, though not to the exclusion of the Son or Spirit. It would be too tedious to reckon up all the instances of this kind: The epistle to the Ephesians will furnish us with a sufficient number to our purpose. In one place the apostle says to them, (Eph. 1:16, 17) I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; where God the Father is prayed unto, as distinct from the Lord Jesus Christ, whose God and Father he is, and distinct from the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, who as such is prayed for.

And in another place, he says, (Eph. 3:14, 16, 17) For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might, by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; in which passage God the Father is addressed, as the object of prayer, distinct from Christ and the Spirit; the former of which he desires might dwell in their hearts by faith, and that they might be strengthened by the latter in their inner man.

If these instances were not sufficient, others might be produced; but about God the Father's being the object of prayer, there is no question nor hesitation. God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, may be distinctly prayed unto, of which are many instances in Scripture. Sometimes he is prayed unto in conjunction with

his Father, as appears from all those passages (Rom, 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 3; 2 John 3; Rev. 1:4, 5) in the epistles, where grace and peace are desired from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ; and from many others such as these: (1 Thess. 3:11, 12) Now God himself, and our Father, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way unto you; and the Lord, that is, the Lord Jesus, make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and towards all men, even as we do towards you; and in another place, (2 Thess. 2:16, 17) Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope, through grace, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work.

Sometimes Christ is prayed unto singly and alone; as by Stephen at the time of his death, when he prayed, saying, (Acts 7:59) Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. By the apostle Paul, (2 Cor. 12:8, 9) when he had a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him; for this, says he, I besought the Lord thrice, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, as appears from the context, that it might depart from me: And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. By the apostle John, when Christ said to him, (Rev. 22:20) Surely I come quickly, he replies, Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus. And by many others; such as those mentioned by Ananias to Christ, when he bid him arise, and go to Saul; (Acts 9:14) Lord, says he, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

God the Holy Ghost may be also prayed unto, as he is sometimes and singly alone, and as distinct from the Father and the Son; (2 Thess. 3:5) The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ. By the Lord, I understand the Lord the Spirit, whose work it is to direct the hearts of believers into the love of God, and to shed it abroad in their hearts; who is manifestly distinguished in this petition from God the Father, into whose love, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, into a patient waiting for of whom, the hearts of the saints are desired to be directed by him.

Sometimes he is prayed unto distinctly, in conjunction with the other two Persons, as by the apostle Paul; The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor. 13:14) And by the apostle John, (Rev. 1:4,5) Grace be unto you, and peace, from him, which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven spirits which are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is a faithful witness. By the seven spirits cannot be meant angels; for it cannot be thought that they being creatures, should be put upon a level with the divine Being, and be with him addressed in such a solemn manner; but by them we are to understand the Holy Spirit of God, who is so called either in allusion to Isaiah 11:2, or on account of the seven churches of Asia, to whom John wrote by his dictates, or to denote the perfection and fulness of his gifts and graces.

Now though each divine Person may be singly and distinctly addressed in prayer, and all Three together, being the one God, be considered as the object of it; yet, according to the order of persons in the Deity, and suitably to their several and distinct parts, which they, by agreement, take in the affair of man's salvation, God the Father, the first Person, is generally addressed as the object of prayer, though not to the exclusion of the Son and Spirit: Christ is the Mediator, by whom we draw nigh to God; and the Holy Ghost is the inditer of our prayers, and who assists in the putting of them up unto him.

The first Person is usually addressed in prayer under the character of a Father, and as our Father; so Christ taught his disciples to pray, (Matthew 6:9) Our Father which art in heaven, &c. and he is to be considered in this relation to us, either as the Father of our spirits, the Author of our beings, by whom we are provided for, supplied, and supported in them. In this manner the church in Isaiah's time applied to him, (Isa. 64:8, 9) saying, But now, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou our potter, and we are all the work of thy hand.

Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: Behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. Or he may be considered as the Father or Author of our mercies, temporal and spiritual, which he, in a kind and gracious manner, bestows on us, through Christ, and that as the Father of Christ, and as our God and Father in Christ. In this view the apostle addresses him, when he says, (2 Cor. 1:3) Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.

And, in another place, (Eph. 1:3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Now these several considerations furnish out so many reasons and arguments to induce and encourage us to apply to him who is the God of all grace, and is both able and willing to supply our needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. The second Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is both God and man, is the Mediator between God and man.

God absolutely considered, is a consuming fire; there is no approaching to him as creatures, and especially as sinful creatures. Job was sensible of this, when he said, (Job 9:32, 33) He is not a man as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment; neither is there any days-man betwixt us, that might lay his hands upon us both. Now Christ is the days-man, the Mediator, the middle Person, who has opened a way for us to God, even a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh. (Heb. 10:20; John 14:6; Eph. 2:18 and 1:6; 1 Peter 2:5) He himself is the way, the truth and the life; he is the way of access to God; through him, both Jews and Gentiles, have an access, by one Spirit, unto the Father; he is the way of acceptance with God; our persons are accepted in the Beloved, and our spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise are acceptable to God by Jesus Christ: The prayers of the saints are called odours; (Rev. 5:8 and 8:3, 4) they are of a sweet smelling savour to God; which is owing to the mediation of Christ, the Angel of God's presence, who stands continually at the golden altar before the throne, with a golden censer in his hand, to whom is given much incense, with which he offers the prayers of all saints, and which makes them a sweet odour to God.

Our encouragements to prayer, and to the exercise of grace in that duty, are chiefly taken from, and our pleas for the blessings of grace, are founded on the person, blood, righteousness, sacrifice, and intercession of Christ. Seeing then, says the apostle, (Heb. 4:14-16) that we have a High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession: For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. And in another place, (Heb. 10:22) he exhorts and encourages to this work in much the same manner; Having, says he, an High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. The third Person, the Holy Spirit, takes his part, and has a peculiar place in this work; he is the

author of prayer, the inditer of it, who forms it in our hearts, creates breathings, and desires after spiritual things, stirs us up to prayer, and assists in it.

Hence he is called, (Zech. 12:10) The Spirit of grace and supplications; both the gift and grace of prayer come from him; he informs us of our wants, acquaints us with our necessities, teaches us both, in what manner, and for what we should pray; what is most suitable for us, and agreeable to the will of God to bestow on us, and helps us under all our infirmities in prayer; which is observed by the apostle, for the use, instruction, and comfort of believers, when he says, (Rom. 8:26, 27) Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; and he that searcheth the heart, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God.

As Christ is our Advocate with the Father, pleads our cause, and makes intercession at the right hand of God for the acceptation of our persons and prayers, so the Holy Spirit is our Advocate within us; he makes intercession for us in our own hearts; he puts strength into us; he fills our mouths with arguments and enables us to plead with God. Christ is Mediator, through whom, and the Spirit, the assister, by whom we have access to the Father. God, as the God of all grace, kindly invites us to himself; Christ, the Mediator, gives us boldness; and the Spirit of grace, freedom and liberty in our access unto him; and this is what the scriptures call Praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and praying in the Holy Ghost.

But of this more hereafter. I proceed, 2. To consider the several parts of prayer; in which I do not design to prescribe any precise form of praying, but to observe to you the method and matter of it, which may serve to direct and assist you in it. It is proper to begin this work with a celebration and adoration of some one or more of the divine perfections; which will at once have a tendency to strike our minds with a proper sense of the divine Majesty, glorify him and encourage us in our supplications to him; all which is highly necessary in our entrance on it.

All the perfections of God are instructive to us in this work, and serve to influence our minds and affections towards him, command our fear and reverence of him, engage our faith in him, strengthen our dependence on him, and raise in us expectations of receiving good things from him. The greatness, glory, power, and majesty of God, the holiness, purity, and righteousness of his nature, oblige us to an humble submission to him, and reverential awe of him. The consideration of his love, grace, mercy, and goodness, will not suffer his dread to make us afraid.

We learn from his omniscience, that he knows not only our persons, but our wants, and what is most suitable for us, when the most convenient season, and which the best way and manner to bestow it on us. It can be no small satisfaction to us, that all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do; the thoughts of our hearts are not hid from him; the secret ejaculations of our minds are known to him; the breathings and desires of our souls are before him; he understands the language of a sigh and groan; and when we chatter like a crane or a swallow, it does not pass unobserved by him.

His omnipotence assures us that nothing is too hard for him, or impossible to him; that he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think; that we cannot be in such a low estate or distressed condition, or attended with such straits and difficulties, but he is able to relieve, deliver and save us. We conclude from his omnipresence, that he fills the heavens and the earth; that he is in all places, at all times; that he is a God at hand, and a God afar off; that he is near unto us, wherever we are, ready to assist us, and will be a very present help in trouble.

His immutability in his counsel, and faithfulness in his covenant, yield the heirs of promise, strong consolation. These give us reason to believe that not one of the good things which the Lord has promised shall ever fail; that what he has said, he will do: and what he has either purposed or promised, he will bring to pass: He will not suffer his faithfulness to fail; his covenant he will not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips. You see that the notice of these things is necessary, both for the glory of God and our own comfort.

It is also very proper when we begin our addresses to God, to make mention of some one or more of his names and titles, as Jehovah, Lord God, &c, and of the relations he stands in to us; not only as the God of nature, the author of our beings, the Donor of our mercies, and the Preserver of our lives, but as the God of grace, the Father of Christ, and our Covenant God, and Father in Christ. After this manner our Lord directed his disciples to pray, saying, Our Father which art in heaven, &c.

In the next place, it highly becomes us to acknowledge our meanness and unworthiness, to make confession of our sins and transgressions, and pray for the fresh discoveries and manifestations of pardoning love and grace. When we enter into the divine presence, and take upon us to speak unto the Lord, we should own with Abraham, (Gen. 18:27) that we are but dust and ashes; and with Jacob, (Gen. 32:10) that we are not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which God has shewed unto us.

Confession of sin, both of our nature and of our lives, is a very proper and necessary part of this work. This has been the practice of the saints in all ages; as of David, which appears from his own words; (Ps. 32:5) I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquities have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. So Daniel, when he set his face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, made confession both of his own and of the sins of others; I prayed unto the Lord my God, says he, (Dan. 9:4-6) and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant, and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments.

We have sinned and committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts, and from thy judgments; neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. And the apostle John, for the encouragement of believers in this part of the duty of prayer, says, (1 John 1:9) If we confess our sins, he, that is, God, is just and faithful to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness: Not that confession of sin is either the procuring cause, or means, or condition of pardon and cleansing, which are both owing to the blood of Christ; in justice and faithfulness to which, and him that shed it, God forgives the sins of his people, and cleanses them from them; but the design of the apostle is to shew that sin is in the saints, and is committed by them, and that confession of sin is right and acceptable in the sight of God; and, to animate and encourage them to it, he takes notice of the justice and faithfulness of God in pardoning and cleansing his people, through the blood of Christ, which, as he had a little before observed, cleanseth from all sin.

Nay, we are not only to make confession of sin in prayer, but to pray for the pardon and forgiveness of it. Christ directed his disciples to this part of their duty, when he bid them pray after this manner; (Matthew 6:12) Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. This has been the constant practice of the saints, as of Moses; (Ex. 34:9) O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go amongst us, and pardon our iniquities and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance. Of David; (Ps. 25:11) For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine

iniquity, for it is great.

Yea, he says to the Lord, (Ps. 32:6) For this, shall every one that is godly pray unto thee, in a time when thou mayest be found. And of Daniel, (Dan. 9:19) O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do, defer not, for thine own sake, O my God; for thy city and thy people are called by thy name. Now it ought to be observed, that very frequently when the saints pray, either for the forgiveness of their own, or others sins, their meaning is, that God would, in a providential way, deliver them out of present distress, remove his afflicting hand, which lies heavy on them, or avert such judgments which seem to hang over their heads, and very much threaten them which, when he does, is an indication of his having pardoned them.

We are to understand many petitions of Moses, (Ex. 32:32; Num. 14:19, 20) Job, (Job 7:21) Solomon, (1 Kings 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50) and others, in this sense: Besides, when believers now pray for the pardon of sin, their meaning is not that the blood of Christ should be shed again for the remission of their sins; or that any new act of pardon should arise in God's mind, and be passed by him; but that they might have the sense, the manifestation, and application of pardoning grace to their souls.

We are not to imagine, that as often as the saints sin, repent, confess their sins, and pray for the forgiveness of them, that God makes and passes new acts of pardon; for he has, by one eternal and complete act of grace, in the view of his Son's blood and sacrifice, freely and fully forgiven all the trespasses of his chosen ones, all their sins, past, present, and to come: but whereas they daily sin against God, grieve his Spirit, and wound their own consciences, they have need of the fresh sprinklings of the blood of Jesus, and of renewed manifestations of pardon to their souls; and it is both their duty and interest to attend the throne of grace on this account.

Another part and branch of prayer lies in putting up petitions to God for good things, temporal and spiritual mercies, the blessings of nature and of grace. As we ought to live in a dependence on divine providence, so we should daily pray for the common sustenance of our bodies, the comfort, support, and preservation of our lives; as our Lord has taught us, saying, Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11) Our requests in this way ought, indeed, to be frequent, but not large: we should not seek great things for ourselves.

Agur's prayer (Prov. 30:7-9) is a proper copy for us to follow: Two things, says he to the Lord, have I required of thee, deny me them not before I die; Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain. The spiritual blessings we should ask for, are such as God has laid up in the covenant of grace, which is ordered in all things, and sure, Christ has procured by his blood, the gospel is a revelation of, and the Spirit of God makes intercession for in our own hearts, according to the will of God; for these things we should pray in faith, nothing wavering; (James 1:6; 1 John 5:14, 15) for this is the confidence that we have in him, that is, God, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

When we pray for special mercies, spiritual blessings, such as converting grace for unconverted friends and relations, we ought to pray in submission to the secret will of God. Thanksgiving for mercies received, is another thing which we should not be forgetful of at the throne of grace; In every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, says the apostle, (Phil. 4:6) let your requests be made known to God. As we have always mercies to pray for, so likewise to return thanks for; it becomes us to continue in prayer,

(Col. 4:2) for constant supplies from heaven, and to watch in the same with thanksgiving, that is, to wait for the blessings we have been praying for; and when we have received them, to watch for a proper opportunity, and make use of it, to offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.

When this part is neglected, it is highly resented by the Lord; as appears from the case of the ten lepers, (Luke 17:15-18) when one of them saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan; upon which our Lord says, Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God save this stranger. Before we conclude the exercise of this duty, it is proper to deprecate such evils from us, which are either upon us, or we know we are liable to, or may befall us; such as temptations of Satan, the snares of the world, the distresses of life, public calamities, &c.

This was in part practiced by Daniel: O Lord, says he, (Dan. 9:16) according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain; because for our sins, and the iniquities of our Fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. And this is intimated by Christ to his disciples, in that excellent directory of prayer he gave them, part of which was this; Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:13) At the close of this work of prayer, it is necessary to make use of doxologies, or ascriptions of glory to God; as we begin with God, we should end with him; as in the entrance on this duty, we ascribe greatness to him, so at the conclusion of it we should ascribe glory to him.

Such an ascription of glory to God, we find, was used by Christ at the end of the prayer he taught his disciples, in this manner: (Matthew 6:13) Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory. By the apostle Paul in this form; (Eph. 3:21) Unto him, that is, God, be glory in the church, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. And in another place thus; (1 Tim. 1:17) Now unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory, for ever and ever.

By the apostle Jude in these words; Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy; to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. (Jude 24, 25) And by the apostle John after this manner; (Rev. 1:5, 6) Unto him that hath, loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.

These, and such like ascriptions of glory to God, Father, Son, and Spirit, are necessary at the finishing of our supplications, since the mercies and blessings we have been either petitioning, or returning thanks for, come from him; besides, they serve to shew forth the praises of God, and to express our sense of gratitude to him, our dependence upon him, and our expectation of receiving good things from him. The whole of this exercise of prayer should be concluded with pronouncing the word Amen; as a testification of our hearty assent to what we have expressed, and of our sincere desires and wishes, that what we have been praying for might be accomplished, and of our full and firm persuasion and assured belief that God is able, willing, and faithful to perform all that he has promised, and give whatsoever we have been asking of him, according to his will.

But I proceed, 3. To consider the several sorts and kinds of prayer, or the various distributions into which it may be made, or the different views in which it may be considered. Prayer may be considered either as mental or vocal. Mental prayer is what is only conceived in the mind; it consists of secret ejaculations in

the heart, which are not expressed with an audible and articulate voice. Such was the prayer of Hannah, of whom it is said; (1 Sam. 1:12, 13) that as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth.

Now Hannah she spake in her heart, only her lips moved; but her voice was not heard, therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. Vocal prayer is that which, being conceived and formed in the heart, is expressed by the tongue, in words, with an audible and articulate voice, so as to be heard and understood. This the prophet intends, when he says, (Hosea 14:2) Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord, say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips.

Again, Prayer may be considered either as private or public. Private prayer is that which is either performed in the family, by the head or master of it, the rest joining with him in it, or by a society of Christians in a private house, or by a single person in secret and alone; concerning which Christ gives these directions and instructions: (Matthew 6:5, 6) When thou prayest, says he, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men: verily, I say unto you, they have their reward.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet; and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father, which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. Public Prayer is what is used in the house of God, which is therefore called, (Isa. 56:7) an house of prayer; where the people of God meet together, and, with the other parts of divine, public, and social worship, perform this. The first Christians, in the early days of the gospel, are commended, among other things, for their continuing stedfastly in prayers, that is, in public prayers, (Acts 2:42) they constantly met where prayer was wont to be made; and God was pleased to give a signal testimony of his approbation of this their practice; for, at a certain time, they had prayed, the place was shaken, where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31) Once more: Prayer may be considered either as extraordinary or ordinary.

Extraordinary prayer is that which is made use of on particular and special occasions; as that exercise of prayer, which was kept by the church on account of Peter's being in prison. The divine historian says, (Acts 7:5) that Peter was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him; which instance of extraordinary prayer was followed with an extraordinary event; for whilst they were praying, an angel was dispatched from heaven, and loosed Peter from his bonds, who came to the place where the church was assembled, before they had broke up their exercise.

Such also were the prayers of the elders of the church in those times for the sick, which the apostle James speaks of; (James 5:14, 15) is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up. Ordinary prayer is what is used in common in the church of God, in a religious family, or by a single person, at stated times; which, with David and Daniel under the Old Testament, were three times a day, (Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10) evening, morning, and at noon; which practice is laudable enough to follow, provided no stress is laid on the punctual performance of this duty at these precise times, and is not made the term and condition of our acceptance with God, and of our standing in his favour, which would be to reduce us to the covenant of works, ensnare our souls, and bring us into a state of bondage.

II. I come now to consider the manner in which the apostle was desirous of performing this duty. 1. With the Spirit. By the Spirit, some understand no more than the human breath, or voice; and suppose, that the apostle's meaning is, that he would pray vocally, with an articulate voice, with distinct sounds, so as to be understood: perhaps some passages in this chapter, which may seem to favour this sense, might incline them to it; as when the apostle observes, (1 Cor. 14:7-11) that things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?

For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise you, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them are without signification; therefore, if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a Barbarian; and he that speaketh, a Barbarian unto me. But the apostle here, by voice and distinction in sounds, does not intend a clear, distinct, articulate voice, but the mother-tongue, a known language, in opposition to an unknown tongue and foreign language, not understood by the people.

This sense of the words is mean, low, and trifling, as well as forced and strained. By the Spirit, rather is meant the extraordinary gift of the Spirit bestowed on the apostle and others, by which they spoke with divers tongues, and which he determined to make use of, though in such a manner, as to be understood: He would not use it without an interpretation. This is the sense I have given of it already, and is the most generally received sense of interpreters, and which may be confirmed by the use of the word in the context; as in verse 2.

He that speaketh in an unknown tongue, speaketh not unto men, but unto God, for no man understandeth him; howbeit, in the Spirit, that is, by exercising the extraordinary gift of the Spirit, he speaketh mysteries; and in verse 14, If I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, that is, I pray by virtue of the extraordinary gift of the Spirit, bestowed on me; but my understanding is unfruitful; I am of no use and service to those that hear me. So likewise in verse 16. Else when thou shalt bless with the Spirit, that is, when thou givest thanks in an unknown tongue, through the gift of the Spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned, say, Amen, at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?

There is another sense of the phrase, which I am unwilling to omit, and that is this: By praying with the Spirit, some understand the apostle's own spirit, or his praying in a spiritual way, with a spirit of devotion and fervency; and indeed, in such a manner he performed every part of religious worship and service, whether preaching or praying, or any thing else: God is my witness, says he, (Rom. 1:9) whom I serve with my spirit, in the gospel of his Son; which kind of service is most agreeable to the nature of God: (John 4:23) He is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.

And it becomes us to be fervent in spirit, whilst we are serving the Lord. Such a frame of soul particularly in prayer, is most suitable to the work, most desirable to the saints, acceptable to God, and powerful with him; the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much. (James 5:16) We may be said to pray with our spirits, or in a spiritual way, when we draw nigh to God with a true heart; or when we are enabled to lift up our hearts with our hands unto God in the heavens; people may draw near to him, as the Jews of old did, (Isa. 29:13) with their mouth, and with their lips honour him, and yet, at the same time, their heart may be removed far from him, and their fear towards him, be taught by the precept of men.

It is one thing to have the gift of prayer, and another to have the grace of prayer, and that in exercise: it is one thing to pray with the mouth, and another to pray with the heart. Praying in a formal, graceless manner, is mere outside worship, lip-labour, bodily exercise, that profiteth nothing; it is useless to men, and unacceptable to God, who accounts of it, and calls it no other than howling. Hence he says of some, (Hosea 7:14) They have not cried unto me with their hearts, when they howled upon their beds.

Spiritual fervent prayer is, more or less, performed in the exercise of the grace of faith; such who draw nigh to God with a true heart, should also in full assurance of faith. The apostle James directs to prayer in this way; (James 1:5-7) If any of you, says he, lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him: But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed: for let not that man think, that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

We should not only have an assurance of faith, with respect to the object whom we address, which is absolutely necessary; (Heb. 11:6) For he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him; but also with respect to the things we pray for, when they are such which God has promised, which he has laid up in his covenant, put into the hands of his Son, and, we know, are according to his revealed mind and will to give; all which is consistent with that reverence and godly fear, by which we serve God acceptably; with that humility which becomes supplicants, and is grateful to God, who resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble: and with that submission and resignation of our wills to his will, in which Christ is a glorious pattern to us, when he in prayer said, (Luke 22:42) Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.

In a word, when we pray with our spirits, or in a spiritual way, we not only lift up our hearts to God, and what we ask for, ask in faith, with a reverential, filial fear of the divine Majesty, in deep humility of soul, and with an entire submission to God's will; but also in the name and for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ; we do not present our supplications to God for our righteousness's, but for the Lord's sake, and for his great mercies; we come not in our own name, but in Christ's; we go forth not in our own strength, but in his; we make mention of his righteousness, and of his only; we plead the merits and efficacy of his blood; we bring his sacrifice in the arms of our faith; we expect audience and acceptance upon his account alone, and that our petitions and requests will be heard and answered for his sake and we leave them with him, who is our Advocate with the Father.

This may be called true, spiritual, fervent, and effectual prayer. Prayer cannot be performed in such a manner, without the grace, influence, and assistance of the Spirit of God. Some therefore think, that by the Spirit, in my text is, meant the Holy Spirit of God; and that praying with the Spirit, is the same which the apostle Jude calls, praying in the Holy Ghost. If we take the words in this sense, we are not to suppose that when the apostle says, I will pray with the Spirit, that he imagined he could pray with the Holy Spirit, and under its influences when he pleased; his words must be considered only as expressive of the sense he had of the need of the Spirit of God in prayer, and of his earnest desires, after his gracious assistance in the performance of it.

I have already observed what place the Holy Ghost has in the work of prayer; he is the Author of it; he is the Spirit of grace and supplications; the inditer of it, he forms it in the heart; (James 5:16) the effectual fervent, ενεργδμενη, the inspired, the in-wrought prayer of a righteous man availeth much; that is, such a prayer as is formed in the soul by a powerful energy of the Spirit of God, who puts things into the heart and words into the mouth: Take

(Hosea 14:2) with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: He directs in the matter of prayer; (Rom. 8:26, 27) for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God.

And, indeed, who so proper as he, who searches the deep things of God, and perfectly knows his mind? he helps the saints under all their infirmities; when they are shut up in their souls, and cannot come forth in prayer with liberty, he enlarges their hearts, and gives them freedom of soul, and liberty of speech, so as they can pour out their souls before God, and tell him all their mind: Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. (2 Cor. 3:17) Without him we cannot pray, either with faith or fervency; nor can we call God our Father without him, the Spirit of adoption, or use that freedom with him, as children with a Father; but because ye are sons, says the apostle, (Gal. 4:6) God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Perhaps it may be objected, that if the Spirit of God is so absolutely necessary in prayer, then men ought not to pray, unless they have the Spirit, or are under the immediate influences of his grace. To which I answer, That prayer may be considered as a natural duty: and as such is binding on all men, even on a natural man, destitute of the Spirit, and ought to be, and may be, performed by him in a natural way; to which there is something analogous in the brute creatures, whose eyes wait upon the Lord; And he giveth to the beast his food, and unto the young ravens which cry. (Ps. 145:15 and 147:9) And we may observe, that the apostle Peter put Simon Magus upon prayer, though he was in a state of unregeneracy; Repent, says he, (Acts 8:22) of this thy wickedness; and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

It is true, none but a spiritual man can pray in a spiritual manner; but then the spiritual man is not always under the gracious and Powerful influences of the Spirit of God; he is sometimes destitute of them, which seems to be David's case when he said, (Ps. 51:11, 12) Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me; restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit; and yet we are to pray without ceasing, to pray always, and not faint. (1 Thess. 5:17) And one thing we are to pray for is the Spirit, to influence and assist us in prayer, and to work in us whatever is well pleasing in the sight of God; And we have reason to believe that such a petition will be heard and answered; for if earthly fathers know how to give good gifts unto their children, how much more shall our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? (Luke 18:1) And, indeed, when we are in darkness and distress, without the light of God's countenance, the influences of his Spirit, and the communications of his grace, we have need of prayer most, and ought to be most constant at the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need.

This was David's practice; (Ps. 130:1) Out of the depths, says he, have I cried unto thee, O Lord; and so it was Jonah's, when he was in the belly of hell, and said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet, says he, I will look again towards thy holy temple: (Jonah 2:2, 4, 7) And he adds, When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. And so it was the practice of the church in Asaph's time; who, under darkness and distress, said, (Ps. 130:3, 4, 19) Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? But I proceed, 2. To observe that the apostle is desirous of performing this duty of prayer, with the understanding also, that is, in a language that may be understood by others; for, as he observes in verse 9, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? And for his own part, he

declares, in verse 19, he had rather speak five words in the church with his understanding, that by his voice he might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.

This condemns the practice of the Papists, who pray in a language not understood by the people. Or to pray with the understanding, is to pray with the understanding illuminated by the Spirit of God, or to pray with an experimental spiritual understanding of things. A man may use many words in prayer, and put up a great many petitions, and yet have no savoury experience, or spiritual understanding of the things he prays for. The understanding of man is naturally dark, as to divine and spiritual things.

The Holy Ghost is the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, who enlightens the eyes of our understanding, to see our lost state and condition by nature, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the impurity of our hearts, the imperfection of our obedience, the insufficiency of our righteousness, the need of Christ, and salvation by him, and the aboundings of God's grace and mercy, streaming through the Mediator's person. Such who are thus enlightened, are able to pray with the understanding also: they know who they pray unto, whilst others worship they know not what; they can come to God as their God and Father, as the God of all grace and mercy: they know the way of access to him, and are sensible of their need of the Spirit to influence and assist them, by whom they know what to pray for, as they ought, and are well assured of the readiness of God to hear and answer them for Christ's sake: And, says the apostle, (1 John 5:15) If we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

These are the persons who pray with the Spirit, and with the understanding also; these find their account in this work, and it is a delight to them. I shall conclude this discourse with a few words, by way of encouragement to this part of divine worship. It is good for the saints to draw near to God; it is not only good because it is their duty, but because it yields their souls a spiritual pleasure; and it is also of great profit and advantage to them: It is often an ordinance of God, and which he owns for the quickening the graces of his spirit, for the restraining and subduing the corruptions of our hearts, and for the bringing of our souls into nearer communion and fellowship with himself.

Satan has often felt the force and power of this piece of our spiritual armour; and it is, indeed, the last which the believer is directed to make use of. Praying souls are profitable in families, neighbourhoods, churches, and common-wealths, when prayerless ones are in a great measure useless. The believer has the utmost encouragement to this work he can desire; he may come to God, not as on a seat of justice, but as on a throne of grace. Christ is the Mediator between God and him, his way of access to God, and his Advocate with the Father; the Spirit is his Guide, Director, and Assister; he has many exceeding great and precious promises to plead with God; nor need he doubt of a kind reception, a gracious audience, and a proper answer, though never so mean and unworthy in himself; since the Lord will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise his prayer.

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