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Collection

PRACTICAL RELIGION

## CHAPTER 12: PREVAILING PRAYER

I FEAR there are comparatively few Christians who know what prevailing prayer is, because they do not comply with the conditions on which alone it can be offered. I regard these conditions as threefold:

1st. Living and abiding union with Jesus. *"If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."* (John 15:7)

2nd. Systematic obedience to the teaching of the word and of the Spirit. *"Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."* (1 John 3:21-22)

3rd. Unwavering faith in the veracity and faithfulness of God. *"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord."* (James 1:6-7)

Of course there are many other passages of similar bearing and of equal weight, but I regard these three as clearly setting forth the conditions of prevailing prayer, constituting, as it were, the three steps of successful approach to the mercy seat. They are like three links of a golden chain connecting our souls with God, and if one be missing or defective, the power to prevail in prayer is lost. Does not this explain the reason why there is so much ineffectual prayer in our day? Christians get hold of a promise, and try to work themselves up to faith for its fulfillment, but, alas! One of the conditions is wanting, one of the links is broken; their own hearts condemn them; "then have they (no) confidence toward God, and whatsoever they ask they receive (not) of Him, because they keep (not) His commandments, and do (not) those things that are pleasing in His sight." How can a man approach God in confidence, when he is living in the daily practice of something for which his own heart condemns him? Impossible! As soon might Satan offer effectual prayer. Before that man can truly approach to God, he must "cleanse his hands," "purify his heart," and "put away his iniquity."

No matter what our creed or opinion, God has made it a law of our spiritual being, that without submission and obedience there can be no confidence. Faith in Jesus is God's expedient for



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bringing us back to obedience, and not for saving us in disobedience. And all the way through the New Testament He refuses to accept any other proof of discipleship than that of obedience. No less than six times in the 14th and 15th chapters of John is this criterion insisted on. "Faith without works (obedience) is dead," and therefore has no power to take hold of God, or to appropriate His promises. I am satisfied that this is the "missing link" in the experience of multitudes of professors; and in vain do they cry "Lord, Lord, while they do not the things that He says." In vain do they try to assure their hearts before Him, while they love not in deed, but only in word and in tongue. I am afraid! there is much Antinomianism abroad, which makes Christ the minister of sin, and which is always crying, "Faith! faith! only believe!" while consecration and obedience, as indispensable accompaniments of faith, are entirely lost sight of. "How can ye believe," said our Lord to some in His day, "while ye receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" And we may say to some in our day—how can ye believe who prefer self-indulgence, wealth, or worldly conformity, to Christ and His cross, and the extension of His kingdom? Is it not still true that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," and that "the friendship of the world is enmity towards God?" Saving faith in the sinner, and prevailing faith in the believer are alike impossible without full consecration to known duty. If any one disputes this, let him try to exercise faith in any given promise or for any given blessing, while he is refusing obedience to the claims of God, or withholding part of the price which God requires, and he will find, whatever may be his preconceived notions on the subject, that it is simply impossible. Herein is the solution of the question so often asked—How is it that there are so few answers to prayer? David affirmed it when he said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Neither will God hear and answer us, call we ever so loudly, and ever so long, if we willingly consent to any known unrighteousness. How fares it with your prayers, dear reader? Do you know that God hears you by the answers He vouchsafes? If not may not this be the reason for the miscarriage? God is unchanged and unchangeable, the promise faileth not. "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." God must be true; and if your experience contradicts the sure word of promise, you may be certain that it is your experience which is at fault. Examine yourself. Repent, and do your first works. He is faithful and just to forgive the sins of His people, and to cleanse them from all unrighteousness. And then bring all the tithes of a whole-hearted, loving, and believing service into His store-house, and prove Him therewith, and see if He will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out such a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

From a series of papers by Catherine Booth published in 1878.