

USING THE BIBLE IN PRAYER  
or, TURNING THE WORD OF GOD INTO PRAYER

The Scriptures teach that there is a very close connection between the Word of God and prayer. See John 15:7; Acts 6:4; Eph. 6:17, 18; 1 Tim. 4:5. These are two things which are essential both for true spiritual growth as well as for fruitful ministry. Both are intimately related to the Holy Spirit. The Word of God has been given to us by the Holy Spirit. See 2 Pet. 1:19-21. And it is by the ministry of the Holy Spirit that we are able to understand the Word of God. See John 14:26; 16:12-15. True prayer is under the direction and control of the Holy Spirit. See again Eph. 6:18, and also Jude 20. We should always seek the help of the Holy Spirit when we are reading or studying the Word, and we should seek His help continually when we pray.

But there is another close connection between the Word of God and prayer which is often overlooked by pastors (as well as by many of the Lord's people). It is that the Word of God is to be turned into prayer. Hopefully when we read the Word, the Lord will be speaking to us; when we pray, we will be speaking to Him about the things that He has just been saying to us. This is what many of the saints in past days have called, turning the Word of God into prayer. There is probably no lesson regarding prayer that will be more helpful to a pastor and to his people than this. If this is our daily practice, it will give greater meaning to our Bible reading. It will keep us more alert as we read. And it will give us greater faith and greater blessing in our praying, as well as greater variety. No two prayers will be exactly alike.

This was the practice of many Old Testament saints:

- 1) Abraham: Gen. 15:2, 3; 18:25.
- 2) Jacob: Gen. 32:9, 12.
- 3) Moses: Ex. 32:13.
- 4) Gideon: Judges 7:15.
- 5) David: 2 Sam. 7:18-29; 1 Chron. 17:16-27. See also Psa. 27:8.
- 6) Solomon: 2 Chron. 6:14-17.
- 7) Daniel: Dan. 9:1-19.
- 8) Nehemiah: Neh. 1:8, 9.

The Lord taught this to His disciples. Cf. John 15:7. And He Himself prayed this way. Cf. John 17:17.

Peter and John practised this. Cf. Acts 4:24-28.

Paul prayed this way. Cf. Col. 1:9.

See more on the praying of the Apostle John: 1 John 5:14, 15; Rev. 22:20.

This is only a sample of the illustrations of such prayer that can be found in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

In addition to the Scriptural examples the writings of godly people down through the history of the Church abounds with comments which

show that this was their practice in their fellowship with the Lord, i.e., to turn the Word into prayer. The following are some examples:

William Law: "Again, in order to fill your prayers with excellent strains of devotion, it may be of use to you to observe this further rule: When at any time, either in reading the Scripture or any book of piety, you meet with a passage that more than ordinarily affects your mind, and seems, as it were, to give your heart a new motion towards God, you should try to turn it into the form of a petition, and then give it a place in your prayers. By this means you will be often improving your prayers, and storing yourself with proper forms of making the desires of your heart known unto God" (A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, pp. 175, 176).

F. E. Marsh: "Among the many promises that Christ has given us, is this: 'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you' (John 15:7). Christ's words dwelling in us, not only give us the authority to pray, and direct us as to the petitions we should make, but they give us the incentive to prayer. When we come in the spirit of faith to the Word of God, it sharpens our desires, and makes us turn what we read into prayer (*italics mine*).

"Listening to the Lord, as He speaks to us in His Word, makes us to pray for the blessings of which He speaks . . .

"Pondering the promises of God's Word, makes us bold to plead them in petition . . ." (Fully Furnished, pp. 185, 186).

Robert Murray M'Cheyne: "Turn the Bible into prayer. Thus, if you were reading that 1st Psalm, spread the Bible on the chair before you, and kneel, and pray, 'O Lord, give me the blessedness of the man,' etc. This is the best way of knowing the meaning of the Bible and of learning to pray" (Memoirs and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, p. 50).

George Muller: "But perhaps the greatest advantage (of reading the Bible while kneeling) will be that the Holy Scriptures will thus suggest the very words which become the dialect of prayer. 'We know not what we should pray for as we ought'--neither what nor how to pray. But here is the Spirit's own inspired utterance, and, if the praying be moulded on the model of His teaching, how can we go astray? Here is our God-given liturgy and litany--a divine prayer book. We have here God's promises, precepts, warnings, and counsels, not to speak of all the Spirit-inspired literal prayers therein contained; and, as we reflect upon these, our prayers take their cast in this matrix. We turn precept and promise, warning and counsel into supplication, with the assurance that we cannot be asking anything that is not according to His will, for are we not turning His own Word into prayer? . . .

"When therefore the believer uses the Word of God as the guide to determine both the spirit and the dialect of his prayer, he is inverting the process of divine revelation and using the channel of God's approach to him as the channel of his approach to God. How can such use of God's Word fail to help and strengthen spiritual life?

What medium or channel of approach could so insure in the praying soul both an acceptable frame and language taught of the Holy Spirit? If the first thing is not to pray but to hearken, this surely is hearkening for God to speak to us that we may know how to speak to Him" (George Muller of Bristol, pp. 140, 141).

Charles Haddon Spurgeon: "There are other mercies for which we should not have dared to pray if the promise had not encouraged us. We could not have had the heart to ask such great things if the Lord had not promised them to us. So that the Word of God suggests the desire and then encourages us to hope that the desire will certainly be fulfilled. Moreover when a promise comes very close hom to a man as it did to David when it was spoken personally to him by the prophet, it vivifies the soul, causes the mind to realize the blessing, and both intensifies desire and gives grasp and grip to faith. We should not have felt the boon to be real had it not been placed before us in plain words. This is how our prayers come into our heart. The Word of God suggests them, encourages us to seek them, and then gives us a realizing power so that we plead with eagerness and believe with force.

"In saying 'therefore' (Re: "Therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee"--2 Sam. 7:27) David means not only that the Word of God had put the prayer into his mind, but that his whole meditation had led him to the finding of this prayer in his heart. Had he not been sitting before the Lord in quiet thought, he might never have noticed the work of the Spirit upon his soul, but inward searchings brought the right prayer to light" (Sermons on Prayer, p. 30).