

The Prayer of Intercession

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

The Prayer of Intercession is a crucial aspect of evangelism, and believers have a vital role to play in cooperating with God to bring souls to Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 11:27, John 6:44-45, John 14:14, Romans 8:26, Romans 10:13, 1 Peter 2:9, 1 John 5:16

Topics: "Intercessory Prayer", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer delves into the successive aspects of the movements of the 'power of God unto salvation,' emphasizing the necessity of divine illumination by the Spirit to unveil the Gospel to the blinded minds. He highlights the role of prayer of intercession as a crucial step in the power of God unto salvation, revealing believers as royal priests unto God, offering spiritual sacrifices and interceding for the lost. Chafer stresses the importance of prevailing prayer in evangelism, showing how God's divine power is conditioned on human faithfulness in prayer, and how intercessory prayer is a strategic point for the attack of the enemy, Satan.

Transcript

In this attempt to consider the successive aspects of the movements of the "power of God unto salvation," it has already been seen that true evangelism must face the humanly impossible task of lifting the Satanic veil that rests upon all unregenerate minds in connection with the one subject, "the Gospel." This blinding by Satan having been imposed at this one point, for the sufficient reason that "the Gospel" is the revelation of the only way of escape for sinful man from the power of Satan unto God, both the "good news" of the finished work upon the cross and the glory of the living Christ in His present position as Intercessor and Advocate, have been obscured. On the other hand, it has been seen that there is a divinely provided illumination by the Spirit which causes the same "good news" of the finished work and the present glory of Christ to become a reality to the hitherto blinded mind.

The unveiling of the Gospel by the Spirit is necessary and reasonable. For the conditions of saving faith are no less than a deposit of the whole being into the saving power of Christ; and, while superficial decisions may be secured through mere human influence and power, there will be no complete repose of faith until the way is made plain by the enlightenment of the Spirit.

It is true that no man can know the Father, in soul rest, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him (Matt. 11:27, 28). This is the basis of all fellowship with God. It is equally true of the unsaved that no man can come to Christ as Saviour except the Father draw him (John 6:44). Again, "It is written in

the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45).

In view of the appalling absence of personal concern on the part of the multitude of unsaved, in spite of much faithful preaching and exhortation, every serious soul-winner will, sooner or later, raise the question: "What, then, hinders the Spirit from performing His office work of convincing the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment"? The answer to this central question in modern evangelism is found in that subject which is the next step in the successive aspects of the power of God unto salvation, as they are here being considered in their reverse order. That subject is the Prayer of Intercession.

There are but three possible ways in which the believer can fulfil the God-appointed human part in seeking the lost. These are: prayer, personal effort or influence, and giving. Both the first and the last are world-wide in their scope, while the other is limited to the locality and opportunity of the individual. There can never be a question as to the relative value of these various lines of service, for the ministry of prayer is continually open to every believer, and is only limited in its possibilities by the feeble faith of man. There is much in the New Testament that emphasizes the importance of preaching the Word as a means unto salvation; but it is evident that there must be more than the human statement of the truth. The Spirit must wield His mighty Sword and that work of the Spirit, to a large extent it would seem, is subject to believing prayer.

A Christian, as has been mentioned in a previous chapter, is, from the moment of his salvation, constituted a royal priest unto God. The meaning and scope of his position may be better understood by referring to the Aaronic priesthood under the law, for the Old Testament priesthood is evidently a type, or a foreshadowing in some particulars, of the royal priesthood under grace.

That there is a royal priesthood under grace is revealed in the following Scriptures: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises [virtues] of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever" (Rev. 1:6). "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 hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26, 27).

The essential truth concerning the priesthood under grace is suggested in these passages. Here the priesthood is seen as composed of the members of the body of Christ, which is His Church. A "chosen generation" speaks of their position by the new birth; a "royal priesthood" and "kings and priests" of their office; a "holy nation" and a "holy priesthood" of their necessary cleansing; and a "peculiar people" of their essential heavenly character, as distinguished from the people of the world. So again, "lively stones" speaks of their individual responsibility and service; "offer spiritual sacrifices" and the "intercession by the Spirit" speak of their ministry; while the words "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" speak of the rent veil, their access to God, and of their "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh" (Heb. 10:19, 20).

Returning to these important teachings to consider them in the same order, and more at length, it will be seen:

I. A "Chosen Generation."

Like the Aaronic priest under the law, the New Testament priest is born to his position. He is constituted a priest unto God as a part of the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. His position and his privileges, therefore, begin with his new birth into the nature and family of God. It is most important to emphasize the truth that every believer is a priest unto God, though he may never intelligently exercise his glorious privilege. The full realization of this position, so far as it affects prayer, is one of the greatest needs among believers today. It is more than a belief in the general efficacy of prayer. It is to be able to say, "I believe God will do His greatest works solely in answer to my prayer."

II. A "Royal Priesthood" and "Kings and Priests."

The New Testament priesthood is an office. This is in marked contrast to the believer's gifts for service. The contrast is seen in the fact that those things which constitute the ministry of the priest are the privilege and duty of all believers alike: while the gifts for service are bestowed by the Spirit "as he will" (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11). Not all believers have the same gift for service; but all are privileged to minister in the priestly office. Not all have the gift of teaching, or of healing; but all have access in prayer.

III. A "Holy Nation" and a "Holy Priesthood."

The importance of cleansing for the exercise of the priestly office under grace is seen through the words "a holy priesthood." It is seen both as it is foreshadowed in the demands for laving and purification of the Old Testament priest, and in the fact that the ministry of the New Testament priest is also in the holiest place, and is directed unto God. In that holy place the least taint of sin or defilement cannot be allowed, though a degree of unfitness might not hinder the exercise of gifts where the service is only to men.

IV. A "Peculiar People."

No greater evidence of the mighty transformation that is wrought by salvation can be found than the fact that the privilege is granted to the one who is saved of entering the holiest place where Christ is already entered in, and is there making intercession for His own who are in the world. Only those who have partaken of the divine nature by regeneration and have come, by grace, to be heavenly in being and destiny could be so favored.

V. "Lively Stones."

As the ministry of gifts in the church is individual, even world-wide evangelism being committed to each believer rather than to the Church as a body, so there is no present service for the New Testament priests as a whole; but their service is individual, as their cleansing and fitness must be.

VI. To "Offer Spiritual Sacrifices" and the "Intercession by the Spirit."

The Old Testament priest was sanctified and cleansed that he might offer sacrifices and enter the "Holy of holies" to intercede for others; so the New Testament priest is appointed to offer sacrifices in three particulars:

(a) His own body: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1, R.V., with margin. See also Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6; James 1:27). (b) His worship: "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of

praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Heb. 13:15). (c) His substance: "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:16); "But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18). These spiritual sacrifices we may now offer to God.

The New Testament priest is also an intercessor, which, as the word implies, differs from a supplicator who may pray wholly for himself. The intercessor bears the burden and need of others before God, and intercedes in their behalf. No human wisdom is sufficient for this ministry in the holiest place; for "we know not what to pray for as we ought"; but God has anticipated our inability and provided the energizing Spirit Who "maketh intercession for us," and "according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26, 27).

VII. "Acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ."

How much is required in those searching words, "acceptable to God"! Yet how perfect is the believer's fitting "by Jesus Christ"! Only some personal defilement uncleansed, or sin unconfessed can hinder the exercise of the priestly office by the least of all believers. "By Jesus Christ" he has been made "acceptable to God," and only personal pollution can now hinder the realization of those precious privileges in the presence of God.

All evangelism must begin with prayer. And no human service, or device, can take the place of the intercession of a priest who is cleansed, and "acceptable to God," even in the holiest place "by Jesus Christ."

While the believer-priest may intercede in behalf of his fellow-members in the body of Christ, it is a privilege of his co-partnership with Christ to intercede for the lost; and the answer to that prayer will be the going forth of the Spirit to convince them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.

The importance of preaching and teaching the truth is in no way lessened by this emphasis upon priestly prayer. It must only be borne in mind that prevailing prayer necessarily accompanies all other ministry; for it commands the power of God, and secures the needed illumination of the mind toward the Word that may be preached. Without prayer there will be little understanding and vision of the Gospel, even though faithfully presented.

The reason for human intercession in the divine plan has not been wholly revealed. The repeated statements of Scripture that it is a necessary link in the chain that carries the divine energy into the impotent souls of men, in addition to its actual achievement as seen in the world, must be the sufficient evidence of the imperative need for the prayer in connection with the purpose of God. Thus in the Scriptures and in experience it is revealed that God has honored man with an exalted place of cooperation and partnership with Himself in His great projects of human transformation.

Among the many direct and positive promises wherein the activity of the divine power is conditioned on human faithfulness in prayer but one will here be quoted and considered.

In John 14:14, it is written: "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (see also John 15:7; 16:23, 24; and Luke 11:9). In this Scripture the assignment of both the divine and the human part in the work is clearly seen; for the bald outline of this passage is, "If ye shall ask, . . . I will do." Thus God reserves to Himself the undertaking and accomplishment of every object of human intercession, and assigns to man

the service of prayer. This is quite reasonable; for it is evident that the accomplishment of any spiritual transformation must ever be His to do. since its consummation is possible to divine strength alone. Thus, though man cannot do the important task, he is permitted, through intercession, to cooperate with God in its accomplishment, and to fulfil, according to revelation, a necessary part in the divine program.

Prayer is said to be a cause. It is because of prayer that God promises to do. He is pleased to work through preaching; but his mighty undertakings are conditioned on prayer. Effective preaching is one of the necessary means in answering faithful prayer. It is said in Rom. 10:13, 14, that the unsaved cannot hear without a preacher; yet it is equally true that the preaching, to be effective, must be in the "demonstration and power of the Holy Spirit."

It should be noted that, under these conditions and relationships, stated in John 14:14, every true prayer is not only an acknowledgment of God as the only sufficient One, but it demands an attitude of entire expectation from Him on the part of the supplicant. This is essential if normal relations are to exist between God and man. The answer to prayer, when the expectation is not wholly toward God, would but divert the confidence of man, and foster a false trust in his mind. It is necessary for man, therefore, in the interests of his own understanding of God and truth, to come directly to God, acknowledging His omnipotence, and looking to Him as alone sufficient to do the thing for which he may be praying.

Again, it may be seen from this promise that God, to some extent, has seen fit to condition His action upon the believer's prayer; for the Scripture says: "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it"; and this is the secret of all true evangelism.

There is another promise bearing directly on this point: "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it" (1 John 5:16).

It is, then, the teaching of Scripture that the action of the mighty power of God in convicting and illuminating the unsaved is also, in a large measure, dependent upon the priestly intercession of the believer. This, too, is a conspicuous fact in experience as revealed in history. Where believing prayer has been offered with expectation toward God alone, there has always been evidence of the power of God unto salvation, according to His covenant promises. These periods of refreshing have been called "revivals." The immediate blessing resulting from the adjustment of believers to the program of God is natural; but the certain return to an attitude of indifference, on the human side, has made that brief season of blessing seem to be some special visitation from heaven when God was thought to have been "on the giving hand." It may have been impossible, in such a case, for the extra meetings and methods to have continued; but the blessing was in no way conditioned on the meetings or methods. Intercessory prayer, the real basis of the blessing, could and should have continued. The marvellous, and so little experienced, movings of the Spirit upon the unsaved are at the command of the least of God's children, if that one be cleansed; for such a believer is a priest unto God, and no limitation of times and seasons is set in the New Testament upon his intercession.

How little the stupendous fact of this individual power in prayer is realized by Christians today! The present failure on the part of Christians to enter the holy place in intercession according to the appointment of God is sufficient to account for the present lack of Holy Spirit conviction and conversion in the church.

The neglect and ignorance of the facts regarding the believer's privileges in prayer, when those facts are so clearly stated in the Scriptures, can be explained only in the light of the revealed Satanic opposition to

the purpose of God; for intercessory prayer is a strategic point for the attack of this arch enemy, inasmuch as the mighty movements of the Spirit for salvation are, for the present time, awaiting this human cooperation.

If there are exceptions in the history of ingatherings where there have been what seemed to be unprayed-for out-pourings of the Spirit, in no case can it be proven that prayer was not offered. In every case where the Spirit seemed to descend upon the church with sovereign power, there has been either an appalling spiritual death in the church, or a new emphasis has been needed upon some neglected truth in evangelism. Such seasons have been so rare in the history of the church that they can be counted only as exceptions, and should in no way be used to qualify the revealed plan of God, which He has blessed throughout the years.

Not only are the priceless results of the saving power of God hindered, but the individual believer has suffered unmeasured loss in his possible reward, when the prayer of intercession has for any reason ceased. Prayer presents the greatest opportunity for soul-winning, and there is precious reward promised to those who bring souls to Christ, and are found to be suffering with Him in His burden for the lost.

Fundamentally, then, the personal element in true soul-winning work is more a service of pleading for souls than a service of pleading with souls. It is talking with God about men from a clean heart and in the power of the Spirit, rather than talking to men about God. But let no one conclude that such intercessory prayer is not a service demanding time and vitality. If faithfully entered into, this ministry, as has been pointed out, will result in an opportunity to direct Spirit-moved men to the faithful provisions and promises of God.

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