

# Of Public Prayer.

by John Gill

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*Prayer is a principal part of the saints' spiritual armour, and it has great power and prevalence with God for the removal or prevention of evil things and for the obtaining of blessings.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 50:15, Matthew 6:6, Luke 18:1, Acts 1:14, Romans 10:1, Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 1 Timothy 2:1-2, James 5:16

**Topics:** "The Power of Prayer", "Public Worship"

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## Description

John Gill emphasizes the significance of public prayer as a vital component of spiritual warfare and communion with God. He illustrates how prayer serves as a powerful weapon against both temporal and spiritual enemies, citing biblical examples such as Moses and Elijah. Gill categorizes various forms of prayer, including mental, vocal, private, social, family, and public prayer, and stresses the importance of sincerity, faith, and submission to God's will in prayer. He encourages believers to approach God with confidence, knowing that He is attentive to their needs and desires, and highlights the communal aspect of prayer in the life of the church.

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## Transcript

A Body of PRACTICAL Divinity

Book 3--Chapter 5

OF PUBLIC PRAYER

Prayer is one part of the saints' spiritual armour, and a principal one, though mentioned last (Eph. 6:18), it has been often of use against temporal enemies, and for obtaining victory over them; as the prayers of Asa, Jehoshaphat, and others, show 2 Chronicles 14:11, 12, 20:3-5, 22. It is reported of Mary, queen of Scots, that she dreaded the prayer of John Knox, an eminent minister, more than an army of twenty thousand men. And it is of use against the spiritual enemies of God's people, and for the vanquishing of them.

Satan has often felt the force of this weapon; resist the devil, by faith in prayer, and he will flee from you. When the apostle Paul was buffeted and distressed by him, he had recourse to it; he besought the Lord thrice that the temptation might depart from him; and had for answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee!" and indeed, as this part of the Christian armour is managed, so it goes with the saint, for or against him. In the

war between Israel and Amalek, when Moses held up his hands, an emblem of vigorous prayer, then Israel prevailed; but when he let down his hands, a token of remissness in prayer, Amalek prevailed.

Prayer has great power and prevalence with God, for the removal or prevention of evil things, and for the obtaining of blessings. Jacob had the name of Israel given him, because, as a prince, he had power with God, and prevailed, that is, by prayer and supplication (Gen. 32:26, 28; see Hosea 12:3, 4). Elijah prayed earnestly, and his prayer was availing and effectual (James 5:16-18). Prayer is the breath of a regenerate soul; as soon as a child is born into the world it cries, as soon as a soul is born again it prays; it is observed of Saul upon his conversion, "Behold, he prayeth!" where there is life there is breath; where there is spiritual life, there are spiritual breathings; such souls breathe after God, pant after him as the hart panteth after the water brooks: Prayer is the speech of the soul to God[1]; a talking to him, a converse with him, in which much of its communion with God lies.

Prayer is an address to God in the name of Christ, and through him as the Mediator, under the influence and by the assistance of the Spirit of God, in faith, and in the sincerity of our souls, for such things we stand in need of, and which are consistent with the will of God, and are for his glory to bestow, and therefore to be asked with submission. Now though it is public prayer, or prayer as a public ordinance in the church of God, I am in course to consider, yet I shall, 1.

Take notice of the various sorts of prayer, which will lead on to that; for there is a praying with all prayer, which denotes many sorts and kinds of prayer. 1a. There is mental prayer, or prayer in the heart; and, indeed, here prayer should first begin; so David found in his heart to pray (2 Sam. 7:27), and it is "the effectual fervent," or energoumenh, "the inwrought prayer of the righteous man that availeth much;" which is wrought and formed in the heart by the Spirit of God (James 5:16).

Such sort of prayer was that of Moses, at the Red Sea, when the Lord said to him, "Wherefore criest thou unto me?" and yet we read not of a word that was spoken by him; and of this kind was the prayer of Hannah; "She spake in her heart," (1 Sam. 1:13) and this may be performed even without the motion of the lips, and is what we call an ejaculatory prayer, from the suddenness and swiftness of its being put up to God, like a dart shot from a bow; and which may be done in the midst of business the most public, and in the midst of, public company, and not discerned; as was the prayer of Nehemiah in the presence of the king (Neh. 2:4, 5), and such prayer God takes notice of, and hears; and, as an ancient writer[2] observes, "Though we whisper, not opening our lips, but pray in silence, cry inwardly, God incessantly hears that inward discourse," or prayer to him, conceived in the mind. 1b.

There is prayer which is audible and vocal. Some prayer is audible, yet not articulate and intelligible, or it is expressed by inarticulate sounds; as, "with groanings which cannot be uttered;" but God knows and understands perfectly the language of a groan, and hears and answers. But there is vocal prayer, expressed by articulate words, in language to be heard and understood by men, as well as by the Lord; "I cried unto the Lord with my voice," &c. (Ps. 3:4, 5:2, 3) and to this kind of prayer the church is directed by the Lord himself (Hosea 14:2). 1c.

There is private prayer, in which a man is alone by himself; to which our Lord directs (Matthew 6:6), an instance and example of this we have in Christ (Matthew 14:23; see also an instance of this in Peter; Acts 10:9). 1d. There is social prayer, in which few or more join together, concerning which, and to encourage it, our Lord says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," (Matthew 18:19, 20) an instance of this social prayer with men is in Acts 20:36 and it is this social prayer

with fewer or more the apostle Jude has respect unto (Jude 1:20). 1e.

There is family prayer, performed by the head and master of the family in it, and with it. Joshua set a noble example of family worship (Josh. 24:15), and an instance we have in David (2 Sam. 6:20), and even Cornelius, the Roman centurion, before he was acquainted with Christianity, was in the practice of it (Acts 10:2, 30), and the contrary behaviour is resented, and the wrath and fury of God may be expected to fall upon the families that call not on his name (Jer. 10:25), and it is but reasonable service, since family mercies are daily needed, and therefore should be prayed for; and family mercies are daily received, and therefore thanks should be every day returned for them. 1f.

There is public prayer, which is performed in bodies and communities of men, who meet in public, unite and join together in divine worship, and particularly in this branch of it; for prayer always was made a part of public worship. 1f1. First, this part of divine worship was set up in the days of Enos, for "then began men to call upon the name of the Lord;" that is, to pray in the name of the Lord, as it is paraphrased in the Targum[3], of Genesis 4:26 not but that good men before this time prayed personally, and in their families; but now families becoming more numerous and larger, they met and joined together, in carrying on public worship, and this part of it particularly; and so it continued during the patriarchal state. 1f2.

Secondly, under the Mosaic dispensation, while the tabernacle was standing, this practice was used: for the tabernacle was called, the "tabernacle of the congregation;" because, as Munster observes, there the congregation of Israel met to pray and to sacrifice (Ex. 27:21). Moreover, there was another tabernacle which Moses pitched without the camp, which seems to be a temporary one, and which he called by the same name (Ex. 33:7), and which, according to the Targum of Jonathan, was not only a place for instruction in doctrine, but where everyone who truly repented went and confessed his sins, and asked pardon for them, and had it. 1f3.

Thirdly, in the temple, both first and second, public prayer made a part of divine worship; here at the dedication of the first temple, Solomon prayed in public, all Israel present; and where the people, in after times, were to pray and make supplication; and here Jehoshaphat stood and prayed, and all the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem with him: and hence the temple was called "the house of prayer" (Isa. 56:7). Likewise in the second temple, prayer was wont to be made in it; we read of two men going up to the temple to pray, and what they prayed (Luke 18:10; see Acts 3:1).

It was usual with the people to be employed in prayer at the time the incense was offered; so while Zechariah was burning incense in the temple, the people were praying without (see Luke 1:9,10); hence prayer is compared to incense, and the prayers of the saints are called odours, and said to be offered with much incense (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 8:3, 4), and Agatharcides[4], an heathen writer, bears this testimony to the Jews, while the temple was standing, that they kept the seventh day as a rest from labour, and did no work in it, but continued in the temple, stretching out their hands in prayer unto the evening; and it should be observed, that there were a set of men at Jerusalem called "stationary men," who were the representatives of the people in the country, who, because they could not appear in the temple at the time of sacrifice, the residing of the law, and prayer, these attended for them and represented them[5]. 1f4.

Fourthly, public prayer was a part of synagogue worship, and which may be learned from what our Lord says of the hypocrites, who loved to "pray standing in the synagogues," where they might be seen and heard of men (Matthew 6:5), the Jews in general have a great notion of public prayer, as being always heard, and that therefore men should always join with the congregation, and not pray alone; but should

always attend morning and evening in the synagogue; since no prayer is heard but what is put up in the synagogue[6]; and they say, in whatsoever place are ten Israelites, they are obliged to fit up a house where they meet for prayer, at every time of prayer, and this place is called a synagogue[7]; and which some take to be the same with, though others think they differ from, the "proseucha," oratory, or place where prayer was wont to be made, into which Paul and Silas went near Philippi, and spoke to those who resorted thither; and in one of these it is thought our Lord continued a whole night praying (Acts 16:13; Luke 6:12), in which the Jews met for instruction, as well as for prayer, especially on Sabbath days; as is observed by Philo[8] and Josephus[9], and was an ancient custom. 1f5.

Fifthly, under the New Testament dispensation, prayer was always a part of public worship in the several churches; as in that at Jerusalem, the first Christian church. When the disciples returned thither after our Lord's ascension, they continued in "prayer and supplication," with the women and others, who constituted that first church; and it is observed, in commendation of those that were added to it, that they continued steadfastly "in prayer," in the public prayers of the church, whenever they met together; and where there was sometimes a remarkable appearance of the divine presence; and it was to this part of service, as well as to the ministry of the word, the apostles gave themselves continually (Acts 1:14, 2:42, 4:31, 6:4).

Such was the prayer made by this church, without ceasing, for Peter, when in prison, and was remarkably heard (Acts 12:5), so in the church at Corinth, public prayer was a part of divine worship; for it is with respect to that the apostle gives directions to men and women praying, that is, attending that part of public service, the one with their heads uncovered, the other with their heads covered (1 Cor. 11:4, 5), and it is with respect to his own practice in public that he says, "I will pray with the spirit," &c. (1 Cor. 14:15, 16, 19).

The several directions and exhortations to the churches to attend to the duty of prayer, does not regard them merely as individuals, but as bodies and communities, joining together in that service (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17), and public prayer seems to be chiefly intended by the apostle (1 Tim. 2:1, 2, 8), and this was foretold of gospel times (Mal. 1:11). Now this practice obtained in the earliest times of Christianity, and is still continued in Christian assemblies; so Justin Martyr says[10], that after reading the scriptures, and preaching, we all rise up in common, and send up prayers; and after the administration of the supper, he observes, the president or pastor of the church, according to his ability, pours out prayers and thanksgivings, and all the people aloud cry "Amen;" and so Tertullian[11], "We come together in the congregation to God, and as it were with our hands by prayer compass him about; this force is grateful to God: we also pray for emperors, for their ministers, &c."

And from Justin, as well as from Origen, Cyprian, and others, we learn, that the gesture of the ancients in public prayer was "standing;" nay, Tertullian[12] says, "We reckon it unlawful to fast on the Lord's day, or to worship on the knees;" and it was ordered by the council of Nice, "that whereas there were some who bent their knees, it seemed right to the synod that they should perform their prayers standing." Now though my subject is public prayer, yet as all prayer agrees in the object of it; and in the main as to the matter and manner of it, and in persons and things to be prayed for, I shall proceed to consider, 2.

The object of prayer; which is not a mere creature, animate or inanimate; it is the grossest absurdity to set up the wood of a graven image, and pray unto it, which cannot save; to pray to idols of gold and silver, the work of mens' hands, which cannot speak, see, nor hear; are unable to give any help, or bestow any favour upon their votaries: nor to saints departed; for the dead know not anything of the affairs of men in this world; nor can they assist them in them; their sons come to honour, and they know it not; they are brought low, but not perceived by them; Abraham is ignorant of his sons, and Israel acknowledges them

not; it is in vain to turn to any of the saints, or direct prayers unto them: nor to angels, who have always refused worship from men, of which prayer is a considerable part; the angel invoked by Jacob was not a created, but the increated one (Gen. 48:16).

God only is and ought to be the object of prayer; "My prayer," says David, "shall be unto the God of my life," who gives life and breath to all; he upholds their souls in life, and in him they live, move, and have their being; he is the Father of mercies, and the God of all grace, who only can supply with temporal mercies and spiritual blessings, and from whom every good and perfect gift comes; he only can hear the prayers of his people; he only knows men and their wants, and he only is able to help and relieve them; he is God all sufficient, needs nothing for himself, and has enough for all his creatures; he is a God at hand and afar off, and is nigh to all that call upon him, and is a present help in time of need; he is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works; he is gracious and merciful, abundant in goodness and truth.

All which, as it makes him to be a proper object of prayer, and recommends him as such, so serves greatly to encourage men in their addresses to him. God in his Three Persons is the proper object of prayer; Father, Son, and Spirit; who are the one true God; and it is lawful to address either of them in prayer, though not one to the exclusion of the others. Sometimes the Father is prayed unto singly, and as distinct from the Son and Spirit; "If ye call upon the Father," (1 Peter 1:17) as he may be called upon as a distinct divine Person in the Godhead, of which we have instances in Ephesians 1:16, 17, 3:14-16, the second Person, the Son of God, is said to be invoked by all the saints in every place (Acts 9:14; 1 Cor. 1:2), he is sometimes singly prayed unto; as by Stephen at his death; "Lord Jesus receive my Spirit!" and by the apostle John, for his second coming; "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Acts 7:59; Rev. 22:20) and sometimes conjunctly with the Father; as when "grace and peace" are prayed for, as in almost all the epistles, "From God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ," (Rom. 1:7; &c.) and sometimes in prayer he is set before the Father; and sometimes the Father before him, to show their equality (1 Thess. 3:11; 2 Thess. 2:16), the third Person, the Spirit of God, is also sometimes singly prayed to, and as distinct from the Father and Son (2 Thess. 3:5), and the blessings of grace are prayed for from all three together (2 Cor. 13:14; Rev. 1:4, 5).

The first person in the Godhead is usually addressed in prayer, under the character of a Father; so Christ taught his disciples to pray; "Our Father, which art in heaven," &c. as he is the Creator and the Father of spirits, and the author of their beings; so the church in the times of Isaiah (Isa. 64:8), and also as he is the Father of Christ, and our Father in Christ; as such is he frequently addressed (2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3). Now the reason why the address in prayer is generally made to him, though it may be made equally to either of the other two persons, is, because of the priority of order he has, though not of nature, in the deity, and because he bears no office; whereas the other two persons do bear an office, and an office which is concerned in the business of prayer.

Christ is the Mediator between God and men, by whom we approach to God, and offer up our prayers to him; there is no approaching to God in any other way; God is a consuming fire; the flaming sword of justice stands between God and sinners; there is no day's man between them to lay his hands on both, but Christ; none can come to the Father but by him; he has opened a way to him through the vail of his flesh, and through his precious blood, which gives boldness to enter into the holiest of all; through him there is an access by one Spirit unto the Father; he is the way of acceptance with God, as well as of access unto him; it is by him we offer up the sacrifice of prayer and praise, which becomes acceptable to God through the incense of his mediation.

The encouragement to prayer is taken chiefly from him; and the pleas at the throne of grace for blessings of grace are founded on his person, blood, righteousness, sacrifice, and intercession; from his being an advocate with the Father for us, and the propitiation for our sins, and from our having such and so great an High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, and is over the house of God; we are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace, to draw near with true hearts, and even in full assurance of faith (1 John 2:1, 2; Heb. 4:14, 16, 10:21, 22), believing, that whatsoever we ask in his name the Father will give it to us; yea, that Christ himself "will do it;" which shows his equality with his Father, and that he has the same power of doing what he does (John 14:13, 14, 16:23, 24).

The Spirit of God has also a great concern in prayer; he is the author and enditer of it; he is the "Spirit of grace and of supplication," who forms it in the heart; and therefore it is called "inwrought prayer;" he creates divine breathings, and holy desires after spiritual things in men; yea, puts words into their mouths, and bids them take them with them; he impresses their minds with a feeling sense of their wants, and fills their mouths with arguments, and puts strength into them to plead with God; he helps them under their infirmities, when they know not what to pray for, nor how; and makes intercession for them according to the will of God; he gives freedom to them when they are so shut up that they cannot come forth; where he is there is liberty; he is the Spirit of adoption, witnessing to their spirits that they are the children of God; enables them to go to God as their Father, and to cry Abba, Father; and as the Spirit of faith, encourages them to pray in faith and with fervency.

Moses, when he prayed for Israel, when engaged in battle with Amalek, represented a praying saint in its conflict with spiritual enemies; a stone was put under him, on which he sat, while lifting up his hands, an emblem of Christ, the Eben Ezer, the stone of help in time of need; Aaron and Hur, the one on one side, and the other on the other, held up his hands, and stayed them; Aaron, who could speak well, was a type of Christ the advocate and spokesman, of his people, by whose mediation they are encouraged and supported in prayer; and Hur is a name which has the signification of liberty, and may point to the Spirit of God, who is a "free Spirit," and as such upholds and supports the saints in the exercise of grace and discharge of duty.

The next to be considered are, 3. The parts of prayer, of which it consists; the apostle, in Philippians 4:6 uses four words to express it by; and which are commonly thought to design distinct species or parts of prayer; which are comprehended under the general name of "requests," or petitions, as "prayer and supplication with thanksgiving": and he also uses four words for it[13], with some little difference, in 1 Timothy 2:1 "Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks;" by which one and the same thing may be signified in different words, according to the different respects which it has[14]; but if these have different senses, and are different species or parts of prayer, Origen's[15] account of them seems as good as any; that "supplication" is for some good that we stand in need of; "prayer" for greater things, when in great danger, that is, deliverance from it; "intercession" is expressed with more freedom, familiarity, and faith, with greater confidence of having what is asked of God; and "thanksgiving" is an acknowledgment of good things obtained of God by prayer.

But to proceed, and more particularly consider the parts of prayer, of what it consists; and I mean not to prescribe any form of prayer, but to direct to the matter and method. And, 3a. In prayer there should be a celebration of the divine perfections; and it is proper to begin with this; we should declare the name of the Lord to whom we pray, and ascribe greatness to our God; we should begin with some one or other of his names and titles, expressive of his nature, and of the relation he stands in to us as creatures, and new creatures; and make mention of some one or more of his perfections, which may serve to command an

awe and reverence of him; to engage our affections to him; to strengthen our faith and confidence in him, and raise our expectations of being heard and answered by him, as before observed; as of his purity, holiness, and righteousness; of his omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence; and of his immutability and faithfulness, love, grace, and mercy. 3b.

There should be an acknowledgment of our vileness and sinfulness, of our meanness and unworthiness in ourselves; we should come before a pure and holy God under a sense of the depravity and pollution of our nature, and of our unworthiness to be admitted into his presence, and to worship at his footstool; when we take upon us to speak unto the Lord, we should own, with Abraham, that we are but "dust and ashes;" not only frail and mortal creatures, but sinful and impure; and with Jacob, that we are not "worthy of the least of all the mercies" showed us, nor of receiving any favour from God; and therefore do not present our supplications to him "for our righteousnesses, but for his great mercies". 3c.

There should be a confession of sin; of the sin of our nature, of original sin, of indwelling sin; of the sins of our lives and actions; of our daily transgressions of the law of God in thought, word, and deed: this has been the practice of saints in all ages; of David, Daniel, and others (Ps. 32:5, 51:3-5) and which is encouraged (1 John 1:9). 3d. There should be a deprecation of all evil things, which our sins deserve; so our Lord taught his disciples to pray; "Deliver us from all evil;" and this seems to be the meaning of the saints oftentimes when they pray for the forgiveness of their own sins and those of others[16], that God would deliver them out of present distress, of what kind soever, remove his afflicting hand, which lies heavy upon them, and avert those evils which seem to threaten them, and prevent their coming upon them; in which sense we are to understand many of the petitions of Moses, Job, Solomon, and others (Ex. 32:32; Num. 14:19, 20; Job 7:21; 1 King 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50). 3e.

Another part or branch of prayer is, a petition for good things, which are needed; for temporal mercies, such as regard the sustenance of our bodies, the comfort, support, and preservation of life; so our Lord has taught us to pray; "Give us this day our daily bread;" which includes all the necessaries of life. Agur's prayer with respect to this is a very wise one, and to be copied after (Prov. 30:7-9). Spiritual blessings are to be prayed for; which, though laid up in covenant, and are sure to all the covenant ones, what God has promised, and will be performed; and we may have this confidence in him, that whatsoever we ask, according to his will, we shall have; but then they must be asked for; seeing, for what he has promised, and will do, he will "yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them" (Ezek. 36:37). 3f.

Prayer should always be accompanied with thanksgiving; this should always be a part of it; since, as we have always mercies to pray for, we have always mercies to be thankful for (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6). 3g. At the close of this work it is proper to make use of doxologies, or ascriptions of glory to God; of which we have many instances, either of which may be made use of (Matthew 6:13; Eph. 3:21; 1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 1:24, 25; Rev. 1:5, 6), which serve to show forth the praises of God, to express our gratitude to him, and our dependence on him, and expectation of receiving from him what we have been praying for; and the whole may be concluded with the word "Amen," as expressing our assent to what has been prayed for, our wishes and desires for the accomplishment of it, and our full and firm persuasion and belief of our having what we have been asking for, according to the will of God. 4.

The persons to be prayed for may be next considered. Not devils; for as God has not spared them, nor provided a Saviour for them, nor is any mercy promised to them, so none can be asked for them. But men; yet only the living, not the dead; for after death is the judgment, when the final state of men is inevitably fixed; and there is no passing out of one state into another: nor those who have sinned the sin unto death,

the unpardonable sin (1 John 5:16), yet those who are dead in sins, unconverted sinners, may be prayed for (Rom. 10:1), we may pray for unconverted friends and relations, for our children in a state of nature, as Abraham did for Ishmael; and especially we may pray in faith for the conversion of God's elect, as our Lord himself did (John 17:20), and it is an incumbent duty, to pray "for all saints;" of every country, of whatsoever denomination they may be, and in whatsoever circumstances; and therefore we are to pray to God as "our Father" and theirs, as the Father of us all; and for all that are his children, that love the Lord Jesus, bear his image, are called by his name, and call on his name; particularly for the ministers of the gospel, that they may speak the word boldly and faithfully, as they ought to speak it; that the word of the Lord, ministered by them, might have a free course, and be glorified, and be blessed for conversion, comfort, and edification; and that the Lord would raise up and send forth other labourers into his vineyard: yea, we are to pray "for all men;" for all sorts of men, "for kings, and all in authority," for civil magistrates, that they may be terrors to evildoers, and a praise to them that do well; and that the time may hasten on when kings shall be nursing fathers and queens nursing mothers to the church and people of God: we are to pray for the peace and welfare of the inhabitants of any city or country in which we dwell, since in the peace thereof we have peace.

Nay, we are to pray for our enemies, who despitefully use and persecute us; this is enjoined us by Christ, and of which he has set us an example (Matthew 5:44; Luke 23:44) and so Stephen prayed for those that stoned him (Acts 7:60). 5. The manner in which prayer is to be performed is worthy of attention. 5a. It must be done "with" or "in the Spirit;" "I will pray with the Spirit," says the apostle (1 Cor. 14:15)[17], by which he either means the extraordinary gift which he and other apostles had, of speaking with various tongues, which he determined to make use of, yet only when he could be understood by others; or the ordinary gift of the Spirit, his grace, influence, and assistance, which are necessary in prayer; and is the same which the apostle Jude calls, "praying in the Holy Ghost;" and the apostle Paul, "supplication in the Spirit" (Jude 1:20; Eph. 6:18).

The concern the Spirit of God has in prayer, and the need there is of his grace and assistance in it, and the use thereof, have been observed already; but it does not follow from hence that men ought not to pray but when they have the Spirit, and are under his influences: for prayer is a natural duty, and binding on all men, who are to pray as well as they can, though none but spiritual men can pray in a spiritual manner; and yet even such are not always under the gracious influences of the Spirit, and such, when destitute of them, should pray for them; for "our heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him;" and when men are in darkness and distress, without the light of God's countenance, the communications of his grace, and the influences of his Spirit, they stand in the more need of prayer, and should be more constant at it (Ps. 130:1; Jon. 2:2, 4, 7). 5b.

It should be performed "with the understanding also," as in the forementioned place; with an understanding of the object of prayer, God in Christ; or otherwise men will pray unto and worship they know not what, an unknown God; and with an understanding of the way of access unto him, Christ, the Mediator between God and man; and with a spiritual understanding of the things prayed for, having their understandings enlightened by the Spirit of God: by whom they are taught what to pray for, and how to pray as they ought, and know that what they ask according to the will of God, that they have the petitions they desire of him. 5c.

It must be done in faith, without which it is impossible to please God in this or in any other duty; what we ask we should "ask in faith, nothing wavering;" it is the "prayer of faith" that is effectual; for our Lord assures us, "all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22). 5d.

Fervency in spirit is requisite to prayer; we should be fervent in spirit, "serving the Lord" in every branch of duty, and so in this prayer; for it is "the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man which availeth much" (James 5:16).

Prayer, which is compared to incense, like that, burns sweetly, when kindled by the fire of the Spirit, and the flame of love; such earnest, fervent, and importunate prayer was made by the church for Peter incessantly; and we have an instance of earnest, intense, and fervent prayer in our Lord, whose prayers and supplications were with "strong crying" and tears; and being in an agony, prayed the more earnestly and fervently (Luke 22:44; Heb. 5:7). 5e. Prayer should be put up to God in sincerity; it should go forth, "not out of feigned lips," but from the heart; men should draw nigh to God with true hearts, and call upon him in truth; that is, in the sincerity of their souls; for when they cry not to him with their hearts, it is reckoned no other than howling on their beds (Hosea 7:14). 5f.

It should always be made with submission to the will of God, as our Lord's was when he prayed so earnestly: so when we want to have a favour conferred, or an affliction removed, it becomes us to say, "the will of the Lord be done" (Luke 22:42; Acts 21:14). 5g. It should be performed with assiduity and watchfulness; there should be a "watching thereunto with all perseverance," (Eph. 6:18) for a fit opportunity of doing it, and for the proper and suitable time of need, and when the Lord is nigh to be found: and there should be a watching in the same "with thanksgiving," (Col. 4:2) for the aid and assistance of the Spirit; that the heart be lift up with the hands; that it does not wander in it, nor enter into temptation: and there should be a watching after it, for an answer to it, and a return of it; "In the morning," says David, "will I direct my prayer unto thee, and look up" for the blessing or mercy prayed for; and again, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak" (Ps. 5:3, 85:8). 6.

The time of prayer, with the continuance in it, and duration of it; it should be "always;" "Praying always with all prayer," (Eph. 6:18) hence these exhortations; "Continue in prayer; Pray without ceasing," (Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17). Not that men are to be always on their knees, and ever formally, praying[18]; for there are many civil duties of a man's calling in life which are to be attended to; and other religious duties, besides prayer, which are not to be neglected; one duty is not to shut out another, whether on a civil or sacred account: but it is desirable to be always in praying frames, and the heart to be ready for it on all occasions; it should be daily, since there is daily need of it, daily cases call for it; we want daily bread for our bodies, and the inward man needs to be renewed day by day.

Temptations are daily; our adversary, the devil, goes about continually like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; and therefore we should pray daily that we enter not into temptation. The above exhortations are opposed unto, and strike at such who either pray not at all, judging it to be vain and fruitless (Job 21:15), or who have prayed, but have left off praying, which Job was charged with, though wrongly (Job 15:4), or who discontinue it because they have not an immediate answer; our Lord spoke a parable to this end, "That men ought always to pray, and not to faint;" to continue praying, and not be discouraged, because their prayers seem not to be heard at once; and gives an instance of the success of the importunate widow with the unjust judge (Luke 18:1; &c.), or who pray only when in distress; it is right to pray at such a time (James 5:13; Ps. 50:15), but this is what graceless persons, who are in a state of distance and alienation from God, and what carnal professors and careless souls will do (Isa. 26:16; Hosea 5:15).

The Jews had stated times in the day for prayer. Daniel prayed three times a day; and what these times were we learn from David; "Evening, and morning, and at noon" (Ps. 55:17). The prayer in the morning,

according to Maimonides[19], was from sunrising to the end of the fourth hour (or ten o'clock) which is the third part of the day (see Acts 2:15). The prayer at noon, was at the sixth hour (or twelve o'clock), at which time Peter went up to the housetop to pray (Acts 10:9).

The evening prayer was at the ninth hour (or three o'clock in the afternoon), about the time of the evening sacrifice; at which time, which was the hour of prayer, Peter and John went up to the temple to pray; at this time we find Cornelius at prayer (Acts 3:1 10:3), and this practice obtained among Christians in early times. Jerome[20] speaks of it as a tradition of the church, that the third, sixth, and ninth hours are times for prayer; and it is a practice laudable enough, where there is leisure from other lawful exercises; and when no stress is laid on the punctual performance of it at these precise times; and is not made a term and condition of acceptance with God; which would bring us back to the covenant of works, ensnare our souls, and entangle us with a yoke of bondage.

What Clemens of Alexandria[21] observes, is worthy of notice; some, says he, appoint stated hours for prayer, the third, sixth, and ninth hours; but "the Gnostic (who is endued with the true knowledge of God and divine things) prays throughout his whole life; his whole life is an holy convocation, a sacred festival:" yea it is said of Socrates, the heathen philosopher, to the shame of Christians, "the life of Socrates was full of prayer." From the whole of this we learn, that at least a day should not pass over without prayer.

I proceed to observe, 7. The encouragement to prayer, and the advantages arising from it. Saints may be encouraged to it. 7a. From the concern which God, Father, Son, and Spirit have in it; which has been taken notice of already. God the Father, as the God of all grace, sits on the throne of grace, holding forth the sceptre of grace; inviting men to come thither, where they may find grace and mercy to help them in their time of need: Christ is the Mediator, through whom they have access to God, audience of him, and acceptance with him; Christ is their Advocate with the Father, who pleads their cause, and makes intercession for them; he introduces them into the presence of God, and as the Angel of his presence presents their prayers to God, perfumed with his much incense.

And the Spirit of God is the Spirit of grace and of supplication, who supplies them with grace, and assists them in their supplications to God; and by whom, through Christ, they have access to God as their Father. 7b. From the interest saints have in God, to whom they pray, they have encouragement to it; he is their Father by adopting grace, whose heart is full of love, pity, and compassion; his heart is towards them, his eyes are upon them, and his ears are open to their cries; he is their covenant God and Father, who has provided blessings in covenant for them, and is ready to distribute them, upon their application to him by prayer (Phil. 4:19). 7c.

From the call of God in providence, and by his Spirit, to it, and his delight in it, saints may take encouragement to be found in the performance of it (Ps. 27:8), he delights to see the face, and hear the prayers of his people (Prov. 15:8; Ps. 102:17). 7d. Many promises are made to praying souls; as of deliverance from trouble, &c. (Ps. 50:15, 91:15). For their encouragement it is said, "Ask, and it shall be given," &c. (Matthew 7:7) yea, God has never "said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain" (Isa. 45:19). 7e.

The experience the people of God in all ages have had of answers of prayers, either to themselves or others, serve greatly to animate them to this duty: this was the experience of David, and he observed it in others (Ps. 40:1, 34:6), and this was not the case only of a single, and of a private person, but of good men in times past, in all ages (Ps. 22:4, 5). 7f. It is "good for saints to draw nigh to God;" it is not only

good, because it is their duty; but it is a pleasant good, when they have the presence of God in it, and their souls are drawn out towards him; and it is a profitable good to them, when God owns it as an ordinance, for the quickening the graces of his Spirit, subduing the corruptions of their hearts, and bringing them into nearer communion and fellowship with himself.

Praying souls are profitable in families, in churches, in neighbourhoods, and commonwealths; when prayerless ones are useless, and obtain nothing, neither for themselves nor others. Of all the fruits which faith produces in Christians, says Beza[22], prayer, that is, calling on the name of God, through Christ, is the principal one. ENDNOTES:

[1] omilia prov ton yeon h euch Clem. Alex. Stromat. l. 7. p. 722, 742.

[2] Clemens Alex. ut supra.

[3] In Reg. Hisp. Bibl.

[4] Apud Joseph. contra Apion. l. 1. c. 22.

[5] Maimon. Cele Hamikdash, c. 6. s. 1, 5. See Lightfoot's Temple Service, c. 7. s. 3. p. 924, 925.

[6] Maimon. Hilchot Tephillah, c. 8. s. 1.

[7] Ib. c. 11. s. 1.

[8] Deut. Vita Mosis, l. 3. p. 685. et de Leg. ad Caium, p. 1014.

[9] In Vita ejus, s. 54.

[10] Apolog. 2. p. 93.

[11] Apologet. c. 39.

[12] Deut. Corona Mil. c. 3.

[13] They seem to answer to four words used by the Jews, of prayer, hnxt hlpt hvqb hkrb Vid. Vitringam de Synagog. vet. par. 2. l. 3. c. 13. p. 1025. & c. 19. p. 1103.

[14] Witsius de Orat. Domin. Exercit. 1. s. 2, 4.

[15] peri euchv, c. 44. Ed. Oxon.

[16] Of Praying for the Pardon of Sin; see the Body of Doctrinal Divinity, vol. ii. b. 6. c. 7. p. 354. See on topic 1013.

[17] See a Discourse of mine on this text. See Gill on "1 Cor. 14:15".

[18] There were a sort of heretics in the fourth century, called Euchetae and Messalians; who, neglecting all business, pretended to pray continually, ascribing their whole salvation to it, Aug. de Haeres. c. 57. & Danaeus in ib.

[19] Hilchot Tephillah, c. 3. s. 1.

[20] Comment. in Dan. fol. 270. M.

[21] Stromat. I. 7. p. 722, 728. Maximus Tyrius apud Witsium in Orat. Domin. Exercitat. 2. s. 19. p. 43.

[22] Confessio Fidei, c. 4. art. 16. p. 34.

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