

PERFECTED PRAYER

Joseph H. Smith

There are three well-marked stages in successful prayer; and there are three rather distinct grades of prayer as to the Christian's life. It is perhaps more than merely incidental that it is written of our Lord in Gethsemane: "He prayed the third time saying the same words." (Matthew 26:44). Or of Paul concerning the thorn in his flesh: "I besought the Lord thrice that it might be removed from me." (I. Cor. 12:8). As there is a tri-fold nature of man and as there is a tri-unity of the God-head, so there seems to be a three-fold perfection or completeness of Prayer.

Our Lord in that masterful Treatise on Prayer brought out by the disciples' request that He teach them to pray, enjoined these three: Asking, Seeking and Knocking. And these, we take it, indicate not only a repetition, nor even only a perseverance, but a progression in prayer, up unto the removal of the last hindrance; and what seemed to be a wall of obstruction is turned into a door that is opened unto us. And we apprehend that this is meant to apply not only to the prayer for the Gift of the Holy Ghost—up to which his discourse led—but to Christian prayer in general. And the example of the Lord set in the garden, and the pattern followed by Paul as to his thorn, (and which prayer resulted in something incalculably greater than healing to himself, and the whole Christian world in all generations to follow) is pattern to be followed by us in order to successful Christian praying.

And not only this, but there are three well defined grades in the School of Christian Prayer. There was a grade to which John Baptist taught his disciples but beyond which he could not carry them. And they got their certificates at the river Jordan. There was a second and higher grade to which the Lord himself promoted them; and in this they graduated at the upper room in Jerusalem. But there is a post-graduate course that is provided and is promised in the text: "At that day, ye shall ask the Father in my name, and I say not unto you that I will pray for you: for the Father himself loveth you because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God." John 16:26-27.

Persistence is the qualification for entrance into the School of Christian Prayer. This is the prayer of the sinners calling upon God for salvation. It is the publican's cry of: "God be merciful to me a sinner." Its success is conditioned upon John the Baptist's requisition of fruit worthy of repentance, and upon confession of sins with a covenant to renounce them. It must be attended with a looking by faith unto the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Its answer and result is in the remission of sins. Thus had John taught his disciples to pray. This was the farthest range of prayer in his school. His graduates came to Jesus saying: "Lord, teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples."

This inducted them into the Second Grade of Christian Prayer. While in John's grade they had matriculated as penitent sinners, in this of our Lord, they entered as children of the Heavenly Father. Remission of sins had been accompanied with their regeneration and adoption into the household of Faith. The Lord now proceeds to lead them up to prayer for the Gift of the Holy Ghost. John had announced himself incapable of this. But he had assured them that: "He that would come

after him was mightier than he, and would baptize them with the Holy Ghost and fire." But as his own baptism with water unto the remission of sins was conditional upon their humble prayer as contrite penitents, so their receiving of the Gift of the Spirit from their heavenly Father was likewise conditional upon their asking Him. Asking as a hungry child asking for food. Asking as a kindly neighbor had asked for bread for a lost and hungry man at his door. Asking because of the remaining evil in their being which only such Baptism with the Spirit could remove. Then the Lord taught and trained them in prayer for their upper-room at Jerusalem tarrying. That Day of Pentecost was Commencement Day with them. Then they received their diploma which certified their full salvation from sin, and their perfected relations with Christ, and equipment for their Kingdom since upon earth.

But the Master had promised a Post Graduate Course in the School of Prayer. "At that day" (and he is speaking of this Pentecostal Day when they shall have received the Comforter) "ye shall pray the Father in my name; and I do not say that I will pray for you; for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me and have believed that I came out from the Father." (John 16:26-27). Here is the highest order of prayer, and the nearest relation to God than man has ever reached on earth. Christ has accomplished His purpose in our souls. This was not only, nor primarily, to get us to heaven; but to get us to God. The gulf is spanned. The abyss is filled. The last barrier is removed. The soul now coming in the name of Christ has direct access to the Father. He has entered the Holy of Holies. He is anointed, both as King with dominion over his own spirit and over the world, and as Priest to make supplication and prevail in prayer. "At that day ye shall ask." While prayer from John's grade prevailed to the remission of their sins; and prayer under Christ's instruction has been answered in their receiving the Gift of the Holy Ghost, their praying now henceforth is to be in the Spirit. Thus, the apostle Paul encourages and enjoins the Christian warrior to: "All prayer and supplication in the Spirit." And Jude, likewise, as security against failing, bids us to be both building up ourselves and praying in the Holy Ghost." This is maximum prayer privilege and majestic prayer power. By this things are brought to pass which no preaching, planning or performing on our part can bring to pass. This relates humanity to duty in a way never before known among men. This brings to bear against Satan and all the powers of darkness forces at much greater than the physical or mental forces of mankind, whether in the individual or in the aggregate as heaven is greater than earth. It carries into the realm of prayer the truth the fact that it is "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord."

Prayer by and "in" the Spirit is the privilege and prerogative of those who prayed through for the Spirit. This is that effectual prayer of which James writes in his epistle: "Fervent as to our own Spirit; and effected by the Holy Spirit is the prayer that 'avail-eth much.'" In the former dispensations a Samuel, a Daniel, or an Elijah may have had foretaste or an earnest of this privilege and power in prayer; but we in this crowning "day of salvation" may all have the full measure of this holy right and might.

And here is the source and surety of it. In Romans 8:26-27, we are made acquainted

with the Intercessory Prerogative of the Holy Ghost himself: "The Spirit himself maketh intercession for us in groanings which can not be uttered." Beyond our knowledge and beyond our power of expression, He that maintains our comfort and peace, and instructs us and leads us in the way, does also present our needs and desires unto the Father, "And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Now our praying is made effectual by our abandonment unto the Spirit's exercise in prayer. And while doubtless he will engage our thought and our desire and oft times our speech as well, yet he will also transcend all these. Thus it is that our faith is encouraged (and rewarded too) for God's doing "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to his power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20). Now we are to observe that in this grade of Christian life, this "in the Spirit" feature is to attach to "all" our praying. Not simply on great and unusual occasions, not only even in public prayer but as it is written: "Praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Family prayer, social prayer, private prayer. Silent and ejaculatory prayer may all, by momentary recollection of and repose in the Holy Spirit, be made prayer in the Holy Ghost.

And as this is the final degree of prayer it is alike interesting and important for us to note that it will become predominantly intercessory prayer. That is prayer for others rather than mostly for ourselves. Prayer for the Kingdom interests rather than mostly for our own affairs. Thus, we have been brought into completed fellowship with the Father and the Son. We share now to our fullest measure God's love for His own church. In all our praying we "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" on the earth, and His holiness in the hearts of men. And more, even, than upon preaching or program or enterprise, God is depending upon our "Praying in the Holy Ghost" for the spread of the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. We are his anointed priests as well as His heralds and witnesses.—Heart and Life Magazine.

REPORT

Wolcott, Vermont—Following the camp at Ithel Falls, Rev. W. Edmund Smith of 37 Curtis St., West Somerville, Mass., gave us a three weeks' revival campaign at Wolcott. Brother Smith who is a great student of the Word of God is a prince of preachers and gave us one of the greatest meetings we have ever had. He preaches, sings, prays and shouts on the saints like a mighty warrior. We are confident that some victories were won in this campaign that will be on record when the books are opened. I am glad to recommend our brother as one who will fit in anywhere; who carries a burden for souls, seeketh not his own and is willing to go anywhere the Lord wants him; stay as long as the Lord wants him, and when he leaves he goes with a smile even though the offering has been small knowing the saints have done what they could. God grant that the time will soon come when the ten day meetings will be the exception and not the rule, and evangelists will be willing as of old to stand by until the victory comes and be satisfied with their pay whether large or small, when the saints have done their best.

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