

Lecture v. - the Prayer of Faith.

by Charles Finney

Faith is an indispensable condition of prevailing prayer, and we are to believe that we shall receive the very thing we ask for when we pray.

Scripture: Matthew 7:7, Mark 11:24, Hebrews 11:6, James 1:5

Topics: "Prevailing Prayer", "Faith in Prayer"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the significance of faith in prayer, arguing that true prayer must be grounded in a strong belief that God will grant the specific requests made. He illustrates this through the example of Jesus cursing the fig tree and teaching His disciples about the power of faith, asserting that faith is essential for prevailing prayer. Finney explains that believers should not only trust in God's existence but also in His willingness to answer their prayers, and he encourages Christians to seek evidence from Scripture to support their faith. He addresses common objections to the prayer of faith and stresses the importance of living a holy life, cherishing good desires, and persevering in prayer to receive God's blessings.

Transcript

TEXT. --"Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." --MARK xi. 24.

THESE words have been by some supposed to refer exclusively to the faith of miracles. But there is not the least evidence of this. That the text was not designed by our Saviour to refer exclusively to the faith of miracles, is proved by the connection in which it stands. If you read the chapter, you will see that Christ and his apostles were at this time very much engaged in their work, and very prayerful; and as they returned from their places of retirement in the morning, faint and hungry, they saw a fig-tree at a little distance. It looked very beautiful, and doubtless gave signs of having fruit on it; but when they came nigh, they found nothing on it but leaves. And Jesus said, "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.

"And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots.

"And Peter, calling to remembrance, saith unto him, Master, behold the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away.

"And Jesus answering, saith unto them, have faith in God.

"For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith."

Then follow the words of the text:

"Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

Our Saviour was desirous of giving his disciples instructions respecting the nature and power of prayer, and the necessity of strong faith in God. He therefore stated a very strong case, a miracle--one so great as the removal of a mountain into the sea. And he tells them, that if they exercise a proper faith in God, they might do such things. But his remarks are not to be limited to faith merely in regard to working miracles, for he goes on to say,

"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any, that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

"But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

Does that relate to miracles? When you pray, you must forgive. Is that required only when a man wishes to work a miracle? There are many other promises in the Bible nearly related to this, and speaking nearly the same language, which have been all disposed of in this short-handed way, as referring to the faith employed in miracles. Just as if the faith of miracles was something different from faith in God!

In my last lecture, I dwelt upon the subject of "prevailing prayer;" and you will recollect that I passed over the subject of faith in prayer very briefly, because I wished to reserve it for a separate discussion. The subject to-night is,

THE PRAYER OF FAITH.

I propose,

- I. To show that faith is an indispensable condition of prevailing prayer.
- II. Show what it is that we are to believe when we pray.
- III. Show when we are bound to exercise this faith, or to believe that we shall receive the thing that we ask for.
- IV. That this kind of faith in prayer always does obtain the blessing sought.
- V. Explain how we are to come into the state of mind, in which we can exercise such faith.
- VI. Answer several objections, which are sometimes alleged against these views of prayer.

I. That faith is an indispensable condition of prevailing prayer, will not be seriously doubted. There is such a thing as offering benevolent desires, which are acceptable to God as such, that do not include the exercise of faith in regard to the actual reception of those blessings. But such desires are not prevailing prayer, the prayer of faith. God may see fit to grant the things desired, as an act of kindness and love, but it would not be properly in answer to prayer. I am speaking now of the kind of faith that insures the

blessing. Do not understand me as saying that there is nothing in prayer that is acceptable to God, or that even obtains the blessing sometimes, without this kind of faith. But I am speaking of the faith which secures the very blessing it seeks. To prove that faith is indispensable to prevailing prayer, it is only necessary to repeat what the apostle James expressly tells us: "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 is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed."

II. We are to inquire what we are to believe when we pray.

1. We are to believe in the existence of God--"He that cometh to God must believe that he is" --and in his willingness to answer prayer--"that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." There are many who believe in the existence of God, and do not believe in the efficacy of prayer. They profess to believe in God, but deny the necessity or influence of prayer.

2. We are to believe that we shall receive--something--what? Not something, or anything, as it happens, but some particular thing we ask for. We are not to think that God is such a being, that if we ask a fish, he will give us a serpent, or if we ask bread, he will give us a stone. But he says, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." With respect to the faith of miracles, it is plain that they were bound to believe they should receive just what they asked for--that the very thing itself should come to pass. That is what they were to believe. Now what ought men to believe in regard to other blessings? Is it a mere loose idea, that if a man prays for a specific blessing, God will by some mysterious sovereignty give something or other to him, or something to somebody else, somewhere? When a man prays for his children's conversion, is he to believe that either his children will be converted, or somebody's else children, and it is altogether uncertain which? All this is utter nonsense, and highly dishonorable to God. No, we are to believe that we shall receive the very things that we ask for.

III. When are we bound to make this prayer? When are we bound to believe that we shall have the very things we pray for? I answer, When we have evidence of it. Faith must always have evidence. A man cannot believe a thing, unless he sees something which he supposes to be evidence. He is under no obligation to believe, and has no right to believe, a thing will be done, unless he has evidence. It is the height of fanaticism to believe without evidence. The kinds of evidence a man may have are the following:

1. Suppose that God has especially promised the thing. As for instance, God says he is more ready to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him, than parents are to give bread to their children. Here we are bound to believe that we shall receive it when we pray for it. You have no right to put in an if, and say, "Lord, if it be thy will, give us thy Holy Spirit." This is to insult God. To put an if into God's promise, where God has put none, is tantamount to charging God with being insincere. It is like saying, "O God, if thou art in earnest in making these promises, grant us the blessing we pray for."

I heard of a case where a young convert was the means of teaching a minister a solemn truth on the subject of prayer. She was from a very wicked family, and went to live with a minister. While there, she was hopefully converted, and appeared well. One day she came to the minister's study, while he was in it--a thing she was not in the habit of doing; and he thought there must be something the matter. So he asked her to sit down, and kindly inquired into the state of her religious feelings; she said, she was distressed at the manner in which the old church members prayed for the Spirit. They would pray for the Holy Spirit to come, and would seem to be very much in earnest, and plead the promises of God, and then say, "O Lord, if it be thy will, grant us these blessings for Christ's sake." She thought that saying, "if it be

thy will," when God has expressly promised it, was questioning whether God was sincere in his promises. The minister tried to reason her out of it, and of course he succeeded in confounding her. But she was distressed and filled with grief, and said, "I cannot argue the point with you, sir, but it is impressed on my mind that it is wrong, and dishonoring God." And she went away weeping with anguish. The minister saw she was not satisfied, and it led him to look at the matter again, and finally he saw that it was putting in an if where God had put none, and where he had revealed his will expressly, and that it was an insult to God. And he went and told his church they were bound to believe that God was in earnest when he made them a promise. And the spirit of prayer came down upon that church, and a most powerful revival followed.

2. Where there is a general promise in the Scriptures which you may reasonably apply to the particular case before you. If its real meaning includes the particular thing for which you pray, or if you can reasonably apply the principle of the promise to the case, there you have evidence. For instance, suppose it is a time when wickedness prevails greatly, and you are led to pray for God's interference? What promise have you? Why, this one: "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." Here you see is a general promise laying down a principle of God's administration, which you may apply to the case before you, as a warrant for exercising faith in prayer. And if the case come up, to inquire as to the time in which God will grant blessings in answer to prayer, you have this promise: "While they are yet speaking, I will hear."

There is a vast amount of general promises and principles laid down in the Bible, which Christians might make use of, if they would only think. Whenever you are in circumstances to which the promises or principles apply, there you are to use them. A parent finds this promise: "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children, to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them." Now, here is a promise made to those that possess a certain character. If any parent is conscious that this is his character, he has a rightful ground to apply it to himself and his family. If you have this character, you are bound to make use of this promise in prayer, and believe it, even to your children's children.

If I had time to-night, I could go from one end of the Bible to the other, and produce an astonishing variety of texts that are applicable as promises; enough to prove, that in whatever circumstances a child of God may be placed, God has provided in the Bible some promise, either general or particular, which he can apply, that is precisely suited to his case. Many of God's promises are very broad on purpose to cover much ground. What can be broader than the promise in the text: "Whatsoever things ye desire when ye pray?" What praying Christian is there who has not been surprised at the length, and breadth, and fullness, of the promises of God, when the Spirit has applied them to his heart? Who that lives a life of prayer, has not wondered at his own blindness, in not having before seen and felt the extent of meaning and richness of those promises, when viewed under the light of the Spirit of God? At such times he has been astonished at his own ignorance, and found the Spirit applying the promises and declarations of the Bible in a sense in which he had never dreamed of their being applicable before. The manner in which the apostles applied the promises, and prophecies, and declarations of the Old Testament, places in a strong light the breadth of meaning, and fullness, and richness of the word of God. He that walks in the light of God's countenance, and is filled with the Spirit of God as he ought to be, will often make an appropriation of promises to himself, and an application of them to his own circumstances, and the circumstances of those for whom he prays, that a blind professor of religion would never dream of.

3. Where there is any prophetic declaration, that the thing prayed for is agreeable to the will of God. When it is plain from prophecy that the event is certainly to come, you are bound to believe it, and to make it the

ground for your special faith in prayer. If the time is not specified in the Bible, and there is no evidence from other sources, you are not bound to believe that it shall take place now, or immediately. But if the time is specified, or if the time may be learned from the study of the prophecies, and it appears to have arrived, then Christians are under obligations to understand and apply it, by offering the prayer of faith. For instance, take the case of Daniel, in regard to the return of the Jews from captivity. What does he say? "I Daniel understood by books the number of the years whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem." Here he learned from books, that is, he studied his Bible, and in that way understood that the length of the captivity was to be seventy years. What does he do then? Does he sit down upon the promise, and say, "God has pledged himself to put an end to the captivity in seventy years, and the time has expired, and there is no need of doing any thing?" Oh no; he says, "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." He set himself at once to pray that the thing might be accomplished. He prayed in faith. But what was he to believe? What he had learned from prophecy. There are many prophecies yet unfulfilled, in the Bible, which Christians are bound to understand, as far as they are capable of understanding them, and then make them the basis of believing prayer. Do not think, as some seem to, that because a thing is foretold in prophecy it is not necessary to pray for it, or that it will come whether Christians pray for it or not. There is no truth in this. God says, in regard to this very class of events, which are revealed in prophecy, "Nevertheless, for all these things will I be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them."

4. When the signs of the times, or the providence of God, indicate that a particular blessing is about to be bestowed, we are bound to believe it, The Lord Jesus Christ blamed the Jews, and called them hypocrites, because they did not understand the indications of Providence. They could understand the signs of the weather, and see when it was about to rain, and when it would be fair weather; but they could not see, from the signs of the times, that the time had come for the Messiah to appear, and build up the house of God. There are many professors of religion who are always stumbling and hanging back, whenever any thing is proposed to be done. They always say, The time has not come--the time has not come; when there are others who pay attention to the signs of the times, and who have spiritual discernment to understand them. These pray in faith for the blessing, and it comes.

5. When the Spirit of God is upon you, and excites strong desires for any blessing, you are bound to pray for it in faith. You are bound to infer, from the fact that you find yourself drawn to desire such a thing while in the exercise of such holy affections as the Spirit of God produces, that these desires are the work of the Spirit. People are not apt to desire with the right kind of desires, unless they are excited by the Spirit of God. The apostle refers to these desires, excited by the Spirit, in his epistle to the Romans, where he says--"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God." Here, then, if you find your self strongly drawn to desire a blessing, you are to understand it as an intimation that God is willing to bestow that particular blessing, and so you are bound to believe it. God does not trifle with his children. He does not go and excite in them a desire for one blessing, to turn them off with something else. But he excites the very desires he is willing to gratify. And when they feel such desires, they are bound to follow them out till they get the blessing.

IV. I will proceed to show that this kind of faith always obtains the object. The text is plain here, to show that you shall receive the very thing prayed for. It does not say, "Believe that ye shall receive, and ye shall

either have that or something else equivalent to it." To prove that this faith obtains the very blessing asked, I observe,

1. That otherwise we could never know whether our prayers were answered. And we might continue praying and praying, long after the prayer was answered by some other blessing equivalent to the one we ask for.

2. If we are not bound to expect the very thing we ask for, it must be that the Spirit of God deceives us. Why should he excite us to desire a certain blessing, when he means to grant something else?

3. What is the meaning of this passage, "If a man ask bread, will he give him a stone?" Does not our Saviour rebuke the idea that prayer may be answered by giving something else? What encouragement have we to pray for any thing in particular, if we are to ask for one thing and receive another? Suppose a Christian should pray for a revival here--he would be answered by a revival in China. Or he might pray for a revival, and God would send the cholera, or an earthquake. All the history of the church shows that when God answers prayer, he gives his people the very thing for which their prayers are offered. God confers other blessings, on both saints and sinners, which they do not pray for at all. He sends his rain both upon the just and the unjust, But when he answers prayer, it is by doing what they ask him to do. To be sure, he often more than answers prayer. He grants them not only what they ask, but often connects other blessings with it.

4. Perhaps you may feel a difficulty here about the prayers of Jesus Christ. People may often ask, "Did not he pray in the garden for the cup to be removed, and was his prayer answered?" I answer that this is no difficulty at all, for the prayer was answered. The cup he prayed to be delivered from was removed. This is what the apostle refers to, when he says--"Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, was heard in that he feared." Now I ask, On what occasion was he saved from death, if not on this? Was it the death of the cross he prayed to be delivered from? Not at all. But the case was this. A short time before he was betrayed, we hear him saying to his disciples, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death." Anguish of mind came rolling in upon him, till he was just ready to die, and he went out into the garden to pray, and told his disciples to watch, and then he went by himself and prayed; "O my Father," said he, "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." In his agony he rose from his knees, and walked the garden, till he came where his disciples were, and there he saw them fast asleep. He awaked them and said, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" And then he went again, for he was in such distress that he could not stand still, and again he poured out his soul. And the third time he goes away and prays, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." And now the third time of praying, there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And his mind became composed, and calm, and the cup was gone. Till then, he had been in such an agony that his sweat was as it were great drops of blood, but now it was all over.

Some have supposed that he was praying against the cross, and begging to be delivered from dying on the cross! Did Christ ever shrink from the cross? Never. He came into the world on purpose to die on the cross, and he never shrunk from it. But he was afraid he should die in the garden before he came to the cross. The burden on his soul was so great, and produced such an agony, that he felt as if he was on the point of dying, His soul was sorrowful even unto death. But after the angel appeared unto him, we hear no more of his agony of soul. He had prayed for relief from that cup, and his prayer was answered. He became calm, and had no more mental suffering till just as he expired. This case, therefore, is no

exception. He received the very thing for which he asked, as he says, "I knew thou always hearest me."

But there is another case often brought up, where the apostle Paul prayed against the thorn in the flesh. He says, "I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." And God answered him, "My grace is sufficient for thee." It is the opinion of Dr. Clarke and others, that Paul's prayer was answered in the very thing for which he prayed. That "the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan," of which he speaks, was a false apostle who had distracted and perverted the church at Corinth. That Paul prayed against his influence, and the Lord answered him by assuring him, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Who does not know that it was, and that Paul's influence ultimately triumphed?

But admitting that Paul's prayer was not answered by granting the particular thing for which he prayed, in order to make out this case as an exception to the prayer of faith, they are obliged to assume the very thing to be proved; and that is, that the apostle prayed in faith. There is no reason to suppose that Paul would always pray in faith, any more than that any other Christian does. The very manner in which God answered him shows that it was not in faith. He virtually tells him, "That thorn is necessary for your sanctification, and to keep you from being exalted above measure. I sent it upon you in love, and in faithfulness, and you have no business to pray that I should take it away. --LET IT ALONE."

There is not only no evidence that he prayed in faith, but a strong presumption that he did not. From the history it is evident that he had nothing on which to repose faith. There was no express promise, no general promise, that could be applicable, no providence of God, no prophecy, no teaching of the Spirit that God would remove this thorn; but the presumption was that God would not remove it. He had given it to him for a particular purpose. His prayer appears to have been selfish, or at least praying against a mere personal influence. This was not any personal suffering that retarded his usefulness, but on the contrary it was given him to increase his usefulness by keeping him humble; and because on some account he found it inconvenient and mortifying, he set himself to pray out of his own heart, evidently without being led to it by the Spirit of God. But did Paul pray in faith without the Spirit of God, any more than any other man? And will any one undertake to say that the Spirit of God led him to pray that this might be removed, when God himself had given it for a particular purpose, which purpose could not be answered only as the thorn continued with him?

Why then is this made an exception to the general rule laid down in the text, that a man shall receive whatsoever he asks in faith? I was once amazed and grieved at a public examination at a Theological Seminary, to hear them darken counsel by words without knowledge on this subject. This case of Paul, and that of Christ just adverted to, were both of them cited as instances to prove to their students that the prayer of faith would not be answered in the particular thing for which they prayed. Now to teach such sentiments as these in or out of a Theological Seminary, is to trifle with the word of God, and to break the power of the Christian ministry. Has it come to this, that our grave doctors in our seminaries, are employed to instruct Zion's watchmen, to believe and teach that it is not to be expected that the prayer of faith is to be answered in granting the object for which we pray? Oh, tell it not in Gath, nor let the sound reach Askelon! What is to become of the church while such are the views of its gravest and most influential ministers? I would not be unkind nor censorious, but as one of the ministers of Jesus Christ, I feel bound to bear testimony against such a perversion of the word of God.

5. It is evident that the prayer of faith will obtain the blessing, from the fact that our faith rests on evidence that to grant that thing is the will of God. Not evidence that something else will be granted, but that this particular thing will be. But how, then, can we have evidence that this thing will be granted, if another thing

is to be granted? People often receive more than they pray for. Solomon prayed for wisdom, and God granted him riches and honor in addition. So a wife sometimes prays for the conversion of her husband, and if she offers the prayer, of faith, God may not only grant that blessing, but convert her child, and her whole family. Blessings sometimes seem to hang together, so that if a Christian gains one he gets them all.

V. I am to show how we are to come into this state of mind, in which we can offer such prayer. People sometimes ask, "How shall I offer such prayer? Shall I say, Now I will pray in faith for such and such a blessing?" No, the human mind is not moved in this way. You might just as well say, "Now I will call up a spirit from the bottomless pit." I answer,

1. You must first obtain evidence that God will bestow the blessing. How did Daniel make out to offer the prayer of faith? He searched the Scriptures. Now, you need not let your Bible lie on a shelf, and expect God to reveal his promises to you. Search the Scriptures, and see where you can get either a general or special promise, or a prophecy, on which you can plant your feet when you pray. Go through the Bible, and you will find it full of such things--precious promises, which you may plead in faith. You never need to want for objects of prayer, if you will do as Daniel did. Persons are staggered on this subject, because they never make a proper use of the Bible.

A curious case occurred in one of the towns in the western part of this state. There was a revival there. A certain clergyman came to visit the place, and heard a great deal said about the Prayer of Faith. He was staggered at what they said, for he had never regarded the subject in the light they did. He inquired about it of the minister that was laboring there. The minister requested him, in a kind spirit, to go home, and take his Testament, look out the passages that refer to prayer, and go round to his most praying people, and ask them how they understood these passages. He said he would do it, for though these views were new to him, he was willing to learn. He did it, and went to his praying men and women, and read the passages without note or comment, and asked what they thought. He found their plain common sense had led them to understand these passages, and to believe that they mean just as they say. This affected him, and then the fact of his going round and presenting the promises before their minds awakened the spirit of prayer in them, and a revival followed.

I could name many individuals who have set themselves to examine the Bible on this subject, and before they got half through with it have been filled with the spirit of prayer. They found that God meant by his promises just what a plain, common sense man would understand them to mean. I advise you to try it. You have Bibles; look them over, and whenever you find a promise that you can use, fasten it in your mind before you go on; and I venture to predict you will not get through the book without finding out that God's promises mean just what they say.

2. Cherish the good desires you have. Christians very often lose their good desires by not attending to this; and then their prayers are mere words, without any desire or earnestness at all. The least longing of desire must be cherished. If your body was likely to freeze, and you had even the least spark of fire, how you would cherish it! So if you have the least desire for a blessing, let it be ever so small, do not trifle it away. Do not grieve the Spirit. Do not be diverted. Do not lose good desires by levity, by censoriousness, by worldly-mindedness. Watch and pray, and follow it up, or you will never pray the prayer of faith.

3.* Entire consecration to God is indispensable to the prayer of faith. You must live a holy life, and consecrate all to God--your time, talents, influence--all you have, and all you are, to be his entirely. Read

the lives of pious men, and you will be struck with this fact: that they used to set apart times to renew their covenant, and dedicate themselves anew to God; and whenever they have done so, a blessing has always followed immediately. If I had Edwards here to-night, I could read passages showing how it was in his days.

4. You must persevere. You are not to pray for a thing once, and then cease, and call that the prayer of faith. Look at Daniel. He prayed twenty-one days, and did not cease till he had obtained the blessing. He set his heart and his face unto the Lord, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and he held on three weeks, and then the answer came. And why did not it come before? God sent an Archangel to bear the message, but the devil hindered him all this time. See what Christ says in the parable of the unjust judge, and the parable of the loaves. What does he teach us by them? Why, that God will grant answers to prayer when it is importunate. "Shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him?"

5. If you would pray in faith, be sure to walk every day with God. If you do, he will tell you what to pray for. Be filled with his Spirit, and he will give you objects enough to pray for. He will give you as much of the spirit of prayer as you have strength of body to bear.

Said a good man to me, "Oh, I am dying for the want of strength to pray. My body is crushed, the world is on me, and how can I forbear praying!" I have known that man go to bed absolutely sick, for weakness and faintness, under the pressure. And I have known him pray as if he would do violence to heaven, and then seen the blessing come as plainly in answer to his prayer as if it was revealed, so that no person would doubt it any more than if God had spoken from heaven. Shall I tell you how he died? He prayed more and more, and he used to take the map of the world before him and pray, and look over the different countries and pray for them, till he absolutely expired in his room praying. Blessed man! He was the reproach of the ungodly and of carnal, unbelieving professors, but he was the favorite of heaven, and a prevailing prince in prayer.

VI. I will refer to some objections which are brought forward against this doctrine.

1. "It leads to fanaticism and amounts to a new revelation." Why should this be a stumbling block? They must have evidence to believe before they can offer the prayer of faith. And if God gives other evidence besides the senses, where is the objection? True, there is a sense in which this is a new revelation; it is making known a thing by his Spirit. But it is the very revelation which God has promised to give. It is just the one we are to expect, if the Bible is true; that when we know not what we ought to pray for, according to the will of God, his Spirit helps our infirmities, and teaches us the very thing to pray for. Shall we deny the teaching of the Spirit?

2. It is often asked, "Is it our duty to pray the prayer of faith for the salvation of all men?" I answer, No; for that is not a thing according to the will of God. It is directly contrary to his revealed will. We have no evidence that all will be saved. We should feel benevolently to all, and, in itself considered, desire their salvation. But God has revealed it to us that many of the human race shall be damned. And it cannot be a duty to believe that they shall all be saved, in the face of a revelation to the contrary. In Christ's prayer, in the seventeenth chapter of John, he expressly said, "I pray not for the world but for those thou hast given me."

3. But say some, "If we were to offer this prayer for all men, would not all men be saved?" I answer, Yes, and so they would be saved, if they would all repent. But they will not. Neither will Christians offer the

prayer of faith for all, because there is no evidence on which to ground a belief that God intends to save all men.

4. But you ask, "For whom are we to offer this prayer? We want to know in what cases, for what persons, and places, and at what times, etc., we are to make the prayer of faith." I answer, as I have already answered, When you have evidence, from promises, or prophecies, or providences, or the leadings of the Spirit, that God will do the things you pray for.

5. "How is it that so many prayers of pious parents for their children are not answered? Did you not say there was a promise which pious parents may apply to their children? Why is it, then, that so many pious praying parents have had impenitent children, that died in their sins?" Granted that it is so, what does it prove? Let God be true, but every man a liar. Which shall we believe, that God's promise has failed, or that these parents did not do their duty? Perhaps they did not believe the promise, or did not believe there was any such thing as the prayer of faith. Wherever you find a professor that does not believe in any such prayer, you find, as a general thing, that he has children and domestics yet in their sins. And no wonder, unless they are converted in answer to the prayers of somebody else.

6. "Will not these views lead to fanaticism? Will not many people think they are offering the prayer of faith when they are not?" That is the same objection that the Unitarians make against the doctrine of regeneration--that many people think they have been born again when they have not. It is an argument against all spiritual religion whatever. Some think they have it when they have not, and are fanatics. But there are those who know what the prayer of faith is, just as there are those who know what spiritual experience is, though it may stumble cold-hearted professors who know it not. Even ministers often lay themselves open to the rebuke which Christ gave to Nicodemus: "Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?"

REMARKS.

1. Persons who have not known by experience what this is, have great reason to doubt their piety. This is by no means uncharitable. Let them examine themselves. It is to be feared that they understand prayer as Nicodemus did the new birth. They have not walked with God, and you cannot describe it to them, any more than you can describe a beautiful painting to a blind man who cannot see colors. Many professors can understand about the prayer of faith just as much as a blind man does of colors.

2. There is reason to believe millions are in hell because professors have not offered the prayer of faith. When they had promises under their eye, they have not had faith enough to use them. Thus parents let their children, and even baptized children, go down to hell because they would not believe the promises of God. Doubtless many women's husbands have gone to hell, when they might have prevailed with God in prayer and saved them. The signs of the times and the indications of Providence were favorable, perhaps, and the Spirit of God prompted desires for their salvation, and they had evidence enough to believe that God was ready to grant a blessing, and if they had only prayed in faith, God would have granted it; but God turned it away because they would not discern the signs of the times.

3. You say, "This leaves the church under a great load of guilt." True, it does so; and no doubt multitudes will stand up before God covered all over with the blood of souls that have been lost through their want of faith. The promises of God, accumulated in their Bibles, will stare them in the face and weigh them down to hell.

4. Many professors of religion live so far from God that to talk to them about the prayer of faith is all unintelligible. Very often the greatest offence possible to them is to preach about this kind of prayer.

5. I want to ask the professors who are here a few questions. Do you know what it is to pray in faith? Did you ever pray in this way? Have you ever prayed till your mind was assured the blessing would come--till you felt that rest in God, that confidence, as perfect as if you saw God come down from heaven to give it to you? If not, you ought to examine your foundation. How can you live without praying in faith at all? How do you live in view of your children, while you have no assurance whatever that they will be converted? One would think you would go deranged. I knew a father at the West; he was a good man, but he had erroneous views respecting the prayer of faith; and his whole family of children were grown up and not one of them converted. At length his son sickened and seemed about to die. The father prayed, but the son grew worse and seemed sinking into the grave without hope. The father prayed till his anguish was unutterable. He went at last and prayed--(there seemed no prospect of his son's life)--but he poured out his soul as if he would not be denied, till at length he got an assurance that his son would not only live, but be converted; and not only this one, but his whole family, would be converted to God. He came into the house and told his family his son would not die. They were astonished at him. "I tell you," says he, "he won't die. And no child of mine will ever die in his sins.["] That man's children were all converted years ago.

What do you think of that? Was that fanaticism? If you believe so, it is because you know nothing about the matter. Do you pray so? Do you live in such a manner that you can offer such prayer for your children? I know that the children of professors may sometimes be converted in answer to the prayers of somebody else. But ought you to live so? Dare you trust to the prayers of others when God calls you to sustain this most important relation to your children?

Finally--See what combined effort is made to dispose of the Bible. The wicked are for throwing away the threatenings of the Bible, and the church the promises. And what is there left? Between them, they leave the Bible a blank. I say it in love: What are our Bibles good for if we do not lay hold on their precious promises, and use them as the ground of our faith when we pray for the blessing of God? You had better send your Bibles to the heathen, where they will do some good, if you are not going to believe and use them. I have no evidence that there is much of this prayer now in this church or in this city. And what will become of it? What will become of your children? your neighbors? the wicked?

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