

The Example of Paul

Andrew Murray:

'Be Ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.' I Corinthians 11. 1

1. Paul was a minister who prayed much for his congregation

Let us read his words prayerfully and calmly so that we may hear the voice of the Spirit.

'Night and day praying exceedingly that we ... might perfect that which is lacking in your faith... The Lord make you to increase ... to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness' (1 Thess. 3.10-13). 'The very God of peace sanctify you wholly' (I Thess. 5.23).

What food for meditation!

'Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself ... comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work' (2 Thess. 2.16, 17).

'Without ceasing, I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request...that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established' (Rom. 1.9-11).

'My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved' (Rom. 10. 1).

'I ... cease not ... making mention of you in my prayers; that God ... may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him ... that ye may know ... what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe' (Eph. 1. 16-19).

'For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father ... that he would grant you ... to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted ... in love ... might be filled with all the fullness of God' (Eph. 3:14-19).

'Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy ... I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more ... that ye may be sincere ... filled with the fruits of righteousness' (Phil. 1.4, 9-11).

'But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus' (Phil. 4.19).

'We ... do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will ... that ye might walk worthy of the Lord ... strengthened with all might according to his glorious power' (Col. 1.9,11). 'I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you ... as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love' (Col. 2.1, 2).

What a study for the inner chamber! These passages teach us that unceasing prayer formed a large part of Paul's service in the gospel; we see the high spiritual aim which he set before himself, in his work on behalf of believers; and the tender and self-sacrificing love with which he ever continued to think of the Church and its needs. Let us ask God to bring each one of us, and all the ministers of his word, to a life of which such prayer is the healthy and natural outflow. We shall need to turn again and again to these pages if we would really be brought by the Spirit to the apostolic life which God has given us as an example.

2. Paul was a minister who asked his congregation to pray much

Read again with prayerful attention:

'I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea' (Rom. 15.30,31). 'We ... trust ... in God ... that he will yet deliver us; Ye also helping together by prayer for us' (2 Cor. 1.9-11).

'Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel ... as I ought to speak' (Eph. 6.18-20).

'For I know that this shall turn to my salvation, through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 1. 19).

'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak ... as I ought to speak' (Col. 4.2-4).

'Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you' (2 Thess. 3. 1).

What a deep insight Paul had as to the unity of the body of Christ and the relation of the members one to another! It is as we permit the Holy Spirit to work powerfully in us that he will reveal this truth to us, and we too shall have this insight. What a glimpse he gives us of the power of the spiritual life among these Christians, by the way in which he reckoned that at Rome, and Corinth, and Ephesus, and Colossae, and Philippi, there were men and women on whom he could rely for prayer that would reach heaven and have power with God! And what a lesson for all ministers, to lead them to inquire if they truly appreciate the unity of the body at its right value; if they are endeavouring to train up Christians as intercessors; and if they indeed understand that Paul had that confidence because he was himself so strong in prayer for the congregation! Let us learn the lesson and beseech God that ministers and congregations together may grow in the grace of prayer, so that their entire service and Christian life may witness that the Spirit of prayer rules them. Then we may be confident that God will avenge his own elect which cry out day and night unto him.

Ministers of the Spirit

What is the meaning of the expression: the minister of the gospel is a minister of the Spirit (see 2 Cor. 3.6, 8)? It means:

1. That the preacher is entirely under the power and control of the Spirit, so that he may be led and used by the Spirit as he wills.
2. Many pray for the -Spirit, that they may make use of him and his power for their work. This is certainly wrong. It is he who must use you. Your relationship toward him must be one of deep dependence and utter submission. The Spirit must have you entirely, and always, and in all things under his power.
3. There are many who think they must preach the word only, and that the Spirit will make the word fruitful. They do not understand that it is the Spirit in and through the preacher who will bring the word to the heart. I must not be satisfied with praying to God to bless, through the operation of his Spirit, the word that I preach. The Lord wants me to be filled with the Spirit: then I shall speak aright and my preaching will be in the manifestation of the Spirit and power.
4. We see this on the day of Pentecost. They were filled with the Spirit and began to speak, and spoke with power through the Spirit who was in them.
5. Thus we learn what the relationship of the minister toward the Spirit should be. He must have a strong belief that the Spirit is in him, that the Spirit will teach him in his daily life and will strengthen him to bear witness to the Lord Jesus in his preaching and visiting; he must live in ceaseless prayer that he may be kept and strengthened by the power of the Spirit.
6. When the Lord promised the apostles that they should receive power when the Holy Spirit had come upon them and commanded them to wait for him, it was as though he had said: 'Do not dare to preach without this power. It is the indispensable preparation for your work. Everything depends on it.'
7. What then is the lesson we may learn from the phrase 'ministers of the Spirit'? Alas, how little we have understood this! How little have we lived in it! How little have we experienced of the power of the Holy Spirit! What must we do then? There must be deep confession of guilt, that we have so constantly grieved the Spirit, because we have not lived daily as his ministers; and simple childlike surrender to his leading in sure confidence that the Lord will work a change in us; and further, daily fellowship with the Lord Jesus in ceaseless prayer. He will bestow on us the Holy Spirit as rivers of living water.