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THOUGHTS ON PRAYER.

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"I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."
—1 Tim. ii. 8.

The passage of scripture at the head of this article refers more particularly to the public prayers in the house of God, but it is also a command and a directory for prayer in every place and condition.

Prayer is the heart's desire of helpless, dependent, guilty man for aid, bounty, and pardon from a justly-offended God. It is the longing of the soul, when stung with remorse and terror, for a way of escape from impending wrath,—the cry of a soul, partially enlightened, for succour from him who is "the refuge from the storm"—"Lord save me, I perish." It is the calling upon God for deliverance when distress of any kind is endured, and when it is felt that there is no help in man. And it is the breathing of the sanctified heart for a closer walk with God—for a brighter manifestation of the grace of Christ—for a complete conformity to the image of God's dear Son.

Prayer is suitable for men in every condition, and it is indispensable. A Christian cannot live without prayer, and a man cannot become a Christian without prayer. It is the knocking at heaven's gate, without which that gate opens not—the enquiry at God, without which the blessings of salvation never diffuse joy and gladness over the sin-stricken soul. It is God's ordinance—God's gift. God hears and answers prayer.

It is therefore the duty and the privilege of all men to pray—to come to the throne of grace by Christ, the new and living way, and there, acknowledging their helplessness, and confessing their guilt, to ask that his name may be glorified in delivering them from so great a death as that which is the wages of sin.

Some will tell us that men of such and such a description of character should not pray; and some will refuse to join in prayer with those they call "unconverted men"—that is, in many cases, with those who follow not with them, forgetting that it is God's prerogative to try the heart, and that he will take effectual care that his name and glory be not dishonoured by any.

It is true we read of prayers that shall not be answered—of sins that are not to be prayed for—that shall never be forgiven; but not a word is said of the inpropriety of prayer, even in the case where the petition is not granted; and we cannot tell where that sin is committed that shall not be forgiven. We read that the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord. We hear God saying,—"When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear." But whenever we behold a poor creature, however guilty, crying to God for mercy—seeking him, it may be, with many a cloud of error and darkness around—it becomes us not to say that such a one is of the wicked, whose prayer is an abomination—that he is stretching forth hands which the Lord regards not—making prayer which the Lord will not hear. Contrary to the prejudices, bigotry, and cruelty of men, God says, "I will that men pray everywhere;" and he takes measures to protect the sanctity of every approach to his holy place, far

more effectually than can do the most zealous angels; for, in prayer, he says there must be a "lifting up of holy hands, without doubting." So whatever obstacles men may, in pride or misdirected zeal, put in the way of a poor sinner seeking Christ, we need not mind them. God says "Come"—"Come now and let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

I. The duty of prayer is prescribed and enjoined upon all men—"I will that men pray."

It was Paul's earnest wish. The Apostle had once lived without true prayer, though he did not know that then; but he was called by God's grace—a change passed over him—and it was said of the persecutor of God's people, "Behold, he prayeth;" and ever since that memorable day when Christ was revealed in him, prayer was his constant and delightful practice. He knew the value of prayer—the joy of communion with God. So highly did he prize the blessings given in answer to prayer, that for them he was willing to endure, and did endure, unheard of sufferings without a sigh. So full was he with what God had done for his soul, that he could not contain himself—his swelling heart was like to burst—the benefit was too great for his shoulders to bear—and so he invites every sinner—every man to come with him and call upon the Lord, and be partakers of redeeming love. Oh! if ye knew what I know, he says—and ye saw what I see—if ye enjoyed what I enjoy, I am sure ye would pray! I will—I wish that men would pray.

But the Apostle spoke as he was moved by the Holy Ghost, and what was Paul's wish was the Spirit's will—not the absolute sovereign will of God, for that cannot be resisted—but God's desire—the same will as is spoken of in a preceding verse, where it is said, "God will have all men to be saved"—the same will as Christ's, when he says of the guilty and doomed Jerusalem, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, and ye would not!" So we have God's permission and command, and it is God's sincere desire that we call upon him in prayer.

The Apostle introduces this injunction to prayer by the word "therefore," which marks its connection with the foregoing context. At the beginning of the chapter, he had exhorted that "supplications, prayers, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings and all that are in authority," &c. Consider for a moment who were kings and men in authority in Paul's days—Herod, Pilate, Nero, and such like—a set of the most wicked and unprincipled rulers that ever lived. If they were to be prayed for by God's people, they might also, if God would but incline their hearts to repentance, pray for themselves; and if they might call upon God for mercy, where is the sinner who may not draw near to the throne of grace? Who can be more of an incarnate fiend than was the execrable Nero?

Again, the Apostle has also said in a preceding verse, that Christ "gave himself a ransom for all." He does not mean that Christ paid the price of redemption for every man, for then every man would be redeemed; and the sad truth is too apparent, both from scripture and observation, that the redeemed of Christ are but a remnant. The Apostle was speaking of men in different degrees or classes. The first Christians, interpreting too literally some of the words of Christ, perhaps considered that the poor were the special objects of his mercy, or at least that the rulers of those days, who were not

only persecutor of the church, but also men of "ho-met debased and vulgar character, were excluded from any hope of salvation. To correct this error, the Apostle says, Christ gave himself a ransom for all—that is, for men in every rank, condition, and age. Christ also gave himself a ransom for all in the sense that he offers the blessings of salvation without money and without price to every hearer of the gospel, and adds, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Paul was ordained to preach the gospel—to offer a free and sufficient Jesus, one able and willing to save to the ut-most all who come unto God by him—to every man within the reach of his voice—therefore he urges them to prayer, well knowing that if they called in truth upon the Lord alone, the work of the redemption on was begun. Nothing can be more true than that "without faith it is impossible to please God," and without the Holy Spirit we cannot pray—but prayer is our duty notwithstanding; and in a *secret heart's desire*, addressed to God, there must be faith though it may be weak—there is the spirit, though his operations may be unknown. So let not any who would see God's face in righteousness, remain far from the mercy seat, waiting for some inputs or qualifications yet to come, but instantly by prayer and thanksgiving let their requests be made known to God—let them ask in Christ's name, as perceiving, as for blessings whose value cannot be estimated, and, for their encouragement, let them remember the words thrice repeated in the oracles of truth, "Whoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

II. Prayer should be made to God in all circumstances, at all times, in every place—"I will that men pray everywhere."

1. Are you in adverse circumstances? Has all earthly refuge failed you? Then who is a rock but our God? To whom can you go but unto him? And, to encourage you in your approach, consider that he is the God of providence. He has brought you under this calamity or trial to startle you from your sleep, on the brink of perdition, or to purge you, that you may bring forth more fruit. God has done it in love, to humble you, and to bring you in earnest to seek his aid—to call in truth on him alone. And consider further, there is an advocate above—an intercessor who is touched with a feeling of our infirmity—who was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin—and come, cast your burden upon him—praise the Lord, and try the truth of his word—call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee.

Are you in prosperous circumstances? Who makes you a candidate to shine? Who continues to you your comforts? Who can make them blessings instead of clogs to your soul? Thank God for his favours. Rest not on them, but seek the giver, and implore grace to improve every mercy.

Do you fear that you are unpardoned, unreconciled sinner? God in Christ stands before you—the eyes that once ran in tears over doomed Jerusalem are fixed with imploring looks upon you. He can if he will make you clean—upon you call yourself—come and say, "Wash thou me."

Are you living and walking by faith? Then you will pray, for you will feel a "law in your members warning against the law of your mind, and bringing you into captivity to the law of sin, which is in your members." You will be conscious that you are saved by grace; and you will ever be seeking more grace to keep you from the evil, and to glorify your God.