

GOD PROMISING TO ANSWER PRAYER.

I do not think that the promises refer to prayers offered up one for another only, though this is a large part of the cases put forward in Scripture, "pray one for another," "for me also," "labouring earnestly for you in prayers," and many others; but the prayer of faith is not confined to this. There are prayers for opening the door for the gospel and for all men. If it be not the prayer of positive faith, we are told in all things to present our requests to God, but then the answer is, or may be only, that "God's peace which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." For the prayer of faith, or the promise to it, there are certain limits as to the certainty of answer, such as "in My name," "according to His will," "if ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will," "if two of you agree"; besides what stops prayer, as "a sin unto death." But then I see no limits put to the expectation of faith *if God gives it*. If it be my will asking amiss to consume it on my lusts, I cannot expect an answer. But the Lord contemplates the giving of faith and certainty of answer for drying up of the fig-tree or removing a mountain, and whatever I can ask believing, I receive it. This is a very important principle. But first the limits on which formal promise of answer rests besides spe-

cial faith. The first passage I may refer to is, "if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us.....and we know that we have the petitions." This supposes the demand according to His will, and then we can reckon on His power accomplishing it. This is the general christian confidence, a great boon to be assured of the acting of Him who is Almighty in the way of His will.

Next it is said, "if ye abide in me and *my words abide in you*, ye shall ask *what ye will*" Here I do not doubt there was special reference to the twelve ; but in principle it applies to all christians. Where the mind is formed by the words of Christ, when *they* abide in one who lives in dependence on and confidence in Him—one thus abiding in Him, having Him in spirit, and his mind guided by Christ's word, his will is (so to speak) Christ's—he asks what he will, and it will come.

Another case is where any two are agreed : here individual will is set aside. It is where Christians have a common desire and agree to present it to God. The deliberate formal agreement supposes a common Christian mind, and it will be done. So, when I ask, coming for what I can attach Christ's name to, under His auspices, (influence) the Father will do it. Here, I doubt not too, the twelve are specially in view ; still it is in principle every christian.

A man cannot in faith bring Christ's name attached to his lusts : and all these statements suppose the disciple and faith, as James expressly

teaches us, and indeed the Lord Himself. But there are other statements which cast us more generally on the goodness of God, and His interest in us, and shew us that, where faith is in exercise, the answer will be there; "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing ye shall receive." This supposes faith, and intimacy, so to speak, with God. The heart is supposed to be in His interests, and then if there is faith as a grain of mustard seed, a mountain goes.

I do not doubt this kind of faith was much more when any, as the apostles, felt themselves interested in God's cause, identified with Him and it on the earth; but there is no limit to it. Where such faith is, such answer will be; and God is as much occupied now with the details of blessing for us as for the great deeds of those days. It might be more palpable, more concentrated too then, but not more true.

Not a sparrow falls now without Him more than then; and the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availing much is ever true: only one must, so to speak, put ourselves with God, for those to whom these things were said were identified with Him in His interests on the earth. This gave their prayers of course a peculiar place: but then if faith (that is the operation of His Spirit and grace) brings me into His interest now even in details, the promise is there, and we can reckon on God and His power exercised in love now as then. There is no limit:

only it is the working of His Spirit in us, and hence faith that reckons on the answer.

Presenting our requests, subject to His will, is always right: of this we have an example even in Gethsemane: so Paul for his thorn in the flesh. And the answer will be more glorious and blessed than the request, even when it does not *as* asked answer it. See John xii. and Psalm cxxxii. So Psalm xxi., and even Paul's request about the thorn.

Let us trust His love, and this will not come short, and if He has given us faith to expect a specific answer, bless God for it. Only *our* will must not come in; even if it were answered, (this was the case of the quails), but as a rule not, as James teaches. But where there is earnest faith, God will surely hear, though He may give us safeguards against our own will in it.

GATHERED FRAGMENTS:

Read JOHN xii. 1-11.

In chapter eleven Lazarus was dead and corrupting, and the sisters Martha and Mary broken-hearted with sorrow.

Jesus, the resurrection and the life, comes into this scene of death and sorrow, and gives *life* and *liberty* to *dead* Lazarus, and *joy* and *peace* to the sorrowing sisters. Then, in chapter twelve, they *make Him a supper*.

There is not only life but liberty; for when La-

zarus heard the voice of the Son of God and came forth, he was bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and could not see, or walk, or move at all. But when the second word reached him, "Loose him and let him go," he gets liberty.

So it is with our souls, and we have in Lazarus, the man who was dead, sitting in a *new life*, and at *liberty*, feeding with Jesus, a picture of the believer. Indeed, Lazarus, Martha and Mary, taken together, make up one Christian. If Christians, we are all Lazaruses, Marthas and Marys. Martha is seen here serving, and not now, as in Luke x., cumbered with it, and careful and troubled about many things, but here it is a picture of service flowing from *life, liberty* and *communion* with the Son of God. Mary personifies worship, also flowing from the same, and a beautiful picture it is of worship. Mary pours out on the blessed Lord's feet, what (if she had not known and loved the Lord) she would have put on her own head—given to herself—and worship, *i. e.*, praise, thanksgiving and adoration, is just what we all like naturally to give to, and get ourselves.

When, however, we get to know and love Him, we gladly *give Him* what we used to give, and like to get for, ourselves. We adore and praise and thank Him. We thus break the box of spikenard on Him instead of ourselves. And the Lord's Table is the place where we should specially come together to *make Him a supper*, in the outside place gathered to His blessed name, like the little

group at Bethany, which was outside Jerusalem and all the Temple worship there.

But we must not think to find a box of spikenard all ready to hand because we have come to the Lord's Table on the first day of the week. Just as Mary's box of spikenard cost her something (it was very costly), so it will cost us something to have a box of spikenard to pour out upon Him. It will cost watchfulness, prayerfulness and self-denial during the week in order to keep near the Lord and walk with Him, else on Lord's-day there will be no spikenard to give to Him—no worship in us.

"And the house was filled with the odour of the ointment." God smells a sweet savour when we make much of His dear Son; when we pour out on Him our adoration, praises, and thanksgiving, as we remember Him together. Men, and even Christians, like the disciples (carried away by the "good words and fair speeches" of a Judas), call this "waste," "waste of time," etc., getting together for a whole hour or more and spending it all in making much of God's Son, but doing nothing for man.—But though service, too, is all right in its place, as in Martha, and will not be neglected if we are in communion with the Lord, yet the highest thing of all is to make much of, to adore, God's dear Son, giving praise, thanksgiving, and adoration to Him.

But there is another point in this picture. We not only have worship and service flowing from life, liberty, and communion with the Lord: we have testimony, too. The man with a new life in

communion with the Son of God is a *testimony*. (See verses 9, 10, 11.) Much people of the Jews came not only to see Jesus, but Lazarus also whom He had raised from the dead, and many of them went away and believed on Jesus, from just seeing the man with a new life, sitting, feeding with Jesus. This draws out the jealousy and opposition of the chief priests, who consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death, because that, by reason of him, many went away and believed on Jesus.

How blessed to know that if we are only going on in communion with the Lord, people will be attracted by it, and some of them will go away and believe on Jesus, too, through God's grace using those who have a new life and liberty from the Son of God, and are in communion with Him. And it is not here direct service, such as preaching and talking to people, (at least we do not know that Lazarus preached to anybody), blessed as that is, but the new life being manifested and so seen in the ways, manners, business, everything, that others are led to think of, and to believe in Jesus too. This draws down religious opposition and the religious leaders try and kill the testimony.

A WORD ON GOING FORTH AS A LABOURER AND DROPPING OTHER WORK.

. . . . I suppose as to the principle that we are clear on one point, namely, that we are bought with a price, and are not our own—servants, blessed

be God in this ruined world, of the Lord, by His great grace: and if besides the joy of being for ever with Him there is one, it is that of being able to serve Him down here, the little while that we have for so doing, for it is only here that we can suffer with Him.

Then the question arises as to what He calls us— for you, dear brother, if God has really called you to the ministry of the word, or if it is only that your practical faith wavers at the difficulties of the path. You must remember that God tests faith; He never fails us, but He makes us feel our entire dependence on Him. I see this in Paul: he was often hungry; he learnt to glory in infirmities that the power of Christ might rest upon him. But the result was that he was instructed to be in abundance, and to want, to be full and to be hungry—"I can do all things through Him that strengtheneth me." Without were conflicts, within were fears—and he gained the knowledge of God as the One who comforts those who are cast down. Then it was worth while being cast down. But he was able to say, not "who causeth us to triumph," but "who leadeth us about in triumph"—having missed the open door at Troas, being in great conflict with regard to Corinth, but able to say, in order to be a sweet savour of Christ wherever he was.

The question of his call to the ministry was certain. If grace had not sustained him here, he could have returned like John Mark: woe be to him, as he said, if he preached not, and he did so without

his will: being sent assuredly of God, he could not doubt having been sent. The word of the Lord near Damascus and the prophecy at Antioch were too positive. Now neither our mission, nor any part of this work of the Lord, has this distinctness. Our work is not confirmed by accompanying signs. This does not trouble me. It demands more of the heart's confidence, confidence in Christ, and that is always good. But it strengthens the heart greatly to be assured of it. Then if there are difficulties in the way, they are but difficulties to be overcome. If I have not this assurance in starting, it is a question if I am in my place: in any case God can exercise us here for our good. Not only that, but when God has clearly called some one, either by the ardour of his faith, like Moses, or by any formal calling like Paul, He can put him aside. Moses during forty years kept the sheep of his father-in-law, and Paul had not any active mission, to reduce the fleshly activity which might mix itself in his work with the activity purely of God, and to make him learn his entire dependence. It was Barnabas who put Saul afresh to the work; then came the mission of Antioch. But the heart is in these cases always in the work, but retired with God, in such a manner that God has a larger place in the heart, and our labour is *afterwards* more directly with reference to Him. There then, dear brother, is the question for you: Are you truly called to labour for the Lord? that is to say, to go about in His work, for we *all ought to labour for him*. When we

are, faith may fail; yes, but we are miserable if we abandon it, as Jeremiah said when he did not wish to speak anymore. "But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones." If it is only a fire that crackles in the thorns, it will soon be extinguished. But if you feel that the Lord has entrusted you with His word, has put it into your heart, not only for yourself, but for others, (Gal. i. 15, 16), then fear nothing. Faith tested is faith strengthened, it is to have learnt your own weakness, but to have learnt the faithfulness of God. His tender care even in sending the difficulties, that we may be there with Him. And if you have the assurance that God has entrusted you with His word, do not be troubled if you are set aside for a time. One learns one's lack of courage, at least, I have learnt it, but God takes account of what we are, gives us our thorn, that we may be humbled, and that we may feel that the strength and work are of Him. No doubt we have to judge our want of courage. For my part, it is my greatest test, the want of aggressive courage, and the way in which I shrink back before the coarseness of the world. But there is the look towards God, who has pity for us.

Profit then by your present separation from the work, to be much with Him. You will learn much inwardly in your incapacity to go forward, much of Himself, then more distinctly if God has really sent you, which gives great inward power in following out the work. But do not doubt His faithfulness.

"PRAY YE THE LORD OF THE HARVEST
 THAT HE MAY SEND FORTH LABOUR-
 ERS INTO HIS HARVEST."

We must pray the Lord of the harvest that He may send forth labourers into His harvest. It is more devotedness that is lacking. There are—I know it to be the case—brothers who would be more useful in the work, if only they were more devoted. *They are absorbed by something else*, and this not only distracts them from the work, but when they do set themselves to it, there is not that maturity, that furnished condition of soul that knowledge of hearts, and of the way in which the word suits itself to their needs, which gives value to ministry. (See 1 Tim. iv. 15.) It is not that one might not, if one were to keep quietly in one's place, be busy about some occupation, *manual, or otherwise*; Paul was so indeed; but let the heart be in the work, not in a *worldly* object.

PROVING WHAT IS ACCEPTABLE TO THE LORD.

EPHESIANS V. 10.

This is a short exhortation containing nothing attractive for the intellect, but very much for the heart. Are we doing it? How much of the "proving" has there been in your course and in mine this day? How much of real, earnest, godly exercise as to what was the Lord's mind about each little occurrence? "Ye have an unction from the

Holy One, and ye know all things." (1 John ii. 20.) This is true of every Christian, whether only a babe, or more advanced as a young man, or a father in Christ. And this gives to us the power to do what the verse I have quoted exhorts us to do.

Is there anything in your daily path with which Christ can have fellowship? (You will be instructed as to this in the word.) Are this and that "acceptable unto the Lord"? If so then persevere in it, go on with it. Let no human influence deter you from this path. Why? Because the Lord is with you, and can there be anything like *that*? You have His own blessed presence, and favor, and *sympathy*, and they will compensate, even if you have to face all the world's frown.

But again, is there anything in your daily path or allowed in yourself, that is *not* "acceptable unto the Lord"? If so, (suffer one to exhort you and himself too) judge it, have done with it, refuse it, and do all this *at once*; and why? You are risking the loss of the Lord's present favor and company with you. To lose the sense of these is to lose all that is worth living for in this world.

To have to tread this world *alone*! What a cheerless blank the Christian life would be. And I *do* tread it alone if Christ is not practically with me, and this when I may be looked upon by others as a pious person.

It is an established truth for our hearts that the Lord has not only dealt with and settled the question of our sins, but that now the desire of His

heart is to be *with us*—daily—continually near ; the One I can consult in every difficulty, and on whose love I can rest all the day long? What is my Christianity worth, if it does not minister these to my soul? To have Christ (as He was at Bethany) at home with *me* on earth, is only surpassed by one thing, namely, the blessed future, when I shall be at home with Him in heaven. (John xiv. 3.)

EVIL THOUGHTS, UNBIDDEN AND HATED.

(*Extract from a Letter.*)

Dear——, I have your letter, and I am sure that the enemy is very busy, as well as the evil heart within. What you need is thorough deliverance from yourself, that is, the flesh. You speak of evil thoughts, unbidden and hated, springing up in the heart even when you seek to be occupied with the Lord, this too when really thinking of Him. Then you stop to confess them, and the occupation for a moment in confession only provokes another evil thought. And so it is as you say, an unending, all-day work.

My feeling is that you have never yet enjoyed full deliverance from self and flesh. You are what scripture calls still "in the flesh," though a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe if your soul were free you would find the simple yet profound truth of "reckoning yourself dead" (Rom. vi. 2),

would so act that the thought of turning aside to confess what would spring up unsought for in your soul, would be found to be really and only *allowing the flesh a triumph*, in leading you to be occupied with it.

When there is no will, such thoughts will be left, turned aside from, and treated as "not I." Of course when the soul is not free I could not say you could do so at all, *but were freedom enjoyed you would not be the sufferer from such things*. What I would simply say to you is, when evil thoughts are present to your soul, unsought for and hated, do not stop or cease from your measure of occupation with the Lord, to confess them. *If will enters they must be confessed*, but if not, pass them by as you would avoid an evil person who is not yourself, and who you know is incorrigible, and with whom contact is only misery and defilement. "Avoid such, pass not by them," but leave them there. *To own them at all*, is but to give the flesh the place it seeks—a recognition in some way or another. This, even when it is only to abhor its workings, will be a *satisfaction to the flesh*.

Oh that you had grace to leave "the flesh," unrecognised and disowned, and to pass on conscious that it is always there and will be in you to the end. How blessed that we can by grace disown and refuse to hear its suggestions when it works, knowing through mercy that it is no more "I." Your case is one that has been and is common to most of the Lord's people, if not all. I refer to un-

solicited, hated and wandering thoughts. You should simply go on and take no notice of them whatever, as by doing so you only give the flesh the place it seeks. Go on as not hearing the suggestions—be as it were deaf to them. Confess to God if you find *will* at work, but not so as to be occupied with the analysis of the evil: rather look up to Him, the sense of weakness and impotency filling your heart, and in the attitude of dependence of soul, pass on with your eye resting on Him, out of whom strength comes whenever there is conscious weakness.

JUDE VERSE 24.

It is important to observe the way in which the Spirit of God speaks in the Epistles of a power that can keep us from every fall, and unblameable; so that a thought only of sin is never excusable. It is not that the flesh is not in us, but that, with the Holy Ghost acting in the new man, it is never necessary that the flesh should act or influence our life, (compare 1 Thess. v. 22.) We are united to Jesus; He represents us before God, He is our righteousness. But at the same time, He who in His perfection is our righteousness is also our life. He who says, "I abide in Him," ought also to walk as He walked.

I'M GOING HOME.

I'm a stranger here ;
No home, no rest I see,
Not all earth counts most dear
Can wring a sigh from me,
I'm going Home.

Jesus, Thy Home is mine,
And I, Thy Father's child,
With hopes, and joys divine ;
This world's a dreary wild ;
I'm going Home.

Home, oh, how soft and sweet,
It thrills upon the heart—
Home—where the brethren meet,
And never, never part—
I'm going Home.

Home, where the Bridegroom takes
The purchase of His love ;
Home, where the Father waits
To welcome me above!
I'm going Home.

And when the world looks cold,
Which did my Lord revile
(A lamb within the fold)
I can look up and smile.
I'm going Home.

When its delusive charms,
Would snare my weary feet,
I fly to Jesus' arms,
And yet again repeat,
I'm going Home.

And as the desert wide,
The wilderness, I see,
Lord Jesus, I confide,
My trembling heart to Thee,
I'm going Home.

While severing every tie,
That holds me from the goal,
This, this can satisfy
The craving of the soul—
I'm going Home.

Ah, gently, gently lead
Along the painful way,
Bid every word, and deed,
And every look to say,
I'm going Home.