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by D. L. Moody

Prayer holds a high place among the exercises of a spiritual life. Robert Murray McChesney said, "A great part of my time is spent in getting my heart in tune for prayer. Prayer is the link that connects earth with heaven."

It may be said that there are nine elements which are essential to true prayer. The first is adoration; we cannot meet God on a level at the start. We must approach Him as the One far beyond our reach or sight. The next is confession; sin must be put out of the way. We cannot have any communion with God while there is any transgression between us. If there stands some wrong you have done a man, you cannot expect that man's favor until you go to him and confess the fault.

Restitution is another; we have to make good the wrong wherever possible. Thanksgiving is the next; we must be thankful for what God has done for us already. Then come forgiveness and unity. There must also be faith in order for prayers to produce answers.

Thus influenced, we shall be ready to offer direct petition. We hear a good deal of praying that is just exhorting, and if you did not see the man's eyes closed, you would suppose he was preaching. Then much that is called prayer is simply finding fault. There needs to be more petition in our prayers. After all these, there must come submission. While praying, we must be ready to accept the will of God. If we meet these conditions, we can be certain of our receiving answers to prayer.

Adoration

Adoration has been defined as the act of rendering divine honor, including in it reverence, esteem and love. It literally signifies to apply the hand to the mouth, "to kiss the hand." In Eastern countries this is one of the great marks of respect and submission. The importance of coming before God in this spirit is great; therefore it is so often impressed upon us in the Word of God.

The Rev. Newman Hall, in his work on the Lord's Prayer, says: "Man's worship, apart from revelation, has been uniformly characterized by selfishness. We come to God either to thank Him for benefits already received, or to implore still further benefits: food, raiment, health, safety, comfort. Like Jacob at Bethel we are disposed to make the worship to render to God correlative with 'food to eat, and raiment to put on.'"

"This style of petition, in which self generally precedes and predominates, if it does not altogether absorb our supplications, is not only seen in the devotees of false systems, but in the majority of the prayers of professed Christians. In our prayers we seem to go toward God, but indeed, reflect upon ourselves. This may be the reason why many times our prayers are sent forth like the raven out of Noah's ark and never return. But when we make the glory of God the chief end of our devotion, they go forth like the dove and return to us again with an olive branch."

Let me refer you to a passage in the prophecies of Daniel. He was one of the men who knew how to pray: his prayer brought the blessing of heaven upon himself and upon his people. He says: "I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes; and I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love Him, and to them that keep His commandments..." (Dan. 9:3-4).

The thought I want to call special attention to is conveyed in the words, "O Lord, the great and dreadful God..." Daniel took his right place before God – in the dust; he put God in His right place. It was when Abraham was on his face, prostrate before God that God spoke to him. Holiness belongs to God; sinfulness belongs to us.

Brooks, that grand Puritan writer, says: "A person of real holiness is much affected and taken up in the admiration of the holiness of God. Unholy persons may be somewhat affected and taken with the other excellences of God; it is only holy souls that are taken and affected with His holiness. The more holy any are, the more deeply are they affected by this. To the holy angels, the holiness of God is the sparkling diamond in the ring of glory. But unholy persons are affected and taken with anything rather than with this.

"Nothing strikes the sinner into such a damp as a discourse on the holiness of God; it is as the handwriting on the wall; nothing makes the head and heart of a sinner to ache like a sermon upon the Holy One; nothing galls and gripes, nothing stings and terrifies unsanctified ones like a lively setting forth of the holiness of God. But to holy souls there are no discourses that do more suit and satisfy them, that do more delight and content them, that do more please and profit them, than those that do most fully and powerfully discover God to be glorious in holiness." So, in coming before God, we must adore and reverence His name.

The same thing is brought out in Isaiah: "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. 6:1-3).

A Sense of God's Holiness Needed

When we see the holiness of God, we shall adore and magnify Him. Moses had to learn the same lesson. God told him to take his shoes from off his feet, for the place whereon he stood was holy ground. When we hear men trying to make out that they are holy, and speaking about their holiness, they make light of the holiness of God. It is His holiness that we need to think and speak about; when we do that we shall be prostrate in the dust.

You remember also, how it was with Peter. When Christ made Himself known to him he said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). A sight of God is enough to show us how holy He is and how unholy we are.

We find that Job had to be taught the same lesson. "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer Thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth" (Job 40:3-4). As you hear Job discussing with his friends you would think he was one of the holiest men who ever lived. He was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; he fed the hungry, and clothed the naked. What a wonderfully good man he was! It was all I, I, I. At last God said to him, "Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou Me" (Job 38:3). The moment that God revealed Himself, Job changed his language. He saw his own vileness and God's purity. He said, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6).

The same thing is seen in the cases of those who came to our Lord in the days of His flesh: those who came aright, seeing and obtaining the blessing, manifested a lively sense of His infinite superiority to themselves. The centurion, of whom we read in Matthew, said: "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof..." (Matt. 8:8). Jairus "fell down at Jesus' feet," as he presented his request (Luke 8:41). The leper in the Gospel of Mark came "kneeling down to Him" (Mark 1:40). The Syrophenician woman "came and fell at His feet" (Mark 7:25). The man full of leprosy "seeing Jesus fell on his face" (Luke 5:12).

So, too, the beloved disciple, speaking of the feeling they had concerning Him when they were abiding with Him as their Lord, said: "...we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). However intimate their companionship, and tender their love, they revered as much as they communed, and adored as much as they loved.

We may say of every act of prayer as George Herbert says of public worship:

"When once thy foot
Enters the church, be bare;
God is more than thou;
For thou art there
Only by His permission.

"Then beware,

And make thyself
All reverence and fear.
Kneeling ne'er spoiled silk stocking;
Quit thy state,
All equal are
Within the church's gate."

The wise man says: "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Eccl. 5:1-2).

If we are struggling to live a higher life, and to know something of God's holiness and purity, what we need is to be brought into contact with Him, that He may reveal Himself. Then we shall take our place before Him as those men of old were constrained to do. We shall hallow His Name as the Master taught His disciples when He said, "Hallowed be Thy Name" (Matt. 6:9). When I think of the irreverence of the present time, it seems to me that we have fallen on evil days.

Let us as Christians when we draw near to God in prayer, give Him His right place. "...let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28).