

The Sermon on the Mount and Prayer

In the portions of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, contained in the gospel of Matthew chapters 5-7; we are presented with a standard of moral excellency and holiness which is utterly unattainable by mere flesh and blood. Jesus spoke one requirement after another that is not within the power of fallen human nature to meet.

Our Savior had forbidden an hateful word, a malignant wish, an impure desire, a revengeful thought. He had enjoined the most unsparing mortification of our lusts. He had commanded the loving of our enemies, the blessing of those who curse us, the doing good to those who hate us, and the praying for those who despitefully use and persecute us.

In view of these statements by our Savior the christian may well exclaim "Who is able to do these things? Such demands of holiness are far beyond our feeble strength: yet Christ has made them, what then are we to do?" Here is Christ's own answer:

"Ask, and ye shall receive, seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."(Matt 7:7)

Jesus knew that in our own wisdom and strength we are incapable of keeping His commandments, but He at once informed us that the things which are ordinarily impossible to men can be made possible by God.

Divine assistance is imperative if we are to meet the Divine requirements. We need Divine mercy to pardon and cleanse, power to subdue our raging lusts, quickening to animate our feeble graces, light on our path that we may avoid the snares of Satan in this world, wisdom from above for the solving of our varied life problems.

Only God Himself can relieve our distresses and supply all our needs. His assistance, then, is to be sought: sought prayerfully, believingly, diligently and expectantly; and if it be sought in this way, it will not be sought in vain: for the same passage goes on to assure us;

"What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will 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, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him!"
(Matthew 7:9-11)

What inducement is that! Yet other requirements besides prayer are needed by us if we are to obtain that help and sustenance from God which we so sorely need.

A christian must first obtain a fuller knowledge of God's will and increase the light on his path by regularly studying God's Word. Would it not be foolish for you to blame the bulb for emitting no light

if you switched off the electrical current?

Nor will the Holy Spirit open the Word to a believer while they are indulging in the lusts of the flesh and “allowing” sin in their heart and life willfully. Equally clear is that no Christian has any Scriptural warrant to expect they will receive wisdom and strength from above while they neglect the Throne of Grace and keep up a form of “praying” while following a life of self-will and self-pleasing pride devoid of all humbleness and humility.

“If I regard [cherish] iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Ps. 66:18).

“Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:2):

“Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3).

“He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law [i.e., following your own traditions and beliefs not contained in the Word of God], even his prayer shall be an abomination” (Prov. 28:9)

Under such circumstances praying would be downright hypocrisy and a mocking of God.

Scripture is quite plain on this point. We are bidden to “receive with meekness the ingrafted Word,” but before we can do so we must first comply with what immediately precedes, namely, “lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness” (James 1:21).

Room has to be made in our hearts for the Word.

“Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings” (1 Peter 2:1).

There has to be a purging of our corruptions so there will be a spiritual appetite for Divine things. The natural man may “study the Bible” to become intellectually informed of its contents, but there has to be a change “a laying aside” in obedience and humility of the things God hates for Him to hear our cries in prayer.

It is one thing to read the Scriptures and become acquainted with their teachings, it is quite another to really feed upon them and live them for the soul to be transformed by them. God's Word is holy, and it requires holiness of heart and life from the one who would be profited by it: the believer must be attuned to its message in obedience before there will be any real revelations by a Holy God.