

RIGHT REPLIES TO RIGHT REQUESTS NO. 959

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORDS-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 6, 1870,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“If a son shall ask for bread of any of you who is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”
Luke 11:11-13.

IN this chapter there is an evident progress. It opens by the disciples asking the Lord to teach them to pray. To that He gave a full and sufficient reply; He prepared them an outline of what complete prayer should be. Brothers and sisters, we have need, some of us, to begin with asking to be taught to pray. It will be a blessed sign when it can be said of us, “Behold, he prays.” And just in proportion as we are instructed how to pray shall we give evidence of a more advanced Christian life; he has most grown in grace who prays best; depend upon it, the most acceptable prayer with God is the evidence of a most accepted state of heart within. Our growth in prayer may be to us the test of our growth in all other respects. “Lord, teach us to pray,” is a prayer for the young beginner, and for the more advanced disciple; it is a suitable petition for us all, for we have none of us yet learned to the fullest the sacred art of supplication.

Then the chapter proceeds a little further to answer a question: we are shown how to pray, but will God really answer us? Is prayer only meant to do good to the suppliant? Does it end with the benefit which it works in us, or does it really affect the heart of God? Do replies actually come from heaven in answer to the entreaties of God’s children? The answer is given by our Lord with great clearness. We have a parable to show that as importunity does evidently affect men, so importunity will also gain an answer from God that He will be pleased to give us what we need if we do but know how, with incessant earnestness, to come again and again to Him in prayer. We are assured that asking is attended with receiving, that seeking is attended with finding, that knocking will lead to opening, that it is not a vain thing to pray, that our prayers are not lost on the wind, or expended merely on ourselves, but that there is a connection established by divine decree between the prayer that is raised on earth, and the mercy that is given forth from heaven.

But since we are such sinful creatures, the chapter proceeds to deal with a grave doubt which may arise in the troubled mind. “It may be God will hear, and as a general rule will make replies in mercy, but I am an undeserving one. If the Lord should be incensed at my prayers, and answer me in wrath instead of love, I should deserve it; if after having made my confession, He should deal with me, judging me out of my own mouth, and then and there condemn me, what should I say?” The Savior very explicitly answers the question as to whether God will give answers of peace, and will always grant us good things, and He puts it thus to us: when your children ask for good things you grant their requests; you do not mock them by giving them something that may look like what they asked for, but is only a deception; you never play upon their ignorance and mock their childish confidence by giving them the injurious semblance of what would have been a useful reality; when their prayers are right, you answer them. If you then, being evil, fallen creatures, yet answer your children’s right and proper prayers, how much more will your heavenly Father answer your fitting prayers, and give to you good things? He will not put you off with evil things when you ask for good, but He will grant you in truth the good gifts which you are seeking.

You will observe that the fear, lest God should give us something evil when we are seeking something good, is very naturally raised in the heart by a sense of sinfulness, and is increased by the conviction that we should not always be able to judge whether the thing received is good or not good. We

tremble lest we should receive from the divine hands what appears to be gracious, and yet may be sent in judgment. But he says, “No, your children trust in their father, and their father never deceives them; you may safely trust your heavenly Father that when you ask a good thing from Him, He will most assuredly give you a good thing, and not an evil thing in lieu of it.” You are true and kind to your children, much more shall God be good towards you. In asking, “How much more?” we ask an unanswerable question! As high as God is above us, so high is the certainty that He will give us good above the certainty that we will give good things to our children. Yet since we feel in our hearts quite certain that we could not mock our children, let us be quite convinced that it is still further beyond all question that God will ever mock us, and give to us an evil thing when we are seeking a good thing at His hands! By the way, it has been remarked that the expression of our Savior here is, “you being evil”; that expression evidently teaching the doctrine of our fallen condition, the doctrine of human depravity. You, My disciples, you are evil; you who have children, whether you are upright or otherwise in others’ estimation, you are all evil, and yet, being evil, you still have such affection and judgment that you give your children good gifts; much more shall He who is infinitely good give good things to you when you seek them.

I have met with many expositions of this passage in which there is an attempt made to show that the child asked a wrong thing, and wished for a stone which appeared to be bread. Nothing of the kind is here! The child is not represented as asking for a stone, but as seeking, as he should, a most proper gift, namely, bread. No mistake was made at all by the child, his prayer was what it should be, and the point of the parable touches the *father’s answer*. The truth here taught is not that God will refuse us evil things if in our mistake we ask for them; that is a truth, but it is not alluded to here; the one statement of this verse is that prayers for good things will be answered, and that they will not be answered with gifts wearing the mere appearance of good, but with the actual good things desired. That simple thought I shall endeavor to enlarge upon in this morning’s discourse.

Our first head will be—*right prayers, right answers*; the second point will be *the best prayer, the surest answer*; and the last head will be this, *the prayer of the text is the best, for it contains all blessings in it*.

I. First then, RIGHT PRAYERS, RIGHT ANSWERS. The child asks for bread, his father does not give him a stone. He asks for a fish; there are certain kinds of fish that are very much like snakes, but the father does not give him a serpent. The child asks for an egg; we are told by some that certain scorpions, when they fold themselves up, look like eggs; the father never makes a fool of the child, or injures him by giving him a scorpion for an egg! If we may be allowed to put some interpretation upon this, I should say if we begin our prayers by asking God for necessities, that is bread, bread temporal, or the bread of life, He will not give us useless, tooth-breaking, unsatisfying stones. We shall have, when we pray for necessary things, the really necessary things themselves, not the imitation of them, but the actual blessings, and if our faith grows a little stronger, and having obtained bread, we may ask for fish—not absolutely a necessity, but a comfort and a relish. If we make bold to ask for spiritual comforts, consoling gifts, and ennobling graces, something over and above what is absolutely necessary to save us, our heavenly Father will not mock us by giving us superficial comforts which might be injurious as a serpent; He will give us as much of comfort as we can bear, and it shall be pure, holy, healthy comfort. And if gathering still more confidence, we ask for an egg, which I take it was in Christ’s day a rarer luxury, we shall not be deluded by its counterfeit. Only once, besides this place, and that in the book of Job, and Job was a rich man, do we ever read of eating eggs at all in Scripture; and all through the Bible we find not even the mention of poultry till our Savior’s day, and then chickens were so valuable that eggs were considered a high luxury, for which a child, at least, might not be expected to make a request. But if the child is bold enough at last to ask for this larger favor, his father will not punish his impertinence by putting into his hand a deadly scorpion! Even thus, if I can summon faith enough to ask for the highest enjoyments and enrichments of divine grace, the highest blessings of Christian manhood, the most rapt and intense fellowship with Christ, I shall not receive instead of that an intoxicating excitement, a delirious fanaticism, or some other deadly or injurious thing.

Now, this at first sight may not seem to be a very useful truth of God, but I think I can show you that it is. To begin with the common blessings of providence; you have been laying your case before the throne with much earnestness of late, and you have prayed God to guide and lead you in all the steps of

life, but at this moment you are overwhelmed with trouble—distress has followed distress. Now, do not judge God harshly; above all do not judge Him so harshly as to think Him less kind and tender than you would be yourself. Your child asking for bread receives bread; you have asked for guidance and shall have it! You have asked for providential care, and you have obtained it; these present circumstances which God has appointed for you are what you have asked for! Your present lot is from the Lord; He has not given you a stone; it seems hard perhaps, may it not be the crust of true bread for all that? Believe it to be so, but never suspect that you are treated ungenerously by your Lord. Were you as able to judge as He is, you would perceive that He has given you that which is for your lasting good, and has appointed the best thing possible for you; do not look upon your present distress as a stone, a serpent, or a scorpion; if so you will be afraid of your mercies and tremble at your consolations. Providential love you have sought, and providential love is yours beyond all question, even though trials surround you, for by all these things men live, and in all these is the life of our spirit. God will bring good out of the apparent evil; indeed, if faith will but open her eyes, it is not apparent evil, but it is even now evidently good! Blind unbelief misrepresents the work of God; faith's clearer eye discerns the truth. Do not suspect your God of giving you the scorpion instead of the egg; you have asked that here on earth providence may deal wisely with you, and that God may be glorified by you; infinite wisdom is even now fulfilling your hallowed wish! Amid fiery trials your faith is honoring God, and every circumstance of your affliction is made subservient to your soul's perfection.

In spiritual matters how often in our earnest anxiety to be right have we questioned whether the spiritual gifts which we have received are what we hope they are, or whether after having sought of God, divine grace, we may after all have missed it? For instance, many of us, I hope most of us, are possessors this day of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We look to His cross, and we are lightened; we see Him as our suffering substitute, and our soul feels joy and peace as the result of faith. Our faith does lay her hand upon His head as the scapegoat, and we see sin carried away by Him into the wilderness of forgetfulness, but the question will come and sometimes very bitterly, "Is this true faith? Is this the faith of God's elect? Is it not after all presumption for me to say and believe that in Jesus Christ I am pardoned and saved? There is evidently, a notional faith; may not mine be that? There is, it seems, a faith of devils, for they 'believe and tremble'; may not mine be of that sort? Is this which I have sought of God in prayer, and which I accepted as my answer, the real grace of faith, or am I after all, deluding myself?" Look, my brother, where did you seek this faith? Did you not ask your heavenly Father to give it to you? Have you not devoutly sought, and do you not still seek today, even with tears, that He would work in you the faith which is of His own Spirit's creation? Now do you think that He would have given you a stone instead of bread, that He would have put into your heart a carnal presumption, or have allowed it to come there while you were waiting for the humble, simple faith of God's own people? My Lord, I sought it at Your feet, and there I found it! And it cannot be otherwise than a good and real faith which I found when I looked up to You! Be assured, O anxious heart, that in the vital matter of faith, true seekers shall not be put off with false faith.

The same question may arise as to every spiritual grace. We will take repentance. I am not for a moment about to depreciate the value of a discriminating theology which clearly shows the difference between legal bondage and the evangelical repentance of a child of God, but I suppose few of us can sit under sermons of that order, especially if the preachers make a great many nice distinctions, without feeling, "I am afraid I come short on several points; I fear that my repentance does not come up to the mark, and I hardly know whether I can quite say that I have so renounced sin, so abhorred it, so detested it, so loathed it from the very bottom of my soul, as this good man describes." Well, then, it will be a sweet thing to fall back upon this—I seek repentance of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ; I come to my Father, and I say, "Create in me a new heart, O God; if my heart is not broken and contrite, break it; and heal it if it is." I earnestly desire that the Lord would give me a tender spirit. My longing is towards the repentance which is of His working. I lay myself down like a field, and ask Him to plow me; I put myself before Him as the patient places his limb under the surgeon's knife, and I beseech Him to deal with me in the most cutting and severe manner, so that He may but rid me of the disease of sin. Now, if you sincerely act thus, I am sure you will not be deceived in your repentance; you shall receive the repentance that needs not to be repented of! You would not give your child the serpent instead of the

fish—neither will God allow you to be deluded with a suppositious repentance instead of the gospel repentance which is the peculiar watermark of His own chosen.

Now, as I have said, all our divine graces may be subjected to the same questioning, and our confidence in them may be reestablished by the same method. If you have sought them of the Lord, and have waited upon Him in prayer, anxiously desiring to have such as He gives—and only such as He gives, you shall not be deceived or disappointed. He of whom you seek these gifts is truth itself, and gives no mockeries to His children. If you went to pretended mediators and priests, you would be deceived, but never by the one Mediator, Jesus Christ! If you dream that the spiritual benefit is to pass through mortal hands—there are priests nowadays, like the priests of Egypt, Jannes and Jambres, who during the passage of the fish through their hands would have transformed it into a serpent, and craftily exchanged the egg for a scorpion by a little manipulation; if, then, I have got my religion at second hand, I may have been deceived. But if I have gone to God Himself, my Father, in earnest and importunate prayer, and have desired to receive these blessings direct from His Son and His Spirit, no mistake can have occurred; I will have received the good thing which I sought!

We will take one more instance, and that shall comprehend the whole. My dear brothers and sisters, in looking back upon all our experience, the doubt will occur to us whether after all it may not have been a fallacy and a delusion. I *thought* that I was brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light; I *thought* that I rejoiced in the Lord; I have *thought* that my prayers have been answered; I have believed that I have been led from grace to grace by His Spirit; I have thought, and if not awfully deceived it is true, that I have had fellowship with the Father and with His Son; I have had but few ecstasies, but I have had much peace; I have had both the mournful and the cheerful experiences of God's people—I *think* I have. But in dark times we say, "Is it so? Am I after all a true child of God? May I not after all have persuaded myself that I was converted during a revival or under a certain earnest minister? May I not since then have propped up that deceptive supposition by the respect and esteem of Christian people, and may I not up till now have been a deceiver, or self-deceived? May not the whole thing turn out to be one awful sham?" In such a case we come back to this—where did I seek this, and what did I seek? Did I go to God and desire to be a mere professor? Was it my wish to gain a worldly position, or to win the respect of my friends by professing to be a Christian? Or did I go sincerely to the Lord, and for love of salvation desire to be converted? Did I desire the Savior that I might be reconciled to God, that I might be made holy? And since then have I still desired truly and earnestly to possess the grace which God gives, and not the mere imitations of man? Do I pant to have God's own Spirit in my soul, and is that my sincere and earnest prayer now? Well then, I have no right to suspect that I am deceived! Like a child, I believe that my heavenly Father has given me what I asked for; I have done right in so believing. My child would do me a gross injustice if he suspected that the fish I gave him was not a fish, but a serpent, and I do my God a great injustice if sincerely knowing that I have sought the one thing necessary at His hands through Jesus Christ, I suspected that He has permitted me to be deluded with something else! No, if I sought it from Him, and sought it sincerely, I have now the good thing which I longed for!

Now, this simple truth may yet be very, very helpful to you—for nowadays men assail our faith. Some of us have waited upon the Lord for teaching, and we have been established in the old faith which men now sneer and rail at as a worn-out creed; we have been taught as we believe, by the Spirit of God, and by God's word, and now because this advanced age and this enlightened century have discovered that these old-fashioned truths are not philosophical, are we to believe that when we went to God for teaching we did not receive bread, but a stone? I do not believe it, nor will I give up the bread I have long lived on because these *men* choose to call it a stone! I will hold it still; it is my food, and on it I shall live forever! If a man has sought of God to be filled with zeal till he becomes like a burning seraph, some will tell him this is all wildfire—the man is excited beyond bounds, he ought to be more reserved. My dear brothers, if you have sought from God the zeal of His house that eats you up, do not believe that the Spirit that God has given you is wildfire; do not believe that your ardor for the conversion of sinners is fanaticism; hold on to it and get more of it, and do not let the devil delude you out of the treasure you have gained! The fish is a fish, not a serpent, and the egg is an egg, and not a scorpion, and so too, when the believer has stood fast in the faith and would not leave it, then he has been told, "It is only your natural obstinacy; you are pig-headed; you have got hold of a thing, and there is no making you

give it up.” Many a man of God has been ridiculed for his determination—“It is not that he has any real martyr’s spirit in him, it is only his animal obstinacy.” Ah, my friend, but you know where you got this firmness! And if you wait upon the Lord and say, “Establish me in Your fear, my God; help me to bear contradiction of sinners against myself, as my Redeemer did,” then God will not give you any evil thing. Having done all, still stand; endure to the end and you shall gain the crown of life that fades not away.

That is our first point—prayer for good things produces good answers.

II. Then, dear friends, the question will arise in every heart: “It seems then that I have only to ascertain that my prayer is for a really good thing, and I shall have it.” Just so, and therefore, secondly, THE PRAYER FOR THE BEST THING IS SUREST OF AN ANSWER, for, says the text, “How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” There is no doubt about the Holy Spirit being a good thing; when we, therefore, ask for Him, for His divine presence and influence, we may rest assured that God will give it! Make that our first point under this head—*God will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask for Him.* Beloved, the Holy Spirit sometimes is represented as the wind, the life-giving breath; He blows upon the valleys thickly strewn with slain, and they are quickened to life. You and I, though we are made to live, often feel that life to be flagging and almost dying; the Spirit of God can quicken us, revive in us the spark of divine life, and strengthen in our hearts the life of God. Pray for this quickening breath, and, my brothers and sisters, God will give it to you. As surely as you sincerely pray, you shall have and feel the revival of the life within! The Spirit of God is sometimes compared to water; it is He who applies the blood of Jesus and sanctifies us; He cleanses us. Well, He will come to us in that capacity. Do we feel that our sin has much power over us? O Spirit of God, destroy sin within us and work purity in us! You have already given us the new birth by water and the Spirit, go on and complete Your work till our whole nature shall be fashioned in the image of the great First-Born. You shall have it if you seek it—God will give you this Spirit if this you seek for. The Holy Spirit is revealed to us under the image of light, He illuminates the mind; He makes our natural darkness flee. Wait upon Him, O child of God, that you may be led into all truth; He can make that which now perplexes you to become plain; He can uplift you into truths of God which are now too high for your attainment. Wait upon Him! As a child of God, long to be taught of God; I do not know how to express to you the sense I feel just now of the deep condescension of God in promising to give us the Holy Spirit. He has given us His Son, and now He promises His Spirit! Here are two gifts unspeakable in preciousness! Will God, in very deed dwell with man upon the earth? Will God dwell *in* man? Can it be that the infinite Spirit, God over all, blessed forever, will dwell in my poor heart, and make my body to be His temple? It is certainly so, for as sure as it is that God will give good things to those who ask for good things, He will surest of all give the Holy Spirit to those who ask for the Holy Spirit! Sit not in the dark, when the light of God will break upon you if you seek it!

The Holy Spirit is set forth to us under the emblem of fire, and in this capacity He kindles enthusiasm of spirit, and burning zeal in the hearts of God’s people. The tongue of fire speaks with a matchless might; the heart of flame conquers the sons of men. O that we had this fire! It is to be had; the Spirit of God will come in answer to our cries; He will come and fire the church and each individual member of it. Oftentimes the Spirit of God is set forth as oil; by Him we have the divine anointing. The prayer that the pastor may be anointed with fresh oil is a very welcome one, but it is equally necessary that you have your lamps supplied that your light may not go out. This desire will be fulfilled. He will give the Holy Spirit in this way to those who ask Him for it. And so too, as the gentle dropping dew that cheers and refreshes the grass, so will the Spirit come to console our spirits, care-worn, tried with the heat of this world’s busy day. The Holy Spirit will come and bedew us if we seek Him. As the blessed Dove, bearing peace upon His wings, He will come to us; in fact, there is no operation of the Spirit which will not be brought in us if we seek it; there is no attribute of the Spirit of God which shall not be put forth for us if we ask it. He will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.

From the connection in which the text stands, I gather the following remark, namely, *that it will truly be the Holy Spirit.* Go back again to that first thought. The child asks for bread, and does not get a stone; you ask for the Holy Spirit, and you shall receive the Holy Spirit. Some persons have been misled by an evil spirit; I believe that very much of the rant that came out years ago about the date of the second coming of Christ, the unknown tongues, and I do not know what beside of blatant nonsense, was of an evil

spirit, and I question whether there was a humble laying down of minds before God's throne to seek the Holy Spirit, whether there was not much self-sufficiency, and much desire for something that would make important its possessor which led certain eminent preachers into vain imaginings and fanatical rant. You shall not receive an evil spirit instead of the good Spirit if you humbly and patiently wait upon the Most High! Neither shall you be misled by fancy; men will tell you that you are deluded when you experience high joys and deep experiences, but if you have sought the Spirit sincerely and intensely, it shall be the Spirit who God will give you. You need not be afraid when you bow before Jehovah's throne in Jesus' name, and ask for the Holy Spirit, that you will be sent away with anything short of that Holy Spirit that proceeds from the Father and the Son!

But it appears plainly enough from the text that *this Holy Spirit is to be given in answer to prayer*. Did not we hear some time ago from certain wise brethren that we were never to pray for the Spirit? I think I heard it said often, "We have the Holy Spirit, and therefore we are not to pray for Him." Like that other certain declaration of the same brotherhood, that we have pardon of sin, and are not to pray for it, just as if we were never to pray for what we have! If we have life, we are to pray that we have it more abundantly; if we have pardon in one respect, we are to ask for a fuller sense of it, and if we have the Holy Spirit so that we are quickened, and saved, we do not ask for Him in *that* capacity, but we ask for His power in other directions, and for His grace in other forms. I do not go before God now and say, "Lord, I am a dead sinner, quicken me by Your Spirit," for I trust I am quickened of His Spirit; but being quickened, I now cry, "Lord, let not the life You have given me ebb down till it becomes very feeble, but give me of Your Spirit that the life within me may become strong and mighty, and may subdue all the power of death within my members, that I may put forth the vigor and energy which come from Yourself through the Spirit." O you who have the Spirit, you are the very men and women to pray that you may experience more of His matchless operations and gracious influences, and in all the benign sanctity of His indwelling may you seek that yet more and more you may know Him! You have this as your encouragement—that God will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! Ever since certain brethren gave up asking for the Holy Spirit, they have not had Him, and they have gone aside into many inventions. If they will not ask, they shall not have, but be it yours and mine to wait humbly and patiently upon the Lord that He may *daily* give us of His Spirit.

I desire earnestly to call your attention to one thing which our Savior says—"If you then, being evil, *know how to give* good gifts unto your children," how ought it to run to make it parallel?—"How much more shall your heavenly Father *know how to give* the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" Would not that be the parallel? Of course it would, but He does not say so; He very kindly puts it in the first place, that we, "know how to give good gifts," for sometimes we know how to give them, but we cannot do it. It is a bitter thing, and yet it has sometimes happened that the child has said, "Father, give me bread," and with a breaking heart the father has had to reply, "My child, there is none." It must be one of the hardest trials of human life, and yet it is the trial of tens of thousands in this city at this time, to have to say, "No, there is not even a crust of bread for my child." You see the father *knows how*, but he cannot do it. But the text does not say that God knows how to give the Holy Spirit; it says a great deal more than that; it declares that He *does* give, because with Him to know how is the same thing as to do it. He gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him; He does not only *know how*, but He *does* it! Never does He have to say to His child, "My child, I cannot." The poor sinner says, "Lord, help me to repent," and the Lord never says, "I have not enough of the Holy Spirit to make you repent." When one of His children cries, "Lord, give me the anointing of the Holy One that I may understand Your gospel more fully," the heavenly Father never answers, "I cannot give you as much of the Holy Spirit as that." Boundlessly will He give if faith dares but open her mouth wide! You are not straitened in Him, you are straitened in yourselves! Brothers and sisters, I am telling you nothing new, but a very simple truth, and yet for all that, a truth which we do not put into practice. We may have the Spirit of God resting upon us; as Stephen was a man filled with the Holy Spirit, even so may we; no miracles do we seek, but all the spiritual uplifting which the Holy Spirit gave to men of old we need, and He can still give it to us! Though He will not reveal new truths, we do not need Him to, for we have already the complete gospel revealed. He will bring home the old truths to our souls, and make them potent upon our consciences, and upon our lives—*this* is what we need! Oh, if any of you are but just Christians, and are not glorifying God, nor

living near Him, nor mighty in prayer, nor well taught in Scripture, nor useful in your lives; I beseech you remember if you have not the Spirit it is because you do not seek Him importunately! You do not seek Him with a deep sense of your need of Him. If you, being evil, give your children bread, how much more will God give you the Spirit? And as you, being evil, do not mock your child by putting him off without the bread, and giving him something else, neither will your heavenly Father; He will give you the *real* Spirit, not enthusiasm that might mislead you; not fanaticism that might injure you; not self-conceit that might become like a deadly scorpion to you, but He promises to give His own gentle, truthful, infallible Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.

III. Now for our last point. THE BEST OF PRAYERS, WHICH IS SURE TO BE HEARD, IS ALSO A MOST COMPREHENSIVE ONE.

Turn to the parallel passage in the gospel of Matthew (7:11). Note that Matthew says nothing about the egg. And then read the 11th verse, “If you 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 those who ask Him?” Now what does our text say, “How much more shall your heavenly Father *give the Holy Spirit* to those who ask Him?” Is it not clear then that the Holy Spirit is the equivalent of “good things,” and that in fact when the Lord gives us the Holy Spirit He gives us all “good things”? What a comprehensive prayer then, is the prayer for the Spirit of God! Dear brothers and sisters sit down with pencil in hand, and a sheet of blank paper before you, and write down all your spiritual needs. I will judge of your wisdom by the length of the list, for if you know yourself you will find you have not done yet; you are a great mass of needs; to pray for all these things separately might seem a very long exercise! My dear brothers and sisters just take the pencil and do as the school boys do when they add up the total of their sums. You will find it all adds to this—the Holy Spirit. “My God, give me Your Holy Spirit, and I have all.” “But do we not need the Savior?” asks one. Truly, but the Holy Spirit, when He comes, “takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us.” That is the great value of the Holy Spirit! “He shall glorify Me.” Wherever the Spirit of God comes, there comes the blood of the atonement; we are brought near by it, and every spiritual blessing bought with blood is brought by the Holy Spirit home to the soul. If you have the Spirit, He does not come empty-handed, He comes loaded with all the treasures of the everlasting covenant—the blessings ordained for you from before the foundation of the world! And He brings the blessings secured to you in the covenant of grace, and the blessings bought for you by Jesus’ precious blood. Do then let this be your prayer; “Give me, O God, Your Holy Spirit.”

Then, my dear friends, your prayer is intercessory as well as for yourselves. You pray for your children, for your wife, for your neighbors, for your friends; I hope your intercessory roll is a long one. If God gives you power to bless men by your prayers, do not prevent the blessing. What is it that you want for others? In one word, it is the Holy Spirit! Let the Holy Spirit be given to that dear boy of yours, and he will have a tender conscience you have often wished he had. He will have a desire after Christ, and he will find Christ! He will be a Christian! Let the Holy Spirit be given to that girl of yours, and she will have a desire for the word of God, a love for the means of grace; she will find the Savior, she will become a useful Christian woman! Your neighbors, you prayed that they might go with you to hear the gospel, and a very excellent prayer it was; but it would be a fuller prayer, still, that the Spirit would visit them. Some have been visited by the Holy Spirit who have not been in the house of God. Even at their work, divine impulses they could not account for have followed them. The fact is, the hearing of the word is but the vehicle, the *power* lies in the Spirit of God! I put it to you therefore, whether it is not a most fitting prayer for you to offer for your neighbors and kinsfolk.

And, now, the last point is one I wish to impress upon your hearts, my dear friends. Tomorrow is the day of prayer. As I have said, I hope you may be all with one accord, in one place in prayer. But I humbly suggest to you that we should all pray throughout that day and onward, that God will give to His churches more and more of the Holy Spirit. Just now I do not know how you feel, but I am ill at ease. The Church of England is eaten through and through with Sacramentarianism, but Nonconformity appears to me to be almost as badly riddled with philosophical infidelity! Those of whom we thought better things are turning aside one by one from the fundamentals of the faith; at first they gave up the doctrine of the eternity of future punishment, now it must be the doctrine of the fall—first one thing then another. If some men have their way, all the doctrines of the word must go; they treat the doctrines of

Scripture as though they were all disproved, and only held by a few ignorant bigots. Through and through, I believe the heart of England is honeycombed with a detestable infidelity which still dares, to go into the pulpit, and call itself Christian. I pray that God may preserve our denomination from it, but my prayer shall go up that He will give us the Holy Spirit—for men never go wrong with the Holy Spirit, for He will keep them right, and lead them into all truth. Soundness of doctrine is only worth having when it is the result of the living indwelling of God in the church, and because too much of the Holy Spirit has departed, we see the signs that the orthodox faith is given up, and the inventions of man preached instead.

Sometimes I breathe, as I walk along, this prayer, that God would raise up more ministers to preach the gospel with His power. There is so much feeble preaching, mere twaddling, and so little declaration of the gospel with power, but I do not know that I will pray that prayer again. I will put up this, “Lord, send Your Spirit upon the churches!” Then will come the ministers! Then will come the earnest workers! The Spirit of God will touch their tongues with fire, and they will say, “Here am I, send me!” And once again we shall have back the Puritan age of preaching, and ministries like those of Whitefield, Edwards, and McCheyne! The Spirit of God is the power of the church and speaks with might in her.

My longing is that the churches may be more holy. I grieve to see so much of worldly conformity; how often wealth leads men astray; how many Christians follow the fashions of this wicked world. But shall I pray that the churches may be holy? I will, but I will put my prayer in this form—I will ask that God will give the Holy Spirit; He is the Spirit of holiness; He leads to obedience, purges from sin, and creates the image of God in His people.

I desire to see, and I think you all do, more unity among the churches. It is a pity when churches fall out, and chide, and fight. Ecclesiastical quarrels are generally bitterer than any other! Do not so much pray for unity, as put it all into this, “Lord, give the Holy Spirit; for if the Holy Spirit is in us and abounds, we shall not be divided—the church of God will feel the unity of life.” Life it is that creates true unity among the people of God!

If there is anything else that we long to see in the churches, and I confess there are a thousand things, for I would desire to see them increased with men as with a flock—I would desire to see them built up in an intelligent understanding of the doctrines of grace. I desire to see them looking for the coming of Christ and ready for His advent. If we desire all these, let us ask that the Holy Spirit may be more plentifully given—and when this prayer is answered, as answered it must be, then shall we see all that our soul desires!

I do, therefore, very earnestly, over and over again, ask you to make tomorrow a day of real prayer, and if you cannot be here in body, yet all day long cry mightily unto the God of Sabaoth, our Father, who has spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up for us all, who will also with Him freely give us all things, if we know how to ask aright.

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