

THE PROVINCE OF PRAYER.

This article is suggested by a letter at hand in which the Brother says: "I have read the articles, 'Our Mediator,' 'Our Access to God through the one Mediator,' 'An Advocate with the Father,' in the last TOWER. I was much pleased, both with the logical reasoning and the Scriptural evidence adduced," but he adds, "that he is at a loss how to harmonize those teachings with the command to 'Pray for your enemies,' 'Pray ye – Thy kingdom come,' and Paul's exhortation to 'Pray for all men – for kings,' etc." The Brother asks: "Is not the principle the same in all prayer – 'Imperfect human beings attempting to direct the All-wise Jehovah?'" We answer:

There can be no doubt that for the ignorant and weak finite beings to attempt to use prayer or any other agency to thwart the plans and change the arrangements of the Almighty, and to attempt to instruct the All-wise, would be improper. Such *cannot* be the province of prayer. This we hold to be an axiom. But if this be beyond its scope, what is the purpose and intent of prayer; what are its privileges and its limits?

The privilege of praying to God, of holding communion with him, is a great privilege and an evidence of his favor. God permits and arranged to grant us this privilege, not that he might be informed of our desires, for we being imperfect our desires are not perfect, so that "we know not what things to ask for *as we ought*," and he does for us *better* than we know how to ask or think. Nor does God permit us to pray to him that we may *inform* him regarding matters here; for he knoweth the end from the beginning as well as every intervening step. But he has instituted prayer for our benefit and comfort and instruction.

The OBJECT of prayer is to bring the heart and mind of the child of God, whether in joy or sorrow, into contact with the heart of God, that he may be enabled thus most fully to realize the fatherhood of God, his love and care and his deep interest in every item of our welfare; that

in deep affliction we may unburden our hearts to God and thus have forcibly brought to our attention his love and care and wisdom – for our encouragement, not his; for our strengthening, not his, and for our joy. This opportunity is not for us to instruct Jehovah how to arrange matters for the best, but it is to bring our hearts to realize him as the centre of wisdom and power, that having unburdened our hearts, we may be prepared to listen for his answer and advice through his word. And he whose knowledge of prayer is confined to the meagre information he has imparted to God with "much speaking," and who has never learned to listen for the answer to his prayer at the word of God, has as yet measurably failed to appreciate the object of prayer.

Earnestness in God's service will bring his children to him frequently, to **[R798 : page 3]** realize at his feet his sympathy with them in the difficulties, discouragements and trials of life, as well as to ask his guidance and overruling of every affair of life, through his word, and to hearken to his wisdom, which will enable us to serve him acceptably.

The PROVINCE of prayer is to ask for such, and only such things, as God has already declared himself well pleased to grant. And while we may freely speak to him as a Father, and tell him how we understand his word, and the confidence and trust we have in its ultimate fulfilment, yet we must not only avoid telling the Lord of *our* will and *our* plan, and what *we* would like; but we must avoid and put far from us any such spirit, and must recognize and bring ourselves into full accord with *his* will and *his* plan of accomplishing it. If this thought were appreciated, it would cut short some of the "long prayers," "much speaking," and "vain repetitions" by which some endeavor to instruct the Lord in *their* wishes regarding every matter under heaven. It would send them speedily to the word of God to search diligently the plan of God that they might labor as well as pray in harmony with it. While assuring us that the Father careth for us, and is well pleased to have us come to him with sincere hearts, the Master informs us of the conditions upon which we may expect an answer. He says: "If ye abide in me, and

my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." (John 15:7.) These are the conditions for *sure* answers to our prayers. What is it to abide in Christ? It implies first that our WILL has been wholly consecrated – swallowed up in the will of Christ. And more, that the will is in this condition at the time of the prayer, *abiding* in Christ. And if the suppliant's own will is gone and he is now controlled entirely by the will of Christ, he surely would consult the words of Christ and there seek information as to what his will is before framing a petition to the Father in Christ's name. And if this be his case, if the will of Christ is governing him, and the words of Christ are *abiding* in him, such an one is prepared to ask *any* and *everything* he may WILL to ask.

His requests would probably be as simple as was the Master's petition when he prayed, "*Not my* will, but thine be done. (Luke 22:42.) In such a condition prayers are always answered; but in such a condition the prayers would be very modest. Our prayers under such circumstances would be more a thanksgiving for our blessings, an expression of confidence and trust, and the committal of our way unto the Lord, confidently realizing the promise that to us under such conditions, ALL THINGS [even seeming disasters and troubles] shall work together FOR GOOD. Hence whatever came, such an one could realize his prayer answered. He could rejoice evermore because he is prepared to rejoice in tribulation as well as in prosperity, in the path of service. He has no *will* to oppose whatever God permits, *knowing* that it will work out good.

Such could not pray for anything of their own will, for they have no will except God's; then abiding in Christ, and his words in them, would prevent any other petition. They could not pray for the immediate conversion of the world, for though they know that "God will have all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth," they also know that the present age is not in God's plan devoted to this work, but solely to the *selection*, under SEVERER trial, of those who shall be

God's instruments for blessing all the families of the earth in God's arranged time.

We cannot single out an ungodly friend and request God to work a miracle on him, and bring him into the "Church of the first-born," though we may pray for wisdom to "rightly divide the word of truth," that if possible the light of the knowledge of the glory of God might thus shine into the understanding of that friend. This would be in harmony with the Word. Jesus said, "Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves," and instructs that "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask [it] of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not."

We may not ask for riches and honor; nor for fine food and fine clothing. To seek or pray for these is contrary to the Spirit of the Master. But we may ask, "Give us this day our daily BREAD," assured that the Father knoweth best what kind is best, and what things are needful to us as seen from his standpoint which embraces our interests spiritual as well as temporal, future as well as present.

We may not pray for the increase in numbers of any of the many sects of today, well knowing that Jesus would not approve of thus fettering with human tradition those whom he calls to liberty; and that he does not approve, but would condemn the sects of today as he did those of eighteen centuries ago, saying, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees," and declaring to them, "Ye do make void [useless and ineffective] the law of God by your traditions."

We can neither labor nor pray for the advancement and growth in power, wealth, influence and numbers of any of these sects, knowing their very existence to be contrary to God's Word, and their advancement a hindrance to the light of truth.

Nor can we today either labor or pray for the perpetuation of the governments of this world, for the word of Christ abides in us, and we are therefore not in darkness, but we know that "the times of the Gentiles" are about fulfilled; and the time for the establishment of God's

kingdom is at hand. For that new kingdom we may pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth," patiently awaiting the fullness of God's due time. So surely as we are children of the light, not left in darkness that that day should come upon us unawares, we know that the success of the heavenly kingdom for which we pray, means the destruction of all these kingdoms of earth. (Dan. 2:44.)

We cannot pray our Father to grant abundant harvests, send rains, prevent famines, drouths, wars and pestilences, for we find no example in the Master of such presumption, and realize from his words (Luke 21:9) that God will permit these things until the reign of Christ is inaugurated. And further, we are informed by the Master that the present day will be one of trouble caused by the new Prince binding the strong ruler of earth and spoiling his house. (Matt. 12:29) Hence we pray for none of these things, but with trust and peace look with patience into the future, praying, "Our Father – thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven." In all things "Thy will be done," – and even in the midst of the present necessary unrest and trouble we rejoice in confident hope, knowing that all things are so overruled as to work out the accomplishment of our Father's grand designs, revealed to us in his Word.

Instructed by the abiding words of Christ, and realizing the covenant of sacrifice to be *even unto death* we cannot ask release from pain and trouble and death, but with Jesus we can only ask that if it be possible, the cup of shame and misrepresentation might pass, that we suffer not as evil doers; and yet with him we must say: "Not my will but thine be done!" "Father, glorify thy name!"

These may pray for the healing of others, but not for themselves. It was truly said of the Master, that he saved others, but he could not save himself and be a sacrifice too. Yet, in requests for the healing of others we must remember that the time for full restitution of life and health to the world has not yet fully come. Jesus did not heal all the blind and impotent in Judea, and what healing he did was merely to show forth

the glorious power and blessing of his coming glorious reign which has not yet fully dawned. Hence our prayers for the sick should be with full confidence in God's ability to heal, yet not demanding it, always letting the words of our Lord abide in us – "Thy will be done."

To pray in other than this spirit is to "ask amiss," to ask for things to be consumed upon *our own* lusts [desires] (Jas. 4:3.) Desires for ease, for earthly prosperity, for a sect and its growth and honor; all these are earthly *lusts* contrary to the Spirit and Word of Christ. Thus the word lusts is used by the Apostle in the above instance. Most prayers seemingly are of this sort, and therefore amiss.

Those who abide in Christ, and in whom his word abides, can pray for their enemies and those who spitefully use and persecute them, though they cannot pray God to open their blinded eyes at once, or in their way; but realizing from the indwelling word of God's promise, that the blinded eyes shall all be opened to the truth, they can abide his time, but going to God in prayer they may express their forgiveness of the persecutor, their interest in him, and their patient waiting for the day when "the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth," and his will be done on earth.

When in harmony with Paul's exhortation (1 Tim. 2:1,2) these pray – "For all men; for kings and all that are in authority," their prayers will not be that those kings may be continued in power and control; for they well know that this would be in direct opposition to God's expressed plan, which is to break in pieces and consume all these.

And though these may labor toward it they cannot expect and pray for the conversion of "all men," "kings," etc., well remembering the Master's prayer – "I pray not for the world *but for* THEM which thou hast given me,...that they all may be one, that [*then*] the world may believe" in its due season. (John 17:9,21.) In none of Jesus' prayers did he ever pray for Caesar, or Pilate, or Herod; nor did he make any *special* effort to reach these, with the gospel message, [R798 : page 4] remembering how it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon

me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the MEEK." (Isa. 61:1, and Luke 4:18.) And when he gave the disciples a formula of prayer it contained no prayer for kings and rulers of this age, nor for "all men" except [R799 : page 4] as this is implied in the expressions of forgiveness of debtors, and the prayer for the coming kingdom which will bless *all* men.

What then could we pray for "as we ought," and not ask "amiss," for all men and for kings? Very little, indeed, other than the prayer for the blessing of all, *implied*, when we pray, "Thy kingdom come." Our prayer to God for kings, etc., must be merely that he would so overrule and direct by raising up or casting down among the nations, as would be most in harmony with his wise plans, for the blessing and development of the Church now being selected. For though God has given over the world to the rule of the Prince of this world and his faithful agents *until* the full end of Gentile Times, when he shall come whose right the dominion is and shall take the dominion under the whole heaven, associating with him his faithful followers according to his many promises (Dan. 7:14,18,22), YET God has not given present rulers unlimited power. He will suffer them to take their course only so far as it does not interfere with his plans – there it must stop. The wrath of man shall not work ruin to the plan of God, for God will cause the wrath of man to work to his praise, and all that will not so work he will restrain. (Psa. 76:10.) And this is what the Apostle has in view: Pray God's guidance and direction over all the affairs of life and over rulers TO THE END THAT the piety and sobriety and growth of the Church may be conserved. Verse 2.

Thus considered, not merely as a begging arrangement, nor yet as an occasion for instructing the Lord as to our wills; but considered as a season of union and communion of heart with our Father in which we may relieve our burdened or perplexed hearts by there realizing divine sympathy, calling to mind divine promises, reviewing divine care, and expressing our confidence in God's many promises, thus bringing those promises afresh and closely to our hearts, *as though* God now audibly

uttered them in our hearing – thus considered, how proper, yea, how necessary, is prayer to the true child of God. He cannot live without it. To break off this communion would be like stripping a tree of its leaves: it would stunt and hinder its development.

But to suppose that Christian life depends *solely* upon prayer without earnest study of God's word, is like supposing that a tree could flourish from its leaves only, without roots and soil. Both are needful: good soil and roots will produce leaves and fruitage, and, likewise, the promises of God's word absorbed by us will naturally lead to good works and to communion with God in prayer, without which our fruits would soon wither and disappear.

No wonder, then, that Jesus both by precept and example said, "Watch and pray" (Matt. 26:41), uniting the two conditions needful in our development. Some pray and neglect to watch; others watch and neglect to pray; both these errors are serious, and it is not possible for us to decide which is the *most* serious neglect, since either would work disastrous loss of the great prize for which we are running.

PRAYER NOT A CEREMONY.

No where is prayer defined as a *duty*, though its *necessity* is stated. The Father desireth such to worship him as worship in spirit and in truth (Jno. 4:23); and it would be contrary to this principle to define prayer as a duty, and stipulate a set time or place or formal manner. The earnestness of the service and the peculiarity of the circumstance, will regulate the frequency and the matter.

But though "Family Prayer," "Morning Prayer," "Evening Prayer," nor any other stated time of praying is not specified in Scripture, who among God's children has not experienced the blessedness of communion with the Lord in the morning of each day asking his guidance of its affairs, and realizing and expressing to him our confidence in and reliance upon his promises. This does not remind the Lord of his obligation contained in these promises, but it does *remind*

us of those promises and *thus strengthen and prepare us* for the events of the day. Likewise, how impossible it is for a child of God, remembering and impressed by the events of the day, as to the Lord's wisdom and care and the surety that all things shall work for good – how impossible, we say, for such an one to retire to rest without thankfulness of heart to him upon whose power and promises they have leaned throughout the day: and how appropriate to bow the knee as well as the heart to render homage as well as thanks.

Hence no *form* of prayer is furnished in the Scripture. Even the Master, when asked by the disciples for instruction on this subject, gave them not a *form* to repeat, but merely an idea or example of how to arrange their prayers to God. He did not say, Pray this prayer; but "after *this manner* pray ye." Our prayers, then, should be after this *manner* – not an assortment of extravagant demands, but the simple expression of the earnest heart. First acknowledging and paying homage to God as our Father the Almighty and hallowed One. Secondly, expressing our expectations and trust that his kingdom according to promise is coming, and our eagerness for it, and the time when his will shall be done as in heaven. Thirdly, our reliance upon him, for "daily bread," which he has promised us. Fourthly our acknowledgment that our ways are not perfect and our reliance upon his favor [granted through Christ Jesus] for forgiveness; and our willingness to exercise forgiveness toward our debtors.

FAMILY PRAYER.

Though not enjoined specifically, how appropriate that husband and wife should blend their hearts and bow their knees in divine worship, and in submission to the divine will. How much this must tend to unify those hearts and lives. How blessed must such an example be to the children. How appropriate that the little "olive branches" be trained to look to their Creator in the days of their youth, not with formal and long prayers, but with the evidence before them of parental trust in and love for the giver of every good, as expressed in a simple, earnest,

trustful prayer *after the* MANNER of the Lord's illustration. As children see their parents recognizing and bowing to the superior will and wisdom of their heavenly Father, they learn from the example the lesson of obedience and submission to parental authority while learning to know and reverence their Creator.

As soon as children come to reasoning age, their attention to the daily family prayer, whether it be morning or evening, should be placed on the same plane that God places it before us: *not of* CONSTRAINT, but of a willing mind, out of thankful and loving hearts. Such an influence and example will make home and parents and sacred things dear to children in after life. The true worship of God is profitable both for the present and future life.

UNCEASING PRAYER.

With the climax of Christian growth, the climax of worship is reached, and the earnest child of God will presently experience the meaning of the Apostle's words: "Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks." 1 Thes. 5:17,18. Communion with God and the feeling of continual trust in his goodness and care, will become interwoven with all the affairs of life, so that to thus pray without ceasing, and be continually thankful, will become as natural as breathing. But this continual prayer and thanksgiving can never take the place of the formal recognition of worship of God, either to our own hearts or to our families.

PRAYER IN THE CHURCH.

What is true of our families is not less true of God's family, of which we are members – the body of Christ. To bind us together in love, God has arranged to make the various members more or less dependent on each other for the blessings he is willing and ready to bestow. Thus he would unify the body of Christ in his method of providing spiritual food, as the human body is dependent as a whole upon its various members for the natural "daily bread" which God thus supplies.

This being true, we should not only neglect not the assembling of ourselves with those of *like* precious faith, personally when we *can*; and at least through the medium of the printed page, but when assembled how sweet and refreshing, and how appropriate, to ask our Father's blessing upon the meeting; that the spirit of love may pervade the members of Christ's body there assembled, and that the truth might be discerned by sincere and truth-hungry souls, so that all might be more and more filled with the self-sacrificing spirit of that truth, and thus be built up in the most holy faith and love, and made meet for the Master's service both now and hereafter. Can it be doubted that to the extent that such prayer is the expression of the sentiment of all, it will bring an answer at the moment of its utterance, by impressing upon all solemnly the object of the meeting and the blessings to be expected and enjoyed? It is ever thus; as we draw nigh to God in prayer we bring the blessings promised nigh to ourselves by bringing our hearts into a condition of readiness to enjoy the blessings promised the seeker.

While the offered prayer is to God it should not be forgotten that in harmony with the foregoing statement (that the prayer influences of all who join in it) that Jesus and the Apostle indicate that it should be uttered in such a voice and manner as to enable those about to appreciate and intelligently join it. Jesus said, in connection with one of the few of his recorded sayings, "Because of them that stood by I said it." (John 11:42.) Paul exhorts those who lead the company in prayer to seek to do so in such a manner that all may be able to hear and acquiesce in it. (1 Cor. 14:14-17.) And in all things whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

