

THE PURITANS ON
PRAYER

THE PURITANS ON...

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THE PURITANS ON PRAYER

Essays by
Samuel Lee
John Preston
Nathaniel Vincent

Edited by Don Kistler



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The Puritans on Prayer

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Editor's Note

In the process of editing these classic works on prayer by the venerable authors, I became aware that often, when they referred to Scripture, it would be from memory rather than an exact biblical quotation. I have decided to leave the Scriptures as they appear in the original manuscripts, whether cited from memory or paraphrased, rather than correcting them to exact quotations from Scripture passages.

John Preston's work is, arguably, the classic Puritan work on prayer. The other two works by Vincent and Lee fit so nicely with it that *Soli Deo Gloria* is offering them as a trilogy on this most vital subject for today's church. Preston calls us to prayer and defines it. Vincent tells us to pray continually and gives instruction how to do that. Lee gives us the sweetness of secret prayer, then adds a section on sudden, spontaneous prayers. Combined, these three treatises give us encouragement and instruction in the duty and privilege of prayer, that "holy breathing of the soul."

May God use this book to encourage your heart to greater communion with Himself in prayer.

Dr. Don Kistler
Editor
Soli Deo Gloria Publications

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The Saint's Daily Exercise

A
Treatise
Concerning
the Whole Duty of Prayer

Delivered in Five Sermons Upon
1 Thessalonians 5:17

by the late Faithful and
Worthy Minister of Jesus Christ

John Preston

Doctor in Divinity, Chaplain to His Majesty,
Master of Emmanuel College in Cambridge,
and sometimes Preacher of Lincoln's Inn

“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous
man availeth much.” James 5:16

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord
will not hear my prayer.” Psalm 66:18

To The Reader

Courteous Reader,

To discourse of the necessity and use of this piece of spiritual armor after so many learned and useful treatises upon this subject may seem superfluous, especially considering that there is so much spoken to this purpose for your satisfaction in the ensuing treatise. Besides unfolding the nature of this duty (which is the saint's daily exercise) and strong enforcement to it, there is contained herein an endeavor to give satisfaction in the most incidental cases, lack of clearing whereof is usually a hindrance to the cheerful and ready performance thereof. In all of this, what has been done by this reverend and worthy man we would rather should appear in this treatise itself to your indifferent judgment than to be much in setting down our own opinion. We do not doubt that, by reason of the spiritual and convincing manner of handling this argument, it will win acceptance with many, especially considering that it is of that nature wherein, though much has been spoken, yet much more may be said with good relish to those who have any spiritual sense. For it is the most spiritual action wherein we have nearer communion with God than we do in any other holy performance, and whereby it pleases God to convey all good to us, their performance whereof Christians find most backwardness and indisposedness, and from thence, most dejection of spirit. In these times,

this is also most necessary wherein, unless we fetch help from heaven this way, we see the church and cause of God likely to be trampled under foot.

Only remember that we let these sermons pass forth as they were delivered by himself, in public, without taking that liberty of adding or detracting which, perhaps, some would have thought good. For we thought it best that his own meaning should be expressed in his own words and manner, especially considering that there is little which, perhaps, may be superfluous to some, but may, by God's blessing, be useful to others. It would be a good prevention of many inconveniences in this kind if able men would be persuaded to publish their own works in their lifetime, yet we think it is a good service to the church when that defect is supplied by giving some life to those things which otherwise would have died of themselves. The blessings of these labors of his we commend unto God, and the benefit of them unto you, resting

Yours in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Richard Sibbes

John Davenport

Sermon One

1 Thessalonians 5:17
“Pray continually.”

The Apostle here, in the latter end of this epistle, heaps up many precepts together, and, therefore, we shall not need to seek out the dependence of these words upon those that go before or those that follow after. “Rejoice evermore. Pray continually, in all things give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus to you wards.”

We are now fallen upon this text, where this duty of prayer is commended to us; and it is a command from God Himself delivered shortly, as laws are wont to be, without any great premises and reasons, and, indeed, having therefore the more authority in it.

In the handling of this command, “pray continually,” we will do these three things:

First, we will show you what prayer is.

Second, why the Lord requires this at our hands. For a man might object, “The Lord knows my wants well enough. He knows my mind and how I am affected.” Aye, but yet the Lord will have us to pray and to ask before He will bestow it upon us.

And, last, what it is to pray continually.

I. What prayer is. If we should define prayer in general to you, I would give you no more than this description of it. It is an expression of the mind to the

Lord. Sometimes it is by words, sometimes without words, but yet there must be an expression and some opening of the will to Him. This is the general.

But to know what a right prayer is—what such a prayer is as God accepts—you must have another definition, which must have more ingredients to it. And so prayer is nothing else but an expression or offering of those holy and good dispositions to God that arise from the spirit, or the regenerate part, in the name of Jesus Christ. Wherefore, you are to observe this: The prayers we make are divided into one of these two sorts.

First, some are such prayers as are the expression of our own spirits, the voice of our own spirits, and there is nothing but flesh in them—such prayers as any natural man may make to the Lord. And the Lord does not regard these. He does not know the meaning of them, that is, He does not accept them.

Second, there are prayers that are the voice of God's own Spirit, that is, such as arise from the regenerate part within us, which is quickened and enlarged to pray from the immediate help of the Holy Ghost. These prayers alone are accepted and, of these, it is said, "He knows the meaning of the Spirit." That is, He so knows it and sees it that He also accepts it. Therefore you shall see in Hosea 7:14 that when they prayed and prayed earnestly they set a day apart for prayer. They called a solemn assembly and kept a fast. Yet, says the Lord plainly, "Ye did not call upon Me when you howled upon your beds; for you assembled yourselves for corn and for wine, which any natural man may do." And therefore He says, it is but "a howling." It is the voice of beasts to seek for wine, oil, and

corn; but, He says plainly, “You called not upon Me” when, notwithstanding, they spent a whole day in prayer. But the meaning is this: The Lord regards this as no prayer at all.

Therefore, to open this description a little unto you, there is one main business that we have to do in the handling of this text—to describe to you the meaning of this precept as to what the nature of prayer is so that you may know what kind of prayer it is that prevails with God. I say, it is an expression of holy and good dispositions. I use that expression “dispositions” rather than “desires” because there is some part of prayer that stands in thanksgiving, when you desire nothing at God’s hand but give thanks for what you have received. Mark it, first they must be holy and good. The desires and the dispositions must be good, for that is a rule. All the affections and desires are good or evil, according as their objects are. Those that are fixed upon good things are good desires.

You will say, then, “What are the good things that make the desires and dispositions of the heart good?”

They are both temporal and spiritual things. A man may pray for temporal things in a spiritual manner, and the desire may be good. And again, he may pray for spiritual things in a carnal manner, and the desire may be naught. Therefore, it must be observed that it is not simply the object, but there is a certain manner of desiring too. For example, if a man prays for temporal things for outward comforts—such things as belong to the present state of his body here—if he prays for them so that he prays for that which is convenient for him, he prays for such a measure as God sees to be proper. Proverbs 30:8 says, “Feed me with convenient

food for me.” This prayer is good, but (if as in 1 Timothy 6:9, “if any man will be rich”) it is an inordinate desire when men will have an excess of these outward things and more than is fit for them. And again, if you desire that which is convenient and spend it upon your lusts, if you desire health and long life so that you may live more pleasantly, if you desire wealth that you may live more deliciously and not simply that which the creature may desire, to the end that you may be the more enabled to serve the Lord in these things, your desire is not good. So I say, first, it is for that which is convenient. Second, you must not spend it upon your lusts but in God’s service.

And, last, we must pray for them in a right method—first the kingdom of God and then other things. That is, set a price on them as you ought—not too high a price, but value them rightly. We should so pray for outward things as our prayers may be spiritual. On the other side, a man may pray for spiritual things in a carnal manner as he may pray for temporal things in a spiritual manner.

A natural man may pray earnestly for faith, for grace, and for repentance, not out of any beauty that he sees in them, not out of any taste and relish that he has of them but because he thinks them a bridge to lead them to heaven, and that he cannot come there without them. When he considers that he cannot be saved without these things, then he may desire them, and desire them earnestly. It was the case of Frances Spira, who cried so earnestly for grace that he might have but a drop of it because he could not be saved without it. He gave the reason himself when he said that he saw no excellency in it. He did not desire it for

himself and, therefore, he thought his prayers could not be heard. Thus you see that prayer is an expression of holy and good desires; it is an offering them up to the Lord.

I will not stand upon that (you are well-instructed enough in it), that whatsoever petition is made to the creature is not a prayer; they must be offered up to the Lord alone.

Then, I add, these prayers are such as must arise from the regenerate part; that is, look how much there is of the regenerate part in prayer. Look how much the Holy Spirit has to do in it. Look how much comes from that which is called "the inward man." As far as it is sanctified, so far that prayer is accepted and no further. But, that we may open this a little more fully, we will show you it by some other expressions of prayer that we find in the Scriptures.

It is called a lifting up of the heart to God, a "pouring forth of the soul to the Lord," 1 Samuel 1:15. Paul calls it "serving Him in spirit." Now, if we open these phrases unto you a little, you shall know more fully wherein the nature of right praying to God consists. That phrase the Apostle uses, "whom I serve in my spirit," Acts 13:21, in the original is used for fasting and prayer. Now, what is it to pray to God in the spirit? For a man may say, "A man cannot make a prayer, but there is an act of his mind in it, and every man, whatever service he performs, his spirit must have a hand in it, so it cannot be performed without the mind."

I take this to be the meaning of it. The Apostle's scope is to distinguish the true and holy services of God from those that are but shadows and counterfeit, that are but the body and carcass of right service.

Therefore, when he says "I serve the Lord in my spirit", or "I pray in the spirit", the meaning is this: When the prayer of a man is not only that which the understanding dictates to him, but when the whole soul, the will and affections, goes together with his petition a man's heart is affected accordingly.

For example, if a man comes to confess his sins, and yet slights them inwardly in his heart, if a man prays for reconciliation with God and yet has no longing and sighing in his heart after it, if he earnestly asks for grace and the mortification of sinful lusts, when the heart does not inwardly seek it, he is not now praying in the spirit. To pray in the spirit is as we see in John 4:24, "He will be worshipped in spirit and in truth." The meaning is, to pray so that the heart goes together with the petition also. This is the meaning of that when a man pours forth his soul before the Lord. So Hannah said of herself, "I am a woman troubled", and I "have poured out my soul before the Lord." That is, when a man delivers to God that which the understanding and mind have devised (for prayer is not a work of wit or of memory), when a man pours forth his whole soul, that is, his will and affections, when they go together, when there is no reservation in his mind, but when all within him is opened and explicate, and is exposed to the view of the Lord—not as Austin said of himself when he came to pray for the mortifying of his lusts. He said, "I had a secret, inward desire that it should not be done." Therefore, when the soul is poured forth, the meaning is that all is opened to him, so that, when a man will make an acceptable prayer, he must make this account; he must then call in all his thoughts and affections, and recollect them together

as the lines in the center or as the sun beams in a burning glass, and that makes prayer to be hot and fervent; whereas, otherwise, it is but a cold and dissipated thing that has no strength or efficacy in it.

Now, with all this, you must know that when we say the whole soul must go together with the petition, the meaning is that not only the will and affections must be employed (for in a natural man, in his desire of health when he is sick or lacks assistance and guidance in difficult cases, not only the understanding, but the will and affections are busy enough, it is likely), and therefore we add further that that which is called the spirit, which is diffused in the whole soul, is set to work in the performance of this holy duty to the Lord whenever we seek Him in prayer.

For this you know, there are two things in a regenerate man (for you must take for granted, by the way, that no natural man is able to make an acceptable prayer to God, seeing there is no spirit in him, but there is in the regenerate man). There is flesh and spirit. Now, when we come to pour forth our hearts to the Lord, that which lies uppermost will be ready to be poured forth first; and that which is spiritual, it may be, lies in the bottom and is kept in. And so a man may make a carnal prayer, though he is a holy man, that is, when the flesh has gotten the upper hand. When the mind is filled with worldly sorrows, worldly rejoicing, and worldly desires, and these are expressed to the Lord, it is a prayer the Lord does not regard, though the man is holy from whom it comes. But right prayer is this: when the regenerate part is acted and stirred up and the flesh that hinders is removed.

You must know this, wherever there is a regenerate

part in any man, there is a regenerate aptness in that man to call upon God, and it cannot be disengaged from it, but that is not always in action. We see a fountain, and it always has an aptness to pour forth water. It is ready to break into a current; but, if it is stopped with stones and mud, and other impediments, it cannot break out. In the same way, he who is a regenerate man, who has a holy part in him, has an aptness to prayer. That is what our Savior said, Matthew 26:41, "The spirit is willing," that is, there is always a willingness that follows the spirit, or the regenerate part in a holy man; but, He says, the flesh is backward. That is, it stops this fountain and, therefore, Romans 8:27, the Spirit is said there to help our infirmities, and to make requests for us. That is, even as a man removes stones from a fountain with his hands and, when he has done that, it breaks forth into a current, so the Holy Ghost removes this flesh that stops up the current; the Spirit takes away those carnal impediments that are in us. And not only so, but it stirs up the regenerate part and, when that is done, we are able to make spiritual prayers to God in Christ Jesus.

So that is the thing that you are now to observe. The Spirit must help our infirmities when we come to call upon God, and our prayers are as acceptable as they are the fruits of the regenerate part. Now, we want but one thing to add in the definition.

They are such prayers as are offered to God in the name of Jesus Christ. This is a thing you all know, that those prayers that are not offered up in Christ are not acceptable because the person is not regarded. It was the sin of Uzziah, in 2 Chronicles 26, that he would go to the temple, himself being a king on the throne, and

would offer incense without a priest. We do the very same thing whenever we go to offer up any prayer to God without Christ Jesus. In the old law men might bring their sacrifices, but the priest must still be the one to offer them up. So must we here; and the reason is given in Revelation 8, because the prayers that come from us savor of the flesh from which they come, and the angel of the covenant mingles much incense with them and makes them sweet and acceptable to God with much incense. That is, as the flesh is more, so there needs to be more incense so that they may be made acceptable to God the Father.

So, then, we have a double intercessor. One is the Spirit that helps our infirmities, who helps us to make our petitions, who quickens and enlarges our hearts to prayer. The other is the intercessor to make them acceptable to God, so that He may receive them and not refuse and reject them. So much shall serve for the first thing, to show you what the duty is, what a right, true, and acceptable prayer is.

II. Why we must pray. Now, for the second, why we must pray. A man may make this objection: "The Lord knows my mind well enough, what need do I have to express it by prayer?". The reasons briefly why the Lord will have us to pray are taken partly from Himself and partly from us.

1. From Himself. Though He is willing to bestow mercies upon us, yet He will have us ask His leave before He does it. This, you know, fathers do with their children. Though they intend to bestow such things upon them as are needful, yet they will have their children to ask. It is a common thing among men, though

they are willing that a man should pass through their grounds, yet they will have permission asked because, by that means, the property is acknowledged. Otherwise it would be taken as a common highway. So the Lord will have His servants to come and ask so that they may acknowledge the property He has in those gifts He bestows upon them. Indeed, otherwise we would forget in what tenure we hold those blessings we enjoy, and what service we owe to the Lord. There is an homage due to the Lord so that the Lord might be acknowledged. So the Lord will have this duty of prayer performed so that we might acknowledge Him, so that we might remember the service we ought to do for Him, to rise and go at His command, that is, to do His service which we would be ready to forget if we were not accustomed to the duty of calling on Him.

Likewise, He will have it done for His honor's sake. He will have men call upon Him so that they might learn to reverence Him and, likewise, so that others might be stirred up to reverence Him, to honor Him, and to fear Him. The servants of a prince, doing honor and reverence to their Lord, stir up those who are looking on.

As the schoolmen say of glory, glory is properly this: not when a man has an excellency in him (for he may have and yet be without glory), but glory is an ostentation, a showing of that excellency. It is the phrase that is used in the Sacrament. You are to celebrate the Sacrament that you may show forth the Lord's death. So the Lord will have us come and call upon His name to show forth the duty of prayer, and that we may show forth His glory. This is for the Lord Himself.

2. For ourselves. We are to do it partly that the

graces of His Spirit may be increased in us, for prayer exercises our graces. Every grace is exercised in prayer, and these graces, being exercised, are increased. See an excellent place for this in Jude 20, "That you beloved edify yourselves in the holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost." It is as if he should say, "The way to edify yourselves and build yourselves up is to pray in the Holy Ghost"—that is, spiritual prayer made through the power, assistance, and strength of the Holy Ghost. Every such prayer builds us up, it increases. Every grace in us—faith, repentance, love, obedience, and fear—are all increased by prayer. Partly because they are exercised and set to work in prayer—for the very exercises increases them—and partly, also, because prayer brings us to communion with God. Now, if good company increases grace, how much more will communion with the Lord Himself quicken and increase it?

Moreover, this duty is required that we may be acquainted with God, for there is a strangeness between the Lord and us when we do not call upon His name. It is the command which you shall find in Job 22:21, "Acquaint thyself with the Lord that thou mayest have peace with Him, and thou shalt have prosperity." Now, you know how acquaintance grows among men. It is by conversing together, by speaking to one another. On the other side, we say when that is broken off, when they do not salute, when they do not speak together, a strangeness grows. So it is in this.

When we come to the Lord and are frequent and fervent in this duty of calling upon Him, we grow acquainted with Him. Without it, we grow to be strangers and the Lord dwells far off. We are not able to behold

Him unless we are accustomed to it. And the more we come into His presence, the more we are acquainted with Him. Therefore, that is another reason why we should use this, that we may get acquainted with the Lord.

Likewise, we should pray that we may learn to be thankful to Him for those mercies we have received from Him. For if God should bestow mercies upon us unasked we would forget them. His hand would not be acknowledged in them, and we would not see His providence in disposing those blessings that we enjoy. But when we come to ask everything before Him, we are then ready to see His hand more, to prize it more, and we are more disposed to thankfulness. So this is a sure rule commonly: What we win with prayer, we wear with thankfulness. And what we get without prayer, we spend and use without any lifting up of the heart to God in praising Him, and acknowledging His hand in bestowing it upon us. So you see what this duty is, and why the Lord will have this duty performed.

III. What it is to pray continually. The word in the original signifies such a performance of this duty that you do not cease to do it at such times as God requires it at your hands. Compare this with that verse in 2 Timothy 1:3. The Apostle said there that he has him in continual remembrance, praying for him night and day. The same word is used here. Now we cannot think that the Apostle had Timothy in continual remembrance, that he was never out of his thoughts, but the meaning is that when he did call upon God from day to day, He still remembered him. So to pray continually is to pray very much, to pray at those times when

God requires us to pray.

Philosophers give this definition of idleness: A man is said to be idle when he does not do that which he ought in the time in which it is required of him. He is an idle man who does not work when he ought to work. So he is said not to pray continually who does not pray when he ought to pray. So I conceive this to be the meaning of the Apostle, "Rejoice evermore." But when he comes to this exhortation of prayer, he does not content himself to say "pray very often" but "pray continually." When we would have a thing done frequently, we would say that you are always to be doing it. So the Apostle's scope is to show that it should be done frequently and that it should be done much. Hence, we gather this, by the way, that we are bound to keep our constant course of calling upon God at least twice a day, whatever more we do.

But, you will say, what ground have you for that? Why do you say twice a day?

The ground of it is this: When the Apostle bids us to pray continually, to do it very often, the least we can do it is twice a day. We may do it more often, but this, I say, is the least. When we have such a command as this, when we have such a precept as this, to pray continually, and this rule is illuminated by such examples as we have in the Scriptures, why is it recorded if it is not true of every example in that kind that is said of the general example, 1 Corinthians 10:11, "they are written for our learning"? It is said that Daniel prayed often. Daniel expressly, in Daniel 6:10, is said to have prayed three times a day. That was his constant course.

I say, we may think we are bound to do it at least twice a day. Consider a little why we are bound to do it.

In the temple, you know, the Lord was worshipped twice a day. There was the morning and the evening sacrifice. What was the ground of that commandment? There was no reason for it but that the Lord might be worshipped, and that was the time that He would have it done, twice a day, morning and evening. But, besides that, it was not only that the Lord might be worshipped (wherein we should follow that example of worshipping Him morning and evening), but likewise our occasions are such that this is the least we can do to call upon Him constantly morning and evening.

There is no day where we do not use many of His blessings and take many of His comforts. Now we may not take any of them without His permission, so that you are bound to ask for them before you take them, and pray for a blessing upon them, or else you have no right to them. You have no lawful use of them, that place is plain, 1 Timothy 4, "Every creature of God is good, and ought not to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by prayer." So that, if you take common blessings every day, and do not seek them at the Lord's hands before you take them, they are not sanctified unto you. You do not have a lawful use of them. You have no right unto them.

Besides, my beloved, it is that which the Lord commands in everything. "Make your requests known in everything." That is, whenever you need anything, make your requests known; so "in everything give thanks." And, therefore, the least we can do when we have received, and need, so many mercies, is to give thanks and to seek Him so often from day to day.

Moreover, do not our hearts need it? Are they not ready to go out of order? Are they not ready to con-

tract hardness, are they not ready to go from the Lord and to be hardened from God's fear? Therefore, this duty is needful in that regard to compose them and bring them back again into order.

Moreover, do not the sins we commit daily put a necessity upon us of doing this so that they may be forgiven and done away with, so that we may be reconciled to God again? Therefore, do not think that it is an arbitrary thing to call upon God twice a day because there is no particular or expressed command. For, if you consider these places that I have named, and the reasons, we shall see there is a necessity that lies upon us to do it. So much shall serve for that. I now come to make some use of this that has been delivered.

USES

First, in that such prayers as the Lord accepts are an expression of holy duties, such desires as rise from the regenerate part of a man. Hence, then, we see that all natural men are in a miserable condition when times of extremity come, and when the day of death comes, when there is no help in the world but seeking the Lord, when all the creatures forsake them, and are not able to help them; and there is no way to go to the Lord but by prayer. If prayer is an effect and fruit of the regenerate part of a man, a carnal man is not able to help himself—he is in a miserable condition. Therefore, let men consider this that puts all off to times of extremity. Put the case, you have warning enough at such a time. Put the case, you have the use of your understanding, yet you are not able to do any

good without this. For if there is not grace in the heart you are not able to make a spiritual prayer to the Lord that He accepts. Therefore, take heed of deferring and putting off. Labor to be regenerate, to have your hearts renewed, while you have time. And if you are not able to call upon God in the time of health, how will you do it when your wits and your spirit are spent and lost, and when you are in times of sickness and extremity? Therefore, let that be considered which we are only touching on briefly.

Second, if the Lord commands us to "pray continually," then take heed of neglecting this duty. Rather, be exhorted to be frequent and fervent in it, to continue therein, and watch thereto with all perseverance. It is a common fault among us that either we are ready to omit it, or to come to it unwillingly, or else we perform it in a careless and negligent manner, not considering what a command lies upon the sons of men to perform it constantly and conscionably.

I beseech you to consider that this is a privilege purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. Christ died for this end, it cost Him the shedding of His blood, so that we, through Him, might have entrance to the throne of grace. And will you let such a privilege as this lie still? If you do, so far as is in you, you cause His blood to be shed in vain. For if you neglect the privileges gotten by that blood, so far you neglect the blood that procured them. But to neglect this duty is to neglect that. Besides, if we ask you the reason why you abstain from other sins, why you do not steal, why you do not commit adultery and murder, the reason you give is that the Lord has commanded you not to do those things. Has not the Lord commanded you to pray con-

stantly, pray at all times?

If you make conscience of one commandment, why do you not of another? Consider Daniel in this case, Daniel 6. He would not omit a constant course of prayer. He did it three times a day, and that was his ordinary custom. If he would not omit it to spare his life, if he would not omit it in such a case of danger as that, why will you omit it for business, for a little advantage, for a little gain, for a little wealth, or pomp, or pleasure, or whatever may draw you from that duty? Do but consider what an unreasonable, and how unequal, a thing it is that when the Lord gives us meat, drink, and clothes from day to day, when He gives us sleep every night, when He provides for us such comforts as we have need of (as there is not the least creature that does us any service but as far as He sets it to work to do that service), for us to forget Him and not give Him thanks, and not to ask these things at His hands, not to seek him but to live as without God in the world, as we do when we neglect this duty, is a profession of living without God in the world. We are strangers to Him. It is open rebellion against Him. Therefore, take heed of omitting it.

Besides all this, we should do it for our own sakes, if we consider what use we have of this duty for ourselves. Is it not the key that opens all God's treasures? When heaven was shut up, was not this the key that opened it? When the wombs were shut up, was not this that opened it? You know, Elijah prayed for rain, so we may pray for every other blessing. All God's treasures are locked up to those that do not call upon His name. This opens the door to them all. Whatever they are that we have occasion to use, this is effectual. It does

better than anything besides.

If a man is sick, I will be bold to say it, a faithful prayer is more able to heal his disease than the best medicine. "The prayer of faith shall heal the sick," James 5:5. You know, the woman that had the bloody issue, when she had spent all upon physicians and they could do no good, then she came to Christ and offered faithful prayer to Him. That did it when so many years of medicine could not do it. Beloved, if there is a prince or a great man whose mind we would have turned towards us, a faithful prayer will do it sooner than the best friends. So it was with Nehemiah. You know his request, that the Lord would give him favor in the sight of the man. If we are in any strait, as it was in Joseph's case, if we have any difficult matter to bring to pass, this prayer and seeking the Lord will expedite and set us at liberty sooner. It will find a way to bring it about more than all the wits in the world because it sets God to work. You have no power to do anything.

Certainly, a praying Christian who is prevalent and potent with God is able to do more than all the riches in the world. Riches set the devil to work, but prayer sets God to work. It sets Him to work to do us good and to heal us, to deliver us out of extremities. Therefore, I say, for our own sakes, even out of self-love and for common comforts, you need to do this. Certainly, if these things were believed (you hear them, you give us the hearing for the time, but if they were believed), many would be more frequent in this duty. They would not be so negligent in it or come to it in so careless a manner as this.

Besides, I beseech you to consider this. Every man desires joy and comfort, and one thing that commonly

keeps us off from this duty is sports and pleasures, one thing or another that we take delight in which dampens and hinders us in these things, in spiritual performances. Prayer is the best way of all others to fill your heart with joy, as we see in John 16:24. He said there, "In my name you have asked nothing hitherto, but now ask that your joy may be full." This is one motive that Christ uses to exhort us to be frequent in this duty, that our joy may be full. That I take to be the meaning of James 5:13, "If any be sad, let him pray." Not only because prayer is suitable to such a disposition, but likewise it will cheer him up. It is the way to get comfort. So it is in Philippians 4:6, "In all things, make your requests known, and the peace of God shall keep you in the communion of Jesus Christ." That is it that brings peace and quietness, and, therefore, there is much reason why we should be constant in this duty. It is that which quickens us, it is that which fills us with peace and joy and comfort, and with that peace which is what everyone desires.

Moreover, consider it is your buckler. Prayer is the helmet that keeps you safe. When a man neglects it, when he ceases to go to God in prayer, when he once shows himself to be a stranger to the Lord by neglecting this duty, then he is out of the pales of his protection, like the moles that go out of their burrows. For so is the Lord to those who pray. The Lord is a protection to those who call upon His name. The very calling upon His name is a running under God's wings, as it were, putting our souls under His shadow; but when you neglect that, you wander abroad from Him.

Now, do we not need protection from outward dangers from day to day? Do we not need to be kept

from the inward danger of sin and temptation? Surely, prayer is one part of the spiritual armor, as we see in Ephesians 6. In the complete armor of God, prayer is reckoned up the last, as that which buckles up all the rest. The Apostle says, "Continue in prayer, and watch with perseverance." And you have all the more reason to do it, because it is not only a part of this armor, but it enables you to use all the rest, to use the Word and to use faith. For prayer stirs them all up.

What is it to have armor and not to have it ready? Now prayer makes it ready. Therefore, you see Christ prescribes the same rule in Matthew 26:41: "Pray that ye enter not into temptation", as if that were the way to secure and shelter us, and to keep us safe from falling into temptation. It is a thing I would advise you to, to pray and to seek the Lord continually. Therefore, if we should use only this reason to you to be constant in this duty, because it is for your safety, it would be sufficient.

When a man is as a city whose walls are broken down, when he lies exposed to temptation, he is in a dangerous case. So I may use this dilemma to you if you have a good disposition, if you think thus: "I hope I am well enough. I am not now exposed to any temptation; I fear nothing."

Make this argument against yourself, "Why do I neglect so good a gale? If my heart is so well disposed to pray, why do I then omit it? Again, if there is an indisposition in me, why do I hazard myself?"

What if Satan should set upon you? What if the world should set upon you? What suitable temptations, agreeable to your lusts, are offered? Are you not in danger? And, therefore, a constant course should be

kept in it. We should take heed of negligence in it.

And will a man now profess that he hopes he is the servant of God, and in a good estate, although he does not pray as much as others (we speak not of frequency simply, but of such a performance as is required), I say, to profess that you are a servant of Christ, and that you love Him, and that He is your husband, and that you are His servant, and yet you do not call upon Him from day to day. This is an idle thing. It is impossible.

If you loved Him, you would express yourself in calling upon His name. Shall a friend who is but an acquaintance to us, in whom we delight, come to us (we are willing to spend many hours with him), and shall we profess ourselves to be friends of God, and Him to be a friend to us, and that we delight in Him, and yet neglect this duty?

This is a common thing among you. When you see a man who meditates all his matters himself, or if he opens his mind and tells them to somebody else, it must be such a one as professes to be a friend to him. Now, if this friend should never hear from him, nor ever speak to him, or if he does it is in such a negligent manner as it may appear that he does not trust him, and he does it so shortly that he can scarcely tell what his business is, I say, in such a case, would you not reckon his profession of friendship to be an idle and empty profession?

Now, apply it to yourself. Those who say they have communion with God, and hope their estate is good enough, stand in good terms with Him. But yet, if they are in any necessity, for all the matters and occasions that fall out from day to day, either they think of them in themselves, or they are apt enough to declare them

to man. Or, if they go to God, they do it negligently. They post over the matter so as they have scarcely any leisure to express themselves and their doings. Do you think He will take such for friends? And do you think that this is a true, sound, and hearty profession? Therefore, to end this, I beseech you to consider it, and take heed of being remiss and negligent in it. You see, it is a command from the Lord, "Pray continually."

And so much for this time.

Sermon Two

1 Thessalonians 5:17
"Pray continually."

Not to repeat what has been delivered, but to press this point on us a little further (for what is more necessary than that we should keep a constant course in this duty, since the very life of religion consists in it?), I add this to all I pressed in the morning, that if you neglect it, it exposes you to great disadvantage, both for the outward man, and for the inward man, and there are but these two that you need to care for.

For the outward man, it deprives you of the blessing. Put the case, you have never so good success in your enterprises. Put the case, you have outward comforts in abundance, yet still the blessing is lacking and, not only so, but it uncovers the roof, as it were, and the curse is rained down upon your tables, upon your meat and drink, upon all the endeavors and enterprises you take in hand. We do not consider what we do when we neglect this duty, what dangers we expose ourselves to from day to day. For it is one thing to have outward comforts, and another thing to have the blessing with them.

Besides, consider what loss you suffer in the inward man when you neglect this duty at any time, for the inward man is ready to be distempered and to go out of order. It is ready to contract hardness, to contract soil. Spiritual grace is ready to decay. It falls out with a