

Andrew Murray:

The Lord did not speak these words to all who believed on him, or who hoped to be blessed by him, but to those whom he would make fishers of men. He said this not only at the first calling of the apostles, but also later on to Peter: 'Henceforth thou shalt catch men' (Luke 5. 10). The holy art of winning souls, of loving and saving them, can be learned only in close and persistent intercourse with Christ. What a lesson for ministers and for Christian workers and others! This intercourse was the great and peculiar privilege of his disciples. The Lord chose them that they might be always with and near him. We read of the choice of the twelve apostles in Mark 3.14: 'And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach. 'So also our Lord said on the last night (John 15.27): 'And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.'

This fact was noticed by outsiders. Thus, for instance, the woman who spoke to Peter: 'This fellow was also with Jesus' (Matt. 26.71). So in the Sanhedrin: 'They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus' (Acts 4.13). The chief characteristic and indispensable qualification for the man who will bear witness to Christ is that he has been with him. Continuous fellowship with Christ is the only school for the training of ministers of the Holy Spirit. What a lesson for all ministers! It is only he who, like Caleb, follows the Lord fully, who will have power to teach other souls the art of following Jesus. But what an unspeakable grace that the Lord Jesus himself would train us after his own likeness, so that others may learn from us! Then we might say with Paul to our converts: 'Ye became followers of us, and of the Lord...' (I Thess. 1. 6), 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ' (1 Cor. 11.1).

Never was there a teacher who took such trouble with his scholars as Jesus Christ will with us who preach his word. He will spare no pains; no time will be too precious or too long for him. In the love which brought him to the cross, he would hold intercourse, converse with us, fashion us, sanctify us, and make us fit for his holy service. Dare we still complain that it is too much for us to spend so much time in prayer? Shall we not commit ourselves entirely to the love which gave up all for us, and look upon it as our greatest happiness now to hold fellowship with him daily? Oh, all you who long for blessing in your ministry, he calls you to be with him. Let this be the greatest joy of your life; it will be the surest preparation for blessing in your service. O my Lord, draw me, help me, hold me fast, and teach me how daily to live in thy fellowship by faith.

The Holy Trinity

1. God is an ever flowing fountain of pure love and blessedness.
2. Christ is the reservoir wherein the fullness of God was made visible as grace, and has been opened for us.
3. The Holy Spirit is the stream of living water that flows from under the throne of God and of the Lamb.
4. The redeemed, God's believing children, are the channels through which the love of the Father, the grace of Christ, and the powerful operation of the Spirit are brought to the earth, there to be imparted to others.
5. What an impression we gain here of the wonderful partnership into which God takes us up, as dispensers of the grace of God! Prayer, when we chiefly pray for ourselves, is but the beginning of the life of prayer. The glory of prayer is that we have power as intercessors to bring the grace of Christ, and the energising power of the Spirit, upon those souls which are still in darkness.
6. The more surely the channel is connected with the reservoir, the more certainly will the water flow unhindered through it. The more we are occupied in prayer with the fullness of Christ, and with the Spirit who proceeds from him, and the more firmly we abide in fellowship with him, the more surely will our lives be happy and strong. This, however, is still only a preparation for the reality. The more we give ourselves up to fellowship and converse with the triune God, the sooner shall we receive the courage and ability to pray down blessing on souls, on ministers, and on the Church around us.
7. Are you truly a channel which is always open, so that the water may flow through you to the thirsty ones in the dry land? Have you offered yourself unreservedly to God, to become a bearer of the energising operations of the Holy Spirit?
8. Is it not, perhaps, because you have thought only of yourself in prayer that you have experienced so little of the power of prayer? Do understand that the new prayer life into which you have entered in the Lord Jesus can

be sustained and strengthened only by the intercession in which you labour for the souls around you, to bring them to know the Lord? Oh, meditate on this--God an ever flowing fountain of love and blessing, and I his child, a living channel through which every day the Spirit and life can be brought to the earth!

Life and Prayer

Our life has a great influence on our prayer, just as our prayer influences our life. The entire life of man is a continuous prayer, to nature or to the world, to provide for his wants and make him happy. This natural prayer and desire can be so strong in a man who also prays to God that the words of prayer which his mouth utters cannot be heard. God cannot at times hear the prayer of your lips because the desires of your heart after the world cry out to him much more strongly and loudly.

The life exercises a mighty influence over prayer. A worldly life, a self-seeking life, makes prayer powerless and an answer impossible. With many Christians there is a conflict between the life and prayer, and the life holds the upper hand. But prayer can also exercise a mighty influence over the life. If I give myself entirely to God in prayer, then prayer can conquer the life of the flesh and sin. The entire life may be brought under the control of prayer. Prayer can change and renew the whole life, because prayer calls in and receives the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit to purify and sanctify the life.

Many think that they must, with their defective spiritual life, work themselves up to pray more. They do not understand that only in proportion as the spiritual life is strengthened can the prayer life increase. Prayer and life are inseparably connected. What do you think? Which has the stronger influence over you, prayer for five or ten minutes, or the whole day spent in the desires of the world? Let it not surprise you if your prayers are not answered. The reason may easily lie here; your life and your prayer are at strife with each other; your heart is more wholly devoted to living than to prayer. Learn this great lesson: my prayer must rule my whole life. What I request from God in prayer is not decided in five or ten minutes. I must learn to say: 'I have prayed with my whole heart. What I desire from God must really fill my heart the whole day; then the way is open for a certain answer.'

Oh, the sacredness and power of prayer, if it takes possession of the heart and life! It keeps one constantly in fellowship with God. We can then literally say, 'On thee do I wait all the day' (Ps. 25.5). Let us be careful to consider not only the length of the time we spend with God in prayer, but the power with which our prayer takes possession of our whole life.

Perseverance in Prayer

'It is not reason,' said Peter, 'that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables' (Acts 6.2). For that work deacons were chosen. And this word of Peter serves for all time and for all who are set apart as ministers. 'But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word' (Acts 6.4). Dr Alexander Whyte, in an address, once said: 'I think sometimes, when my salary is paid to me so faithfully and punctually: the deacons have performed faithfully their part of the agreement; have I been so faithful in my part, in persevering in prayer and the ministry of the word?' Another minister has said: 'How surprised people would be if I proposed to divide my time between these two equally one half given to prayer, the other to the ministry of the word!'

Notice, in the case of Peter, what perseverance in prayer meant. He went up on the roof to pray. There, in prayer, he received heavenly instruction as to his work among the heathen. There, the message from Cornelius came to him. There, the Holy Spirit said to him: 'Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them' (Acts 10. 19-20). And from there he went to Caesarea, where the Spirit was so unexpectedly outpoured on the heathen. All this is to teach us that it is through prayer God will give the instruction of his Spirit to make us understand his will, to let us know with whom we are to speak, to give us the assurance that his Spirit will make his word powerful through us.

Have you ever earnestly thought over why it is that you have a salary and a parsonage, and are set free from the need of following earthly business? It is for nothing else than that you should continue in prayer and the ministry of the word. That will be your wisdom and power. That will be the secret of a blessed service of the gospel.

No wonder that there is complaint about the ineffective spiritual life in minister and congregation, while that which is of prime importance, perseverance in prayer, does not hold its rightful place-the first place.

Peter was able to speak and act as he did because he was filled with the Spirit. Let us not be satisfied with anything less than hearty surrender to and undivided appropriation of the Spirit, as leader and Lord of our lives. Nothing less will help us. Then, for the first time, we shall be able to say that God 'hath made us able ministers ... of his Spirit' (2 Cor. 3.6).

Carnal or Spiritual?

There is a great difference between those two states which is but little understood or pondered. The Christian who 'walks in the Spirit' and has 'crucified the flesh' (Gal. 5.24) is spiritual. The Christian who walks after the flesh and wishes to please the flesh is carnal (see Rom. 13.14). The Galatians, who had begun in the Spirit, were ending in the flesh. Yet there were among them some spiritual members who were able to restore the wandering with meekness.

What a difference between the carnal and the spiritual Christian (I Cor. 3.1-3)! With the carnal Christian there may be much religion and much zeal for God, and for the service of God. But it is for the most part in human power. With the spiritual, on the other hand, there is a complete subjection to the leading of the Spirit, a deep sense of weakness and entire dependence on the work of Christ-it is a life of abiding fellowship with Christ, wrought out by the Spirit.

How important for me it is to find out and plainly to acknowledge before God whether I am spiritual or carnal! A minister may be very faithful in his orthodoxy, and be most zealous in his service, and yet be so, chiefly, in the power of human wisdom and zeal. And one of the signs of this is that there is little pleasure or perseverance in fellowship with Christ through prayer. Love of prayer is one of the marks of the Spirit.

What a change is necessary for a Christian who is chiefly carnal to become truly spiritual! At first he cannot understand what must happen, or how it can come to pass. The more the truth dawns upon him, the more he is convinced that it is impossible, unless God does it. Yet to believe truly that God will do it requires earnest prayer. Quiet retirement and meditation are indispensable, along with the death of all confidence in ourselves. But along this road there ever comes the faith that God can, God is willing, God will do it. The soul which earnestly clings to the Lord Jesus will be led by the Spirit to this faith.

How will you be able to say to others: I brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ'? (1 Cor. 3. 1). It is impossible unless you yourself have the experience of having passed from the one state to the other. But God will teach you. Persevere in prayer and faith.