

OF PRAYER.

PSALM cix. 4. *But I give myself to prayer.*

I SHALL not expatiate upon prayer at large, being to speak more fully to it in the Lord's prayer. But to the words, 'I give myself to prayer.' It is one thing to pray, and another thing to be given to prayer: he who prays frequently, is said to be given to prayer; as he who often distributes alms, is said to be given to charity. Prayer is a glorious ordinance, it is the soul's trading with heaven: God comes down to us by his Spirit, and we go up to him by prayer.

Qu. 1. *What is prayer?*

Ans. "It is an offering up of our desires to God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ."

I. "Prayer is an offering up of our desires."] Therefore it is called a making known of our requests, Phil. iv. 6. In prayer we come as humble petitioners, begging to have our suit granted.

II. 'Tis "offering up our desires to God."] Prayer is not to be made to any but God. The papists pray to saints and angels, but they know not our grievances, Isa. lxiii. 16. 'Abraham is ignorant of us.' And all angel-worship is forbidden, Col. ii. 18, 19. We must not pray to any but whom we may believe in, Rom. x. 14. 'How shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed?' But we cannot believe in an angel, therefore we must not pray to him.

Qu. *Why must prayer be made only to God?*

Ans. 1. Because he only hears prayer, Pf. lxxv. 2. 'O thou that hearest prayer.' Hereby God is known to be the true God, in that he hears prayer, 1 Kings xviii. 37. 'Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God.'

2. Because God only can help. We may look to second causes, and cry, as the woman did, 2 Kings vi. 26. 'Help, my Lord, O king. And he said if the Lord doth not help thee, whence shall I help thee?' If we are in outward distress, God must send from heaven and save: if we are in inward agonies, he only can pour in the oil of joy; therefore prayer is to be made to him only.

III. "For things agreeable to his will."] When we pray for outward things, for riches or children, perhaps God sees these things are not good for us: our prayers must comport with God's will. We may pray absolutely for grace; 'for this is the will of God, our sanctification,' 1 Thess. iv. 4. There might

be no strange incense offered, Exod. xxx. 9. When we pray for things which are not agreeable to God's will, it is offering strange incense.

IV. "In the name of Christ."] To pray in the name of Christ, is not only to mention Christ's name in prayer, but to pray in the hope and confidence of Christ's merits, 1 Sam. vii. 9. 'Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it,' &c. We must carry the lamb Christ in the arms of our faith, and so we prevail in prayer. When Uzziah would offer incense without a priest, God was angry, and struck him with leprosy, 2 Chron. xxvi. 16. When we do not pray in Christ's name, in the hope of his mediation, we offer up incense, without a priest; and what can we expect but to meet with rebukes, and to have God answer us by terrible things?

Qu. *What are the parts of prayer?*

Ans. 1. There is the confessory part, which is the acknowledgement of sin. 2. The supplicatory part, when we either deprecate and pray against some evil, or request the obtaining of some good. 3. The gratulatory part, when we give thanks for mercies received, which is the most excellent part of prayer. In petition we act like men, in giving of thanks, we act like angels.

Qu. 3. *What are the several sorts of prayer?*

Ans. 1. There is mental prayer, in the mind, 1 Sam. i. 13. 2dly, Vocal, Pl. lxxvii. 1. 3dly, Ejaculatory, which is a sudden and short elevation of the heart to God, Neh. ii. 4. 'So I prayed to the God of heaven.' 4thly, Conceived prayer; when we pray for those things which God puts into our heart, Rom. vii. 26. 'The Spirit helps us with sighs and groans.' Both the expressions of the tongue, so far as they are right, and the impressions of the heart, are from the Spirit. 5thly, Prescribed prayer: our Saviour hath set us a pattern of prayer. God prescribed a set form of blessing for the priests, Numb. vi. 23. 6thly, Public prayer; when we pray in the audience of others. Prayer is more powerful, when many join and unite their forces. *Vis unita fortior*, Matth. xviii. 19. 7thly, Private prayer; when we pray by ourselves, Matth. vi. 9. 'Enter into thy closet.'

Qu. 4. *What is that prayer which is most like to prevail with God?*

Ans. When prayer is rightly qualified. That is a good medicine which hath the right ingredients; that prayer is good, and is most like to prevail with God, which hath these seven ingredients in it:

(1.) Prayer must be mixed with faith, James i. 6. 'But let him pray in faith.' Believe God hears, and will in his due time grant; believe God's love and truth. Believe that he is

love, therefore will not deny you; believe that he is truth, therefore will not deny himself. 'Faith sets prayer a work.' Faith is to prayer, as the feather is to the arrow, faith feathers the arrow of prayer, and makes it fly swifter, and pierce the throne of grace. Prayer that is faithless is fruitless.

(2.) A melting prayer, Pf. li. 17. 'The sacrifices of God are a broken heart.' The incense was to be beaten, to typify the breaking of the heart in prayer. O, faith a Christian, I cannot pray with such gifts and elocution as others; as Moses said, 'I am not eloquent:' but canst thou weep? Doth thy heart melt in prayer? Weeping prayer prevails. Tears drop as pearls from the eye. 'Jacob wept and made supplication; and had power over the angel,' Hosea xii. 4.

(3.) Prayer must be fired with zeal and fervency, James v. 16. 'Effectual fervent prayer prevails much.' Cold prayers, like cold suitors, never speed. Prayer, without fervency, is like a sacrifice without fire. Prayer is called a 'pouring out of the soul,' 1 Sam. i. 15. to signify vehemency. Formality starves prayer. Prayer is compared to incense, Pf. cxli. 2. 'Let my prayer be set forth as incense.' Hot coals were to be put to the incense, to make it odoriferous and fragrant: fervency of affection is like coals put to the incense; it makes prayer ascend as a sweet perfume. Christ prayed with strong cries. Heb. v. 7. *Clamor iste penetrat nubes*, Luther. Fervent prayer, like a petard set against heaven's gates, makes them fly open. To cause holy fervour and ardour of soul in prayer, consider, 1. Prayer without fervency, is no prayer; it is speaking not praying: lifeless prayer is no more prayer, than the picture of a man is a man. One may say, as Pharaoh, Gen. xli. 'I have dreamed a dream:' It is dreaming, not praying. Life and fervency baptizeth a duty, and gives it a name. 2. Consider in what need we stand of those things which we ask in prayer. We come to ask the favour of God; and if we have not his love, all we enjoy is cursed to us. We pray that our souls may be washed in Christ's blood; and if he wash us not we have 'no part in him,' John xiii. 8. When will we be in earnest, if not when we are praying for the life of our souls? 3. It is only fervent prayer hath the promise of mercy affixed to it, Jer. xxix. 14. 'Then shall ye find me, when ye search for me with all your heart.' It is dead praying without a promise; and the promise is made only to ardency. The Aediles among the Romans, had their doors always standing open, that all who had petitions might have free access to them: God's heart is ever open to fervent prayer.

(4.) Prayer must be sincere. Sincerity is the silver thread which must run through the whole duties of religion. Sincerity in prayer is, when we have gracious holy ends in prayer; our

prayer is not so much for temporal mercies as spiritual. We send out our prayer, as a merchant sends out his ship, that we may have large returns of spiritual blessings : our aim in prayer is, that our heart may be more holy, that we may have more communion with God ; our design is, that by prayer we may increase the stock of grace. Prayer which wants a good aim, wants a good issue.

(5.) Prayer that will prevail with God, must have a fixation of mind, Pl. lvii. 7. ‘ O God, my heart is fixed.’ Since the fall, the mind is like quick-silver, which will not fix, it hath *principium motus*, but *non quietes* : the thoughts will be roving and dancing up and down in prayer, just as if a man that is travelling to such a place, should run out of the road, and wander he knows not whither. In prayer, we are travelling to the throne of grace, but how often do we by vain cogitations, turn out of the road ? Which is rather wandering than praying.

Qu. *But how shall we cure these vain impertinent thoughts, which do so distract us in prayer, and, we may fear, hinder the acceptance ?*

Ans. 1. Be very apprehensive in prayer of the infirmities of God’s majesty and purity. God’s eye is upon us in prayer, and we may say, as David, Pl. lvi. 8. ‘ Thou tellest my wanderings.’ The thoughts of this world make us *hog agere*, mind the duty we are about. If a man were to deliver a petition to an earthly prince, would he at that time be playing with a feather ? Set yourselves, when you pray as in God’s presence ; could you but look through the key-hole of heaven, and see how devout and intent the angels are in their worshipping of God, sure you would be ready to blush at your vain thoughts and vile impertinences in prayer.

2. If you would keep your mind fixed in prayer, keep your eye fixed, Pl. cxxiii. 1. ‘ Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.’ Much vanity comes in at the eye. When the eye wanders in prayer, the heart wanders. To think to keep the heart fixed in prayer, and yet let the eye gaze, is as if one should think to keep his house safe, yet let the windows be open.

3. If you would have your thoughts fixed in prayer, get more love to God. Love is a great fixer of the thoughts. He who is in love, cannot keep his thoughts off the object. He who loves the world, his thoughts run undisturbedly upon the world. Did we love God more, our minds would be more intent upon him in prayer. Were there more delight in duty there would be less distraction.

4. Implore the help of God’s spirit to fix our minds, and make them intent and serious in prayer. The ship without a pilot rather floats than sails ; that our thoughts do not float up

and down in prayer, we need the blessed Spirit to be our pilot to steer us: only God's spirit can bound the thoughts. A shaking hand may as well write a line steadily, as we can keep our hearts fixed in prayer without the Spirit of God.

5. Make holy thoughts familiar to you in your ordinary course of life. David was oft musing on God, Ps. cxxxix. 18. 'When I am awake, I am still with thee.' He who gives himself liberty to have vain thoughts out of prayer, will scarce have other thoughts in prayer.

6. If you would keep your mind fixed on God, watch your hearts; not only watch them after prayer, but in prayer. The heart will be apt to give you the slip and have a thousand vagaries in prayer. We read of angels ascending and descending on Jacob's ladder: so, in prayer you shall find your hearts ascending to heaven, and in a moment descending upon earthly objects. O Christians, watch your hearts in prayer. What a shame is it to think, that when we are speaking to God in prayer, our hearts should be in the fields, or in our counting-house, or one way or other, running upon the devil's errand?

7. Labour for more degrees of grace. The more ballast the ship hath, the better it sails; so the more the heart is ballasted with grace the steadier it will sail to heaven in prayer.

(6.) Prayer that is likely to prevail with God must be argumentative: God loves to have us plead with him, and use arguments in prayer. See how many arguments Jacob used in prayer, Gen. xxxii. 11. 'Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother.' The arguments he used, are 1. From God's command, *ver.* 9. 'Thou saidst to me return to thy country;' as if he had said, I did not take this journey of my own head, but by thy direction; therefore thou canst not but in honour protect me. And he useth another argument, *ver.* 12. 'Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good.' Lord, wilt thou go back from thy own promise? Thus he was argumentative in prayer; and he got not only a new blessing, but a new name, *ver.* 28. 'Thy name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou had power with God, and prevailed.' God loves to be overcome with strength of argument. Thus, when we come to God in prayer for grace, be argumentative: Lord, thou callest thyself the God of all grace; and whither would we go with our vessel, but to the fountain; Lord, thy grace may be imparted, yet not impaired: hath not Christ purchased grace for poor indigent creatures? Every drachm of grace cost a drop of blood. Shall Christ die to purchase grace for us, and shall not we have the fruit of his purchase? Lord, It is thy delight to milk out the breast of mercy and grace, and wilt thou abridge thyself of thy own delight? Thou hast promised to give

thy Spirit to implant grace ; can truth lie ? can faithfulness deceive ? God loves thus to be overcome with arguments in prayer.

(7.) Prayer that would prevail with God, must be joined with reformation, Job xi. 13. ‘ If thou stretch out thy hands towards him ? if iniquity be in thy hand, put it far away from thee.’ Sin, lived in, makes the heart hard, and God’s ear deaf. ’Tis foolish to pray against sin, and then sin against prayer, sin fly blows our prayers, Psal. lxxvi. 18. ‘ If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.’ The loadstone loseth its virtue when bespread with garlic ; so doth prayer when polluted with sin. The incense of prayer must be offered upon the altar of an holy heart.

Thus you see what is that prayer which is most likely to prevail with God.

Use 1. It reproves, 1. Such as pray not at all : ’Tis made the note of a reprobate, he calls not upon God, Psal. cxliv. Doth he think to have an alms, who never asks it ? do they think to have mercy from God, who never seek it ? Then God should befriend them more than he did his own Son, Heb. v. 7. Christ offered up prayers with strong cries. None of God’s children are born dumb, Gal. iv. 6.

(2.) It reproves such as have left off prayer, a sign they never felt the fruit and comfort of it. He that leaves off prayer, a sign he leaves off to fear God, Job xv. 4. ‘ Thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer, before God.’ A man that hath left off prayer is fit for any wickedness. When Saul had given over enquiring after God then he went to the witch of Endor.

Use 2. Of exhortation. Be persons given to prayer. ‘ I give myself (saith David) to prayer.’ Pray for pardon and purity ; prayer is the golden key that opens heaven. The tree of the promise will not drop its fruit, unless shaken by the hand of prayer. All the benefits of Christ’s redemption are handed over to us by prayer.

Obj. *But I have prayed a long time for mercy, and have no answer,* Pl. lxxix. 3. ‘ *I am weary of crying.*’

Ans. 1. God may hear us, when we do not hear from him : as soon as prayer is made, God hears it, though he doth not presently answer. A friend may receive our letter, though he doth not presently send us an answer of it. 2. God may delay prayer, yet not deny.

Qu. *But why doth God delay an answer of prayer ?*

Ans. 1. Because he loves to hear the voice of prayer, Prov. xv. 8. ‘ The prayer of the upright is his delight.’ You let the musician play a great while ere you throw him down money, because you love to hear his music, Cant. ii. 14.

2. God may delay prayer when he will not deny, that he may humble us ; perhaps God hath spoke to us a long time in

his word to leave such sins, but we would not hear him ; therefore he lets us speak to him in prayer and seems not to hear us.

3. God may delay prayer when he will not deny, because he sees we are not yet fit for the mercy ; perhaps we pray for deliverance, we are not fit for it ; our scum is not yet boiled away ; we would have God swift to deliver, and we are slow to repent.

4. God may delay prayer, when he will not deny, that the mercy we pray for may be the more prized, and may be sweeter when it comes. The longer the merchant's ships stay abroad, the more he rejoiceth when they come home laden with spices and jewels ; therefore be not discouraged, but follow God with prayer : though God may delay, he will not deny. Prayer *vincit invincibilem*, it overcomes the Omnipotent, Hof. xii. 4. The Tyrians tied fast their god Hercules with a golden chain, that he should not remove : the Lord was held by Moses' prayer, as with a golden chain, Exod. xxxii. 10. ' Let me alone ; ' why, what did Moses ; he only prayed. Prayer ushers in mercy. Be thy case never so sad, if thou canst but pray, thou needest not fear, Psal. x. 17. Therefore give thyself to prayer.

OF THE PREFACE TO THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Our FATHER which art in heaven.

HAVING (through the good providence of God) gone over the chief grounds and fundamentals of religion, and enlarged upon the decalogue or ten commandments, I shall now, at the close, speak something upon the Lord's prayer.

MATH. vi. 9. ' After this manner therefore pray ye, Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed,' &c.

In this scripture are two things observable,

1. The introduction to the prayer.

2. The prayer itself which consists of three parts. (1.) A preface. (2.) Petitions. (3.) The conclusion.

I. The introduction to the Lord's prayer, ' After this manner pray ye.' Our Lord Jesus, in these words, prescribed to his disciples and us a directory for prayer. The ten commandments are the rule of our life, the creed is the sum of our faith, and the Lord's prayer is the pattern of our prayer. As God did prescribe Moses a pattern of the tabernacle, Exod. xxv. 9. so Christ hath here prescribed us a pattern of prayer. ' After this manner pray ye,' &c. The meaning is, let this be the rule and model according to which you frame your prayers. *Ad hanc*