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WHATSOEVER YE ASK IN FAITH

Rev H C Muller, June 57

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To be permitted to go "behind the scenes" is ever a fascinating experience. It is a great privilege to have access to a studio where the famous artist is at work. It is surpassingly interesting to be informed of some great scholar's method of study, to be allowed to open his notebook and observe his mode of approach. The mind of every divinity student becomes peculiarly vigilant and absorbed when he is admitted into some great preacher's worship, and sees his tools, and, better still, hears him tell how he sets about to use them.

But, surely, the supreme privilege is to obtain entry, by a private door, into the life of some radiant saint, and to watch with what kind of grasp he lays hold of the unseen, and how he sets about to pray, and what is the character of his supplication. Well, now, here is a great expert in the devout life, the Apostle Paul, and in the Epistle of the Ephesians he takes us into his innermost room, and tells us what he thinks about prayer, and he permits us to hear him engage in its sacred exercise. I propose that we should accept the privilege, and use it for the instruction of our own souls.

What, then, has he to say about prayer? Let us look into his soul through the words of the sixth chapter and the eighteenth verse: "With all prayer and supplication (praying at all seasons) in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." Let me try to disengage and separate the various elements in that conception, and set them out in clear distinction. How ought the great business of prayer to be done?

First, replies this expert apostle, "in the Spirit." That distinguishes true prayer from all professed prayer which takes its rise upon the doorstep of the lips. The strength of a prayer is in proportion to the depth of its source. The flight of an arrow is determined by the strength of the hand that wields the bow. The holy "violence" of a prayer is conditioned by the fullness and the power of the Spirit that backs it. If there be nothing behind it, it will be like a projectile with no explosive initiative to give it motion. No driving power, no going power! And that is the explanation of the infinite differences in the power of prayer. Some prayers lightly skim the surface and leave no mark; others scoop out channels and leave ineradicable tracks of their ministry. Some prayers move like an autumn leaf blown by an idle breath; others move like a plowshare driven by steam.

Everything depends upon the driving power in our supplications. And, therefore, says the apostle, they must be "in the Spirit." Yes, but even at the best, our spirits are comparatively forceless, and we are unable to cut a channel across the field of human need, along which the rich and generous waters of life may flow. And, therefore, when he declares that prayer must be born "in the Spirit," it is Spirit with a capital "S." It is the Holy Spirit in alliance with the human spirit, hurling the projectile, driving the share, scooping the channel across the dry desert of human life. "The Spirit (himself) maketh in-

tercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." "The Spirit (himself) searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." That is the primary dynamic in prayer. And if I interpret the apostle aright, the first thing we have to do when we wish to pray is this: Before we shape our projectiles, we must look to the requisite strength; before we begin with our words, we must make sure of the Holy Ghost. If the bow of Achilles is to be drawn, let us have Achilles to do it. Pray "in the Spirit."

When, again, ought the great business of prayer to be done? "At all seasons," replies the expert. And, therefore, when we sing about the "sweet hour of prayer," we are not exactly expressing the apostle's mind. Prayer to him was not the exercise of an hour, but the mood of a life. Now, if prayer were confined to words, its ministry would be pathetically limited, and only at appointed and infrequent hours could it be exercised. But in our prayerful words it is the aspiration that counts, and it is well to give the aspiration definite expression. It is the aspiration which is the thing with wings, the thing which soars to heaven's gates; and aspiration may continue when the words have ceased. We cannot speak without ceasing, but we can aspire without ceasing, and it is the aspiration which counts. Aspiration born in the Spirit, that is to say, aspiration born of inspiration, rises continually as the fragrance of a garden is rising day and night. I use the figure of the fragrance to express the constancy, but by no means to express the power. Aspiration is not a mere exhalation, it is a mighty minister cooperating with the grace and holy love of God. My sacred aspiration for brother, for friends, for prodigal, for the race, are engines of the Spirit, and day and night they are ceaselessly busy preparing "the way of the Lord."

And what other implication is in the great apostle's conception of prayers? "And watching thereunto with all perseverance." And surely that is perfectly natural, and yet most commonly forgotten. It is surely reasonable, when we have fired a projectile, to watch if it has hit the mark. It is surely reasonable, when we pray for the illumination of China, to keep vigilant eyes perseveringly looking for the morning, and, when any consecrated scout comes home, to question him and say, "Watchman, what of the night?"

If I had one gift, and only one gift, to make to the Christian church, I would offer the gift of prayer. For everything follows from prayer!

"He answers prayer so sweetly that I stand  
Amid the blessings of his wondrous Hand,  
And marvel at the miracle I see.  
The favors that his love hath wrought for me.  
Pray on for the impossible, and dare  
Upon thy banner this brave motto bear:

'My Father answers prayer.'

"And all things, whatsoever ye ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive."

—Pilgrim Holiness Advocate