

## The Holy Spirit and Prayer

**Andrew Murray:**

Is it not sad that our thoughts about the Holy Spirit are so often coupled with grief and self-reproach? Yet he bears the name of Comforter, and is given to lead us to find in Christ our chief delight and joy. But there is something still more sad: he who dwells within us to comfort us is often grieved by us because we will not permit him to accomplish his work of love. What a cause of inexpressible pain to the Holy Spirit is all this prayerlessness in the Church! It is the cause also of the low vitality and utter impotence which are so often found in us, because we are not prepared to permit the Holy Spirit to lead us.

God grant that our meditation on the work of the Holy Spirit may be matter for rejoicing and for the strengthening of our faith!

The Holy Spirit is 'the Spirit of prayer'. He is definitely called by this name in Zechariah 12, 10: 'The spirit of grace and of supplications. 'Twice in Paul's epistles there is a remarkable reference to him in the matter of prayer. 'Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father' (Rom. 8.15). 'God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father' (Gal. 4.6). Have you ever meditated on these words: 'Abba, Father'? In that name our Saviour offered his greatest prayer to the Father, accompanied by the entire surrender and sacrifice of his life and love. The Holy Spirit is given for the express purpose of teaching us, from the very beginning of our Christian life onward, to utter that word in childlike trust and surrender. In one of these passages we read: 'We cry'; in the other: 'He cries.' What a wonderful blending of the divine and human cooperation in prayer. What a proof that God - if I may say so - has done his utmost to make prayer as natural and effectual as though it were the cry of a child to an earthly Father, as he says: 'Abba, Father'.

Is it not a proof that the Holy Spirit is to a great extent a stranger in the Church, when prayer, for which God has made such provisions, is regarded as a task and a burden? And does not this teach us to seek for the deep root of prayerlessness in our ignorance of, and disobedience to, the divine instructor whom the Father has commissioned to teach us to pray?

If we desire to understand this truth still more clearly we must notice what is written in Romans 8.26, 27: 'Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.' Is it not clear from this that the Christian if left to himself does not know how to pray; or how he ought to pray; and that God has stooped to meet us in this helplessness of ours by giving us the Holy Spirit himself to pray for us; and that his operation is deeper than our thought or feeling, but is noticed and answered by God?

Our first work, therefore, ought to be to come into God's presence not with our ignorant prayers, not with many words and thoughts, but in the confidence that the divine work of the Holy Spirit is being carried on within us. This confidence will encourage reverence and quietness, and will also enable us, in dependence on the help which the Spirit gives, to lay our desires and heart-needs before God. The great lesson for every prayer is - see to it, first of all, that you commit yourself to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and with entire dependence on him, give him the first place; for through him your prayer will have a value you cannot imagine, and through him also you will learn to speak out your desires in the name of Christ.

What a protection this faith would be against deadness and despondency in the inner chamber! Only think of it! In every prayer the triune God takes a part - the Father who hears: the Son in whose name we pray; the Spirit who prays for us and in us. How important it is that we should be in right relationship to the Holy Spirit and understand his work!

The following points demand serious consideration.

1. Let us firmly believe, as a divine reality, that the Spirit of God's Son, the Holy Spirit, is in us. Do not imagine that you know this and have no need to consider it. It is a thought so great and divine that it can gain an entrance to our hearts and be retained there only by the Holy Spirit himself. 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our -spirit' (Rom. 8.16). Our position ought to be that of reckoning with full assurance of faith that our heart is his temple, yes, that he dwells within us and rules soul and body. Let us thank God heartily as often as we pray, that we have his Spirit in us to teach us to pray. Thanksgiving will draw our hearts out to God and keep us engaged with him; it will take our attention from ourselves and give the Spirit room in our hearts.

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Oh, it is no wonder that we have been prayerless, and have felt this work too heavy for us, if we have sought to hold fellowship with the eternal God apart from his Spirit, who reveals the Father and the Son.

2. In the practice of this faith in the certainty that the Spirit dwells and works in us, there must also be the understanding of all that he desires to accomplish in us. His work in prayer is closely connected with his other work. We have seen in an earlier chapter that his first and greatest work is to reveal Christ in his omnipresent love and power. So the Holy Spirit will in prayer constantly remind us of Christ, of his blood and name, as the sure ground of our being heard.

He will, further, as 'the Spirit of holiness', teach us to recognise, and hate, and have done with sin. He is 'the Spirit of light and wisdom' who leads us into the heavenly secret of God's overflowing grace. He is 'the Spirit of love and power' who teaches us to witness for Christ and to labour for souls with tender pity. The more closely I associate all these blessings with the Spirit, the more shall I be convinced of his deity and shall be the more ready to commit myself to his guidance, as I give myself to prayer. What a different life mine would be if I knew the Spirit as the Spirit of prayer! There is still another thing which I need constantly to learn afresh, that -

3. The Spirit desires to have full possession of my life. We pray for more of the Spirit, and we pray well, if alongside this prayer we set the truth that the Spirit wants more of me. The Spirit would possess me entirely. Just as my soul has my whole body for its dwelling-place and service, so the Holy Spirit would have my body and soul as his dwelling-place, entirely under his control. No one can continue long and earnestly in prayer without beginning to perceive that the Spirit is gently leading to an entirely new consecration, of which previously he knew nothing. 'I seek Thee with my whole heart.' The Spirit will make such words more and more the motto of our lives. He will cause us to recognise that what remains in us of double-mindedness is truly sinful. He will reveal Christ as the almighty deliverer from all sin, who is always near to defend us. He will lead us in this way in prayer, to forget ourselves and make us willing to offer ourselves for training as intercessors, to whom God can entrust the carrying out of his plans, and who day and night cry to him to avenge his church of her adversary.

God help us to know the Spirit and to reverence him as the Spirit of prayer!