

“PROPER PRAYER—ITS BEARING UPON THE CHRISTIAN WALK”

(Discourse by W. M. Wisdom, Columbus, Ohio convention, June 28, 1914, starting on page 101.)

“My prayer shalt Thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee.” (Psalm 5:3)

This text is from one of the Messianic Psalms, and in it the Psalmist is foretelling how the prayers of the Messiah will be heard in the glorious millennial morning. We know that the Messiah is not one, but of many members, Head and Body. And we realize that it is our privilege to be of this favored class, which will make up the Mystical Body of the Great Messiah—*if we are faithful to our covenant of sacrifice even unto death*. For this purpose indeed we have been called.

How can we best assure ourselves of finally attaining unto this glorious consummation of our hopes? We reply, by giving close attention to the Divine Instructions. The Scriptures clearly point out the importance of prayer in this connection. Prayer lies at the very foundation of all growth and development in Christian character. Without its use we could not hope to increase in favor with God, take on the character-likeness of our Head.

Prayer has been defined in a general sense as, *Communion with God*. It is a rare privilege indeed, which consecrated believers have of communing with God of grace, the loving Heavenly Father; of speaking with Him, as it were, in a confidential manner: making known to Him our desires, presenting our petitions, offering our thanksgiving; having assurance that He will hear us, and because He heareth us, we know we have our petitions, provided we ask according to His will. But it is “proper” that our prayers should be regulated by a standard; indeed, they must be, if they are to be “proper”; and no other kind of prayers will avail with the Father. This standard we find in God’s Word. God’s Word tells us in general: *How to pray; how often to pray; where to pray; for whom to pray; for what to pray*. Whoever will not listen to Him who speaketh from above, has not the spirit of sonship; and the spirit of sonship is the spirit of prayer, as the Heavenly Son gave abundant evidence, often withdrawing Himself from His disciples to pray to the Father in Heaven, even continuing all night in prayer.

How to Pray

In a general sense, however, if we can keep before our minds to whom we are addressing our petitions, that it is the *Great Jehovah*, the God of the universe, the Creator of all things, the One in whom we live and move and have our being, and to the extent then that we have knowledge of His glorious character and appreciate the same, correspondingly will we come into His courts, with true praise and thanksgiving, with great humility,

filled with reverence. *The more we come to reverence the Lord*, the more will we desire to worship before Him, inclining our hearts more and more in obedience to His Word.

How Often to Pray

In Psalm 55:17 we find laid down a basic principle to which we all do well to give heed. Here the Psalmist declares, *“Evening and morning, and noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and He shall hear my voice.”* Regularity in prayer is here clearly suggested. And because of the observance of this principle of regularity the Psalmist had the evidence that the Lord would and did hear his voice; he was faithful, persistent in presenting his petitions and offering his thanksgiving and praise; therefore, he had the assurance that the Lord heard him. The Apostle Peter voices the same thought, saying, *“The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous; and His ears are open to their prayers.”* This is direct, positive language.

Our Lord’s words and attitude are in full harmony with the Psalmist’s expression of confidence, *“I know that Thou hearest me always.”* Why? Because our Lord offered His prayers always in harmony with the Father’s will. This is the secret, therefore, or index to the true heart condition or attitude toward God. Such hearts as are in full harmony with the Divine will, fully consecrated thereto, may have the same evidence as that voiced by the Psalmist, confirmed by the Apostle, and emphasized by our Lord, *“I know that Thou hearest me always.”* This assurance will bring fullness of joy. All those having this evidence are being correspondingly sanctified by the Word of Truth, cleansed from the defilements of the flesh by being brought into closer relationship with their Head, and through Him with the Father. In this way is the *spirit of “Oneness,”* to which our Lord referred to in the 17th chapter of John, established; and this will give assurance that we shall finally see Him as He is; behold His glory, and also share it.

“Pray Without Ceasing”

“Pray without ceasing” is the great Apostle’s injunction; while our Lord declared, “Men ought to pray always, and not to faint.” But how may this be done? We reply that, these texts do not mean that we must be upon our knees always and offering audible *prayer* without ceasing. Literally this is not possible, as all know. Nevertheless, we believe it easily possible to obey the spirit of these injunctions. This however, means heart attainment of high degree. As we are doing with our might what our hands find to do while our brains are engaged with our hands in the duties of the hour, concentrated upon and devoted to the work in hand, we can not, of course, in the strict sense of the language, be *praying at the same time*, without ceasing. Nor is this the thought of our Lord and the Apostle in this connection. But when the strain of labor and care is lifted, for a time, the heart will just as quickly and just as surely return to its rest in God through communion and prayer, as will the needle when released return to the pole. Where our treasure is,

there will our hearts, thoughts be also. To the extent, then, that we are laying up treasure in Heaven, to that same extent will our thoughts, the *prayers of our hearts*, be associated therewith.

Continue Instant in Prayer

Regularity and persistence in prayer are not only “proper” but are commanded as the only safe course to follow, if we would hope to win in Faith’s good fight. We note in this connection the case of the Prophet Daniel. He was greatly beloved of the Lord because of his love and loyalty; therefore the Lord had respect unto Daniel’s prayer. The record shows us that it was his custom to go and kneel three times a day before the Lord, *and pray, facing Jerusalem, giving thanks before his God*. This we note he did in defiance of the law of the Babylonians, which fixed a severe penalty for an infraction thereof. Daniel’s course in this defiance brought upon himself the full measure of the penalty of this law. You know the story. He was faithful, he was persistent, *instant in prayer*, making supplications to his God. And his faithfulness and courage were rewarded.

Oh, that we were all controlled by a like persistency, being *instant in prayer*, as the great Apostle enjoins! Men ought to pray always, our Lord declared, and not to faint. Do not these words of the Master clearly point out that the praying spirit is the opposite of the “*fainting spirit*?” That if we neglect our *privilege of prayer*, communing with God, we are proportionately cultivating the “fainting” spirit? The fainting spirit is not the spirit of the good soldier; the good soldier is a good fighter, courageous, resolute. Such as would come off more than conquerors must be strong in the Lord. If we would be strong in the Lord, we must be obedient unto His Word, His instructions. His definite instructions are, “*Pray always.*” *While praying we are near the Lord*; and as we draw nearer to Him, He in like manner draws nearer to us. For in His presence there are joy and strength. In this connection we recall the lines of the poet:

“Prayer makes the darkest cloud withdraw
Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw;
Gives exercise to faith and love,
Brings every blessing from above.”

To be “instant in prayer” means to be persevering in prayer, not fainting, not doubting. Our Lord gives us a lesson along this line, saying, “Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.” At first the householder would not rise and give to his friend, because of the lateness of the hour, saying, “Trouble me not; I cannot rise and give thee.” Though he would not rise and give him because he is a friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him; his *persistency*, his *importunity*, bringing the thing desired. Our Lord concluded this

parable by saying, “*Ask, and ye shall receive.*” Pray, and faint not, is the thought. Be persistent in asking, in praying.

Where to Pray

“I will that men pray everywhere,” said the great Apostle; and we do well to give heed unto his words. Observation in our own case has taught us that it is possible to do far more direct and definite praying than in times past we have been accustomed to do. Realizing our needs and the special time in which we are living, it is necessary that we strengthen our fortification, re-adjust our armor. *We should more and more attune our hearts to the attitude of prayer.* This means that we must take the “old man” in hand and compel him to perform service to the New Creature.

With all of us there is more or less work that may be said to be mechanical, which we can do without special concentration of thought. At such times as these conditions arise we can in a very definite sense be engaged in prayer to the Heavenly Father. While washing dishes, sweeping, dusting, ironing, sewing, or what not; in much work about the farm, the factory, the shop, the office, there is often good opportunity to engage in prayer, asking the Lord’s blessings upon us in the service we are rendering, doing heartily unto the Lord what our hands have found to do. While riding on the street cars, walking along the street, opportunity for definite prayer is afforded. What might otherwise be wasted or unprofitable moments could thus be used to advantage and to Divine Pleasement.

For Whom To Pray

“For them which despitefully use you, and persecute you,” is the Master’s injunction; and however much we may feel disinclined to pursue such a course, there is no other marked out in the Scriptures for us. This is a direct command of our Lord, and whatever may be our natural inclination along this line we must, as little children, take our instructions from the Lord and conform our views and course to the instructions which cometh from above.

We are called to be copies of God’s dear Son, to walk in the footsteps of the Master. As from the Divine Word we are instructed along these lines we are shown just what is required of us, and how we can meet the requirements acceptably. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” is the standard to which we must conform our prayers. [Comment: apparently on the best authorities this expression attributed to the Master is spurious. The Heavenly Father did not forgive this crime against His Son. The Son would not ask the Father to do something contrary to His character.] This marks the spirit of the Master and the course He took, and we must walk in His footsteps; follow Him. He opened the way, and marked out the course we should take. Had our Lord’s enemies known that He was the Messiah for whom they had been looking and praying for

centuries, they would not have crucified Him. The attitude of our enemies toward us is very much the same.

Praying for our enemies, those who despitefully use us, will intensify our appreciation of the Lord's love for us. "Greater love hath no man than this: that he lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. This is my commandment: that ye love one another as I have loved you." Now, how much did He love us? Well, as we are informed, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, the ungodly; while we were children of wrath even as others, God commended His love toward us. No higher expression of love can be conceived of than this: *That while we were yet enemies Christ died sacrificially for us.* It is our privilege to die a similar sacrificial death; to fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ. If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. If we be dead with Him, we shall live with Him.

Now in comparison with dying for one's enemies, praying for one's enemies seems to be a very small matter indeed. Jesus did both. His injunction to us is that we should follow Him! As to the weightier matter of dying for our enemies or filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, we do indeed look upon this as a privilege; count it all joy to suffer for Christ, for His cause. Glad indeed for this opportunity.

But when the proposition is reduced down to a personal matter, individual matter, it seems to take on a different aspect altogether. Since the commandment requires that we should *pray for our enemies*, those who despitefully use us, we stagger at it, and too often fall away from that which is our plain duty to do. This which is really a small thing in comparison with other things, which we endure joyfully, we turn from, side-track. Why? Well, there is a reason, to be sure. And it lies in the fact that *our hearts have not been properly attuned to love.* When we come to the point where we can get the proper focus on all such matters, that is, from the Divine viewpoint, then we can from our hearts pray for all who despitefully use us. If they knew better, they would do better. "They know not what they do;" if they did know, they would not do such things. If they knew as much as we know they would do as well as we are doing or even better. But all persecutors and revilers are more or less ignorant, more or less blind. The same is true of all evil speakers and those who evilly surmise. All some time, we hope, all such will get their eyes open. Therefore, in proportion as we from our hearts pray for them, are we bringing our hearts into sympathy with the Divine standard. Of course, all saints pray for all saints. But we must bring our hearts to the point where we can love our enemies and pray for all who despitefully use us, and say all manner of evil against us. This our Lord did. We are to follow Him.

For What To Pray

In proportion as we appreciate the privilege of prayer will we desire, and endeavor, to use that privilege in harmony with the Lord's will, in a way most acceptable to Him; and, therefore, to our advantage as New Creatures. "*Proper prayer*" is associated with all progress in spiritual things, in the development of the fruits of the Spirit. Prayer is not only a privilege, which we should appreciate highly, but it is a necessity, commanded as indispensable to our growth in Christian character. And whoever is negligent of this privilege, to that extent is blind, as the Apostle Peter declares, because if he could see he would not be forgetful in the doing. If ye know these things happy ye are if ye do them.

Furthermore, we are to learn to pray aright, as well as to act aright, speak right, think right. *The whole matter is one of learning and growing.* Selfish prayers are not only expensive, but they are likely to prove dangerous. Some have reasoned that if they only had money they could do so much toward advancing the interests of the harvest work, forgetful of the fact that God does not need either us or our money: that all the gold and silver are His; and that He has the power to raise up children to Abraham from the stones of the streets. He graciously grants us the opportunity, however, of being co-workers with Him in things which the angels desired to look into, for the purpose of developing such characters as He could approve and would be pleased to accept as joint-heirs with His dear Son. Therefore, some make the matter of obtaining money the burden of their prayers; and cases are known where such prayers have been answered. But with the answer to such prayers came other things not prayed for: *love for the money*; and with the love for the money was coupled the loss of the love for the Truth. Finally, less being done for the Truth and its interests than before. "*Be content,*" is the proper thought.

Others have prayed for health, made this the burden of their prayers, persuading themselves that if they were only well and strong, they could accomplish so much more in some branch in the harvest work; the cares of life would thus be lighter, their spirits more buoyant, they could attend the meetings more frequently, and altogether increase their advantages and opportunities. Sometimes such prayers have been answered; but with the answer came other trials greater than those they had before.

Others, again, have had their loved ones restored to them from the very jaws of death, as it were, in answer to their prayers, only to wish afterward that their prayers had not been answered. God's ways are best; and we should learn to trust Him more and more, to learn that He will cause everything to work together for our highest good as New Creatures, if we are but satisfied to leave everything in His hands, content to await His time. In proportion as we do this, in that proportion will we desire His will, not ours, done. God has definitely promised us certain things and for these *we may properly pray.* We should not pray for others. And we must study His Word in order that we may know what He has and has not promised. Other than these things we should not expect. *The rich things promised are spiritual blessings*, not temporal; things for the enrichment of

the New Creature. The old creature is reckoned dead; therefore, does not require anything. Ye are dead; and your life is hid with Christ in God.

John Fifteen Seven

“If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” This is one of the many texts which have been misunderstood and misapplied by even some of the Truth friends. Some seem to think that this text warrants them in praying for about any and everything their fancy might chance to rest upon. Such do not study with sufficient care to show themselves approved unto God.

We have in mind such an one, a sister in a very large class in the West, with which we were formerly associated. This sister had been raised from childhood under the influences of the Adventist doctrine; but about three or four years previous to the incident we are about to relate, she freed herself from the doctrinal errors of that sect and accepted the Truth. She was remarkably well informed as to the letter of the Word; for this reason it was very hard for her to get free from some wrong interpretations which she had been brought up under. Thus in her prayers she was in some measure governed by Adventist theories—literal interpretations. She was married to a man who was not even in sympathy with the Truth—a worldly man. She was very desirous that he should come into the truth, so she accordingly made this the burden of her prayers; three times a day, morning, noon and night, going before the Lord in her closet. Now regularity and persistency in prayer we have already commended. But it is equally important that our requests be in harmony with the Divine will. Another brother and myself tried very hard to set her right in respect to this matter; but to no avail. She insisted that the text in question warranted her in thus praying.

John 15:7 was always her anchor in reference to this suggestion. “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.” Upon her understanding of this text she laid her foundation: *ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you*. On the face of it, this language would seem to warrant one in asking for the desire of his own heart. This was just what this sister was doing.

About three years after the incident in question this sister’s prayers along this line terminated, though not because her husband had been brought into the Truth. No, indeed; but because he left her, going off with another woman. Now our sister was zealous for the Truth, but her zeal was not according to knowledge. She was blind to the fact that the words of the Lord were not abiding in her fully, therefore, this promise did not apply. If ye abide in Me—this she did—and My words, My teachings, abide in you, then and then only is this promise to you. And *if My words abide in you, then you will first desire to know what My will is* before making your requests known, and make your requests accordingly.

It is clear that the Master's own words, teachings, did not enter fully into our sister, because her course was contrary to the Scriptures. The Master Himself hath declared that no man could come unto the Son except the Father draw him. But more explicitly do the words of the Apostle Paul apply: *God hath set every member in the Body as it pleased Him*. Not even the Son was privileged to do the drawing, the setting of members in His own Body. Nevertheless, this sister, as we see, was arrogating to herself a prerogative not granted unto the glorified Son of God. She was endeavoring to set a member in the Body of Christ; thinking, apparently, that because it would be her "good pleasure" to have her husband as a body member of the Messiah it should in like manner be the Father's "good pleasure" to have it so. It required a rude awakening for her to get her eyes open. Let us not err along this line.

Our Lord's Example

When our Lord was being sorely tried and tested, was going through His most severe and painful experience, He did not even then ask that His own will should be done—Father, if this cup may not pass from Me except I drink it, Thy will be done. This is the key to the secret which enabled our Lord to keep inviolate His covenant with the Father, even unto the ignominious death of the cross. He sought ever to do the Father's will, not His own. O, how much this thought means, should mean, to all who hope to be joint heirs with Him! This is a heart-searching time in which we are living; the issue of life cometh from the heart. Let us look to it critically.

The question may arise in the minds of some: may we not properly pray for those who are near and dear to us by reason of family ties, even though they be not of the Household of Faith? We answer, yes; *provided we pray properly*, then we may properly pray. In other words, we may pray for them just such blessings as the Heavenly Father, in His wisdom and love, may be pleased to bestow. In the first place, we know not how to pray for ourselves as we ought; therefore, much less are we qualified to choose blessings for our loved ones. Besides, the Master has set us the standard—let us strive to follow it.

Thy Will Be Done

If all the Lord's people could be brought to the point where the chief desire of their hearts is that the Father's will should be done in them, and in regard to them in all things, rather than their own will, what a great blessing it would prove to be to them. It is His will to give us the things He has promised; for these we may properly and advantageously pray; but give thanks for all things. The Apostle James instructs: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

Surely we all recognize our deficiencies along this line—of the wisdom that cometh from above; and realizing, therefore, our needs, we should make this a definite point in our daily petitions at the throne of grace; for every good gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of light. *This wisdom* which cometh from above, the Apostle assures us is, *First pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated*, and full of mercy and good fruits. In fact, we note from this summary, that “*wisdom is the principal thing*” as the wise man states. It comprehends in one word all the graces and fruits of the Spirit—is full of these, and they are pure first.

After this wonderful quality or principle or gift, we are counseled to seek, to ask, to pray for. Therefore, we know it is the Father’s “good pleasure” to give us that which He has definitely promised. As we, then, realize our needs in this respect should we by prayer make known to the Giver of every good gift, who indeed assures us that “*no good thing*” will He withhold from us—if we will but *ask* for it according to His will. God purposely withholds many “good things” from us until we come to a point in our spiritual development where these would prove to be blessings, and He bestows them only then when we feel our needs and express our desire in prayer. How important it is then that by “prayer our requests should be made known.” Persistency in this respect is important.

The Father’s Will

You recall in this connection a parable given by our Lord respecting a certain man who had two sons; to one he said: Son, go work today in the vineyard; he answered, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went. To the other one he said likewise; this one replied, I go; but went not. The Lord here shows that the son who declared he would not go into the vineyard, but afterward went, that it was he who did his father’s will; that the *doing of the Heavenly Father’s will calls for action*, also; to say and do not, is not sufficient.

To know the will of God is a great advantage in many ways, but the fullness of the blessings will come to only those who know His will and then strive to do it to the best of their ability. Too many of the Lord’s people express a desire to do His will, but before attempting to do it they endeavor to adjust His will to their own will, persuading themselves that such and such is the Lord’s will, while as a matter of fact it is their own will they have before their minds. God’s will usually means a crossing of our own will.

What a comforting thought to feel that we have so completely committed our ways and all of our interests, temporal and spiritual to the Lord that *nothing can by any manner “happen” to us*; that our times are in His hands; that the crossing of our own wills, if such are in evidence, will work together for our good as New Creatures. Those who have this hope, this trust, in the over-ruling Providence, purifieth themselves, and have a sweet peace and rest that in a sense bring Heaven to earth, so far as they are concerned, enabling them to truly sit in the heavenlies with Christ Jesus.

Pray For the Best Gifts

Our Lord instructs: Ask, and it shall be given you. Again, blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled. Why? Because, being hungry, these will “ask.” Father, If ye being evil yet know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask Him? But note the fact here clearly indicated that the gift is not bestowed until it is asked for. “Ask, and ye shall receive,” is the promise.

We, therefore, note in this connection the force of our Lord’s statement, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness.” Those who are hungry will of necessity seek for food with which to satisfy their hunger. Those, then, who hunger after righteousness are blessed in advance; for these will seek what they hunger after; and they shall find it, and be filled. For the statement is that the Heavenly Father is willing, pleased indeed, to give the best gifts to them that ask Him—the Bread which cometh down from Heaven, but He gives it only when asked. Let us therefore pray.

CHRISTIAN HEROISM

“He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city.” (Prov. 16:32) The enemy whom the Christian combats is his own heart; for he is required to turn his arms against himself. It is sad to find, in one’s own constitution, an opposition to virtues so lovely as those of submission, charity, sweetness and patience. Groan under this evil, but do not despair. Undertake the conquest of yourself. Carry fire and sword into the most sensitive part of your soul; enter the lists with your darling sin: “mortify your members which are upon earth”; rise above flesh and blood, nature and self-love. To say all in one word, determine to “RULE YOUR SPIRIT.” To this point direct all your attention, all your strength, and all your courage. Say to yourself, this is the post which my general intends I should force; this is the enemy I am to fight with. And be you fully convinced that one of the principal views which God hath in preserving your life, is that you should become master of YOURSELF. Be not dismayed at the greatness of the task, because “GREATER IS HE THAT IS IN US, THAN HE THAT IS IN THE WORLD.” The danger and pain of battle vanish when the eye gets sight of conquest. How inconceivably beautiful is victory then! God grant we may obtain it! —Jacques Saurin 1677-1730.