

HIS IN A . . . LIFE OF PRAYER

by

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INTRODUCTION

THE APPROACH THE PLEA FOR A LIFE OF PRAYER

“**Wait on the Lord**” (Psalm 27:14).

“Dying for lack of breath.” What if this should prove the true diagnosis of the ills and disabilities of the Church and of the child of God in our day? The case is this:

The Church is “**the body of Christ**,” an organism, possessed of His life. Our risen Lord, now a “*life-giving Spirit*,” “**breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit**” (John 20:22). This is the basic fact of all Christian living. The Church’s life, corporate as well as individual, in its beginning and in its continuing, is the very breath of the risen, glorified Son of God.

One of the ceaseless activities of the body is its breathing. It is essential to self-preservation. We do it involuntarily. Such is the function of prayer; hence its primal importance. It is the Church’s part, practically, in the sustaining of her life. We sing:

“Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath,
The Christian’s native air.”

But it is a law of the body that the more actively and vigorously it exercises the more deeply and freely it must breathe. Under exertion the body demands a quickened breathing, an ampler supply of air, to meet its necessities.

The application to the Church is obvious.

She has come upon a day of almost hectic exertion. Her activities are many and varied. She is endeavoring to do things as never before. Hence, acknowledging that she is an organism, this speeding up of activity, by every known law, automatically, so to speak, calls for increased breathing.

To sustain her own life she must have more prayer. Physiologically and scientifically judged, to refuse herself an increase of breathing, proportionate to her heightened exertion, must prove fatal.

From this logic there is no escape. Yet the Church, instead of drinking more deeply at the fountain of her spiritual resources to meet the stress of her present program of action, has unquestionably a diminishing sense of need in the matter. It is this that alarms. Is the Church's unconscious slogan coming to be: "Do Something, and Be Nothing"?

Prayerlessness a Sin

The stress of the hour, arguing for more prayer but leading to less, the disparity between the prayer-privilege as seen in God's Word and the prayer-practice as seen in daily life —these constrain to the present writing, in the belief that many children of God and of Grace share with us a sense of shortcoming in the work of prayer, often mounting to shame over the degree of neglect and restraint of prayer to which we are permitting the present "system" to reduce us.

An illustration. A most devoted servant of the Lord, wholly given to His service, nothing withheld, when it was suggested that prayer was of such tremendous importance that one should aim to give as much as one hour a day to it, replied: "The exactions of my work, the schedule under which I live, preclude any protracted period of prayer. I cannot find the time for it." If such an one must so confess under the present system, what of the scores upon scores of others? What of the average preacher? Known as a "*man of God*," is he a godly man? Is he spending enough time in God's presence to justify the retention of the title? What about the Christian business man? Mechanic? Teacher? Student? Member of society?

No one doubts that a Judson, a Brainerd, a Carey, a Henry Martyn, an Andrew Murray, a McCheyne, a Finney, a Moody, a Chapman, paid the price of power in the habitual practice of protracted prayer. They did it. Therefore their lives told while they lived, and continue unabated in their influence to our day.

Little praying, and listless. Shortcoming, do we call it? That is not a sufficiently strong term. "**To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is SIN**" (James 4:17).

With Samuel let us label our lack of prayer as plain downright s-i-n. Facing a crisis of defection from God and consequent spiritual declension—so akin to our own day— Samuel recognized his responsibility in the words: "**As for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you**" (I Samuel 12:23).

The Appalling Need

Any barest appraisal of the present day situation must set it down as extremely serious. Not to confess it so is to acknowledge ourselves lacking in spiritual insight. We need to keep ourselves alert lest we become acclimated to conditions that should never receive our mental or moral approval.

Our educational institutions are the molders of youthful character. Speaking of them, from grade schools up, a man of wide observation says:

“Not merely the religious conditions, but the moral conditions, are terrible beyond expression. I could not put into print things that have come under my observation as to the slump, not only in modesty, but in the moral decency, not only among our young men and boys, but among our young women and girls.”

Then crime today is not a matter of individual initiative; it is corporate, trained and organized.

There are schools that train and turn out adepts in the latest methods of crime and fraud. We have legalized Atheism. The American Association for the Advancement of Atheism is duly incorporated and authorized to carry out its deadly program of assault on God, His Bible, His Christ and His Church, with all the sacred beliefs and institutions springing therefrom.

A close student of our national life charges that nearly 50 percent of our youth are living on the danger line in the matter of morals; and that between 15 and 20 percent indulge in immorality. Addicts to narcotics, it is stated, number 1,600,000—an increasingly irresponsible class, very largely young people. The recent report of the League of Nations’ Commission on the white-slave traffic strikes horror to the heart as it charges the principal nations (ours is not in the list) with criminal complicity in this widely ramified commercialized vice, characterized as “This filthy stain on civilization.”

But why add to the list of particulars? There are many branches from the one root. If only the Church were girded with power for such an hour! Of her condition, an outstanding leader writes:

“As I travel from one end of this land to the other, and have opportunity to see for myself the condition of the churches; as I read the religious periodicals; as I talk with men and women of influence and power in the church, my heart would be nigh unto despair if I did not know God and that He answers prayer.

“The gross error being taught by many professedly orthodox ministers; the absence of the real, living gospel from the preaching of many who do not preach error, but who are certainly not preaching the truth in its simplicity and in the power of the Holy Ghost; the unconcern of the great mass of the membership of our churches regarding the lost at home and abroad; the growing compromise with the world on the part of a large proportion of the membership of our churches, the neglect of real prayer and the openly avowed disbelief in prayer on the part of not a few; the inactivity in real soul-winning work, cannot but fill any intelligent and properly instructed Christian with a sorrow that almost breaks the heart”. *

* From a recent article by R. A. Torrey.

The Apparent Impotence

The evident powerlessness of the Church to cope with the situation should shame the followers of our all-conquering Christ and cause us to prostrate ourselves in the dust before Him. We are told that 7,500 churches of evangelical faith went the whole year (1925) without a single accession. It takes at least 30 in our churches to rescue and add one more.

The Annual of one large denomination shows it required 56 to secure a net gain of one. Of our young men, 12,000,000 are not members of any church; 7,000,000 are said never to darken a church door. In the State of Missouri alone 500,000 children are reported to be without Christian teaching.

We seem to stand once more with His disciples at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration. Our Lord has had His transforming, empowering communion with the Father; but we have not. We are confronted with a father, presenting his boy, enslaved, the victim of evil, a sad epitome of the world's great need. The Master has commissioned us to relieve such in His name. We rise to the task, little realizing our impotence. We are earnest, sincere, but nothing happens. We are forced to confess defeat.

Then the Master comes, fresh from fellowship with His Father. At once the seemingly impossible takes place. The need is met; the child is cured. Amazed and abashed, we ask Him privately, "**Why could not we cast him out?**" Listen anew to His answer: "**This kind can come out by nothing, but by prayer . . .**" (Mark 9:29).

Now we understand why the world's need goes unmet; for lack of prayer. And we make high resolve to withdraw with Him to our Mount of Transfiguration, ere we essay to go down to the Valley of Service. To such renewing prayer, with its resultant power to live and serve, the truths herein presented are a call and a challenge.

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