

THE CONDITIONS OF POWER IN PRAYER

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A SERMON
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“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. And he that keeps His commandment dwells in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us.”
1 John 3:22-24.

I THOUGHT of addressing you this morning upon the importance of prayer and I designed earnestly to stir you up to pray for me and for the Lord's work in this place. Truly, I do not think I could have had a weightier subject, or one which weighs more upon my soul. If I were only allowed to offer one request to you it would be this—"Brothers and sisters, pray for us." Of what use can our ministry be without the divine blessing and how can we expect the divine blessing unless it is sought for by the Church of God? I would say it even with tears, "Brethren, pray for us:" do not restrain prayer: on the contrary, be abundant in intercession, for so, and so only, can our prosperity as a church be increased, or even continued. But then, the question occurred to me, what if there should be something in the church which would prevent our prayers being successful? That is an important question and one which ought to be considered most earnestly even before we exhort you to intercession. As we have already been taught by the first chapter of Isaiah, the prayers of an unholy people will soon become abominations to God. "When you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear." Churches may fall into such a state that the devotions will be an iniquity. "Even the solemn meeting" will be weariness unto the Lord. There may be evils in the heart of any one of us which may render it impossible for God, in consistency with His own character and attributes, to have any regard to our intercessions. If we regard iniquity in our hearts the Lord will not hear us. According to our text there are some things which are essential to prevalence in prayer. God will hear all true prayer, but there are certain things which the people of God must possess or else their prayers will fall short of the mark. The text tells us, "Whatever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." Now, this morning the subject of consideration will be the essentials to power in prayer; what we must do, what we must be, what we must have, if we are to prevail habitually with God in prayer, as a matter of constant fact. Let us learn how to become Elijahs and Jacobs.

I. I shall begin, first, by considering THE ESSENTIALS OF POWER IN PRAYER. We must make a few distinctions at the outset. I take it there is a great difference between the prayer of a soul that is seeking mercy and the prayer of a man who is saved. I would say to every person present, whatever his character, if you sincerely seek mercy of God through Jesus Christ you shall have it. Whatever may have been your previous condition of life, if you now penitently seek Jehovah's face through the appointed Mediator, He will be found of you. If the Holy Spirit has taught you to pray, hesitate no longer but hasten to the cross and there rest your guilty soul on Jesus. I know of no qualifications for the sinner's first prayer except sincerity, but we must speak in a different way to those of you who are saved. You have now become the people of God and while you shall be heard just as the sinner would be heard, and shall daily find the necessary grace which every seeker receives in answer to prayer, yet you are now a child of God and you are under a special discipline peculiar to the regenerated family. In that discipline answers to prayer occupy a high position and are of eminent use. There is something for a believer to enjoy over and above bare salvation. There are mercies, blessings, comforts and favors which render his present life useful, happy and honorable. And these he shall have irrespective of character. They are not vital matters with regard to salvation; those the believer possesses unconditionally, for they are covenant

blessings; but we now refer to the honors and the dainties of the house, which are given or withheld according to our obedience as the Lord's children. If you neglect the conditions appended to these, your heavenly Father will withhold them from you. The essential blessings of the covenant of grace stand unconditioned; the invitation to seek for mercy is addressed to those who have no qualifications whatever, except their need. But come inside the divine family as saved men and women and you will find that other choice blessings are given or withheld according to our attention to the Lord's rules in His family. To give a common illustration; if a hungry person were at your door and asked for bread, you would give it to him whatever might be his character. You will also give your child food whatever may be his behavior; you will not deny your child anything that is necessary for life. You will never proceed in any course of discipline against him, so as to deny him his necessary food, or a garment to shield him from the cold; but there are many other things which your child may desire which you will give him if he is obedient, which you will not give if he is rebellious to you. I take it that this illustrates how far the paternal government of God will push this matter and where it will not go.

Understand, also, that the text refers not so much to God's hearing a prayer of His servants now and then, for that He will do, even when His servants are out of course with Him and when He is hiding His face from them. The power in prayer, here intended, is continuous and absolute power with God, so that to quote the words of the text, "Whatever we ask of Him we receive."

For this prayer there are certain prerequisites and essentials, of which we have now to speak, and the first is *child-like obedience*: "Whatever we ask, we receive of Him, *because we keep His commandments.*" If we are destitute of this the Lord may say to us as He did to His people Israel, "You have forsaken Me, and served other gods, therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which you have chosen." Any father will tell you that for him to grant the request of a disobedient child would be to encourage rebellion in the family and render it impossible for him to rule in his own house. It is often incumbent upon the parent to say, "My child, you did not listen to my word just now, and therefore, I cannot listen to yours." Not that the father does not love, but that he does love the child, and because of his love he feels bound to show his displeasure by refusing the request of his erring offspring. God acts with us as we should act towards our refractory children. And if He sees that we will go into sin and transgress, it is a part of His kind paternal discipline to say, "I will shut out your prayer, when you cry unto Me; I will not hear you when you entreat of Me; I will not destroy you, you shall be saved, you shall have the bread of life, and the water of life, but you shall have no more: the luxuries of My kingdom shall be denied you, and anything like special prevalence with Me in prayer you shall not possess." That thus the Lord deals with His own people is clear from the Eighty-first Psalm: "Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries. I should have fed them, also, with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out the rock should I have satisfied you." Why, if the disobedient child of God had the promise put into his hands—"Whatever you ask in prayer, you shall receive," he would be sure to ask for something that would bolster him up in his rebellion. He would be asking for provision for his own lust, and aids for his rebellion. This can never be tolerated. Shall God pander to our corruptions? Shall He find fuel for the flames of carnal passion? A self-willed heart hankers after greater liberty that it may be the more obstinate. A haughty spirit longs for greater elevation that it may be prouder still. A slothful spirit asks for greater ease that it may yet be more indolent; and a domineering spirit asks for more power that it may have more opportunities of oppression. As such the man is, will his prayer be—a rebellious spirit offers self-willed and proud prayers. Shall God listen to such prayers as these? It cannot be. He will give us what we ask if we keep His commandments, but if we become disobedient and reject His government He, also, will reject our prayers and say, "If you walk contrary to Me, I also will walk contrary to you: with the forward, I will show Myself forward." Happy shall we be if through divine grace we can say with David, "I will wash my hands in innocence; so will I compass Your altar, O Lord." This will never be perfect innocence, but it will at least be innocence of the love of sin and of willful revolt from God.

Next to this is another essential to victorious prayer, namely, *child-like reverence*. Notice the next sentence: We receive what we ask, "because we keep His commandments, and *do those things that are pleasing in His sight.*" We do not allow children, when they have a command from their father, to question its propriety or wisdom. Obedience ends where questioning begins. A child's standard of its duty

must not become the measure of the father's right to command: good children say, "Father has bid us to do so-and-so, and therefore we will do it, for we delight to please him always." The weightiest reason for a loving child's action is the persuasion that it would please his parents. And the strongest thing that can be said to hold back a gracious child is to prove that such a course of action would displease his parents. It is precisely so with us towards God, who is a perfect parent, and therefore we may, without fear of mistake, always make His pleasure the rule of right, while the rule of wrong may safely remain that which would displease Him. Suppose any of us should be self-willed and say, "I shall not do what pleases God, I shall do what pleases myself." Then, observe, what would be the nature of our prayers? Our prayers might then be summed up in the request, "Let me have my own way." And can we expect God to consent to that? Are we to be not only lords over God's heritage but over God Himself? Would you have the Almighty resign His throne to place a proud mortal there? If you have a child in your house who has no respect, whatever, for his father, but who says, "I want to have my own way in all things," if he comes to you with a request, will you stoop to him? Will you allow him to dictate to you and forget the honor due you? Will you say, "Yes, my dear child, I recognize your importance, you shall be lord in the house and whatever you ask for you shall have"! What kind of a house would that be? I fear there are some such houses, for there are foolish parents who suffer their children to become their masters and so make a rod for their own backs. But God's house is not ordered so! He will not listen to His self-willed children, unless it is to hear them in anger and to answer them in wrath. Remember how He heard the prayer of Israel for meat, and when the meat was yet in their mouths it became a curse to them? Many persons are chastened by obtaining their own desires, even as backsliders are filled with their own devices. We must have a child-like reverence of God, so that we feel, "Lord, if what I ask for does not please You, neither would it please me; my desires are put into Your hands to be corrected. Strike the pen through every petition that I offer which is not right, and Lord, put in whatever I have omitted even though I might not have desired it had I remembered it. Good Lord, if I ought to have desired it, hear me as if I had desired it. 'Not as I will, but as You will.'" Now I think you can see that this yielding spirit is essential to continual prevalence with God in prayer. The reverse is a sure barrier to eminence in supplication. The Lord will be revered by those who are round about Him. They must have an eye to His pleasure in all that they do and all that they ask, or He will not look upon them with favor.

In the third place, the text suggests the necessity of *child-like trust*: "And this is His commandment that *we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ.*" Everywhere in Scripture faith in God is spoken of as necessary to successful prayer. We must believe that God is and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, or else we have not prayed at all. In proportion to our faith will be the success of our prayer. It is a standing rule of the kingdom, "According to your faith, so be it unto you." Remember how the Holy Spirit speaks by the mouth of the Apostle James, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed; for let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." The text speaks of faith in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, which I understand to mean faith in His declared character, faith in His gospel, faith in the truth concerning His substitution and salvation. Or it may mean faith in the authority of Christ, so that when I plead with God and say, "Do it in the name of Jesus," I mean, "Do for me as You would have done for Jesus, for I am authorized by Him to use His name. Do it for me as You would have done it for Him." He that can pray with faith in the name of Jesus cannot fail, for the Lord Jesus has said, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." But there must be faith and if there is no faith we cannot expect to be heard. Do you understand that? Let us come back to our family similitudes again. Suppose a child in the house does not believe his father's word and is constantly saying that he finds his mind full of doubts as to his father's truthfulness? Suppose, indeed, that he tells his brothers and sisters that his faith in his father is very weak? He mentions that wretched fact and is not at all shocked that he should say such a thing, but he rather feels that he ought to be pitied, as if it were an infirmity which he could not avoid. Somehow or other he does not believe that his father speaks the truth and he declares that though he tries to believe his father's promise, yet he cannot. I think a father so basely distrusted would not be in a very great hurry to grant such a son's requests. Indeed, it is very probable that the petitions of the mistrustful son would be such as could not be complied with, even if his father were willing to do so, since they would amount to a gratification of his own unbelief and a

dishonor to his parent. For instance, suppose this child should take it into his head to doubt whether his father would provide him with his daily food? He might, then, come to his father and say, "Father, give me enough money to last for the next ten years, for I shall then be a man and shall be able to provide for myself. Give me money down to quiet my fears, for I am in great anxiety." The father replies, "My Son, why should I do that?" And he gets for a reply, "I am very sorry to say it, dear father, but I cannot trust you. I have such a weak faith in you and your love that I am afraid one of these days you will leave me to starve. And therefore I should like to have something sure in the bank." Which of you fathers would listen to a child's request if he sought such a thing? You would feel grieved that thoughts so dishonoring to yourself should pass through the mind of one of your own beloved ones! But you would not and could not, give way to them. Let me, then, ask you to apply the parable to yourselves. Did you never offer requests which were of much the same character? You have been unable to trust God to give you, day by day, your daily bread, and therefore you have been craving for what you call, "some provision for the future." You want a trustier provider than providence, a better security than God's promise. You are unable to trust your heavenly Father's Word. A few bonds of some half-bankrupt foreign government you consider to be far more reliable. You can trust the Sultan of Turkey, or the Viceroy of Egypt, but not the God of the whole earth! In a thousand ways we insult the Lord by imagining "the things which are seen" to be more substantial than His unseen omnipotence. We ask God to give us, at once, what we do not require at present and may never need at all! At bottom, the reason for such desires may be found in a disgraceful distrust of Him which makes us imagine that great stores are necessary to ensure our being provided for. Brethren are you not to blame here, and do you expect the Lord to aid and abet your folly? Shall God pander to your distrust? Shall He give you a heap of cankering gold and silver for thieves to steal and chests of garments to feed moths? Would you have the Lord act as if He admitted the correctness of your suspicions and confessed to unfaithfulness? God forbid! Expect not, therefore, to be heard when your prayer is suggested by an unbelieving heart: "Commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass."

The next essential to continued success in prayer is *child-like love*: "That we should believe on the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, *and love one another as He gave us commandment.*" The great commandment after faith is love. As it is said of God, "God is Love," so may we say that, "Christianity is love." If we were, each one, incarnations of love we should have attained to the complete likeness of Christ. We should abound in love to God, love to Christ, love to the church, love to sinners and love to men everywhere. When a man has no love to God, he is in the condition of a child without love to his father. Shall his father promise absolutely to fulfill all the desires of his unloving, unfilial heart? Or, if a child has no love to his brothers and sisters, shall the father trust him with an absolute promise, and say, "Ask and it shall be given you?" Why, the unloving son would impoverish the whole family by his selfish demands, regardless of all the rest of the household. He would only care to indulge his own passions. His request would before long be—"Father, give me all the inheritance," or, "Father, regulate the home to suit me and make all my brothers submit to my wishes." Vain of his personal appearance, like Absalom, who was proud of his hair, he would soon seek the kingdom for himself. Few Josephs can wear the garment of many colors and not become household tyrants. Who would allow a prodigal to run off with the estate? Who would be so unwise as to install a greedy, domineering brother in the seat of honor, above his brethren? Therefore, you see that selfishness cannot be trusted with power in prayer. Unloving spirits, that love neither God nor men, cannot be trusted with great, broad, unlimited promises. If God is to hear us we must love God and love our fellow men for, when we love God, we shall not pray for anything that would not honor God and shall not wish to see anything happen to us which would not also bless our brethren. Our hearts will beat true to God and to His creatures and we shall not be wrapped up in ourselves. You must get rid of selfishness before God can trust you with the keys of heaven. When self is dead, then He will enable you to unlock His treasures and as a prince, shall you have power with God and prevail.

Next to this, we must have *child-like ways* as well. Read the next verse, "*He that keeps His commandments dwells in Him, and He in him.*" It is one of a child's ways to love its home. The good child, to whose requests its father always listens, loves no place so much as the dear old house where its parents live. Now he who loves and keeps God's commandments is said to dwell in Him—he has made the Lord his dwelling place and abides in holy familiarity with God. In him our Lord's words are fulfilled,

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.” Faith and love, like two cherubic wings, have borne up the believer’s soul above the world and carried him near to the throne of God. He has become like God and now it is that his prayers are such as God can answer—but until he is thus conformed to the divine mind there must be some limit to the potency of his pleadings. To dwell in God is necessary to power with God. Suppose one of you had a boy, who said, “Father, I do not like my home, I do not care for you and I will not endure the restraints of family rule. I am going to live with strangers, but mark, father, I shall come to you every week and I shall require many things of you. And I shall expect that you will give me whatever I ask from you”? Why, if you are at all fit to be at the head of the house, you will say, “My son, how can you speak to me in such a manner? If you are so self-willed as to leave my house, can you expect that I will do your bidding? If you utterly disregard me, can you expect me to support you in your cruel unkindness and wicked insubordination? No, my son, if you will not remain with me and own me as a father, I cannot promise you anything.” And so is it with God. If we will dwell with Him and commune with Him, He will give us all things. If we love Him as He should be loved, and trust Him as He ought to be trusted, then He will hear our requests. But if not, it is not reasonable to expect it. Indeed, it would be a slur upon the divine character for Him to fulfill unholy desires and gratify evil whims. “Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart,” but if you have no delight in God and He is not your dwelling place, He will not answer you. He may give you the bread of affliction and the water of affliction and make life bitter for you, but certainly He will not give you what your heart desires.

One thing more: It appears from the text that we must have a *child-like spirit*, for, “*Hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us.*” What is this but the Spirit of adoption—the Spirit which rules in all the children of God? The willful who think and feel and act differently from God must not expect that God will come round to their way of thinking and feeling and acting. The selfish who are actuated by the spirit of pride, the slothful who are actuated by the love of ease must not expect that God will indulge them. The Holy Spirit, if He rules in us, will subordinate our nature to His own sway and then the prayers which spring out of our renewed hearts will be in keeping with the will of God—and such prayers will naturally be heard. No parent would think of listening to a willful child, to a child that said, “I know my father does not wish me to have this, but I will have it.” Why, as a man you would not thus be twisted about by an upstart youngster. Shall God grant us that which we ask for when it is contrary to His holy mind? It must not be! Such a possibility is not conceivable. The same mind must be in us, which is also in Christ Jesus, and then we shall be able to say, “I know that You hear me always.”

But we must pass on and occupy your attention, for a few minutes, with another branch of the same subject.

II. In the second place we shall notice THE PREVALENCE OF THESE ESSENTIAL THINGS. If they are in us and abound, our prayers cannot be barren or unprofitable.

First, if we have *faith* in God, there is no question about God’s hearing our prayer. If we can plead, in faith, the name and blood of Jesus, we must obtain answers of peace. But a thousand arguments are suggested. Suppose these prayers concern the laws of nature then the scientific men are against us. What of that? I will glory in giving these scientific men scope enough—I had almost said rope enough. I do not know of any prayer worth praying which does not come into contact with some natural law or other and yet I believe in prayers being heard. It is said that God will not change the laws of nature for us, and I reply, “Whoever said He would!” The Lord has ways of answering our prayers irrespective of the working of miracles or suspending laws. He used to hear prayer by miracle, but as I have often said to you, that seems a rougher way of achieving His purpose; it is like stopping a vast machine for a small result, but He knows how to accomplish His ends and hear our prayers by I know not what secret means. Perhaps there are other forces and laws which He has arranged to bring into action just at times when prayer also acts, for laws just as fixed, and forces just as natural as those which our learned theorizers have been able to discover. The wisest men know not all the laws which govern the universe, no, nor a tenth of them. We believe that the prayers of Christians are a part of the machinery of providence, cogs in the great wheel of destiny, and when God leads His children to pray, He has already set in motion a wheel that is to produce the result prayed for and the prayers offered are moving as a part of the wheel. If there is but faith in God, God must either cease to be, or cease to be true, or else He must hear prayer.

The verse before the text says, “If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God; and whatever we ask, we receive of Him.” He who has a clear conscience comes to God with confidence and that confidence of faith ensures to him the answer of his prayer. Childlike confidence makes us pray as none else can. It makes a man pray for great things which he would never have asked for if he had not learned this confidence. It makes him pray for little things which a great many are afraid to ask for, because they have not yet felt towards God the confidence of children. I have often said that it needs more confidence in God to pray to Him about a little thing than about great things. We fancy that our great things are somewhat worthy of God’s regard, though in truth they are little enough to Him! And then we imagine that our little things must be so trifling that it would be almost an insult to bring them before Him, whereas we ought to know that what is very great to a child may be very little to its parent, and yet the parent does not measure the thing from his own point of view but from the child’s. You heard your little boy the other day crying bitterly. His mother called him and asked what ailed him? It was a splinter in his finger. Well, that was a small affair. You did not want to call in three surgeons to extract it, or raise a tone and cry in the public press. Bring a needle and we will soon set it right. Oh, but what a great thing it was to that pretty little sufferer as he stood there with eyes all wet with tears of anguish. It was a great concern to him. Now, did it occur to that boy that his pain was too small a thing for his mother to attend to? Not at all! What were mothers and fathers made for but to look after the little needs of little children? And God, our Father, is a good father. He pities us as fathers pity their children and condescends to us. He knows the number of the stars, and calls them all by their names, yet He heals the broken in heart and binds up their wounds. The same God who kindles the sun has said, “I will not quench the smoking flax.” If you have but confidence in God, you will take your great things and your little things to Him and He will never belie your confidence—for He has said they that trust in Him shall never be ashamed or confused, world without end. Faith must succeed.

But next, *love* must succeed, too, since we have already seen that the man who loves, in the Christian sense, is in accord with God. If you confine your love to your own family, you must not expect God to do so, and prayers narrowed within that circle He will disregard. If a man loves his own little self and hopes everybody’s crop of wheat will fail, that his own produce may fetch a higher price, he certainly cannot expect the Lord to agree with such mean selfishness. If a man has heart enough to embrace all the creatures of God in his affection while he yet prays specially for the household of faith, his prayers will be after the divine mind. His love and God’s goodness run side by side. Though God’s love is like a mighty rolling river and his is like a trickling brook, yet they both run in the same direction and will both come to the same end. God always hears the prayers of a loving man because those prayers are the shadows of His own decrees.

Again, the man of *obedience* is the man whom God will hear because his obedient heart leads him to pray humbly and with submission, for he feels it to be his highest desire that the Lord’s will should be done. Hence it is that the man of obedient heart prays like an oracle; his prayers are prophecies. Is he not one with God? Does he not desire and ask for exactly what God intends? How can a prayer shot from such a bow ever fail to reach its target? If your soul gets into accord with God’s soul, you will wish God’s own wishes. The difficulty is that we do not keep, as the word is, *in rapport* with God. But if we did, then we should strike the same note as God strikes and though His would sound like thunder and ours as a whisper, yet there would be a perfect unison—the note struck by prayer on earth would coincide with that which sounds forth from the decrees in heaven.

Again, the man who lives in *fellowship with God* will assuredly prevail in prayer because, if he dwells in God, and God dwells in him, he will desire what God desires. The believer in communion with the Lord desires man’s good and so does God. He desires Christ’s glory and so does God. He desires the church’s prosperity and so does God. He desires himself to be a pattern of holiness and God desires it too. If that man at any time has a desire which is not according to God’s will, it is the result of ignorance, seeing that man is but man and not God. Even when he is at the best he must err, but he provides for this defect by the form of his prayer which always has this addendum at the end of it—“Lord, if I have asked in this, my prayer, for anything which is not according to Your mind, I beseech You, do not regard me. And if any wish which I have expressed to You—even though it is the desire which burns in my bosom above all other wishes—is a wish that is not right in Your sight, regard me not, my Father, but, in Your infinite love and compassion, do something better for Your servant than Your servant

knows how to ask.” Now, when a prayer is after that fashion, how can it fail? The Lord looks out of the windows of heaven and sees such a prayer coming to Him, just as Noah saw the dove returning to the ark, and He puts out His hand to that prayer. And as Noah plucked the dove into the ark, so does God pluck that prayer in unto Him and puts it into His own bosom, and says, “You came out of My bosom, and I welcome you back to Me: My Spirit composed you, therefore will I answer you.”

And here, again, let us say, our text speaks of the Christian man as being *filled with God's Spirit*: “We know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us.” Who knows the mind of a man but the spirit of a man? So, who knows the things of God but the Spirit of God? And if the Spirit of God dwells in us, then He tells us what God's mind is. He makes intercession in the saints according to the will of God. It is sometimes imagined that men who have prevalence in prayer can pray for what they like, but I can assure you any one of these will tell you that that is not so. You may call upon such a man and ask him to pray for you, but he cannot promise that he will. There are strange holdings back to such men when they feel they know not how or why that they cannot pray effectual fervent prayers in certain cases, though they might desire to do so. Like Paul, when he essayed to go into Bithynia and the Spirit suffered him not, so there are requests which we would naturally like to put up, but we are bound in spirit. There may apparently be nothing objectionable about the prayer, but the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him and He gives secret intimations when and where His chosen may hope to prevail. He gives you the promise that He will hear your believing prayer, you being a man that walks with Him, filled with His Spirit. But He does not, at the same time, give you faith about everything that everybody likes to put before you—on the contrary He gives you a discretion, a judgment and a wisdom—and the Spirit makes intercession in the saints according to the will of God.

Thus I think I have laid down the doctrine pretty clearly. Now a few minutes of practical improvement, as the old Puritans used to say. I only wish it may be of improvement to many of us.

The first is, we want to pray for a great blessing as a church. I think I should command your votes if I said we intend to pray God to send a blessing on the church at large. Very well, have we the essentials for success? Do we believing in the name of Jesus Christ? Well, I think we are. I do not think fault could be found with the soundness of our faith, though much is to be confessed about the weakness of it. Let us pass on to the next question. Are we full of love to God and one another? The double commandment is that we believe on the name of Jesus Christ and that we love one another. Do we love one another? Are we walking in love? There are none of us perfect in it. I will begin to confess by acknowledging I am not what I should be in that respect. Will you let the confession go round and each one think how often we have done unloving things, thought unloving things, said unloving things, listened to unloving gossip, held back our hand unlovingly when we ought to have rendered help and put forth our hand unlovingly to push down a man who was falling? If in the church of God there is a lack of love, we cannot expect prayer to be heard, for God will say, “You ask for prosperity. What for? To add more to a community which does not already love itself? You ask for conversions. What? Is it to bring in others to join an unloving community?” Do you expect God to save sinners whom you do not love, and to convert souls whom you do not care a bit about? We must love souls into Christ for, under God's Holy Spirit, the great instrument for the conquest of the world is love. If Christians will love more than Muslims do, and Jews do, they will overcome Muslims and Jews. And if they show less love, Muslims and Jews will overcome them. The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, is the master weapon, and next to that is the loving carriage and generous conversation of Christians towards their fellow men. How much of that have we got? Shall I say, how little?

Next, are we doing that which is pleasing in God's sight? We cannot expect answers to prayer if we are not. Put the inquiry to yourselves all round. Let each church member, especially, answer that question. Have you been doing, lately, that which you would like Jesus Christ to see? Is your household ordered in such a way that it pleases God? Suppose Jesus Christ had visited your house this week, uninvited and unexpected: what would He have thought of that which He would have seen? “Oh,” says one, “I know so-and-so acts very inconsistently.” Sir, I pray you think of yourself! That is the point. Correct yourself. Unless the members of God's church do that which is pleasing in His sight, they bar the door against prosperity; they prevent the prayers of the church from succeeding. Who wishes to be the man that stands in the way of the prosperity of God's church through inconsistency of conduct? Who would be so guilty? God forgive some of you. We could speak of some even weeping, for, alas, though they

profess to be the followers of Christ, they are so inconsistent that they are not friends, but enemies of the cross of Christ.

The next question is, do we dwell in God? The text says that if we keep His commandments, God dwells in us, and we in Him. Is that so? I mean, during the day do we think of God? In our business are we still with God? A Christian is not to run unto God in the morning and again at night, and use Him as a shelter and a makeshift, as people do of an arch or a portico which they run under in a shower of rain. We are to dwell in God and live in Him from the rising of the sun until the going down thereof, making Him our daily meditation, and walking as in His sight, feeling evermore, “You God see me.” How is it with you, dear friends! O let the question go from pew to pew and heart to heart, and mind—let each one answer for himself.

Lastly, does the Spirit of God actuate us, or is it another spirit? Do we wait upon God and say, “Lord, let Your Spirit tell me what to say in this case, and what to do. Rule my judgment, subdue my passions, keep down my baser impulses and let Your Spirit guide me. Lord, be You to me better than myself. Be soul and life to me and in the triple kingdom of my spirit, soul, and body, good Lord, be You supreme Master that in every province of my nature Your law may be set up and Your will may be regarded”? We would have a mighty church, if we were all, of this mind. But the mixed multitude, are with us, and the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt and these fall a-lusting. The mischief always begins with them. God save us as a church from losing His presence! The mixed multitude must be with us to try us, for the Lord has said, “Let both grow together till the harvest,” and if we try to root up the tares we should root up the wheat also—yet, at any rate, let us pray God to make the wheat be the stronger. One of two things always happens in a church. Either the wheat chokes the weeds or the weeds choke the wheat. God grant that the wheat may overtop the weeds in our case! God grant grace to His servants to be strong enough to overcome the evil which surrounds them, and having done all, to stand to the praise of the glory of His grace, who also has made us accepted in the Beloved. The Lord bless you, and be with you evermore. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 JOHN 3; ISAIAH 1:10-20.

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