

PRAY FOR THE SPIRIT

James W. Alexander (1804-1859)

IN order to have mighty and unexampled revival, what we especially need is for the whole Church to be down on its knees before God. Past redemptions should make our cravings great. “I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt; open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it” (Psa 81:10). Thousands have already been seen gathered in one place for prayer, but when “the Spirit of grace and of supplications” is poured out on the great body of Christians, touched with pity for the desolations of the spiritual Jerusalem, that word will come true: “Thou shalt arise *and* have mercy upon Zion, for the time to favour her, yea, the set time is come; for thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof” (Psa 102:13-14). Oh! That God’s people were awake to the privilege of crying aloud for His great gift!

Open your mind, believing reader, to the extraordinary truth that God has an infinite willingness to bestow in answer to prayer that which, since the sending of His Son, is the greatest of all His possible gifts. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luk 11:13). O parent! Ponder on this blessed verse: there is that within thy heart that will reveal its meaning! What is it that God is so ready to give? It is that which secures and applies all the benefits of Christ’s mediation, that which makes revivals here and heaven hereafter; it is the Holy Spirit! Ought not all disciples, all over the world, to be prostrate before the throne of grace, beseeching God for Christ’s sake to communicate this all-comprehensive boon?¹ To Him only do we look because with Him is “the residue of the spirit” (Mal 2:15). But we ask in the name of Christ, for the very name means “anointed,” and the anointing, which flows from Him as Head to all the members, is this very gift, the Holy Spirit, “For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him” (Joh 3:34). He hath it immeasurably, and for His Church—and they draw for it in His name by prayer. Occupy a few moments upon this great gift; it will aid your prayers.

1. THERE IS SUCH A THING AS THE POURING OUT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. As Moses “poured of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head” (Lev 8:12), so God pours the unction of His Spirit on the head of our Great High Priest. And as the ceremonial fragrance flowed down to “the skirts of his garments” (Psa 133:2), so the gift of the Spirit comes on all believers. “The anointing which ye have received of him,” says the Apostle John, “abideth in you” (1Jo 2:27). But the effusion² is sometimes uncommonly great, even to outpouring. Some have found fault with the term, which nevertheless is in-

¹ **boon** – prayer to God; request.

² **effusion** – pouring out.

tensely biblical and consecrated in the Church. Among promises to Israel in the latter day, the Lord says, “Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD” (Eze 39:29). Apostolic comment applies to New Testament times the words of another prophet: “I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh” (Joe 2:28). So in another place: “Behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you” (Pro 1:23).

The idea necessarily presented is that of bountiful effusion. Let us ask for it! The Lord Jesus comforted His sorrowing disciples by the promise of this gift as the result of His ascension. “If I depart, I will send him unto you” (Joh 16:7). This Comforter He did send, O! how graciously and gloriously, at the first Christian Pentecost. “Having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost,” said the Apostle Peter, “he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear” (Act 2:33). There had just been suddenly a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, filling all the house where they were sitting, “and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (Act 2:4). Do not fail to observe that believers had been in union of prayer for this very gift, thus complying with the Lord’s injunction that they should “wait for the promise of the Father” (*cf.* Act 1:4-5, 14; 2:1).

The gift was continued under early preaching: “the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Act 10:44). The same apostle, many years afterwards, refers to the known fact of “the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven” (1Pe 1:12). Every great awakening and plentiful harvest of souls has proceeded from the same Spirit, sought by the same importunity of beseeching prayer. Therefore, pray for the Spirit!

2. THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD IS EXCEEDINGLY POWERFUL. We ask for something mighty and revolutionizing. We are praying for Omnipotence. A wicked city, a wicked world, will yield to no inferior strength. What an encouragement that “in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength” (Isa 26:4). It is as applicable to revival of the Church as to the rebuilding of the Temple: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zec 4:6). Let Christians no longer despair of the conversion of high-handed sinners, even the vilest of the vile, in our filthiest and bloodiest places; as if we expected in answer to our prayers only some weak, halfway operation. “Our gospel,” says the Apostle of the Gentiles, “came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance” (1Th 1:5). This is our ground of hope when the ministers of the Word proclaim the glad tidings that the preaching may be “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1Co 2:4). God grant us deliverance from our unbelief as to the power of the Holy Spirit in giving efficacy³ to the truth!

3. THE SPIRIT, WHOM WE SEEK, IS THE AUTHOR OF REGENERATION AND SANCTIFICATION.⁴ If God gives us these in wide extent, our revival will be indeed

³ **efficacy** – power to produce a desired result.

⁴ See FGB 215, *Sanctification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

complete. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Joh 3:5-6, 8). All believers shout the same praise: “According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Ti 3:5). Look at thousands, utterly blind as to spiritual realities, and say, What can we ask for them so indispensably important, as that Spirit of Truth, Who will “reprove [or convince] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (Joh 16:8)? He is just as able to convert the murderer or the fallen woman as the church-going Pharisee, just as able to renew a thousand as one. Who is sufficiently awake to the necessity of imploring God to convert a multitude of sinners?

All revival of the Church is increased sanctification; all reclaiming of the impenitent⁵ is sanctification begun. For both, we need the gift of the Spirit, and we need it now. We need it to break the power of sin in professing Christians and to nail their lusts to the cross, for it is by this influence that we “do mortify the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13). Some of the primitive⁶ believers had been atrocious sinners; “But,” says the Apostle Paul, “ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1Co 6:11). Hope, joy, love, and consequent activity and success are fruits of the same Spirit (Rom 5:5; 1Th 1:6). In a word, the Spirit of God is the Spirit of revival. Earnest, daily, united prayer of the people of Christ for this high gift puts honor upon God in a remarkable degree. We already have cause to note how signally He blesses endeavors that were openly begun in prayer. Beloved brethren, let us not mistake the token nor fail to go in the path pointed out by Providence and the Spirit.

4. THE HOLY SPIRIT SENDS THOSE GIFTS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESSFUL WORK. When miraculous gifts were necessary, they were not withheld. All inspiration, wisdom, and ministry are from the same source. So also are the common qualifications for service demanded in the daily walk of an earnest Christian who seeks to save souls. “There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all; but the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (1Co 12:6-7). The Lord promised that the Spirit should prompt His disciples when arraigned⁷ (Luk 12:12). Equally does the blessed Monitor⁸ fill their hearts and lips for common service! Apostles themselves sought for “utterance” by means of prayer (Eph 6:19), and a praying church will have a ministry and members [who are] bold and loving in owning and recommending their Lord. The supplications that bring down such influences are themselves wrought of God when believers, keeping themselves in the love of God, are at the same time “praying in the Holy Ghost” (Jude 20). See thus how completely dependent we are for all upon the Holy Spirit of God. Grace manifestly began the work; grace keeps it alive; grace must carry it on and give it extension.

⁵ **impenitent** – someone who does not repent.

⁶ **primitive** – from a very long time ago; in context, of the first century.

⁷ **arraigned** – called before a court to answer a criminal charge.

⁸ **Monitor** – one who gives advice or warning to another as to his conduct, i.e., God’s Spirit.

Brethren, we must pray as we have never yet prayed. Our lack of success is due to our coldness of desire and of request. We are not limited in God, but in our own low, slender conceptions and hopes. We have not, because we ask not (Jam 4:2). If we were under a deep and solemn impression of the divine power, bounty, and faithfulness, “How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight” (Deu 32:30)! The lesson that the Revival should teach us is the duty of being instant in supplication for the larger and more glorious effusion of the Holy Spirit. Acting on this, we shall behold new marvels of love in the place of prayer.

Although places of instruction and worship are greatly needed, and although all wealthy Christians should feel guilty until such is established, it is not enough to provide these means. Experience proves that good buildings may remain empty and able preachers unheard. We need a shock to rouse these benumbed souls, an impulse to urge them toward inquiry, a mighty drawing to bring them to the Word. The chief need of those outside is that of interest, awakening, motive; something to make them go to church and care for their own souls. Popular reformations under the truth have this effect in some measure. Indeed, we can think of nothing more likely to compel the attention of worldly, violent, and blasphemous men and women, than a mighty tide of revival, pressing its repeated waves into their miserable homes and hearts. Bad influences are propagated thus—why not good influences? All through the electric circle of a certain class, one hour will suffice to thrill the morbid, passionate excitement of a prizefight, a murder, or a rising mob; why should not the same human conductors bear such impulses as have driven multitudes to hear a Luther,⁹ a Whitefield,¹⁰ or a Spurgeon?¹¹ Would to God that we could see the day in which the messages of salvation and the meeting for prayer should be crowded by the very class who now fills bars, dance halls, caverns of lawless pleasure, and jails! Nothing will effect this but great unexampled awakening; and for this, we are to pray. If we carefully read what our blessed Lord spoke in the parable concerning the two sons, we shall see that these are the people who not only need the truth, but who are accessible to its power. “Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans¹² and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you” (Mat 21:28-32).

When in so remarkable a manner God is displaying His readiness to convert great numbers to Himself, all who fear His name and love the souls of men ought to be prostrate before Him—in beseeching cries that He would vouchsafe¹³ to urge the work of grace more widely and profoundly through the depraved multitude. As certainly as

⁹ **Martin Luther** (1483–1546) – German Protestant theologian, the leading figure of the German Reformation.

¹⁰ **George Whitefield** (1714–1770) – the best-known evangelist of the 18th century that God greatly used in England and the American Colonies during the “Great Awakening.”

¹¹ **Charles Spurgeon** (1834–1892) – influential Baptist preacher.

¹² **publicans** – tax collectors.

¹³ **vouchsafe** – give or grant in a gracious manner.

faith and love beget prayer, so certainly will prayer beget action...The blind and vicious, from whose ranks the levies are made for riots and prisons, will not flock to the preached Word until some fresh and irresistible influence, affecting the whole population, finds its way to the very scenes of their sin. Prayer for such an influence is clearly laid before us as a duty. While we pray, we must work. These children of the wicked one will not come to the light: it must be carried to them. By making the effort in concert and exhaustively, so as to leave no nook or corner untouched, and by giving to the miserable some tidings of that rich gospel feast that awaits their acceptance, we shall instrumentally “compel them to come in” (Luk 14:23).

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Revival leads people to take refuge in the cross of Christ. The end of revival is not groans or cryings out in agony of soul, but rather the light that comes with true and living faith in the Lord Jesus.—*John R. de Witt*