

The Perpetual Process of Prayer

By David Morsey

PRAYER IS COMMUNION WITH GOD

It is a continuous process in which the human spirit, indwelt by the Spirit of God, is in continuous interaction with Him. Prayer is not a religious exercise; it is not a “celestial shopping trip;” it is not the reward of flawless behavior; it is the vital and ceaseless link between ourselves and our Creator. As such it is no more based on performance than is the link between the deep sea diver and the support systems on the surface. The actions of the deep sea diver may get him into difficulty on the bottom of the ocean, but it would be absurd to assume that the support crew would therefore cut off communication. What God chooses to do with the prayers that we offer and the requests that we make is up to Him, but make no mistake about it ... He will always hear. What He does with the request has more to do with His purposes for the individual than with some human failure or inadequacy. If our prayers were all based upon performance, we would never have the ear of God.

The essence of prayer is best expressed in Romans 8:26. *“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities [weaknesses]: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought. but the Spirit itself [Himself] maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered [inexpressible sighs]”* (Romans 8:26). Prayer is fundamentally a spirit to Spirit communion—it is our spirit in touch with or affected by the Spirit of God. Earlier in the chapter Paul has said that *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God...”* (v.16). Since salvation consists of the Spirit of Christ coming to dwell within our spirits, we conclude that there is a Spirit to spirit communion that not only verifies our salvation, but also in view of Romans 8:26 is the initiator and agent of all our prayers. The very desire to pray comes from the Spirit of God. It is not for us to project what God will do with the prayers, but it is ours to respond to the desire to pray that wells up within us.

PRAYER IS SHARING OUR LIVES WITH GOD

According to the plain teaching of Romans 8:26, we do not even know what to pray for, much less how to ask. Nor do we have any idea what God wants to do in the particular situation. So if He initiates all our prayers, how is it then that we do not always get the answers to our prayers? What we are really asking is why do we not always get the answer we want? The trouble lies in the misconception that prayer is something that must be “answered.” To many people successful prayer is “getting things from God.” In reality, such an idea is tasteless. Imagine children getting together to discuss who got the most out of Mom and Dad. Prayer is not a matter of getting God to do what we want, but rather participating with Him in the exercise of what He wants in our lives. It is not trying to get God to change His mind about things, but rather bringing our minds into harmony with His. So why pray if He already knows what we need? In the first place, the Bible tells us to do it. There are no doubt subtleties about praying that we are not aware of. But in the second place, it is a matter of sharing our lives with God. Beyond that, communion with God is a wholesome way to cultivate our spirits. There comes a time when children must learn to express themselves in more sophisticated ways than pointing and grunting. That may be all right for a one year old, but a teenager who does that is a little ludicrous.

Prayer in times of trouble may not always bring deliverance from the affliction immediately, but certainly brings us into the position of sharing our affliction with Christ and insuring us of His grace. It is a greater expression of faith to trust God in the midst of the affliction, than to trust Him for the removal of it. The disciples in the midst of the storm on Galilee are a case in point. Jesus challenged their faith because He had to still the storm for them, instead of their trusting Him to keep the ship afloat in spite of the storm. As long as Jesus was in the boat, it was not going to sink. So prayer is a way of participating with Christ in the midst of our afflictions. But it is also a way of sharing with others in their afflictions. Our prayer for others may not bring about deliverance from their difficulty, but it surrounds them with grace in the midst of it and gives us the opportunity of sharing their afflictions with them. The ultimate expression of prayer then is not in “getting things from God,” but in sharing with God in the process of our lives and the lives of others.

PRAYER IS A PROCESS WITHIN THE SPIRIT

Paul says, “His Spirit bears witness with our spirit.” It is thus a Spirit-to-spirit communion. Many times such a communion does not even involve the human mind. The witness from God to our spirits is a deep torrent within us, like an artesian spring, that flows ceaselessly beneath the surface and is not affected by surface conditions. One may be in great distress outwardly, and still the river of God’s peace flows within. And thus the outward expressions of our fleshly minds or emotions reflect our human weakness, but do not mean a lack of victory. Victory is a matter of the spirit and not the flesh. If victory were a matter of our human emotions, we would often be the victims of either false exuberance, or of false depression. We can never trust the flesh to give a valid expression of the spirit. Remember victory is expressed by the strength of God within and not by the weakness of the flesh without. Thus victory is insured by the power of God and not the religious exercises of the flesh.

The human spirit is a veritable temple of God once the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in it. All of the ancient symbols and rituals of Judaism are now resident in us in the fulfillment of the types. Every religious symbol of the Old Testament was a type of Christ—sacrifices and buildings; animals and furnishings; feasts and rituals—all were types of Christ. The entire book of Hebrews was given to the development of this truth. All the religious exercises and symbols of the Old Testament were but shadows of the reality. When Jesus came to the earth, the shadows fled away before the presence of the true “Son of Righteousness.” So when Christ comes to dwell within us He brings to us the fulfillment of all types. Thus, we are a temple of the Holy Spirit, possessing, figuratively, all its furnishings and rituals. Instead of having to bring an offering, the fulfillment of that offering is within us. And thus we have a ceaseless expression within us of the whole process of redemption. Instead of the continual burnt offering, we have the ceaseless zephyrs of the Holy Spirit. And, whereas the sacrificial system kept the Jewish people mindful of their sin, we have a sensitivity toward sin born of the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER IS AN ENDLESS CHANNEL BETWEEN OURSELVES AND GOD

It is not a sometime thing, based on human fidelity and fervor. It is not governed by an intricate set of rules and requirements. It is as natural as communication with one’s parents. Instead of enumerating countless “hindrances to prayer,” we must rather focus on the openness of God to His children. The very desire to pray is the guarantee that God is open to us, since prayer can only be initiated by the Holy Spirit. If you want to talk to God, you may be sure that He wants to talk to you. But what about the problem of sin? Did not Jesus say that God does not hear sinners? No, the blind man said that, and he got his instructions from Old Testament Judaism. All the passages that are used to indicate that

God does not hear sinners are taken from the Old Testament. That does not mean that sin is acceptable to God, but rather that because of the sacrifice of Christ, God is open to sinners. Nor does it mean that God does not deal with us in regard to our sins. If you want to talk to God, He wants to talk to you. If there is some unconfessed sin in your life, He will talk to you about that. You may be sure of this. If God has a problem with you, He will let you know. If you have to go rummaging through the rubbish of your life to find something, probably God has not made a point of it. The misconceptions about sin and prayer have led to a great deal of insecurity as to whether or not one is ever in a position to pray. It has engendered attitudes that range all the way from uncertainty to total withdrawal from prayer. How can one ever be certain to be in a position to pray, if prayer is based upon performance? There is no need for uncertainty. If you want to pray, pray. If God has something to say to you, He will say it. Nor is prayer mired in the matrix of methodology. It is not governed by rules of posture or jargon or protocol. Prayer is merely communion with God anytime; anywhere; in any way that springs from the spirit within.

*Speak to Him then for He heareth
And Spirit with spirit doth meet.
Closer is He than breathing,
Nearer than hands or feet.*

- Alfred Lord Tennyson -