

Prayer and Faith – E.M. Bounds

From the book *The Necessity of Prayer*, Chapter 2, By E.M. Bounds

Genuine, authentic faith must be definite and free of doubt. Not simply general in character; not a mere belief in the being, goodness, and power of God, but a faith which believes that the things which “he saith, shall come to pass.” As the faith is specific, so the answer likewise will be definite: “He shall have whatsoever he saith.” Faith and prayer select the things, and God commits himself to do the very things which faith and persevering prayer nominate, and petition him to accomplish.

The American Revised Version renders the twenty-fourth verse of the eleventh chapter of Mark, thus: “Therefore I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” Perfect faith has always in its keeping what perfect prayer asks for. How large and unqualified is the area of operation—the “All things whatsoever!” How definite and specific the promise—“Ye shall have them!”

Our chief concern is with our faith—the problems of its growth, and the activities of its vigorous maturity. A faith which grasps and holds in its keeping the very things it asks for, without wavering, doubt or fear—that is the faith we need—faith, such as is a pearl of great price, in the process and practice of prayer.

The statement of our Lord about faith and prayer quoted above is of supreme importance. Faith must be definite, specific; an unqualified, unmistakable request for the things asked for. It is not to be a vague, indefinite, shadowy thing; it must be something more than an abstract belief in God’s willingness and ability to do for us. It is to be a definite, specific, asking for, and expecting the things for which we ask. Note the reading of Mark 11:23:

And shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatever he saith.

Just so far as the faith and the asking is definite, so also will the answer be. The giving is not to be something other than the things prayed for, but the actual things sought and named. “He shall have whatsoever he saith.” It is all imperative, “He shall have.” The granting is to be unlimited, both in quality and in quantity.

Faith and prayer select the subjects for petition, thereby determining what God is to do. “He shall have whatsoever he saith.” Christ holds himself ready to supply exactly, and fully, all the demands of faith and prayer. If the order on God is made clear, specific and definite, God will fill it, exactly in accordance with the presented terms.

Faith is not an abstract belief in the Word of God, nor a mere mental credence, nor a simple assent of the understanding and will; nor is it a passive acceptance of facts, however sacred or thorough. Faith is an operation of God, a divine illumination, a holy energy implanted by the Word of God and the Spirit in the human soul—a spiritual, divine principle which takes of the supernatural and makes it a thing apprehendable by the faculties of time and sense.

Faith deals with God, and is conscious of God. It deals with the Lord Jesus Christ and sees in him a savior; it deals with God’s Word, and lays hold of the truth; it deals with the Spirit of God, and is energized and inspired by its holy fire. God is the great objective of faith; for faith rests its whole weight on his Word. Faith is not an aimless act of the soul, but a looking to God and a resting upon his promises. Just as love and hope have always an objective so, also, has faith. Faith is not believing just anything; it is believing God, resting in him, trusting—His Word.

Faith gives birth to prayer and grows stronger, strikes deeper, rises higher, in the struggles and wrestlings of mighty petitioning. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the assurance and realization of the inheritance of the saints. Faith, too, is humble and persevering. It can wait and pray; it can stay on its knees, or lie in the dust. It is the one great condition of prayer; the lack of it lies at the root of all poor praying, feeble praying, little praying, unanswered praying.

The nature and meaning of faith is more demonstrable in what it does, than it is by reason of any definition given it. Thus, if we turn to the record of faith given us in that great honor roll, which constitutes the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, we see something of the wonderful results of faith. What a glorious list it is—that of these men and women of faith! What marvelous achievements are there recorded, and set to the credit of faith! The inspired writer, exhausting his resources in cataloguing the Old Testament saints, who were such notable examples of wonderful faith, finally exclaims:

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets.

And then the writer of Hebrews goes on again, in a wonderful strain, telling of the unrecorded exploits wrought through the faith of the men of old, “of whom the world was not worthy” “All these,” he says, “obtained a good report through faith.”

What an era of glorious achievements would dawn for the church and the world, if only there could be reproduced a race of saints of like mighty faith, of like wonderful praying! It is not the intellectually great that the church needs; nor is it men of wealth that the times demand. It is not people of great social influence that this day requires. Above everybody and everything else, it is men of faith, men of mighty prayer, men and women after the fashion of the saints and heroes enumerated in Hebrews, who “obtained a good report through faith,” that the church and the whole wide world of humanity needs.

Many men, of this day, obtain a good report because of their money-giving, their great mental gifts and talents, but few there be who obtain a “good report” because of their great faith in God, or because of the wonderful things which are being wrought through their great praying. Today, as much as at any time, we need men of great faith and men who are great in prayer. These are the two cardinal virtues which make men great in the eyes of God, the two things which create conditions of real spiritual success in the life

and work of the church. It is our chief concern to see that we maintain a faith of such quality and texture, as counts before God; which grasps, and holds in its keeping, the things for which it asks, without doubt and without fear.

Doubt and fear are the twin foes of faith. Sometimes, they actually usurp the place of faith, and although we pray, it is a restless, disquieted prayer that we offer, uneasy and often complaining. Peter failed to walk on Gennesaret because he permitted the waves to break over him and swamp the power of his faith. Taking his eyes from the Lord and regarding the water all about him, he began to sink and had to cry for succor—"Lord, save, or I perish!"

Doubts should never be cherished, nor fears harbored. Let none cherish the delusion that he is a martyr to to fear and doubt. no-credit to any man's mental capacity to cherish doubt of God, and no comfort can possibly derive from such a thought. Our eyes should be taken -off -self, removed from our own weakness and allowed to rest implicitly upon God's strength. "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward." A simple, confiding faith, living day by day, and casting its burden on the Lord, each hour of the day, will dissipate fear, drive away misgiving and deliver from doubt: Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by supplication and prayer, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

That is the divine cure all fear, anxiety, and undue concern of soul, all of which are closely akin to doubt and unbelief. This is the divine prescription for securing the peace which passeth all understanding, and keeps the heart and mind in quietness and peace.

All of us need to mark well and heed the caution given in Hebrews: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

We need, also, to guard against unbelief as we would against an enemy Faith needs to be cultivated. We need to keep on praying, "Lord, increase our faith," for faith is susceptible of increase. Paul's tribute to the Thessalonians was, that their faith grew exceedingly Faith is increased by exercise, by being put into use. it is nourished by sore trials. That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Faith grows by reading and meditating upon the Word of God. Most, and best of all, faith thrives in an atmosphere of prayer.

It would be well, if all of us were to stop, and inquire personally of ourselves: "Have I faith in God? Have I real faith-faith which keeps me in perfect peace, about the things of earth and the things of heaven?" This is the most important question a man can propound and expect to be answered. And there is another question, closely akin to it in significance and importance-"Do I really pray to God so that he hears me and answers my prayers? And do I truly pray unto God so that I get direct from God the things I ask of him? "

It was claimed for Augustus Caesar that he found Rome a city of wood, and left it a city of marble. The pastor who succeeds in changing his people from a prayerless to a prayerful people, has done a greater work than did Augustus in changing a city from wood to marble. And after all, this is the prime work of the preacher. Primarily, he is dealing with prayerless people-with people of whom it is said, "God is not in all their thoughts." Such people he meets everywhere, and all the time. His main business is to turn them from being forgetful of God, from being devoid of faith, from being prayerless, so that they become people who habitually pray, who believe in God, remember him, and do his will. The preacher is not sent to merely induce men to join the church, nor merely to _get them to do better. It is to get them to pray, to trust God, and to keep God ever before their eyes, that they may not sin against him.

The work of the ministry is to change unbelieving sinners into praying and believing saints. The call goes forth by divine authority, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." We catch a glimpse of the tremendous importance of faith and of the great value God has set upon it, when we remember that he has made it the one indispensable condition of being saved. By grace are ye saved, through faith." Thus, when we contemplate the great importance of prayer, we find faith standing immediately by its side. By faith are we saved, and by faith we stay saved. Prayer introduces us to a life of faith. Paul declared that the life he lived, he lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved him and gave himself for him-that he walked by faith and not by sight.

Prayer is absolutely dependent upon faith. Virtually, it has no existence apart from it, and accomplishes nothing unless it is its inseparable companion. Faith makes prayer effectual, and in a certain important sense, must precede it. For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Before prayer ever starts toward God; before its petition is preferred, before its requests are made known-faith must have gone on ahead; must have asserted its belief in the existence of God; must have given its assent to the gracious truth that "God is a rewarder of those that diligently seek his face." This is the primary step in praying. In this regard, while faith does not bring the blessing, yet it puts prayer in a position to ask for it, and leads to another step toward realization, by aiding the petitioner to believe that God is able and willing to bless.

Faith starts prayer to work-clears the way to the mercy seat. It gives assurance, first of all, that there is a mercy seat, and that there the high priest awaits the prayers and the prayers. Faith opens the way for prayer to approach God. But it does more. It accompanies prayer at every step she takes. It is her inseparable companion and when requests are made unto God, it is faith which turns the asking into obtaining. And faith follows prayer, since the spiritual life into which a believer is led by prayer, is a life of faith. The one prominent characteristic of the experience into which believers are brought through prayer, is not a life of works, but of faith.

Faith makes prayer strong, and gives it patience to wait on God. Faith believes that God is a rewarder. No truth is more clearly revealed in the Scriptures than this, while none is more encouraging. Even the closet has its promised reward, "He that seeth in

secret, shall reward thee openly," while the most insignificant service rendered to a disciple in the name of the Lord, surely receives its reward. And to this precious truth faith gives its hearty assent.

Yet faith is narrowed down to one particular thing-it does not believe that God will reward everybody, nor that he is a rewarder of all who pray, but that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Faith rests its case on diligence in prayer, and gives assurance and encouragement to diligent seekers after God, for it is they, alone, who are richly rewarded when they pray.

We need constantly to be reminded that faith is the one inseparable condition of successful praying. There are other considerations entering into the exercise, but faith is the final, the one indispensable condition of true praying. As it is written in a familiar, primary declaration: "Without faith, it is impossible to please him."

James puts this truth very plainly.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth [or doubteth] is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

Doubting is always put under the ban, because it stands as a foe to faith and hinders effectual praying. In the First Epistle to Timothy Paul gives us an invaluable truth relative to the conditions of successful praying, which he thus lays down: "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

All questioning must be watched against and eschewed. Fear and peradventure have no place in true praying. Faith must assert itself and bid these foes to prayer depart.

Too much authority cannot be attributed to faith; but prayer is the scepter by which it signalizes its power. How much of spiritual wisdom there is in the following advice written by an eminent old divine.

Would you be freed from the bondage to corruption? Would you grow in grace in general and grow in grace in particular? If you would, your way is plain. Ask of God more faith. Beg of him morning, and noon and night, while you walk by the way, while you sit in the house, when you lie down and when you rise up; beg of him simply to impress divine things more deeply on your heart, to give you more and more of the substance of things hoped for and of the evidence of things not seen.

Great incentives to pray are furnished in Holy Scriptures, and our Lord closes his teaching about prayer, with the assurance and promise of heaven. The presence of Jesus Christ in heaven, the preparation for his saints which he is making there, and the assurance that he will come again to receive them-how all this helps the weariness of praying, strengthens its conflicts, sweetens its arduous toil! These things are the star of hope to prayer, the wiping away of its tears, the putting of the odor of heaven into the bitterness of its cry. The spirit of a pilgrim greatly facilitates praying. An earthbound, earth-satisfied spirit cannot pray. In such a heart, the flame of spiritual desire is either gone out or smoldering in faintest glow. The wings of its faith are dipped, its eyes are filmed, its tongue silenced. But they, who in unswerving faith and unceasing prayer, wait continually upon the Lord, do renew their strength, do mount up with wings as eagles, do run, and are not weary, do walk, and are not faint.