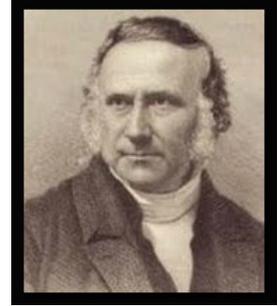


Ceasing to Pray



At the earnest solicitation of a friend, very dear to me, who had herself just come to a happy tranquility of mind, I sought an interview with her sister—an accomplished young woman, of about seventeen years of age. I found that the attention of my new acquaintance had been directed to religion some few months previous to this; but though her mind was still very tenderly affected, yet she had ceased to pray. She appeared very much discouraged and very miserable.

“I have given up trying to seek God,” says she, “it does no good. I would give anything to be a Christian, but I never shall be!”

“You ought not to say that, my child,” said I, “You do not know that. I know you may be a Christian, if you will; for God has never said, seek ye my face in vain.”

“Well, sir, it seems to me that I can never be a Christian; I have that feeling; it comes over me every time I think about religion.”

“And is that the reason why you have ceased to pray?”

“Yes, sir; my prayers will do me no good!”

“How do you know they will do you no good?”

“Because I don’t pray with a right heart.”

“And do you expect to get a right heart without prayer?”

“I don’t expect to get a right heart at all, sir.”

“Well, if you could get a right heart, would you get it without prayer?”

“I suppose not. But all my praying is only an abomination in the sight of God!”

“Does not God command you to pray, to seek Him by prayer; to seek His aid and favor?”

“Yes, sir; I know He does.”

“Then is it not a greater abomination in His sight when you neglect prayer, than when you pray as well as you can?”

“Perhaps it may be,” said she, sadly, “I don’t know; but if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”

“Then you had better not regard iniquity in your heart. You ought to give God your heart; you ought to repent; you ought to ‘cease to do evil,’ and ‘learn to do well.’

I then took up her Bible which was lying upon the table, and read to her, and explained the first five verses in the second chapter of Proverbs: the first ten verses in the fifty-fifth of Isaiah: and the twelfth and thirteenth verses in the twenty-ninth of Jeremiah. Then I appealed to her,—

“Is it not plain that God requires you to pray? and is it not just as plain that He connects encouragements and promises with that requirement?”

“Yes sir, I suppose it is.”

“Then, will you obey Him?”

“I would, sir,” said she, “if I had any heart to pray,” and burst into tears.”

Do you want to have a heart to pray?”

“Oh, sir, I do wish I had one !”

“Then, cannot you ask God to give you such a heart? Cannot you go to Christ, and give up your heart to Him, and beg Him to accept you, since He loves to save sinners; and trust Him to put a right spirit within you, as He has promised to do?”

In this way I reasoned with her out of the Scriptures for a long time. It appeared to me that she was deeply sensible of her sins. She was evidently very miserable. She longed to be a Christian. But she was prevented from every attempt to seek the Lord, by the discouraging idea that her prayers would be useless, and were an offense to God. I had no

expectation that she would gain any blessing without prayer, and therefore I requested her to listen to me, as calmly as she could, (for she had become much agitated,) while I should mention to her some things which I wanted her to remember. She tried to repress her emotions; and drying her tears, lifted her face from her handkerchief,—

“I will hear you, sir, very willingly; but you don’t know what a wicked heart I have.”

I proceeded,—

“The First thing I would have you remember is this: that your God commands you to pray. That is your duty. Nothing can excuse you from it. Wicked heart as you may have, God commands you to pray.

“The Second thing is, that God connects His promises with these commands. You have no right to separate them. The promise and the command stand together.

”The Third thing is, that when you do thus separate them (saying the promises are not for such wicked hearts as yours), and therefore refuse to pray, you are not taking God’s way, but your own. You are teaching Him, instead of suffering Him to teach you. Your duty is to take His way. His thoughts are not your thoughts.

“The Fourth thing, therefore, is, you are never to despair. Despair never yet made a human being any better; it has made many a devil worse. Hope in God, by believing what He says. You need not have any hope in yourself; but you may have hope in God, and you may pray in hope. Never despair.

“The Fifth thing is, that your wicked heart, instead of being a reason why you should not pray, is the very reason why you should pray most earnestly. It is the strongest of all reasons. Pray just because you have a wicked heart. Such a heart needs God’s help.

“The Sixth thing is, that a great many persons have thought, and felt, and talked about prayer just as you do; and afterwards have found out that they were mistaken, have prayed, and have become true and happy Christians. I could name to you, this moment, at least a dozen, whom I have known and have talked to, just as I do now to you. They

have been persuaded to pray, and they are now happy in hope. If you will go with me, I will introduce you to some of them, and they will tell you their own story. Remember this: others just like you have found out their error. You may find out yours.

“The Seventh thing is, that your impression about prayer is a temptation of the Devil, it is a falsehood, a deception, a lie designed to keep you in sin and misery. Not that you think your heart worse than it is; but that you do not think God so gracious and merciful as He is, to hear the prayers of even such a heart. Resist the Devil and he will flee from you.

“The Eighth thing is, that this idea of yours (about not praying with such a heart), is just an idea of self-righteousness. You are ‘going about to establish a righteousness of your own, and have not submitted yourself to the righteousness of God. Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness.’ You wish to pray with such a good heart, that God will hear you on that account. This is pride, wicked, foolish pride, a spirit of self-righteousness, self-justification, and self-reliance. It is this which keeps you from prayer.

“Do you understand me?”

“Yes sir, I think I do.”

“And are not all these things true?”

“I don’t know but they are, sir.”

“Then will you pray? Will you begin now, to-day?”

“Yes sir, I will try.”

For a time she faithfully kept her promise. Several times after this I conversed with her, and though she did not appear to me to become more unhappy, yet she did appear to me to become more truly convicted. Her conscience seemed to be more awakened. Her mind seemed to be more influenced by the principles of truth, and I fondly expected that she would soon find ‘peace in believing.’ But she did not. She yielded to the old temptation. She neglected prayer; and, in a few weeks, divine truths ceased to affect her!

I strove to bring her back to her closet duty, but in vain! Years have passed, she is still without hope!