

# *a community called ...*

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## PRAYING OR SINNING: WHICH SHALL BE GIVEN UP?

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[T was a saying of an old author, that "either prayer will make a man give over sinning, or sin will make a man give over praying." Does any reader of these lines feel inclined to reply, "Yes, it is all very well to quote old sayings; but I know such a one, and such another, who go to church or to chapel as regularly, and say their prayers at home as devoutly, as you can wish; but for all that they are no better than their neighbors. They have not left

off sinning yet, let old authors say what they may." Granted ; but this is not all that you might have said. Not a few, it is to be feared, say many prayers in order that they may sin the more. Many, after having been savingly converted to God, have confessed that, though they said prayers time without number, and, it may be, with much apparent devotion, yet they never truly prayed !

As to one case of the kind there can be no mistake, for we read of it in the Bible. A man belonged to a particular sect, famous for this one thing—that they made long prayers. He was likewise one of the most devout of the whole sect, and so had always been in the habit of making these long prayers ; yet when he was savingly converted to God, it is said of him, as a thing as new as it was strange, "Go, and inquire for Saul of Tarsus ; for, BEHOLD, he prayeth !"

What, then, is prayer ? We see what it is not ; but what is it ? When a person, in imminent danger of perishing from fire or from water, calls upon another for help he means

what he says, and really wishes for the aid he implores. When a person, in destitute circumstances and ready to perish, begs for relief from one able to afford it, or when any one has set his whole mind on the attainment of some particular object, and requests the assistance of a man of great influence, who has the power of obtaining it for him, such persons are perfectly sincere in the petitions they present. This may serve to give us some notion of what prayer really is.

Now, if a person has such desires he must wish to be holy. Not that he will henceforth be free from the rising up in his mind of sinful desires; but they will be subdued. He must have a prevailing desire to be holy, for the plainest of all reasons. The salvation of which he now longs to partake is a deliverance from sin in every sense of the word, from all sinful feelings and inclinations as truly as from the punishment that sin deserves. The blessings God has to bestow are spiritual—*holy* blessings. The heaven in which they all end is a *holy* place. God himself is *holy*. Say,

then, whether it is possible for a man to have directly opposite desires at the same moment. Can he supremely and prevailingly love the very thing which he hates, or hate what he loves? How plain, then, is the consequence! If a man *really* prays, he cannot willingly and habitually sin. If he willingly goes on in the ways of sin, he cannot *really* pray; he must give up prayer. The two cannot exist together. There is not, there cannot be, any argument in saying, "I know such a man who prays, but he has not given up sinning for all that." Hypocrites there have been in all ages who have professed to pray without meaning a word they uttered. The prayer of all such is "abomination to the Lord." Prov. xv, 8; xxviii, 9.

But we have said that real prayer is not only the sincere desire of the heart, but that it must be offered up with faith in the mediation and intercession of Jesus Christ; and this is a point of the greatest importance. By this is meant, not merely that we ought to end our prayers with a mention of the name of Christ,

but that, in order to pray aright, we must have a steadfast faith in him, as our righteous Advocate with the Father, who has "entered into the holy place;" that is, into heaven itself, as it is said, "by his own blood." We must have faith in him who, though he "knew no sin, was made sin for us," that we might be saved from the wrath of God through him. Heb. ix, 12; 2 Cor. v, 21. Now this faith, we are told, "purifieth the heart," (Acts xv, 9;) is directly connected with, and produces, all the fruits of holiness—love to God, obedience to his will, a desire to please and glorify him—"fruits" which are directly the opposite of sin. Faith, too, is always connected with repentance, and cannot exist without it; and the meaning of repentance is a hearty sorrow for sin, and a desire to forsake it. So here again we are brought to the same conclusion, that praying will make a man give up sinning, or sinning will make him give up praying.

Which, then, will you choose, and which will you give up? This is the all-important question which is now put to you. O, look

for one moment at the consequences of each; for, be assured, they are as certain as cause and effect can be in any case whatever.

The consequences of prayer! These are stated by our blessed Saviour in a single sentence: "Every one that asketh receiveth." Matt. vii, 8. He, then, that, in the manner just spoken of, prays in the faith of Christ, "receives" the forgiveness of all sin, and with it "all things" which can bless or satisfy the soul in time and to eternity. "God is love." 1 John iv, 8. There is only one obstacle which can prevent all the needful blessings our heavenly Father has to bestow from being poured out upon us. Let sin be pardoned and removed forever; and as certainly as the sun will shine when the clouds are rolled away, so surely will the God of all grace lift up upon us the light of his countenance, and bestow all things needful here, and eternal glory hereafter. He who lives in the habit of constant, fervent, believing prayer, has a refuge in all trouble, a guide in all perplexity, a joy which no one who does not possess it can form any

conception, and an antidote against the fear of death. He who could say, "It is good for me to draw near unto God," was also able to say, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." Psa. lxxiii, 24.

But the consequences of sinning—what are they? We tremble to think of them. It is true, we do read, even in the Bible, in one place, of the "pleasures of sin," but they are styled, "the pleasures of sin *for a season*;" (Heb. xi, 25;) and many other passages, and facts without number, might be brought to prove that they are as vain and hollow and deceitful as they are temporary. How forcibly does the Apostle say to his Roman converts, "What fruit had ye *then* in those things of which ye are now ashamed?" That is, however, but half the verse; what follows? "The end of those things is death." Rom. vi, 21. We see the misery which sin brings in its train in the present world. We read in the inspired book of God such sentences as the following: "Be sure your sin will find you out!"

“Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap?” “The wages of sin is death.”

But now is the golden opportunity; now God waits to be gracious, invites you to pray, promises to hear; only delay not lest it be gone forever. Do you say you know not how to pray? It is God alone who, by his Holy Spirit, can pour out upon you a “spirit of grace and supplication;” but ask him to do so, and thus to “assist the prayers that you make before him.” “Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive *me* graciously.” Hos. xiv, 2.

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