

## "THOU DOST NOT HEAR ME."

True prayer calls for an answer from God. But not all prayer is genuine. There is a great difference between formal prayer of the lips and earnest outpouring of soul in supplication. Formal prayer however should not be underestimated. It implies a power that maintains prayer. And though it tarries, a spark from above may suddenly come down into this dead formalism and ignite the flame of true prayer in it. But though it is unfair to say that he who prays in this mere, formal way, had better not pray at all, it remains true that cold and heartless prayer is infected prayer, in behalf of which the man of ardent prayer invokes the cleansing power of the atonement.

If we would examine the true character of prayer, we must distinguish it from the form, and direct the attention to real supplication of the soul; and then he who prays, awaits an answer; such as in olden times was given in a revelation, in a word spoken in the soul, in a vision, or appearance of an angel; and in our times in the hearing of our prayer, in an unexpected meeting, or in a motion worked by the Holy Ghost within. He who prays in a godly manner always awaits an answer; not only when he asks for something, but also when he worships, ascribes praise, or gives thanks. In these holy exercises he does not merely aim at reciting words in honor of God's name and majesty but he asks God, whom he worships, to accept his praises and thanksgivings. The scripture speaks of them as offerings, and

calls them: "the calves of the lips" (Hosea 14:2), or "the fruit of the lips" (Is.57:19) by which to indicate clearly the significance of an offering which such prayer implies. From the account of the first fratricide we learn that there is an offering which God accepts and one which he rejects. And nowhere has it been more clearly shown than in Cain's anger and wrath, that with every offering the human heart awaits an answer from God.

But it does not always come. And amid the sorrows of heart and the distresses of soul nothing is more grievous than this lack of an answer from the Lord. Hear the complaint of Job (30:20): "I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me; I stand up, and thou regardest me not." This is expressed still more strongly in Ps. 22, where the Messiah exclaims: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me! O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season also I take no rest." Or as it reads in Micah 3:7 "Then shall the seers be ashamed . . . for there is no answer of God".

The failure of obtaining an answer from God is by no means always the fault of the worshipper. With the Messiah at least this is unthinkable. Every one knows from experience that at one time he was heard in spite of an accusing conscience, and that at another time, when his prayer had been earnest and sincere, no answer came. In many instances, the hearing failed, because prayer was a sin in our lips. Withholding of an answer, on the part of God, can frequently be explained from the sinful mood of the heart during prayer. But sin on the part of a worshipper

is not the only cause of the failure to obtain an hearing of prayer. The most devout saints in Israel complained again and again that their prayer was not heard, which was a source of deep grief to their hearts; and their grief was proof that their prayers had been earnest and sincere. The Lama Sabachthani from the cross shows the height which this sorrow of the human heart can climb, and Golgotha makes it plain, more strongly than anything else, that the withholding of an answer, on the part of God, can be intentional.

The question in dispute on Carmel was an answer from above. Both Elijah and the priests of Baal acknowledged that if God is alive, and man prays to Him, a sign of life must proceed from the side of God, as an answer to prayer. The priests sought this answer with Baal, and Elijah sought it with Jehovah. From morning even until noon the cry arose from a thousand mouths; "O Baal, answer us," and they cut themselves with knives and lancets, because no answer came. Then Elijah also prayed and God answered by fire. The question at stake was, whether the God who was invoked was able to answer. A God who is not, and who is not alive, *can not* answer. Jehovah, who is alive in glory *could* answer, and the fearful answer descended in fire from heaven.

But ability to answer is not enough. God must also be willing to answer; and the *Sabachthani* is the most striking instance of the awful truth, that at times God is intentionally unwilling, and that he does not withhold his answer by chance or by mistake, but in accordance with his counsel and plan. Even when his child continues to

call he refuses to hear; even when the saintliest worshipper pours out his soul before him; even when his own well-beloved Son cries unto Him from the cross. This is the comfort of the cry from the cross for every soul that cries and gets no answer. Otherwise the silence of God might bring the soul to despair. But when it appears that even the prayer of God's own Son remained unanswered, why should a sinful suppliant complain or despair, when he, too, is numbered with the Son of God.

Is this non-compliance on the part of God mere arbitrariness? Far from it. Such an idea is unthinkable in God. Even this Divine withholding of an answer to our prayer is outflow of the love-life wherewith God compasses the soul of his child. In our prayer-life there is danger that we seek a gift from God rather than God himself. Prayer is almost always invocation of God's help, of his assistance; of his saving and blessing grace; but apart from ourselves, our own interests and conditions of need, prayer seldom aims first of all to have dealings with God himself. The "Our Father" teaches the way. It instructs us first to pray for the hallowing of God's name, for the coming of his Kingdom, for the doing of his Will, and then it goes on to the prayer for our daily bread, for forgiveness of our sins and for our deliverance from the Evil. But this is the misery of our spiritual estate, that even in prayer we rarely stand on the sacred height of the "Our Father".

This wounds the tender love-life between God and the soul. Prayer for provision in personal need is natural, but it always springs from love

of self. God must lend help and assistance and deliverance. And so it comes to appear at times that God is and exists merely for our sakes, for our benefit, to deliver us from trouble. But love is different. Love for God in prayer is, that first of all we are concerned with the things that glorify God's name, God's honor and God's power. If it be true that love alone maketh rich and exalteth the soul, it is grace, and nothing but seeking grace, when by temporary withholdings of answers to our prayers God initiates us more fully into the life of love, represses egoism in our prayers, and in our prayer-life also quickens love.

Hence when an answer to prayer tarries, let not the soul grow faint. Apart from the fact that an answer is not immediately necessary, and that it is frequently shown later on that in his own time God granted the request, there is no reason why, when God withholds an answer, we need to despair. When saints in Old- and New-Testament times were tried along this line, and our blessed Savior endured it in the dark hour of death upon the cross, why then should we be spared? The very restraint on the part of God, when the soul cries out to him, may be the token, that he loves the soul more than we ourselves; that he wants to raise the life of the soul and the life of prayer to higher vantage grounds; that he desires to initiate us into the deeper ways of love; and that by not answering our prayer he prepares us for a more glorious future, when we shall pray more sincerely, supplicate more earnestly, and receive a far more abundant answer. Even among us it is frequently seen that a temporal withdrawal from those whom we love is the

means to quicken tenderer love. How much the more is this true of him, who himself is love and who by putting a cloud between us and his Majesty, leads us up to the higher and far richer enjoyments of love.

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### “HIS WAYS ARE EVERLASTING”

With the passing of another year another boundary-line in life is drawn. A new year is brought into the course of time. It was 1903, and so it continued for months and weeks and days. It became 1904, and involuntarily we ask what it shall bring us. Whether the year will outlive us or whether we shall outlive it. This of itself on the threshold of the new year makes us to look up to our Father who is in heaven, and ask little but trust much, to lay the hand on the mouth and as a weaned child quietly to wait what He will bring upon us, and upon our beloveds.

The goings of the age are his, declares the prophet (Hab. 3:6 Dutch Version.) God counts and reckons with centuries, as on the dial of the clock it is done with hours and minutes. We are the little, needy ones who count with the tenth part of a penny. God bathes himself as it were in the great eternities. There is no comparison between our and God's reckoning of time. With God it is the ever-flowing fountain of the eternal; with us the dripping of the moments is heard in the ticking of the clock. While waiting for it, five single minutes seem sometimes unbearably long.

This vast difference between us and God should