

## XL.

### Prayer and the Consciousness.

“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.”—*Psalm 1. 15.*

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The *form* of prayer does not affect its character. It may be a mere groaning in thought, or a sigh in which the oppressed soul finds relief; it may consist of a single cry, a flow of words, or an elaborate invocation of the Eternal. It may even turn into speaking or singing. But so long as the soul, in the consciousness that God lives and hears its cry, addresses itself directly to Him as tho it stood in His immediate presence, the character of prayer remains intact. However, discrimination between these various forms of prayer is necessary in order to discover, in the *root* of prayer itself, the work of the Holy Spirit.

The suppliant is you; your ego; neither your body nor your soul, but your *person*. It is true, both body and soul are engaged in prayer, but yet in such a way that your person, your ego, your self, pours out the soul; in the soul becomes conscious of your prayer, and through the body gives it utterance.

This will become clear when we consider the part which the body takes in prayer; for no one will deny that the body has something to do with prayer. Mutual prayer is simply impossible without the aid of the body, for that requires a voice to utter prayer in one, and hearing ears in the others. Moreover, prayer without words rarely satisfies the soul. Mere mental prayer is necessarily imperfect; earnest, fervent prayer constrains us to express it in words. There maybe a depth of prayer that can not be expressed, but then we are conscious of the lack; and the fact that the Holy Spirit prays for us with groans that can not be uttered is to us source of very great comfort.

When the soul is perfectly composed, mere mental meditation may be very sweet and blessed; but no sooner do the waters of the soul heave with broader swell than we feel irresistibly constrained to utter prayer in words; and altho in the solitude of the closet yet the silent prayer becomes an audible and sometimes a loud invocation of the mercies of our God. Even Christ in Gethsemane prayed, not in silent meditation nor in unuttered groans, but with strong words which still seem to sound in our ears.

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And not only in this, but in other ways, the body largely affects our prayer.

There is, in the *first* place, a natural desire to make the whole body partake of it. For this reason we kneel when we humble ourselves before the majesty of God. We close the eyes not to be distracted by the world. We lift up the hands as invoking His grace. The agonized wrestler in prayer prostrates himself on the ground. We uncover the head in token of reverence. In the assembly of the saints the men stand on their feet, as they would if the King of Glory should come in.

In the *second* place, the effect of the body upon prayer is evident from the influence which bodily conditions frequently exert upon it. Depressing headache, muscular or nervous pains, congestive disorders causing undue excitement, often prevent not the sigh, but the full outpouring of: prayer. Every one knows what effect drowsiness has upon the exercise of warm and earnest prayer. While, on the other hand, a vigorous constitution, clear head, and tranquil mind are peculiarly conducive to prayer. For this reason the Scripture and the example of the fathers speak of fasting as means to assist the saints in this exercise.

*Lastly*, bodily distress prior to distress of the soul has often opened mute lips in prayer before God. Families that were strangers to prayer have learned to pray in times of serious illness. In threatening dangers of fire or 'water, lips that were used to cursing have frequently cried aloud in supplication. Compelled by war, famine, and pestilence, godless cities have frequently appointed days of prayer with the same zeal wherewith formerly they appointed days of rejoicing.

Hence the significance of the body in this respect is very great - in fact, so great that when abnormal conditions cause the bond between body and soul to become inactive, prayer ceases at the same time. However, mere bodily exercise is not prayer, but lip-service. Mere imitation of the form, mere sounds of prayer tolling from the lips, mere words addressed to the Eternal One without conscious purpose in the soul, are the form of prayer, but not the power thereof.

And this is not all. To trace the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer we must enter more deeply into this matter. According to the ordinary representation, which is partly correct, prayer is impossible without an act of the *memory*, by which we recall our sins and the mercies of God; without an act of the *mind*, choosing the words to express our adoration of the divine virtues; without an act of the *consciousness*, to represent our needs in prayer; without an act of *love*, enabling us to enter into the needs of our country, church, and place of habitation, of our relatives, children, and friends; and lastly, without meditating upon the fundamentals of prayer, recalling the promises of God, the experiences of the fathers, and the conditions of the Kingdom.

All these are activities of the brain, which is the seat of the thinking mind; as soon as this is disturbed by abnormal conditions, the consciousness is obscured and the thinking ceases or becomes confused. Without the brain, therefore, there can be no thinking; without thinking there can be no thoughts; without thoughts there can be no accumulation of thoughts in the memory; and without meditation, which is the result of the former two, there can be no prayer in the proper sense of the word. From which it is evident that prayer depends upon the exercise of bodily functions much more largely than is generally supposed.

And yet, let us be on our guard not to push this too far; and imagine that the root of prayer is in the *brain*, *i.e.*, in a member of the body; for it is not. Our own experience in



prayer teaches us, agreeably to the Scripture, that it is in the *heart*. As from the heart are the issues of life, so are also the issues of prayer. Unless the heart compels us to pray, all our cries are in vain. Men with magnificent brains but cold hearts have never been men of prayer; and, on the contrary, among the men of poor mental development, but with large, warm hearts, are found a number of souls mighty in prayer.

And even this is not all; for the heart itself is a bodily organ. In proportion as the blood circulates through the heart with strong or feeble pulsation, in that proportion is the soul's vital expression strong and overwhelming, or weak and weary; and, dependent upon this, prayer is warm and animated, or cold and formal. When the heart is weak and suffering, the life of prayer generally loses something of its freshness and power.

We are men, and not spirits; and, unlike angels, we can not exist without the body. God created us body and soul. The former belongs to our being essentially and forever. Hence an utterance of our life like prayer must necessarily be dependent upon soul and body, and that in much stronger sense than we usually suppose.



However, the fact must be emphasized that prayer's dependence upon the body is not absolute. Otherwise there could be no prayer among the angels, nor in the Holy Spirit. Our prayer depends upon the *consciousness*; when that is lost, prayer ceases. And, since we are men, consisting of body and soul, the human consciousness is, in the ordinary sense, related also to the body. But that this dependence is not absolute is evident from the fact that the Eternal Being, whose divine consciousness is but dimly reflected in that of man, has no body. "God is Spirit." And the same is true of the world of spirits, who, altho incorporeal, yet possess a consciousness; and of the three Persons of the Trinity, especially of the Holy Spirit.

Hence the question arises whether man separated by death from the body loses consciousness. To this we reply in the affirmative. Our human consciousness, as we possess it in our present earthly existence, is lost in death, to be restored to us in the resurrection, in a *form* stronger, purer, and holier. St. Paul says: "We,"—that is, our human consciousness,— "now know in part, but then we," —the same human consciousness,— "shall know face to face, even as we are known."

But from this it does not follow that in the intermediate state the soul must be denied all self-consciousness. The Scripture teaches the very contrary. Of course, for this knowledge we depend upon the Scripture alone. The dead can not tell us anything of their state after death. No one but God, who ordained the conditions of life in the intermediate state, can reveal to us what those conditions are. And He has revealed to us that immediately after death the redeemed are *with Jesus*. St. Paul says: "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ." And, since a friend's presence does not afford us pleasure except we are conscious of it, it follows that the souls of the saints, in the intermediate state, must possess some sort

of consciousness different from that which we now possess, but sufficient to realize and enjoy the presence of Christ. For which reasons the fathers rejected every representation of death as a sleep; as tho our persons from the moment of death to that of the resurrection should sleep in perfect forgetfulness of the glorious things of God; altho they denied not the intermediate state in which the soul is separated from the body.

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Wherefore it seems possible for the soul to be conscious in a higher sense, *without the aid of the body*, independently of the heart and the brains—a consciousness which enables us to realize the glorious things of God and the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How this higher consciousness operates is a deep mystery; nor is the nature of its operation revealed. And since we can have no other representations than those formed by means of the brain, it is impossible for us to have the slightest idea of this higher consciousness. Its existence is revealed, but no more.

The following may be considered as settled, and this is the principal thing in our present inquiry: In that temporary consciousness in which we will work in the intermediate state, the same person will become self-conscious who now is conscious by means of heart and brain. Even after death it shall be our own person that shall be bearer of that consciousness, and by it I shall be conscious of myself. It can not be otherwise; or else consciousness after death is impossible, for the simple reason that consciousness alone can not exist without a person. And another person it can not be. Hence my own person shall be bearer of that consciousness; and thus shall I be enabled to enjoy the presence of Jesus.

From this we draw the following important conclusion: that so far as the *form* of the ordinary consciousness is concerned, it is dependent upon the body; while essentially it is not so dependent. Essentially it continues to exist, even when sleep obscures the thought, or insanity estranges me from myself, or a swoon makes me lose consciousness; essentially it continues to exist even when death temporarily separates me from the body. From which it follows that the root and seat of the consciousness must be looked for in the *soul*, and that heart and brain are but the *vehicles, conductors*, which our person uses to manifest that consciousness in ideas and representations.

And since prayer is a speaking to the Eternal, *i.e.*, a conscious standing before Him, it follows that the root of prayer has its seat in our *person* and in our *spiritual being*; and, altho bound also to the body, so far as the *germ* is concerned rests in our personal ego, in so far as the ego, conscious of the existence of the divine Persons and of the bond that unites it to them, allows that bond to operate.

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And thus we come to this final conclusion: that the possibility of prayer finds its deepest ground in the fact of our *being created after the image of God*. Not only is our self-consciousness a result of that fact, for God is eternally self-conscious, but from it also springs that other mighty fact that I, as a man, can be conscious of the existence of the Eternal, and of the intimate bond which unites me to Him. The consciousness of this bond and relation

manifests itself in prayer as soon as we address ourselves to God. Hence the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer must be looked for in His work of the creation of man. And since, in our former study on this point, we discovered that it is God the Holy Spirit who in man's creation caused this consciousness to awake, carrying into it and maintaining by it the consciousness of the existence of God and of the bond which unites man to Him, it is evident that prayer, as a phenomenon in man's spiritual life, finds its basis directly in the work of the Holy Spirit in *man's creation*.

## XLI.

## Prayer in the Unconverted.

“When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.” —*Psalm xxvii. 8.*

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The faculty of *prayer* is not an acquisition of later years, but is *created in us*, inherent in the root of our being, inseparable from our nature.

And yet consistent with this fact is the fact that the great majority of men do not pray. It is possible to possess a faculty dormant in us for a whole lifetime. The Malay possesses the faculty for studying modern languages as well as we, but he never uses it. In sleep we retain our faculties of seeing and hearing, but then they are inactive. Altho possessed of great power, the big fellow did not lift a finger against the little scamp who tormented him. Hence a faculty may remain in us wholly undeveloped and dormant for a lifetime, or partly developed but suppressed. And the same is true of the faculty of prayer. Among the fourteen hundred millions of the earth's population, there are scarcely two hundred million who do not appear to be acquainted with prayer, altho their form of prayer is very defective. Of the non-praying masses, who almost exclusively occupy Europe, one half remember the time when, in some way or other, they used to pray. Many of those who have lost even that, still breathe an occasional prayer. And the number of them who wish that they could pray is very large; and among the non-praying people they represent undoubtedly the noblest.

Hence we maintain our starting-point, that we owe the faculty of prayer to our creation. God created man as a being disposed to prayer. If this were not so, the faculty of prayer could not be among his endowments. We are created for prayer, otherwise we could never have tasted of its sweetness.

To the question, Why in our creation is this a peculiar work of the Holy Spirit? we answer: Prayer is the drawing and pressing of the *impressed image* toward its *Original*, which is the Triune God. To be the bearers of that impressed image is the marvelous honor bestowed upon men. Altho marred by sin—God grant by regeneration restored in you—yet the original features of that image are still the original features of our human being. Without that image we would cease to be men.

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And, owing its origin to the impress of that original Image, our inward being draws toward It, naturally, urgently, and persistently. It can not live without it, and the fact that, on the other hand, the original Image of the Eternal One draws the impressed image in man to Himself, is the ultimate and constraining power of all prayer. However, to be exalted to the dignity of prayer, this drawing to God must not be like the involuntary suction of water to the deep, or the turning of the opening rose-bud toward the light. For the water knows not whither it is going, and the rosebud is unconscious of the sunshine which governs it. That almost irresistible drawing can be called prayer only when *we know* that it is prayer,