

# The Ministration of the Spirit and Prayer

by Andrew Murray

“If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” – Luke 11:13.

Christ had just said (5:9), “Ask, and it shall be given”: God’s giving is inseparably connected with our asking. He applies this especially to the Holy Spirit. As surely as a father on earth gives bread to his child, so God gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. The whole ministration of the Spirit is ruled by the one great law: God must give, we must ask. When the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost with a flow that never ceases, it was in answer to prayer. The inflow into the believer’s heart, and His outflow in the rivers of living water, ever still depend upon the law: “Ask, and it shall be given.” In connection with our confession of the lack of prayer, we have said that what we need is some due apprehension of the place it occupies in God’s plan of redemption; we shall perhaps nowhere see this more clearly than in the first half of the Acts of the Apostles. The story of the birth of the Church in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and of the first freshness of its heavenly life in the power of that Spirit, will teach us how prayer on earth, whether as cause or effect, is the true measure of the presence of the Spirit of heaven.

We begin with the well-known words (Acts 1:14), “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.” And then there follows: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. And the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls.” The great work of redemption had been accomplished. The Holy Spirit had been promised by Christ “not many days hence.” He had sat down on His throne and received the Spirit from the Father. But all this was not enough. One thing more was needed: the ten days’ united continued supplication of the disciples. It was intense, continued prayer that prepared the disciples’ hearts, that opened the windows of heaven, that brought down the promised gift. As little as the power of the Spirit could be given without Christ sitting on the throne, could it descend without the disciples on the footstool of the throne. For all the ages the law is laid down here, at the birth of the Church, that whatever else may be found on earth the power of the Spirit must be prayed down from heaven. The measure of believing, continued prayer will be the measure of the Spirit’s working in the Church. Direct, definite, determined prayer is what we need.

See how this is confirmed in chapter 4. Peter and John had been brought before the Council and threatened with punishment. When they returned to their brethren, and reported what had been said to them, “all lifted up their voice to God with one accord,” and prayed for boldness to speak the word. “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were one heart and one soul. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all.” It is as if the story of Pentecost is repeated a second time over, with the prayer, the shaking of the house, the filling with the Spirit, the speaking God’s word with boldness and power, the great grace upon all, the manifestation of unity and love – to imprint it ineffaceably on the heart of the Church: it is prayer that lies at the root of the spiritual life and power of the Church. The measure of God’s giving the Spirit is our asking. He gives as a father to him who asks a child.

Go on to the sixth chapter. There we find that, when murmurings arose as to the neglect of the Grecian Jews in the distribution of alms, the apostles proposed the appointment of deacons to serve the tables. “We,” they said, “will give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.” It is often said, and rightly said, that there is nothing in honest business, when it is kept in its place as entirely subordinate to the kingdom, which must ever be first, that need prevent fellowship with God. Least of all ought a work like ministering to the

poor hinder the spiritual life. And yet the apostles felt it would hinder them in their giving themselves to the ministry of prayer and the word. What does this teach? That the maintenance of the spirit of prayer, such as is consistent with the claims of much work, is not enough for those who are the leaders of the Church. To keep up the communication with the King on the throne and the heavenly world clear and fresh; to draw down the power and blessing of that world, not only for the maintenance of our own spiritual life, but for those around us; continually to receive instruction and empowerment for the great work to be done – the apostles, as the ministers of the word, felt the need of being free from other duties, that they might give themselves to much prayer. James writes: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.” If ever any work were a sacred one, it was that of caring for these Grecian widows. And yet, even such duties might interfere with the special calling to give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. As on earth, so in the kingdom of heaven, there is power in the division of labour; and while some, like the deacons, had specially to care for serving tables and ministering the alms of the Church here on earth, others had to be set free for that steadfast continuance in prayer which would uninterruptedly secure the down flow of the powers of the heavenly world. The minister of Christ is set apart to give himself as much to prayer as to the ministry of the word. In faithful obedience to this law is the secret of the Church’s power and success. As before, so after Pentecost, the apostles were men given up to prayer.

In chapter 8, we have the intimate connection between the Pentecostal gift and prayer, from another point of view. At Samaria, Philip had preached with great blessing, and many had believed. But the Holy Ghost was, as yet, fallen on none of them. The apostles sent down Peter and John to pray for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost. The power for such prayer was a higher gift than preaching – the work of the men who had been in closest contact with the Lord in glory, the work that was essential to the perfection of the life that preaching and baptism, faith and conversion had only begun. Surely of all the gifts of the early Church for which we should long there is none more needed than the gift of prayer – prayer that brings down the Holy Ghost on believers. This power is given to men who say: “We will give ourselves to prayer.”

In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, in the house of Cornelius at Caesarea, we have another testimony to the wondrous interdependence of the action of prayer and the Spirit, and another proof of what will come to a man who has given himself to prayer. Peter went up at midday to pray on the housetop. And what happened? He saw heaven opened, and there came the vision that revealed to him the cleansing of the Gentiles; with that came the message of the three men from Cornelius, a man who “prayed always,” and had heard from an angel, “Thy prayers are come up before God”; and then the voice of the Spirit was heard saying, “Go with them.” It is Peter praying, to whom the will of God is revealed, to whom guidance is given as to going to Caesarea, and who is brought into contact with a praying and prepared company of hearers. No wonder that in answer to all this prayer a blessing comes beyond all expectation, and the Holy Ghost is poured out upon the Gentiles. A much-praying minister will receive an entrance into God’s will he would otherwise know nothing of; will be brought to praying people where he does not expect them; will receive blessing above all he asks or thinks. The teaching and the power of the Holy Ghost are alike unalterably linked to prayer.

Our next reference will show us faith in the power that the Church’s prayer has with its glorified King, as it is found, not only in the apostles, but in the Christian community. In chapter 12 we have the story of Peter in prison on the eve of execution. The death of James had aroused the Church to a sense of real danger, and the thought of losing Peter too, wakened up all its energies. It betook itself to prayer. “Prayer was made of the Church without ceasing to God for him.” That prayer availed much; Peter was delivered. When he came to the house of Mary, he found “many gathered together praying.” Stone walls and double chains, soldiers and keepers, and the iron gate, all gave way before the power from heaven that prayer brought down to his rescue. The whole power of the Roman Empire, as represented by Herod, was impotent in presence of the power of the Church of the Holy Spirit wielded in prayer. They stood in such close and living communication with their Lord in heaven; they knew so well that the words, “all power is given unto Me,” and “Lo I am with

you always," were absolutely true; they had such faith in His promise to hear them whatever they asked - that they prayed in the assurance that the powers of heaven could work on earth, and would work at their request and on their behalf. The Pentecostal Church believed in prayer, and practised it.

Just one more illustration of the place and the blessing of prayer among men filled with the Holy Spirit. In chapter 13 we have the names of five men at Antioch who had given themselves specially to ministering to the Lord with prayer and fasting. Their giving themselves to prayer was not in vain: as they ministered to the Lord, the Holy Spirit met them, and gave them new insight into God's plans. He called them to be fellow-workers with Himself; there was a work to which He had called Barnabas and Saul; their part and privilege would be to separate these men with renewed fasting and prayer, and to let them go, "sent forth of the Holy Ghost." God in heaven would not send forth His chosen servants without the co-operation of His Church; men on earth were to have a real partnership in the work of God. It was prayer that fitted and prepared them for this; it was to praying men the Holy Ghost gave authority to do His work and use His name. It was to prayer the Holy Ghost was given. It is still prayer that is the only secret of true Church extension, that is guided from heaven to find and send forth God-called and God-empowered men. To prayer the Holy Spirit will show the men He has selected; to prayer that sets them apart under His guidance He will give the honour of knowing that they are men, "sent forth by the Holy Ghost." It is prayer that is the link between the King on the throne and the Church at His footstool - the human link that has its divine strength in the power of the Holy Ghost, who comes in answer to it.

As one looks back upon these chapters in the history of the Pentecostal Church, how clear the two great truths stand out: where there is much prayer there will be much of the Spirit; where there is much of the Spirit there will be ever-increasing prayer. So clear is the living connection between the two, that when the Spirit is given in answer to prayer it ever awakens more prayer to prepare for the fuller revelation and communication of His Divine power and grace. If prayer was thus the power by which the Primitive Church flourished and triumphed, is it not the one need of the Church of our days? Let us learn what ought to be counted axioms in our Church work:-

Heaven is still as full of stores of spiritual blessing as it was then.

God still delights to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.

Our life and work are still as dependant on the direct impartation of Divine power as they were in Pentecostal times.

Prayer is still the appointed means for drawing down these heavenly blessings in power on ourselves and those around us.

God still seeks for men and women who will, with their other work of ministering, specially give themselves to persevering prayer.

And we - you, my reader, and I - may have the privilege of offering ourselves to God to labour in prayer, and bring down these blessings to this earth. Shall we not beseech God to make all this truth so living in us that we may not rest till it has mastered us, and our whole heart be so filled with it, that the practice of intercession shall be counted by us our highest privilege, and we find in it the sure and only measure for blessing on ourselves, on the Church, and on the world?

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