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SERMON II.

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THE UTILITY OF PRAYER.

JOB xxi. 15.— *What profit should we have, if we pray unto him ?*

THE utility of prayer, which, according to this scripture, wicked men dispute, the present discourse humbly attempts to demonstrate. This might be quickly done, by showing that God requires men to pray; for God, being infinitely perfect, cannot prescribe a useless or vain service. Consent, however, to the utility of prayer, so obtained, would be grounded on the presumption of its usefulness, not on the vivid perception of the intrinsic evidences of its utility. The former kind of consent is not the most desirable. The heart is never completely and permanently won to truth, but by the perception of its inherent excellence. When we have convinced men that God has required anything, they are bound to admit its excellence or utility. But before we can effectually commend it to their joyful concurrence, their complacency and love, we must present to their minds the proofs of its essential excellence. This is what I now propose to do in relation to prayer.

Two things let me premise: First, that I speak only of *true* prayer; not the prayer of formality, nor of enthusiasm, nor of selfish anxiety; but that prayer which, through the mediation of Christ, offers up the heart's desires unto God with repentance, and faith, and true submission. Secondly, that in nothing which I say concerning the inherent tendencies and the influence of prayer, do I intend an exclusion of the Holy Spirit's agency in this exercise, although I do not anywhere distinctly mention it. The object of

the discourse requires no reference to that agency, it being an examination, not of the nature of the Holy Spirit's operation, but of the product thence resulting. These things premised, I remark, that the utility of prayer is comprehended—

IN ITS DIRECT TENDENCY TO IMPROVE THE HUMAN CHARACTER ;

IN ITS COUNTERACTING INFLUENCE ON WHATEVER TENDS TO INJURE THAT CHARACTER ;

**IN ITS EFFICACIOUS INFLUENCE ON WHATEVER IS FAVORABLE TO IT ;
AND**

IN ITS PERSUASIVE INFLUENCE ON THE GREAT SOURCE OF BLESSEDNESS HIMSELF.

I. Prayer, more than any other means, is adapted, in its own nature, to improve all the powers and properties of the human soul.

Without a countervailing influence, the soul of man will always acquire the character of the objects with which it has intercourse. If those objects be great, they will leave the stamp of greatness ; if good, the stamp of goodness on the soul :—the stamp of littleness, on the other hand, if the objects be little, and of baseness if they be base.

Again ; the soul is more or less strongly impressed with the image of objects, accordingly as it contemplates them more or less directly and intensely. He who regards a thing through the medium of historical information will be less affected by it than he who with his own eye sees it ; and he who looks at an object closely and minutely, will have a deeper and more exact impression of it than he who casts towards it one or two glances.

Experience thoroughly confirms these observations. Look the world over, and find the individual whose mind and moral character do not correspond to the objects about which his thoughts and affections have been most employed. Is there any truer proverb, than that “ he who walketh with wise men shall be wise, and the companion of fools be destroyed ? ” To know what a man is, it is necessary but to know what company he keeps, what persons and things he has chosen to be familiar with ; and as his familiarity with them has been greater or less, so it is certain that he bears, more or less perfectly, their image, whether good or evil.

But if these remarks be incontrovertible, so likewise is the utility of prayer. Prayer is an exercise of the soul. It expresses the state of the soul in intercourse with God. With God, did I say ? Most certainly so ; it is to no other than God, supremely Good and Glorious, that the soul elevates herself in prayer—elevates not only her intellect, but her conscience, her affections, her sympathies—her whole immortal and ethereal self ;—not to speculate, but to adore—to commune—to breathe out her love, and desires, and longings, into the very bosom and heart of the High and Lofty One. What mode of intercourse more direct, more intimate, more affectionate, or better adapted to acquire the image of the Object ?

But let us consider the nature of this high intercourse more particularly. The different parts of prayer require correspondent acts and affections of mind, which comprise the substance of all moral excellence, and which prayer, by frequently calling them forth, tends, beyond everything else, to invigorate and mature. Prayer is adoration : and when are the divine perfections so likely to expand the soul with the ardors of holy love and delight, as when brought distinctly before her eye in this heavenly employment ? The philosopher may be indevout while he traces these perfections in the face of nature, and the theologian may coldly speculate and discourse concerning them as exhibited in scripture ; but he who fixes a firm and single eye on God in prayer, and dwells on one attribute and another with adoring admiration, will not be long unconscious of that pure flame, in which are blended all the elements of virtue and happiness. Prayer is confession of sin : and when is sin more apt to melt the heart into the soft relentings of godly contrition, than when carefully recounted to Him against whom it has all been committed, with a spirit awed into reverence and submission by the pure majesty of the Divine Presence ? You may speak lightly of sin, when your words are directed to the sinful ear of a creature like yourself ; but get you into some solitary place, and set the Lord distinctly and immediately before you ; and spread out your offences before His undefiled eye : and under His pure and piercing gaze, lay your heart and life open ;—and I see not how you are ever to become repentant, if your sorrows do not then begin to flow forth. Prayer is supplication for mercy, grounded upon the blood of Christ, and the promises, which in him are yea and amen ; and if ever the heart hath advantages for becoming all subdued and possessed by the sentiments and feelings which those wonders of divine love should excite, it is now. Men may speak to one another of these subjects with as little sensibility as

they feel towards common things ; but when the soul collects herself, and comes, and, convinced of her guilt, stands trembling and pleading before her great Judge, and tells Him of His professed clemency and graciousness, and how his own Son hath loved her, and how He Himself hath said, and sworn that for his worthy Son's sake He will withhold no blessing from any humble contrite suppliant—what a resistless tendency hath all this to transfuse the soul with confidence, and faith, and full assurance of hope ! Prayer, finally, is thanksgiving for favors received ; And, sure, if ever gratitude unfeigned and unextinguishable do glow in a mortal's breast, this is the occupation in which the ethereal passion is generated and nourished. You may be reminded that goodness and mercy have followed you all the days of your life, and look around you upon a thousand witnesses of the divine benignity still compassing you about, and your heart still be but little awake to its numberless and everlasting obligations. But not so, if, in a secret interview with your Father in heaven, you yourself tell over to Him but some few of the countless mercies which His hand hath been incessantly bestowing on you, since you first became the object of His providential and gracious care. Thus does it appear, how the various excellencies of holy character are instrumentally produced and promoted by means of this exercise ; and it would appear more convincingly, if the time permitted more detail.

Now as it hence results, that a man, who lives a prayerful life, must be a man of transcendent loveliness and worth, we might be fairly required to subject our conclusion to the decisive test of fact and example. And we need not be unwilling to abide the trial. So much was the life of Enoch a life of prayer, so much did he acknowledge the divine presence, so intimately did he converse with his Maker at all times, that the Scripture, giving a brief description of this ancient prophet, declares, that he "walked with God." And so estimable and spiritual did that man's character become, that God, seeing the world was not worthy of him, translated him to heaven, that he should not taste of death. And of Elijah, another singular example of prayer, it is also testified, that the Lord took him up into heaven, not by death, but by a whirlwind. And who knows not that in every age the best and brightest men have been those, who approached nearest to these illustrious patterns of prayer ? At this present time, there are persons, of but inferior parts and accomplishments, who by reason of great prayerfulness transcend, in moral worth, professors of high distinction and splendid gifts. Religionists, however exalted, who are not

often with God in prayer, are but little profited themselves by all their privileges ; and but little profitable to others by all their intercourse with them ; but contrariwise, being persons of prayer by character, and not in fact, are stumbling-blocks to many ; and are the principal causes of this world's incredulity in regard to the efficacy and usefulness of prayer. Great, therefore, and unparalleled, is the direct tendency of prayer to improve the human character. But,

II. Its utility is further manifest, let me next remark, in its counteracting influence on whatever tends to injure that character.

If a thing proves its excellence by its own good tendency on what it directly exerts itself upon, it proves it still more by resisting and overcoming what has a contrary tendency—a tendency to counteract and neutralize the good it aims to accomplish. If a man show me friendship by coming to me with favors and benefits, he shows it further by defeating the designs of certain enemies who intend to rob me of them, as soon as I get them into my possession.

Now there are many things in this world always acting upon the soul with a most debasing and ruinous tendency ; and there are no means of overcoming this tendency so efficacious as prayer.

To speak first generally ;—there is an influence in worldly things so hostile to the things of the Spirit of God, as sometimes to make these latter things appear like empty shadows, or cunningly devised fables ; and the mysteries of the everlasting Gospel are as the superstitious stories which frighten credulous children ; and judgment and eternity, heaven and hell, are words, by which crazed or criminal imaginations have expressed their fictions of happiness and horror. It needs no demonstration that this is an influence utterly subversive of all religion and virtue—adapted to brutalize man's rational nature ; and of course, if there be a future state in fact, to involve him in all its untold future terrors and torments. Nor need I stay long to show to what vast extent this baleful influence hath full and domineering ascendancy over infatuated mankind ; how, though there be few professed skeptics and scorners, there are but a few whose lives do not preach skepticism from beginning to end ;—which *practical* skepticism is, to all terrible intents, as bad as any other. Now, to overcome this influence, there is no other way than to have the soul brought under a strong impression and bearing from spiritual things. By the very laws of mind, one impression or frame of spirit cannot be permanently displaced but by the introduction of another ; and that other never can be generated but

in the presence of its appropriate object. Of necessity, therefore, must the things of this world sway and debase the human mind, so long as the things of the invisible world do not exert themselves upon it. You must be exposed to the action of unseen things, or remain in unworthy bondage to things which are seen. You must be in such circumstances, that the spiritual glories of God and Christ, and the promises and threatenings of scripture, may pour their peculiar influence on your heart, or else you must remain the slave of mammon and sordid drudge of the flesh.

Now it is almost unnecessary to remark, that there are no circumstances in which these objects are so nearly approached and so deeply felt, as when the soul solemnly betakes herself to the exercises of prayer. I grant that reading, and hearing, and conversing about divine things, rightly managed, may make profitable impressions, and should by no means be omitted. But there are thousands that read, and hear, and converse, and though some feeling may be generated, it passes over their minds as the little circles, produced by the falling pebble, pass over the surface of the smooth water. If those persons could be persuaded to try the influence of true and fervent prayer, they would find it more availing. Retired from the world, shut up alone with Him who dwelleth in secret, kneeling in His awful presence, fixing the heart for communicating and receiving, speaking to Him and not of Him merely;—Oh, this brings the unseen world into view, and casts earth into shade and emptiness; this takes importance and reality off from temporal things, and puts those qualities on eternal and spiritual things; this places the soul on the verge of eternity, and subjects her to the beams, and breezes, and blessed visions of heaven. Here there is hope of her losing her skepticism and worldliness. In these circumstances this world hath little power; and it were not surprising, if he who habituates himself to an exercise like this, should soon have his conversation more in heaven than on earth, and his walk more with God than with men.

But it may show yet more forcibly the counteracting power of prayer, to consider its operation in some particular instances of its resistance to the world.

The world, then, we all know, tends to make the sons and daughters of men light-minded, and levity is no ornament of man's rational being, nor is it at all suited to our condition in a region full of dangers, and lamentations, and arrows of death; neither is it compatible with our present or our eternal well-being. But how can levity stand before prayer? Books and sermons may be unable to contend with it. You may tell me of those who let no day pass

without running through a chapter, and no sabbath pass without a visit to the house of God, and yet have just as much of this world's vanity in their hearts, and gayety in their looks, and giddiness in their lives, as other people. Further, I have heard professors gravely reason in defence of worldly levities, and reason themselves into a persuasion that they are, to say the least, innocent; and with this persuasion they have freely gone into them, and led their unthinking offspring along with them in the wildering path. But what if these persons would but seek in prayer to know the way of duty?—what if they would try whether they could keep the spirit of levity at the throne of grace?—or get leave of Him who sitteth thereon, to be guided by that spirit?—what if they would go to our Father who is in secret, and ask His blessing on their intended indulgencies?—or what if, after leaving their gay companions and diversions, they would go and tell Him of the way in which their time and faculties had been employed, to see whether it would be sanctioned by the uplifted light of His countenance? How could levity endure such experiment? How manifestly must a man of true prayer be a man of pure and permanent sobriety; serene and settled, cheerful without lightness.

Again; the world often fills the bosoms of men with avarice and ambition; under the former of which they make haste to be rich, and under the latter to be great; under either, or both, to be undone—since the love of money is a root of all evil; and since they have no heart to believe the gospel, who receive honor one of another.

Would you then regard that as a useless thing, which has a tendency to eradicate these base passions from the hearts of men? But if men would give themselves to prayer, they would soon cease to be the slaves of these passions. Prayer would quickly dethrone and banish these guilty usurpers of dominion over the immortal minds of men. If men would acknowledge God in all their ways, God himself would be their ruler and guide; and his Holy Spirit would hold the throne of their hearts. If, before they undertake their plans and enterprises, they would submit them, with the calmness and seriousness of pure devotion, for the approbation of Him, on whom they depend for success, how many of them would they relinquish, and with what moderation would they prosecute the rest! Seest thou a man hurrying, and scrambling, and scuffling for the pelf or the praise of this world? Assuredly thou seest a prayerless soul; professor or not, he is a prayerless soul:—one who, if he deals at all with God in prayer, deals with him only so far as to mock and insult him! A praying man knows too much concerning the

true riches, and the honor which cometh from God, to discover such miserable infatuation for the things of an hour. To such a man it matters little, whether he rank with this world's rich or poor, its mighty or its mean. Riches cannot exalt, nor poverty depress him ; honors cannot elate him, nor reproaches break his heart. He dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, abiding under the shadow of the Almighty—afraid neither for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day.

Once more ; the world is full of blinding and infatuating influences, whereby the ears of men are turned away from the truth and are turned unto fables ; and some have one doctrine and some another ; while the ungodliness of others takes occasion from the variance, to renounce all religious opinions, and to hold everything pertaining to God and another world uncertain, unsettled, and incapable of ever being placed on any sure basis. Such confusion and doubt hath human depravity engendered in a world to which God's oracles have been given for a guide and directory in the way of truth ! Nevertheless, men must be extricated from this labyrinth, as they would be either sanctified or saved. As salvation is inseparable from holiness, so is holiness from the belief of the truth. They have pleasure in unrighteousness who believe not the truth ; and against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, the everlasting wrath of God is revealed from heaven.

Yet they plead the impossibility of knowing what is truth. The Bible cannot satisfy them ; books cannot satisfy them ; sermons but multiply their difficulties ; and what are they to do ? The Eternal Source of truth hath informed them, that they would arrive at certainty if they would but cease their rebellion against God. " If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." It is nothing but the spirit of disobedience that subjects any man to the domination of heresy and delusion. But not to enter on the proof of this, in its universal scope, I affirm, that obedience to God, in the single article of prayer, will prove a sure touchstone of truth, and an impregnable defence to the soul against all the innovations of ruinous opinions and dogmas. The soul in prayer stands too near the Fountain of light and truth to be invaded by the fatal infections of error. Her temper, in this exercise, is incongenial to everything in error's likeness, and shrinks away from its polluting approach, as modesty recoils from the approach of impudence. Nothing certainly but pure truth is capable of being either relished or expressed by the spirit of genuine prayer. For the spirit of such prayer is the spirit of humility and submissiveness, of heavenly sincerity and holy love : and how with such a spirit can any falsehood have agreement ?

On such a spirit light will be poured from all nature, as well as from the providence, and book, and Spirit of God. And hence the common observation, that good men always think alike in prayer. Nor is prayer an unthoughtful business. Much of intellect, as well as feeling, is breathed forth in true devotion ; nay, from almost every true prayer an epitome of the gospel might be extracted.

Wherefore nothing is more unfounded than the pretence of not being able to come to the knowledge of the truth in the midst of this world's jargon of opinions. There is a sure and an easy way ; nor is the existence of that destructive jargon resolvable into anything else than the world's forgetfulness of God, and known character for prayerlessness. Let no one question it, that prayer universally tried, would unite the whole world, substantially, in the same mind and judgment, nor leave any man doubtful as to an essential article of faith. Thou, that hearest this announcement, art perhaps an unsettled, unhappy skeptic ; yet desirest not to be so, and hast long tried to convince thyself. Thou hast read ; thou hast disputed ; and thou hast listened, in hope that thy doubts might be dissipated. I will not question that thou hast done all this : but full well I know, there is one thing thou hast not done. Thou hast not disinterred thy heart out of this world's pollutions and vanities. Thou hast been living in the spirit and in the ways of them who fear not God. It hath not been thy daily delight to enter into thy closet and shut thyself in from all earthly society, and then bow down thy spirit before His presence who seeth in secret. Hadst thou done but this, thou wouldst not have been now a tired wanderer, near eternity's dread brink, with a mind full of doubt, void of fixed hope, aching with ungrateful desire, and anon shivering with apprehension of what may yet befall.

III. Thus have I considered the influence of prayer in counteracting the debasing and soul-destroying tendencies of the world. There are other tendencies favorable to the soul's welfare, and I now wish to show briefly the efficacious influence of prayer upon these.

I begin with the word of God. That word is, in its unresisted applications to the heart, quick and powerful, and as the fire and the hammer which breaketh the rock in pieces. It is perfect, converting the soul ; sure, making wise the simple ; right, rejoicing the heart ; pure, enlightening the eyes—but the time would fail me to repeat a small part of what inspiration hath spoken in its praise. It is nevertheless powerless independently of prayer ; for, however great its excellences, prayerlessness will either keep them out of

view, or turn them into deformities and stumbling-blocks. What are the beauties of the rainbow, or the beams of the sun, to the blind man? And who more blind, though voluntarily so, than the prayerless soul? What was the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father to the earthly-minded Jews, when He dwelt among them, full of grace and truth? And what, also, are the wonders of Truth and Wisdom in sacred scripture, to those who are so swayed by an obstinate will, that they cast off fear, and restrain prayer to God. Depravity can see no beauty in holiness; and who are depraved, if not the prayerless? When such persons have read the Bible, till they have it all in their memories, what are they better? Which hath the greater charms in their eye, God's truth, or their riches? salvation, or the pleasures of sin? I have known of such great readers, who seemed to have learned by their researches, how to cavil and blaspheme, or to play the bigot or the fanatic—such miserable fruit of their labor came of their not mixing prayer with it. Even the renewed find prayer still indispensable to a profitable meditation in scripture. Remaining pollution will blind their eye, if the anointing of the Holy One be not constantly sought; and, therefore, though the sacred pages lie open before them, and though they have once been truly enlightened to understand them; they shall not, without unremitted prayer, continue to behold the wonder of God's law.

But the Bible is not the only book that may profit the soul of man. There are profound treatises on every subject of theology and morals, in which treasures of light and learning are contained for the edification of mankind; and here, where man speaks to man, what can hinder the acquisition of benefit by the diligent student? Without meaning to discourage deep study, let me rather ask, what can hinder its resulting fatally, if prayer be restrained? It matters not what the subjects of human thought are, if intellect alone be conversant with them,—if the other faculties of the soul—the conscience, the will, the affections—be not duly exercised,—the reign of depravity, instead of being overthrown, is established. And the danger is not imaginary, that in deep and retired studies these other faculties will not be proportionately engaged. Those pastors know this, whose souls are kept in an almost constant stretch of thought, in order to get food, intellectual and spiritual, for their flocks, that else would starve for lack of knowledge. Many think their lives easy, and their labor well rewarded, if they are just kept out of want; but these know little of mental travail; which, in our case, while it is all for the profit of others, greatly endangers our own spiritual state. We have to think so much for them, that often we have hardly

time for prayer, unless we think and pray at once; and yet nothing but prayer can keep our thinking from withering up the life of our personal godliness. Study, in short, will much advance the soul, if it be conducted with a prayerful spirit; but if prayer be slighted, while study accumulates knowledge, it also genders spiritual leanness and impotence; and it is well if it prove not a savor of death unto death at last.

Thus, also, as to the divine ordinance of public preaching—that ordinance by means of which more hath been done for man's spiritual interest than by all other means beside. A man may make his boast of having the ablest minister in the land, and of hearing habitually the most clear and pungent discourses that the human tongue hath ever pronounced; and yet the good of every sermon may be lost to that man, for want of the spirit of prayer in his hearing. For what though the seed be the best, and be sown with the greatest diligence, if it fall upon hard-beaten, or stony, or thorny ground? Now there is no other way of preparing the ground of the heart for the seed of the word, than prayer; and no other influence but that which prayer draws down upon the soul can make that seed vegetate and yield fruit. A church-going man, who is not also a man of prayer, has no better reason to expect spiritual benefit from the ordinances of grace, than a husbandman has to expect a harvest, who plants his grain and leaves his field an unfenced common. It is he who enters his closet before he comes to the house of God, and prays in secret before he takes his place in the public assembly, and keeps still praying while the word is sounding powerfully in his ear, and forgets not another retreat to his private chamber after dismission from the courts of the Lord—this is the man, who grows, and thrives, as every one ought, under the ministrations of the word.

The same necessity is there for prayer, to make providential dispensations available to the advancement of man's salvation. For though adversities have a tendency to draw him away from the idolatry of the world, and mercies should lift his affections to their glorious Source, yet all experience testifies that the former will only sink him into sullen melancholy or fretfulness, and the latter infatuate him with pride and self-sufficiency, unless he keep near to God in the exercise of prayer.

Thus, besides ennobling man's soul, by its own proper and direct influence, and keeping other influences from injuring it, by resisting and overcoming them, prayer is of this further utility, that it makes all favorable influences secure of their end. And now, whether, taking these things together, there be not good reason to esteem prayer useful,—none I think can doubt, except those who are resolved not to be convinced.

IV. But all the truth on this subject has not yet been told. Prayer has another bearing—another kind of influence, than any which hath yet been considered. It has an influence, not only upon ourselves, and upon all the means and second causes, which tend either to our injury or advantage, but upon Him, likewise, to whom it is addressed—upon the mind and conduct of God himself.

So, most obviously, are we taught in holy scripture, especially in those winning words of Christ—“What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things unto them that ask him.” For what are we to gather from this and many parallel texts, if the only influence of prayer is that which it exerts either directly or indirectly upon ourselves? Is it consistent with any just rule of interpreting language, to give this, or anything compatible with this, as the meaning of passages which represent God as bestowing benefits *in answer* to earnest supplication for them? How *in answer*, if the supplication hath no influence to procure them? Is it not clear, that any rendering of these passages, which admits not that prayer has in some way a persuasive influence on God, is a wresting,—not an explaining—of scripture,—adapted to make men heartless and cold in an exercise which should never be otherwise than fervent.

Look at scriptural examples of prayer. When Jacob, after wrestling in this exercise till break of day, still refused to cease without a blessing, how far was he from supposing, that the only influence of prayer was that which it had on his own mind? Did these effectual prayers of Moses, which turned away wrath from rebellious Israel, even after God had threatened to destroy them, exert no influence except on Moses himself? Were those prayers of Elijah, which availed to shut, and afterwards to open heaven, without all influence, except on Elijah's own heart? And what shall we say of Abraham's prayer for Sodom? or Daniel's for Jerusalem? or that of the first Christians, which brought an angel down from heaven for St. Peter's enlargement? or, indeed, of any prayer in behalf of others, if the influence of prayer is confined to those who offer it?

And why should it be thought inconsistent with the infinite perfection of God, that He should be influenced by prayer? It is

surely agreeable to God's perfection to love righteousness and hate iniquity ; and give due expression to that love and hatred by distributing equal rewards and punishments. As well deny the being of God, as make Him indifferent to holiness and sin. But true prayer is holiness, and prayerlessness is sin. In him then who prays, God discerns something excellent ; something which, consistently with his perfection, he may approve and reward. In him who does not pray, God discerns something evil and hateful ; and which therefore must draw forth his abhorrence and indignation. Just as a prodigal son, who asks forgiveness of his father, presents, in his penitent and submissive spirit, a reason why his father should receive him to his arms ;—reason, it may be, that prevails ; while another unreformed prodigal, who claims no forgiveness, presents no such reason, and receives no such favor.

But does not this doctrine make God changeable ? Not more so, I first reply, than God's being influenced by the obstinacy of sinners, suddenly and without remedy to destroy them ; and by the holiness of his people, to smile upon them with complacency and loving kindness. But wherein, let me ask, consists the unchangeableness of God ? Not in His being always entirely destitute of moral feeling ; but in His feeling always alike towards the same objects in the same circumstances. God doubtless has perfectly pure and proper feeling toward all things. But all things being eternally present in His view, He is eternally and always in the same degree and manner affected by them. The prayer that forms a reason for his showing favor at this moment, has always been before His infinite mind ; and before it with all its present persuasive influence.

Nor is there any conflict between our doctrine of prayer and that of the divine purposes. The purposes of God embrace all events, and embrace them in that very order in which they occur in time. If, in the order of actual occurrence, prayer always precedes the bestowal of blessings, it precedes it agreeably to the order of the divine purposes ; if in the purpose of God, prayer eternally stands present as the immediate condition of his favor, it were inconsistent, if things were not so, in event.

It does not appear, therefore, that we speak otherwise than soberly and truly, when we say that prayer hath power with God. There is nothing in the word of God, nothing in His nature, nothing in his purposes, to discourage the hope of prevailing with him by

prayer. Far, infinitely far different is the fact. Hath the hungry child encouragement to hope he shall not ask his parent in vain for wholesome food? The most affectionate parent would sooner give such a child a stone for bread, or a scorpion for a fish, than the Father of Mercies refuse His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. There is not in the universe a being who, compared with God, hath any susceptibility to the influence of prayer. What emanations of love hath it drawn from His heart! What blessings of goodness from His hand! His mightiest act shave been achieved in answer to prayer. "What terrible judgments have been averted; what mighty armies conquered; nay, more, the very course of nature changed—the sun himself arrested—by the power of prayer!"—Who can assign the limits of that power? Who can tell what influence prayer hath had on the government of God in this world? But since all the parts of God's empire are united, its influence has travelled beyond earth's boundary, and is now exerting itself, and will exert itself for ever, on the far distant tracts of creation.

While I muse on this, oh how refreshing and invigorating is the recollection, that at this present period, the smoke of the incense of prayer is rising up to heaven day and night from God's universal Church in the four quarters of the globe! Assuredly the time draws nigh of the restitution of all things. What wonders shall the arm of God presently achieve in fulfilment of the desires of his saints! Away fly all obstructions to the universal spread of Christian truth. Away pass the infidels and scorners of the day to their own proper places, and the Gospel of the kingdom becomes the glory of all nations, and earth resounds with "Alleluia, Salvation!" Transporting scene! and yet, is it not possible, that some man may hear all this, and, without gainsaying it, remain unapprised of his private concern in the blest contemplation? Let me put thee in mind, then, my brother, that the end of hearing is practice; and that thou wilt be but a despiser of divine counsel, if thy life henceforth be not a life of true prayer. It depends upon thy conduct, concerning prayer, how it is to fare with thy soul for ever. It depends upon this, whether thou find in God a friend or an enemy; and of course, whether all things shall work for thy good or thy ruin. It may not, indeed, depend upon thy praying, whether the ordinary fruits of the divine bounty shall be bestowed or not. God's sunshine and rain are given to the praying and the prayerless; and even blasphemers and atheists riot on His exhaustless beneficence.

But prayer makes this difference—that while temporal blessings become as wings, with which a praying man soars to his eternal rest, they become as millstones about the neck of the prayerless, with which they will be sunk down in the deep of eternal despair! “I will curse your blessings,” saith He who gave them—“yea, I have cursed them already, because ye lay it not to heart to give God the glory.” Whether thou prayest or not, a smooth full tide of prosperity may float thee along for a season; but a storm is gathering; and soon the current will turn against thee: and if thou art not a man of prayer, the proud waters shall overwhelm thee, and thy prosperity be thy destruction.

Nor can I suppress the apprehension that thine own soul will not be the only victim of thy negligence in this prime regard. Thou standest not separate and aloof from all the rest of the sons of men, but sustainest towards them relations through which, of necessity, thou exertest some influence, hurtful or happy, on their eternal condition. Art thou one in authority? Thine inferiors regarding thee perhaps, not only as higher, but as more knowing than themselves, learn from thy prayerlessness, that to cast off fear and restrain prayer to God is no crime, no disgrace, and of no ill consequence.—Under which delusion thou art leading them on to the perdition of ungodly men. Art thou a parent? Then thine doubtless is one of the families that call not on the name of the Lord; and from all the exalting influences of prayer, thine offspring, by thy fault, are withheld. And will they not, by the same means, be also withheld from grace and the inheritance of life? Art thou a member of the church? Thy remissness in prayer exerts a secret influence to make the courts of Zion desolate, and her ways to mourn; and to take out of their places or obscure the brightness of her golden candlesticks. Art thou a minister of God? Thousands may go away to wail for ever in the prisons of darkness, because thou givest not thyself to the exercise of prayer. By that one neglect, thy thoughts are sensualized—thy discourses robbed of unction, thy walk before the saints made a snare and scandal, and all thy ministrations sadly marred and misdirected, if not utterly perverted. The prayerless man perisheth not alone in his iniquity.

A word, at parting, to the saints and faithful in Christ. Great, beloved brethren, and manifold are your privileges; but what I now would humbly call upon you to bear in constant remembrance is the power which you, all impotent and helpless as you are in

yourselves, can exert through prayer. The feeblest among you can chase a thousand—can put ten thousand to flight—can overcome the world—can elevate himself to higher honor than earth can give or appreciate. There is a kind of omnipotence in prayer; as having influence on Him who is Almighty. But why do I put you in mind of this? Not because I would have you inflate yourselves with pride; but because I remember that the spirit of prayer is altogether benevolent. Its power is unto the destruction of nothing but sin and its fruits. Its power hath the same scope and aim with that Glorious Being on whom it depends. Pure prayer's first accents are, "hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." Faithful brethren, men of prayer, men who have power with God, forget not, I beseech you, what, by means of prayer, you are capable of accomplishing. The world's conversion hath not yet been achieved. Means with that great end in purpose, have been long in operation, and have recently been much increased. What those means are, you know; and their powerlessness, independently of God's blessing, you also know. I remind you again of your privilege, as endued with the spirit of grace and supplication. For Zion's sake then, hold not your peace, for Jerusalem's sake rest not, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. There is neither dulness in the ear nor weariness in the arm of God. Both almighty strength and boundless mercy are awake and alert, to make full and swift return to any righteous man's effectual fervent supplication. And the divine glory is still pledged to make the dominion of truth and grace universal and complete. Of the prophecies promising that triumph, not a jot or tittle can fail to be fulfilled, unless God can cease to be God, or the scriptures cease to be his word. And the souls of men have not become less excellent than when Christ counted not his blood too precious to be given for their ransom; nor are they less liable to be lost, or liable to less than an everlasting perdition. And shall the knees of the saints be soon wearied, and the breath of their prayers be stifled? Oh, let them lift up their hands, and pour forth their cries, till they cease to have their dwelling in the land of prayer.