

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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### The Christian's Armor: All Prayer (Part 2)

The expression that Paul uses in 6:18 “praying at all times in the Spirit” closely parallels that of Jude 20 “pray in the Holy Spirit.” Recently my friend Danny Hyde, the pastor of Oceanside United Reformed Church highlighted the way the Puritans, especially Thomas Manton, (one of the Westminster divines) understood this. “In his *A Practical Commentary: or An Exposition with Notes on the Epistle of Jude*, Thomas Manton gave a clear exposition (Manton, *Works* 5, 334-341). According to Manton, the importance of praying ‘in the Holy Ghost’ was that ‘God will own nothing in prayer but what cometh from his spirit; any other voice is strange and barbarous to him’ (Manton, *Works* 5, 336). This was a common Puritan theme, which John Owen also expressed in these words: ‘It is the language of faith and love alone, and the like graces of his Spirit, that God hears in his worship. Other voices, cries, and noises he regards not; yea, at least, if not some of them in themselves, yet all of them when these are wanting, are an abomination unto him’ (Owen, *Works* 9, 74). In sum, since prayer in the Spirit is the only kind of prayer God receives, believers need to offer it. Yet Manton went on to say that it is ‘a work too hard for us.’ This is why believers need the Holy Spirit: ‘we can babble of ourselves, but we cannot pray without the Holy Ghost; we can put words into prayer, but it is the Spirit that puts affections, without which it is but a little cold prattle and spiritless talk’ (Manton, *Works* 5, 337).

Manton went on to explain this Spirit-filled prayer in some detail in terms of what the Christian was given by the Spirit in Christ in contrast with what mankind lost in Adam. Adam ‘maimed’ humanity in terms of God’s gifts and graces. Because of this, and in order that believers’ prayers ‘may be answerable, the Spirit bestoweth upon us the gift of prayer’ (Manton, *Works* 5, 337-338). These gifts were both extraordinary in the days of the apostles as well as ordinary now in the lives of all believers. Of these ordinary gifts in relation to prayer, Manton described them as ‘special dexterity whereby men are able to put their meaning into apt words.’ As ordinary gifts, the Holy Spirit uses the ordinary means of the lives of Christians to bring them about: hearing, reading, and meditating upon the Word, as well as conference with believers and other ordinary habits (Manton, *Works* 5, 338).

Finally, Manton detailed how the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in prayer was either habitual or actual. The habitual assistance of the Spirit was his work whereby he implanted a new *habitus* into his new creatures that they might pray to him as they ought; a duty they could not perform previously. He ‘createth and preserveth these gracious habits in the soul, and doth excite the soul to act, and doth assist it in acting according to them’ (Manton, *Works* 5, 233; cf. 12, 235). This habitus he described elsewhere as ‘the renewed soul’ that was ‘the proper inward and vital principle’ of all the new actions of believers (Manton, *Works* 5, 232). Manton’s concern, though, was with actual assistance of the Spirit, saying that although believers are regenerated and have a new *habitus* of prayer, they still needed to be ‘moved and assisted by the Holy Ghost’ (Manton, *Works* 5, 339). His movement of the believer was in terms of the time of prayer, the matter of prayer, as well as the manner of prayer in affection, confidence, and reverence (Manton, *Works* 5, 339-340).

In a word, praying ‘in the Spirit’ for Puritans such as Manton, meant that the child of God prayed because the Spirit of God gave him the ability to pray and to do so in complete reliance upon the Spirit himself.”<sup>11</sup>

I think that Manton and the rest of the Puritans were spot on. Let’s examine how biblical prayer illustrates Manton’s point by first turning to Moses. Moses had ascended Mt. Sinai where he received the Law, written by the finger of God, on two tablets of stone. Moses’ descent from the mountain, however, was not triumphant.

God told Moses to quickly return to the camp because the Israelites were already forsaking the covenant and debasing themselves in idolatry. God, in covenantal faithfulness, executed judgment (Ex. 32:19-35). Would the apostate nation be utterly destroyed? Moses ascends once more to the top of Mt. Sinai to intercede for the people.

## I. WHAT MOSES PRAYS AGAINST

Moses' intercession is a noble example of selflessness in prayer. He seeks no glory for himself. In fact, he deliberately avoids seeking anything for himself.

A. His Own Honor: God's anger at the rebellious nation was such that He informs Moses that He would start all over and would make Moses the new founder of a nation. Moses would be the new Abraham (Ex. 32:9, 10). Edmund Clowney observes, "Don't pass quickly over what that offer could mean to Moses. Had not this idolatrous people renounced his leadership? Had they not grumbled, complained, even threatened to court martial and stone him for following God's directions? From the beginning, God had identified himself as the God of Abraham. Now he would be the God of Moses, and of the children of Moses."<sup>2</sup> Moses is emphatic in his rejection of this offer, and gives three reasons:

(1). God's name and glory would suffer amongst the nations. (2). God's faithfulness to His promise is at stake. (3). Moses' life would be meaningless if Israel was destroyed.

B. God's Own Compromise: Not only did Moses pray against his own honor, he also prayed against God's proposed compromise. God declared that He would not destroy the nation, but he also declared that He would not go in the midst of Israel. Instead the angel of God's presence would be there instead (this particular angel is described in (Ex. 23:20, 21). The difference was this: would God only go before them to lead them, or would He dwell amongst them? Moses passionately implores God to remember His covenant promise (Ex. 34:9).

## II. WHAT MOSES PRAYS FOR

Moses does not offer excuses, or plead better performance in days ahead. He does not try to defend Israel's idolatry by putting the golden calf in a cultural context, or by repeating Aaron's lame defense. He does not plead what he has done for the Lord, but rather what the Lord has done for him: called him, known him by name, chosen him to lead the people (Ex. 33:12, 13).<sup>3</sup>

A. God in the Midst: What was it that distinguished Israel from all other nations? It certainly was not anything in them. What made them different was their God who was present with them. Without God's presence, the Promised Land loses its meaning. Moses understood this all too clearly. Only God's presence can offer the *rest* that the land so richly symbolizes (Ex. 33:14, 15).

B. The Blessings of His Presence: We often hear people pray "and Lord just be with our brother Bob as he travels..." What are we praying for when we ask the Lord "to be with" someone? When Moses seeks to have the blessing of God's presence he immediately prays that he may *know* the Lord (Ex. 33:12, 13). Moses seeks more than the cloud of glory moving before the march. He would have personal knowledge of the Lord. He would know the Lord, because the Lord says that he knows him. Here is the tie that will bind the Lord to his people: the personal fellowship of the mediator with the Lord. Moses also prays that he may know the Lord's ways. He would have the Lord reveal his purposes—a moving prayer that bears witness to Moses' conviction that God's purposes are at last gracious toward his people (Jer. 29:11). God's 'ways' are revealed in his Name, the declaration of who he is for his people. Moses prays to the God of the burning bush to complete the revelation he then began. The knowledge of God which Moses requests refers to a personal or intimate knowledge that is rooted in God's character. This in turn stems from the fact that Moses has found favor in the eyes of God (cf. Ex. 20:4-6; 3:21, and Gen. 6:8). The Hebrew word for *favor* "is derived from a verb that indicates the showing of unmerited kindness; the word thus indicates condescending, free, and gracious kindness, goodness not based on obligation."<sup>4</sup> Finally, note the connection with Moses' desire to see the glory of God (Ex. 33:18) and this association with God's presence.

## III. HOW GOD ANSWERS

Moses' prayer cannot be fully answered—he cannot see the face of God and live. What God does give Moses "is quite specifically *not* the *sight* of his beauty, his glory, his Presence—that, indeed, he pointedly denies. What he gives rather is a *description*, and at that, a description

not of how he *looks* but of how he is.”<sup>5</sup> What Moses desired in knowing God is granted in the display of God’s glory as manifested in His sovereign grace (Ex. 24:6, 7).

**CONCLUSION:** Why do we pray? What happens when we pray? Many people have a decidedly mystical notion when it comes to prayer. They pray to bring about changes in themselves. Prayer here primarily is something that will transform the consciousness. It is a method of discipline, like meditation or chanting that enables a person to attain bliss or tranquility. This is *not* the Biblical understanding of prayer. Granted things do happen to us when we pray as the Bible instructs us. The Psalms are full of prayers that show us that prayer does relieve the troubled mind (Ps. 102). In the Scriptures, prayer is depicted as that which consists of personal communication and communion with the Living God. Prayer does bring about changes because God changes things in answer to prayer. Abraham Kuyper, that great Dutch theologian, put his finger on this aspect of prayer when he wrote, “Through foolish prayer we come to purified prayers. Through earthly prayer we come to those holier ones, which have been watered with dew from above and which radiated sunlight of a higher order. And such is the case with individual, particular prayers. These too, are not at once purified and made perfect. These, too, go through a process in the soul. These, too, spring up from a root, and only by degrees develop themselves into prayer such as our Father who is in heaven expects of His child; prayer which is not merely a sound of the lips, but rise from the depths of the heart; prayer, in which one’s own sense and inclination agree; prayer in which not merely a spontaneous thought but our whole person expresses itself; prayer, in which in very truth the soul pours itself before the Holy One.”<sup>6</sup> Prayer cannot be formalistic and mechanical if it is to truly conform to the Biblical pattern. In the episode recorded in our text Moses’ intercession for the nation of Israel captures the essence of this important aspect of Biblical prayer. What Moses sought from God reaches its fulfillment in the person of Christ. The dwelling of God with man is in Christ’s incarnation. Here is where the Glory of God is revealed. Moses’ face shone as he came down from the mountain. We reflect as in a mirror the glory of the Lord in the face of Christ (II Cor. 3:18; 4:6). This is what is at the center of “praying in the Spirit.”

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.meetthepuritans.com/2010/07/08/praying-in-the-spirit-puritan-style>.

<sup>2</sup> E. Clowney, *Leaders at Prayer: Messages by the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary in California Given During the Fall of 1990 Week of Prayer* (WTS, 1990), p.2. I am indebted to Dr. Clowney for the substance of this outline.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>4</sup> W.H. Gispen, *Bible Student’s Commentary: Exodus* (Zondervan, 1982), p. 307.

<sup>5</sup> J. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Exodus* (Word, 1987), p. 452.

<sup>6</sup> A. Kuyper, *To Be Near Unto God* (rpt. P & R, 1979), p. 47.