

Monergism

The Work of the
HOLY SPIRIT
in Prayer

JOHN OWEN

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by John Owen

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Prefatory note.

The preface to the following treatise is of some interest as an earnest pleading against liturgical impositions on four different grounds; as having been instrumental: (1) in securing, at an early period, currency for the errors of the great apostasy; (2) in introducing the gorgeous embellishments of carnal fancy into the pure worship of the Christian religion; (3) in tempting ecclesiastical authorities to employ civil penalties in matters of faith; and (4) in leading to the cessation of spiritual and ministerial gifts in the church. The treatise itself unfolds the evidence and nature of the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in prayer, and it would be esteemed meagre and incomplete if it were regarded as a treatise on the whole subject of prayer. To understand its precise scope, it must be considered simply as another book in the general work of our author on the dispensation and operations of the Holy Spirit. Given that the subsidiary discussions on the mental prayer of the church of Rome,

and the use of devotional formulas, are evidently connected with the particular and distinctive object of the treatise, it is designed to illustrate the operations of the Spirit in the devotional exercises of believers.

Analysis.

The object of the discourse is explained. Its two main divisions are: I. The evidence of a special work of the Spirit in prayer and praise; and, II. The illustration of the nature of this work, (ch. 1).

I. The *evidence* of its reality consists in a minute explanation of two passages in Scripture, Zec 12.10 and Gal 4.6 (ch. 2, 3).

II. Its *general nature* is considered — prayer being defined as a spiritual faculty of exercising Christian graces in the way of vocal requests and supplications to God (ch. 4). The work of the Spirit in the matter of prayer is reviewed in greater detail: as enlightening us into a perception of our spiritual wants; acquainting us with the promises of grace and mercy for our relief; and leading us to express desires for any blessing according to its right and proper ends, (ch. 5). His work as to the manner of prayer is described: as disposing us to obey God in this duty; implanting holy and gracious desires for the objects sought; giving us delight in God as the object of prayer; and keeping us intent on Christ as the way and ground of acceptance, (ch. 6). The manner of prayer is further considered with special reference to Eph 6.18, (ch. 7). In the course of an argument on the duty of external prayer, the promise of the Spirit is exhibited as superseding the necessity of recourse to external forms, on the following grounds:

1. The natural obligation to call on God according to our ability;

2. The example of the saints in Scripture;
3. The circumstance that in all the commands to pray, there is no respect to outward helps;
4. The existence of certain means for the improvement of our gift in prayer;
5. The use to which our natural faculties of invention, memory, and elocution, are thus put; and,
6. The necessary exercise of our spiritual abilities, (ch. 8).

Certain duties are inferred from the preceding discourse:

1. The ascription to God of all the glory on account of any gift in prayer; and,
2. Constant attention to the duty of prayer, (ch. 9).

Two subsidiary discussions follow:

1. A searching exposure of the *mental prayer* recommended by the Church of Rome, in which prayer is merged into spiritual contemplation, without any succession and utterance of thought; it is shown that language is no interference with the workings of devotional sentiment, but serves, on the contrary, to define the objects of thought, and enhance the power of conception, (ch. 10): and,
2. A disquisition on the use and value of forms: the mere use of them by some men (as suited to their attainments and experience) is distinguished from their alleged necessity for purposes of worship; and against the latter these objections are urged:

1. There is no promise of the Spirit to assist in the composition of prayers for others;
2. The Spirit is promised that we may be helped, not to compose prayers, but to pray;
3. Forms of prayer are not an institution either of the law or the gospel;
4. The alleged practical benefit held to result from them is very questionable inasmuch as those who have the gift of prayer do not need them, and those deficient in the gift, if believers, have the promise of it, and they can only cultivate it by actual exercise;
5. There are better ways in which we may have the matter of prayer suggested to us; and,
6. In the light of experience, forms of prayer are not so conducive to spiritual benefit as the exercise of the gift. Lastly,
7. Some arguments for forms of prayer from instances occurring in Scripture are considered and set aside, (ch. 11).

— Ed.

The Preface.

No one who is acquainted with the Scriptures and believes them, can doubt that there are various great and eminent promises referring to New Testament times, concerning the pouring out of the Spirit. By

performing them, a church has been begotten and maintained in the world through all ages since the ascension of Christ, sometimes with greater light and spiritual luster, and sometimes with less. It has been one of the glories of the Protestant Reformation that it has been accompanied with a very conspicuous and remarkable effusion of the Spirit. And indeed, thereby a seal from heaven has been set and a witness borne to that great work of God. In this invaluable blessing, we in this nation have had a rich and plentiful share, insomuch that it seems Satan and his ministers have been tormented and exasperated by it. And from this it has come to pass that some among us have risen up, who have manifested they are not only despisers in heart, but virulent reproachers of the operations of the Spirit. God, who knows how to bring good out of evil, for holy and blessed ends of his own, allowed those horrid blasphemies to be particularly vented.

It was on this occasion that this great, and learned, and holy person, the author of these discourses, took up thoughts of writing concerning the blessed Spirit and his whole economy. This is what I understood from him a number of years ago, discussing with him concerning some books, then newly published, full of contumely and contempt of the Holy Spirit and his operations. For as it was with Paul at Athens when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry, so Dr. Owen's spirit was stirred in him when he read the scoffs and blasphemies cast upon the Holy Spirit and his grace, and gifts, and aids, in some recent writers.

If Pelagius had not vented his corrupt opinions concerning the grace of God, it is likely the church would never have had the learned and excellent writings of Augustine in defense of it. It appears from Bradwardin that the revival of Pelagianism in his days stirred up his zealous and pious spirit to write that profound and elaborate book of his, '*De Causa Dei.*' Arminius and the Jesuits, endeavoring to plant

the same weed again, produced the scholastic writings of Twisse and Ames(not to mention foreign divines); for which we in this generation have abundant cause for enlarged thankfulness to the Father of lights. The occasion which the Holy Ghost laid hold on to carry forth Paul to write his Epistle to the Galatians (in which the doctrine of justification by faith is so fully cleared), was bringing 'another gospel' in among them by corrupt teachers; after this, many in those churches were soon drawn away. The obstinate adherence of many among the Jews to the Mosaic rites and observances, and the inclination of others to apostatize from the New Testament worship and ordinances, was in like manner the occasion of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The light which shines and is held out in these epistles, the church of Christ could ill have wanted.

The like way and working of the wisdom of God is to be seen and adored in stirring up this learned and excellent person to communicate and leave to the world that light, touching the Spirit and his operations, which he had received by that Spirit from the sacred oracles of truth, the Scriptures.

To what advantage and increase of light it is performed, is not for so incompetent a pen to say as writes this. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that the discerning reader will observe such excellencies shining out in this and others of this great author's writings, as to greatly commend them to the church of God, and will do so in ages to come, however this corrupt and degenerate generation may entertain them. They are not the crude, and hasty, and untimely abortions of a self-full, distempered spirit — much less the boilings-over of inward corruption and rottenness put to fermenting. But they are the mature, sedate, and seasonable issues of a rich magazine of learning, well digested with great exactness of judgment. There is in them a great light cast and reflected on, as well as derived from, the holy

Scriptures, those inexhaustible mines of light in sacred things. They are not filled with vain, impertinent jangling, nor with a noise of multiplied futile distinctions, nor with novel and uncouth terms foreign to the things of God, as the manner of some writers is, *to the point of nausea*. But there is in them a happy and rare conjunction of firm solidity, enlightening clearness, and heart-searching spiritualness, evidencing themselves all along, and thereby approving and commending his writings to the judgment, conscience, spiritual taste, and experience, of all those who have any acquaintance with and relish for the gospel.

On these and like accounts, the writings of this great and learned man, and also his ordinary sermons, if any of them will be published (as possibly some of them may), will be — while the world stands — an upbraiding and condemning of this generation, whose vitiated and ill-affected eyes could not bear so great a light set up and shining on a candlestick, and which therefore endeavored to put it under a bushel.

These two discourses, with those formerly published, make up all that Dr. Owen perfected or designed on this subject of the Spirit, as the reader may perceive in the account which he himself has given in his prefaces to some of the former pieces, published by himself in his lifetime. And there are some other lucubrations of his on subjects nearly allied to these, which possibly may be published hereafter — namely, one entitled, 'The Evidences of the Faith of God's Elect,' and perhaps some others. What further he might have had in his thoughts to do is known to Him whom he served so industriously and so faithfully in his spirit in the gospel while he was here on earth, and with whom he now enjoys the reward of all his labors and all his sufferings. For concerning Dr. Owen, it is certain that as God gave him very transcendent abilities, so with that he gave him a boundless

enlargedness of heart, and an insatiable desire to do service to Christ and his church, insomuch that he was thereby carried on through great bodily weakness, languishing, and pains, besides manifold other trials and discouragements, to bring out of his treasury, like a scribe well instructed in the kingdom of heaven, many useful and excellent fruits of his studies — much beyond the expectation and hopes of those who saw how often and how long he was near the grave.

But while he was thus indefatigably and restlessly laying out for the service of Christ, in this and succeeding generations, those rich talents with which he was furnished, his Lord said to him, 'Well done, you good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord.' No man ever yet, but Jesus Christ, was able to finish all that was in his heart to do for God. On the removal of such accomplished and useful persons, I have sometimes relieved myself with this thought: that Christ lives in heaven still, and the blessed Spirit, from whom the head and heart of this chosen vessel were so richly replenished, lives still.

Nath. Mather

October 27, 1692.

Chapter I.

The use of prayer, and the work of the Holy Spirit in it.

The works of the Spirit of God towards believers are either general, and not confined with respect to any one duty more than another, or they are particular, with respect to some special duty. Of the first sort are *regeneration* and *sanctification*, which being common to all duties, are the general principles of all actings of grace or our particular duties in them. But there are, moreover, various *special* works or operations of this Holy Spirit in and towards the disciples of Christ, which, although they may be reduced to the general head of *sanctification*, they fall under a special consideration that is proper to themselves. Of this sort is the *aid or assistance which he gives to us in our prayers and supplications*.

I suppose it will be granted that prayer, in the whole compass and extent of it — as comprising meditation, supplication, praise, and thanksgiving — is one of the most signal duties of religion. The light of nature in its most pregnant notions, with its practical language in the consciences of mankind, concurs in its suffragewith the Scripture in this matter. For they jointly witness that it is not only an important duty in religion, but without it, there neither is nor can be the exercise of any religion in the world. No persons ever lived in the acknowledgment of a Deity, except under the conduct of the same apprehension: they thought the duty of vows, prayers, and praises were incumbent on them as they found occasion. Indeed, even though they discovered external, ceremonious ways of solemnizing their devotions, it was this duty of prayer alone which was their natural, necessary, and fundamental acknowledgment of that Divine Being which they owned.

Nor are there any considerable stories extant, recording the monuments of the ancient heathen nations of the world, in which (it

may be said to the shame of degenerate Christianity) there are no more frequent accounts given of their sacred invocations and supplications to their supposed gods, than are to be found in any of the historical monuments and stories concerning the actions of Christian nations in these latter ages. This, therefore, is the most natural and most eminent way and means of our converse with God. Without this converse, we have no present advantage above the beasts that perish, except what will turn to our eternal disadvantage in that misery of which *they* are incapable. This is the way by which we exercise towards Him, all that grace which we receive from him, and render him an acceptable acknowledgment of that homage and revenue of glory which we are never able to exhibit in the kind and measure that are due. Of what use and advantage the due performance of this duty is to ourselves, no man is able to fully express, though every one can add something of his own experience. But we need not emphasize the commendation of prayer, for it will be said, 'By whom was it ever discommended?'

I wish I saw reason to acquiesce in that reply. For not only the practice of most, but the declared opinions of many, evidence that neither the excellence of this duty, nor its necessity, finds such acceptance and esteem in the minds of men as pretended. But because this is not my present design, I will not further insist on it. For my purpose is not to address the nature, necessity, properties, uses, effects, and advantages, of this gracious duty, as it is the vital breath of our spiritual life to God. And yet it might be further considered and improved, considering these:

- That its origin is in the law of nature, as the first and principal means of acknowledging a Divine Power;

- That its neglect is sufficient evidence of practical atheism (for he that does not pray, says in his heart, 'There is no God');
- That the Scripture gives direction as to the rule, manner, and proper object of prayer;
- Its constant use and practice is necessary, both from special commands, and from our state in this world, along with the whole variety of inward and outward occasions that may befall us, or that we may be exercised with;
- All the arguments, motives, and encouragements to constancy, fervency, and perseverance in performing the duty, with known examples of its mighty efficacy and marvellous success;
- The certain advantages which the souls of believers receive by prayer, in spiritual aids and supplies of strength, with peace and consolation;
- Various other concerns of prayer, although largely addressed by many already.

But none of these is my present design. What alone I will inquire into, is the interest of the Holy Spirit of God in prayer, by his gracious operations.

It cannot be denied that the work and actings of the Spirit of grace in and towards believers with respect to the duty of prayer, are more frequently and expressly asserted in the Scripture, than his operations with respect to any other particular grace or duty whatever. If this were called into question, the ensuing discourse, I hope, will sufficiently vindicate and confirm its truth. But hereby believers are instructed in the importance of the duty itself, and also in the use and necessity of the aid and assistance of the Spirit of God to rightly discharge or perform it. For where frequent plain revelations concur, in multiplied commands and directions, with continual experience — as it is with believers in this case — their

instruction is firm, as a way of being fixed on their minds. This renders an inquiry into this both necessary and timely. For what can be more so, than that in which the spiritual life and comfort of believers are so highly concerned, and which exhibits so gracious a condescension of divine love and goodness? Moreover, the opposition that is made in the world *against* the work of the Spirit of God in prayer, above all His other operations, requires that something be said in vindication of it.

But the enmity to this seems to be particular to these latter ages, I mean among those who pretend to any acquaintance with these things from the Scripture. It will be hard to find an instance in former ages of any to whom the Spirit of God, as a Spirit of grace and supplication, was a reproach. But now the contradiction in this is great and fierce; and so there is no difference concerning any practical duty of religion in which parties at variance are more confident and satisfied in and about their own apprehensions, than those are who dissent about the work of the Spirit of God in our prayers and supplications. For those who oppose what is ascribed to Him in this by others, are not content to deny and reject it, and to refuse communion in the faith and practice of the work that is so ascribed to him. But such is the confidence they have in their conceptions, that they moreover revile and speak evil of what they oppose, contemptuously and despitefully. Hence the ability to pray by the assistance of the Holy Ghost, as pleaded, is so far from being allowed to be a gift, or a grace, or a duty, or in any way useful among men, that it is derided and scorned as a paltry faculty, fit to be expelled from among Christians. At length, it is maligned as an invention and artifice of the Jesuits, to the surprise and offense of many sober persons. The ensuing discourse will manifest the unadvisedness of this insinuation.

Again, others profess that of all the privileges they are made partakers of in this world — of all the aids, assistances, or gifts they receive from or by the Spirit of God — what He communicates and helps them with in their prayers and supplications, is the most excellent and inestimable. And whether living or dying, in all troubles, distresses, temptations, and persecutions. they have in prayer such assurance and satisfaction in their minds, that they are not in the least moved by all the scorn and contempt cast upon their profession and practice in the exercise of the gift which they have received. Rather, they judge that those who reproach this work of the Spirit, contract for themselves the guilt of great sin. Hence I know of no difference about religious things that is managed with greater animosities in the minds of men, and with worse consequents, than this one about the work of the Spirit of God in prayer. Indeed, this is the hinge on which all other differences about divine worship turn and depend. It may, therefore, be well worth our while —indeed, it is our *duty* — to sedately and diligently inquire into what the *Scripture* teaches us in this matter. We must acquiesce in that. And all experiences on one side or the other must be tried and regulated by the *Scripture*.

Therefore, I propose two things for myself in the ensuing discourse, concerning which I will plainly and briefly endeavor to satisfy indifferent and unprejudiced readers. And these are,

First, to evince *that a special work of the Spirit of God, in the prayers or praises of believers, is promised and actually granted under the New Testament;*

Secondly, to declare *what the nature of that work consists in, or the manner of the operation of the Holy Spirit in prayer.*

If no impression in these things can be made on the minds of men, possessed with those mighty prejudices which reject their very proposal and all consideration of them with contempt, then it may yet be of use to those who sincerely desire to live to God — those who are not biased with an undue love or hatred of the parties of men, nor elated with high valuations of their own conceptions above those of others (whom they think they have reason to scorn, if not to hate) — those who prefer the performance of their duty to all other considerations, endeavoring to subdue their inclinations and affections to this duty. Nor do I desire more of any reader than that he will grant, in this, that he is conversant about things which will have an influence into his everlasting account.

Chapter II.

Zec 12.10 explained and vindicated.

The special promise of the administration of the Spirit of God to the end under consideration, is what I will lay as the foundation of the ensuing discourse.

Zec 12.10, 'I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications.'

The Spirit promised here is the Spirit of God, 'the Holy Spirit,' with respect to the special end for which he is promised. And the manner of his administration, in the accomplishment of the promise, is expressed by, 'I will pour out.' The same word is used for the same

purpose in Eze 39.29, and Joel 2.28, as other words of the same importance are also, which we render 'pouring out,' such as Pro 1.23; Isa 32.15, 44.3, 52.15.

1. Two things have been declared elsewhere concerning this expression, as applied to the communication of the Holy Ghost:

(1.) What is intended in this, is a plentiful dispensation of him to the end for which he is promised, with respect to a singular and eminent degree in his operations. The apostle expresses this word, or the accomplishment of what is promised in it, by Tit 3.6, 'he has richly' or abundantly 'poured out his Spirit.' Therefore, what is intended is not a mere grant and communication of the Spirit, but a plentiful effusion of him; which must have some eminent effects as pledges and tokens of this. For it is absurd to speak of a 'plentiful, abundant effusion,' with degrees above what was granted before, and yet there be no certain ways or means by which it may be evidenced and demonstrated. The Spirit, therefore, is so promised in this verse as to produce some notable and specific effects of his communication.

(2.) This promise is specific to the days of the gospel; I mean that every promise is specific where mention is made of pouring out the Spirit on men. This may be evinced by the consideration of every place where this expression is used. But in this place, it is most unquestionable that its immediate effect is looking to Christ as he was pierced. And it may yet be further observed that there is a tacit comparison in it with some other time or season, or some other act of God, in which or by which he gave his Spirit before. But it was not in that way, manner, or measure that he now promises to bestow him.

2. Those to whom he is thus promised are 'the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem,' — that is, the whole church, expressed

as a distribution into the ruling family, and the body of the people under their rule.

The family of David, then in supreme power among the people in the person of Zerubbabel, is expressly mentioned for three reasons:

(1.) Because the faithfulness of God in his promises was concerned in the preservation of that family from which the Messiah was to spring — Christ himself, in the rule of the church, was thereby being typed out in a special manner.

(2.) Because all the promises in a unique manner were first to be fulfilled in the person of Christ, typed by David and his house. The Spirit, under the New Testament, was first to be poured out on Christ in all fullness; and then communicated from Him to others.

(3.) It may be to denote the special gifts and graces that would be communicated to those who were to be employed in the rule and conduct of the church under Him, the king and head of the church. And 'the inhabitants of Jerusalem' is a phrase that expresses the whole church, because that was the seat of all their public ordinances of worship. See Psa 122.

Therefore, the whole spiritual church of God, all believers, are the object of this promise, as represented in the 'house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.'

3. There are two special qualifications of the promised Spirit; for —

(1.) He is to be a 'Spirit of grace,' Heb. *chen* [OT:02580] which the Greek constantly renders *charis*, and we render 'grace,' from the Latin *gratia*. It is derived from *chanan* [OT:02603], as is the following word *tachanuwn* [OT:08469 *supplication*], which signifies

to 'have mercy,' or 'compassion,' to be 'gracious.' All the words by which God's gracious dealings with sinners are expressed in Hebrew, include the meaning of pity, compassion, free goodness, and bounty. And it is variously used in the Scripture. Sometimes it is used for the grace and favor of God, because it is the fountain of all gracious and merciful effects towards us, Rom 1.7, 4.16, 5.2, 15, 20, 6.1, 11.5; 1Cor 1.3; and in countless other places. And sometimes it is used for the principal *effect* of this, or the gracious favor of God by which he accepts us in Christ, Eph 2.5; 2Thes 1.12. This is the grace the apostle prays for in behalf of the church, Rom 16.20; 1Cor 16.23. And sometimes it is applied to the favor of men, and acceptance with them, called 'finding grace' or 'favor' in the sight of anyone, Gen 39.4, 21; 1Sam 2.26; Pro 3.4; Est 2.15, 17, 5.2; Luk 2.52; Acts 4.33. And sometimes for the free effectual efficacy of grace in those in whom it is found, Acts 14.26; 1Cor 15.10; 2Cor 12.9. And sometimes for our justification and salvation by the free grace or favor of God in Christ, Joh 1.17; 1Pet 1.13; — for the gospel itself, as the instrument of the declaration and communication of the grace of God, 2Cor 6.1; Eph 3.2; Col 1.6; Tit 2.11; — for the free donation of the grace and gifts of the Spirit, Joh 1.16; Eph 4.7. And it has many other meanings which do not belong to our purpose.

Three things may be intended in this adjunct of *grace*.

[1.] A respect to the *sovereign cause* of his dispensation, which is none other than the *mere grace* of God. He may be called a 'Spirit of grace,' because his donation is an effect of grace, without the least respect to any desert in those to whom he is given. This reason for the appellation is declared in Tit 3.4-7. The sole cause and reason for pouring out the Spirit upon us, in opposition to our own works or deservings, is the love and kindness of God in Jesus Christ. This is why He may be justly called a 'Spirit of grace.'

[2.] As he is the *author* of all grace in and to those on whom he is *poured out*. So God is called the 'God of all grace,' because he is the fountain and author of it. And it has been proved elsewhere that the Holy Spirit is the immediate efficient cause of all grace in us, both in general and in the principal instances of regeneration and sanctification; and it will yet be further confirmed in what ensues.

[3.] The Hebrew *chen* is commonly used for that *grace* or *favor* which one has with another: 'Let me find *grace* in your sight;' as in the instances quoted before. And so the Spirit may also be called a 'Spirit of grace' because those on whom he is poured out have grace and favor with God; they are gracious with him, as being 'accepted in the Beloved,' Eph 1.6.

Because, therefore, all these concur wherever this Spirit is communicated, I know of no reason why we may not judge them all to be included here, though the second one is especially intended. The Spirit is promised to work grace and holiness in all on whom he is bestowed.

(2.) He is, as thus poured out, a 'Spirit of supplications;' that is, of *prayer for grace and mercy*. The word is formed from *chen*, as the other was — to be gracious or merciful. And expressing our act towards God, it is prayer for grace — a supplication; and it is never used except to express vocal prayer, either in the assemblies of the people of God or by private persons. 'Hearken to the voice of my supplications,' is rendered by the apostle Paul *hiketeria* [NT:2428], Heb 5.7; it is used in this place alone in the Scripture. Originally it signified a bough or olive-branch wrapped with wool or bays, or something of like nature, which were carried in the hands and lifted up by those who were suppliants to others for obtaining peace, or averting their displeasure. Hence came the phrase *velamenta*

proeferre, to hold out such covered branches. So Livy uses it, *De Bel. Punic., lib. 24 cap. 30*, 'Holding forth olive-branches, and other covered tokens used by suppliants, they prayed that they might be received' into grace and favor.

They called them 'branches of supplication,' or prayer. And they constantly called those prayers which they made solemnly to their gods, *supplications*.

Some render *tachanuwn* as *miserationes* or *lamentationes*, and interpret it as men bemoaning themselves in their prayers for grace and mercy — in the end, this does not vary from the sense insisted on. But because it is derived from *chen*, which signifies to be merciful or gracious, and it expresses an act of ours towards God, it can properly signify nothing but supplications for mercy and grace; nor is it used otherwise in the Scripture. See Job 41.3; Pro 18.23; Dan 9.3; Jer 31.9; 2Chr 6.21; Jer 3.21; Psa 28.2, 6; 31.22; 116.1; 130.2; 140.6; 143.1; Dan 9.18, 23; Psa 86.6. These are all the places, besides this one, where the word is used. In all of them, it denotes deprecation of evil and supplication for grace, constantly in the plural number, to denote the earnestness of men.

Therefore, these are properly supplications for grace and mercy, for freedom and deliverance from evil. By a synecdoche, it refers to all sorts of prayer whatever. We may therefore inquire in what sense the Holy Spirit of God is called a 'Spirit of supplications,' or what the reason is for attributing this to him. And he must be such, either formally or efficiently — either because he is such a spirit in himself, or he is such a spirit to us. If it is in the former way, then he is a Spirit who himself prays; and according to the import of those Hebraisms, he abounds in that duty. A 'man of wickedness,' Isa 55.7, or a 'man of blood,' is a man wholly given to wickedness and

violence. So, on the other hand, a 'Spirit of supplications' would be a Spirit abounding in prayer for mercy and diverting evil, as the word imports. Now, the Holy Ghost cannot be a Spirit of supplication in this way, either for himself or for us. No imagination of any such thing can be admitted with respect to him, without the highest blasphemy. Nor can he make supplications for us in his own person; for any such interposition in heaven on our behalf is wholly confined in the Scripture to the priestly office of Christ and his intercession. All prayer, whether oral or interpretative only, is the act of a nature that is inferior to that which is prayed to. The Spirit of God has no nature inferior to that which is divine. Therefore, unless we deny His deity, we cannot suppose he is *formally* a Spirit of supplication. He is such, therefore, *efficiently* with respect to us; and he is promised to us as such. Therefore, in general, our inquiry is how or in what sense he is a Spirit of supplication.

And there are but two ways conceivable by which this may be affirmed about him:

[1.] By working *gracious inclinations* and dispositions in us to this duty;

[2.] By giving us a gracious *ability* for discharging it in a due manner.

These, therefore, must belong to and comprise his efficiency as a Spirit of supplication.

Both of them are included in that statement of the apostle, 'The Spirit itself makes intercession for us,' Rom 8.26. Those who can put any other sense on this promise, would do well to express it. Every sense consistent with the analogy of faith will be admitted, so that we do not judge that the words are void of sense and have nothing in

them. To deny that the Spirit of God is a Spirit of supplication, in and to believers, is to reject the testimony of God himself.

By the ways mentioned, we affirm that he is such a Spirit, nor can any other way be assigned.

[1.] He is such by working *gracious inclinations* and dispositions in us to this duty. He is the one who prepares, disposes, and inclines the hearts of believers to exercise this duty with delight and spiritual contentment. And where this is not so, no prayer is acceptable to God. He does not delight in those cries which an unwilling mind is pressed or forced to by earthly desires, distress, or misery, Jas 4.3. Of ourselves, naturally, we are averse to any converse and intercourse with God, because we are alienated from living to him, by the ignorance and vanity of our minds.

And there is a secret alienation still working in us from all duties of immediate communion with him. It is he alone who works us toward that frame in which we pray continually, as it is required of us. Our hearts are kept ready and prepared for this duty on all occasions and opportunities. And in the meantime, they are acted and steered under the conduct and influence of those graces which are to be exercised in them. Some call this the 'grace of prayer' that is given to us by the Holy Ghost. I suppose they do so improperly, though I will not contend about it. For prayer, absolutely and formally, is not a particular grace distinct from all other graces that are exercised in it. Rather, it is the way and manner by which we are to exercise all other graces of faith, love, delight, fear, reverence, self-abasement and the like, to certain special ends. I know of no grace of prayer that is distinct or different from the exercise of these graces. It is therefore a holy commanded way to exercise other graces, but it is not a particular grace itself. Only, where any person is singularly disposed

and devoted to this duty, we may, if we please (though improperly), say he is eminent in the grace of prayer. And I suppose that it will not be denied by anyone, that this part of His work is intended in the promise.

If any are minded to distance themselves from other things which are ascribed to him — or if they abhor allowing him part or interest in our supplications, such that we may in any sense be said to 'pray in the Holy Ghost' — or if they will not allow so much as the work of his grace being wrought in believers by virtue of this promise — then they will manage to oppose his other actings at too dear a rate to be gainers by it.

[2.] He is such a Spirit by giving an *ability* for prayer, or communicating a gift to the minds of men, that enables them to profitably exercise all his graces in that special way of prayer, for themselves and others. It will be granted afterward that there may be a gift of prayer used where there is no grace in its exercise, nor perhaps is there any to be exercised — that is, as some improperly express it, 'the *gift* of prayer, where the *grace* of prayer is absent.' But in declaring how the Spirit is a Spirit of supplication, we must take both into consideration. He both *disposes* us to pray — that is, to exercise grace in that special way — and he *enables* us to pray. Where this ability is wholly and absolutely lacking, or where it is rejected or despised — even though he may act and exercise those very graces which are to be exercised in prayer, and whose exercise in that way is commonly called the 'grace of prayer' — this work of his belongs to the general head of sanctification, in which he preserves, excites, and acts all our graces, and not to this special work of prayer; nor is he a Spirit of supplication in it

Therefore, He is only a Spirit of supplication, *properly*, as he communicates a gift or ability to anyone, to exercise all His graces in the way and duty of prayer. This is what he is promised for here, and what he is promised to be poured out for, that is, in an abundant and plentiful manner. Wherever he is bestowed in the accomplishment of this promise, he both *disposes* the hearts of men to pray, and he *enables* them to do so. Indeed, he communicates this ability to others in great variety as to its degrees, and its usefulness in its exercise. But he does it for everyone so far as necessary for his own spiritual concerns, or for the discharge of his duty towards God and all others. But though this assertion contains the substance of what we plead for, further confirmation of it must be the principal subject of the ensuing discourse.

It needs no other demonstration that this is the sense of Zec 12.10, and that it is the mind of the Holy Ghost in the words. It expresses their proper meaning, nor can any other sense be tolerably affixed to them. To deny that the Holy Spirit is designated a *Spirit of supplication* because he inclines, disposes, and enables to pray, those to whom he is promised, and on whom he is bestowed as such, is to use a little too much liberty in sacred things.

A learned man of late, out of hatred for the Spirit of prayer, or for prayer being His gift, has endeavored to deprive the church of God of the whole benefit and comfort of this promise. For he contends that it does not belong to the Christian church, but to the Jews only. If he had said it belonged to the Jews in the first place, who would be converted to Christ, he would not have gone so wide from the truth, nor from the sense of other expositors, even though he said more than he could prove. But it is foolish and impious to suppose that any grace, any mercy, any privilege by Jesus Christ, is promised to the Jews, in which Gentile believers will not be sharers, or that whoever

has the prerogative as to *degrees*, would not partake of the same *kind*. For if they too are children of Abraham, if the blessing of faithful Abraham comes upon them also. If it is through them that he is the heir of the world, his spiritual seed inhabiting it by right in all places, then all the promises made to him and his seed, belong to them. And because most of the 'exceeding great and precious promises' of the Old Testament are made to Jacob and Israel, to Jerusalem and Zion, it is saying that all the promises are confined to the Jews. And so at once, this despoils the church of God of all right and title to them. This impious folly and sacrilege has been attempted by some.

But because all the promises belong to the same covenant, with all the grace contained in them and exhibited by them, whoever has an interest in that covenant by faith, has an interest in all the promises of God that belong to it. And that person has an equal right to them with those to whom they were first given. To suppose, now that the Jews are rejected for their unbelief, that the promises of God made to them while they stood by faith, have ceased and are of no use, is to overthrow the covenant of Abraham. Indeed, it overthrows the whole truth of the New Testament. But the apostle assures us that 'all the promises of God in Christ are yes, and Amen in him, to the glory of God *by us*;' 2Cor 1.20 — that is, in their accomplishment *in us* and *towards us*. He also positively affirms that all believers have received those promises which were originally made to Israel, 2Cor 6.16-18, 7.1. And not only so, but he declares that the promises which were made of old to particular persons on special occasions — as to the grace, power, and love contained in them and intended by them — still belong to all individual believers, and they are applicable by them to all their special occasions, Heb 13.5-6. And their right to or interest in all the promises of God, is what those who are concerned

in the obedience of faith, would not forego for all that this world can supply them with.

This, therefore, is only a particular instance of the work and effect of the Spirit, as he is generally promised in the covenant. As we declared, the promises of him as a Spirit of grace and holiness in the covenant, belong to the believers of the Gentiles also. If they do not, then they have neither share nor interest in Christ; which is a better plea for the Jew than this particular instance will afford. But this promise is only a special declaration of what, in one case, this Spirit will do, who is promised as a Spirit of grace and holiness in the covenant. And therefore the author of the evasion, suspecting that the fraud and sacrilege of it would be detected, resorts to other subterfuges, which we will afterward address, so far as we are concerned.

It may be more soberly objected that,

'The Spirit of grace and supplication was given to believers under the Old Testament. And therefore, if there is no more in it, if some extraordinary gift is not intended here, then how does it come to be made a special promise with respect to the times of the New Testament? It may therefore be supposed that what is intended here is not the ordinary grace or gift of prayer, which believers receive, and especially the officers of the church, but some extraordinary gift bestowed on the apostles and first converts to the church. This is how the prophecy concerning the effusion of the Spirit on all sorts of persons (Joel 2.28-32) is interpreted by Peter, and applied to sending the Holy Ghost in miraculous gifts on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2.15-21.'

Ans. 1. I have already obviated this objection elsewhere, in general, by showing the prodigious folly of that imagination that the

dispensation of the Spirit is confined to the first times of the gospel. This objection is a branch of that objection — enmity to the matter itself is the occasion of the whole objection.

Ans. 2. Nowhere do we find *grace* and *prayer*, the things promised here, reckoned among the *extraordinary gifts* of the Spirit under the New Testament. Prayer in an unknown tongue was extraordinary; but prayer itself was not, any more than grace; which if it was, the whole present church is graceless.

Ans. 3. The promise in Joel had express respect to the extraordinary gifts of *prophecy* and *visions*; and therefore it had its principal accomplishment on the day of Pentecost. This promise is of quite another nature.

Ans. 4. What is necessary for all believers, and their duty, and always so, is not an *extraordinary gift* bestowed on a few for a season. Now, if there are any who think that grace and prayer are not necessary for all believers, or that they may have abilities and exercise them without any aid of the Holy Spirit, then I will not at present contend with them. For this is not a place to plead with those who deny the principles of the Christian faith. Divine commands are the rule of our duty, not man's imaginations.

Ans. 5. If this is not a special promise of the New Testament, because the matter of it, or the grace promised, was in some degree and measure enjoyed under the Old Testament, then there is no promise made with respect to that scion. For the saints under the Old Testament were really made partakers of all the same graces with those under the New. Therefore,

Ans. 6. Two things are intended in the promise with respect to the times of the gospel:

(1.) *An application and enlargement* of this grace or favor, as to its subjects *extensively*. It was confined to a few under the Old Testament, but now it will be communicated to many, and diffused all over the world. It will be so poured out as to be 'shed abroad,' and imparted thereby to many. What before was only like watering a garden by a special hand, is now like the clouds pouring themselves out on the whole face of the earth.

(2.) *An increase of the degrees* of spiritual abilities for the performance of it, Tit 3.5-6. There is now a rich communication of the Spirit of grace and prayer granted to believers, in comparison to what was enjoyed under the Old Testament. The very nature of the dispensation of the gospel evinces and confirms this, in which we receive from Jesus Christ 'grace for grace.' I suppose it is needless to prove that, as to all spiritual supplies of grace, an *abundant* administration of it is brought in by Jesus Christ, the whole Scripture testifying to it.

There were, indeed, under the Old Testament, prayers to and praises of God dictated by a Spirit of prophecy, and received by immediate divine revelation, containing mysteries for the instruction of the church in all ages. These prayers were not suggested to them by the aid of the Spirit as a Spirit of *supplication*, but they were dictated in and to them by the Spirit as a Spirit of *prophecy*. Nor did they themselves fully comprehend the mind of the Holy Spirit in them, but inquired diligently into this, as into other prophecies given out by the Spirit of Christ which was in them, 1Pet 1.10-12; — an instance of which we may have in Psalm 22; it is a prayer with thanksgiving from first to last. Now David, to whom it was given by inspiration, might find in his own condition, things that had some low and meanresemblance to what was intended in the words suggested to him by the Holy Spirit, as David was a type of Christ. Yet the depth of

the mysteries contained in it, the principal scope and design of the Holy Ghost, was in great measure concealed from David, and much more from others. Only, it was given out to the church by immediate inspiration, so that believers might search and diligently inquire into what was signified and foretold in this — that they might thereby be gradually led into the knowledge of the mysteries of God, as he was pleased to graciously communicate his saving light to them.

But with this, it was revealed to David and the other prophets, so that in these things 'they did not minister to themselves, but to us,' 1Pet 1.12 as having mysteries in them which they could not, which they were not, to comprehend. But just as this gift has ceased under the New Testament (after finishing the canon of the Scripture), and no one pretends to it, so it was confined of old to a very few inspired persons. It does not belong to our present inquiry, for we speak only of those things which are common to all believers. And in this, a preference in all things must be given to those under the New Testament.

Therefore, if it could be proved (which I know it cannot be) that most of the church under the Old Testament made use of any *forms of prayers*, as mere forms of prayer — without any other end, use, or mystical instruction (all of which concurred in their prophetic composes), and for the sole end of prayer — it would not follow from this, whatever any pretend or plead, that believers under the New Testament may do the same; much less that they may be obliged to always do so. For there is now a more plentiful and rich effusion of the Spirit of grace and supplication upon them than was upon those of old. And as our duty is to be regulated by God's commands, so God's commands are suited to the dispensation of his grace. Persons under the New Testament are commanded to pray. For them not to constantly make use of the gifts, aids, and

assistances of the Spirit, which are particularly dispensed and communicated in prayer, under a pretense of what was done under the Old, is to reject the grace of the gospel, and to make themselves guilty of the highest ingratitude. Therefore, we may and ought to bear with those who, not having received anything of this promised grace and assistance, nor believing there is any such thing, plead for the use of forms of prayer to be composed by some and read by others or themselves, and only in the discharge of this duty of prayer. Yet those who have been made partakers of this grace, and who own it as their duty to constantly use and improve the promised aids of the Spirit of God, will be careful not to allow any such principles or practice that would plainly annihilate the promise.

This much, then, we may suppose to have obtained in consideration of this testimony: *That God has promised under the New Testament to give to believers, in a plentiful manner or measure, the Spirit of grace and of supplications, or his own Holy Spirit, enabling them to pray according to his mind and will.*

The way and manner of his work in this will be declared afterward. It may suffice to generally oppose this one promise, to the open reproaches and bold contempts that are cast on the Spirit of prayer by many. In the end, their framers will fail in their design, unless they can blot this text out of the Scripture.

We will not, therefore, need to plead any other testimony to the same purpose in the way of promises. Only, we may observe that this being expressly assigned as a part of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, as promised under the New Testament, there is no one promise to that purpose in which this grace is not included. Therefore, the known multiplicity of them adds strength to our argument.

Chapter III.

Gal 4.6 explained and vindicated.

The next general evidence given for the truth under consideration is the account of the *accomplishment* of this promise under the New Testament, where the nature of the operation of the Holy Spirit in this is also expressed in general. And this is

Gal 4.6, 'Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.'

As was said, an account is given here of the *accomplishment* of the promise explained before; and various things may be considered in the words:

First. The *subjects* on whom the Spirit is bestowed and in whom he works are *first*, believers, or those who by the Spirit of adoption are made the children of God. We receive the adoption of sons. And *because* we are sons, He sends his Spirit into our hearts. And we obtain this privilege of adoption, by faith in Christ Jesus: Joh 1.12, 'As many as received him, to *them* he gave power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on his name.' *Secondly*, there is a special appellation or description of the Spirit as promised and given for this purpose: he is the 'Spirit of the Son.' It has been evinced elsewhere that the original ground and reason for this is his eternal relation to the Son, as proceeding from him. But something more particular is intended here. He is called the 'Spirit of the Son' with respect to his communication to believers. Therefore, included in this is that special regard to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, which is mentioned *in the work*, as it is an evangelical mercy and privilege.

He is therefore called the 'Spirit of the Son' not only because of his *eternal procession* from him, but —

1. Because the Spirit was in the first place *given to Christ* as the head of the church, for the unction, consecration, and sanctification of his human nature. Here the Spirit laid the foundation, and gave an example of what He was to do in and towards all his members.

2. It is immediately from and by the Son that the Spirit is *communicated* to us, in two ways:

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(1.) *Authoritatively*, by virtue of the covenant between the Father and Son, on which — upon Christ's accomplishment of the work of mediation in a state of humiliation, and according to it — he 'received the promise of the Holy Ghost;' that is, the power and authority to bestow Him on whom he would, for all the ends of that mediation, Acts 2.33, 5.32.

(2.) *Formally*, in that all the graces of the Spirit are derived to us from Christ, as the head of the church, as the spring of all spiritual life, in whom they were all treasured and laid up for that purpose, Col 1.19, 2.19; Eph 4.16; Col 3.1-4.

Secondly. The work of this Spirit in general, as bestowed on believers, is partly included and partly expressed in these words. In general (which is included), he enables them to behave themselves suitably to that state and condition into which they are taken upon their faith in Christ Jesus. They are made children of God by adoption; and it is fitting that they be taught to carry themselves as becomes that new relation. 'Because you are sons, he has given you the Spirit of his Son;' without which they cannot walk before him as

becomes sons. He teaches them to bear and behave themselves no longer as foreigners and strangers, nor as servants only, but as 'children' and 'heirs of God,' Rom 8.15, 17. He endows them with a frame and disposition of heart toward holiness, and filial obedience. For just as he takes away the distance, making those near who were aliens and far from God, so he removes that fear, dread, and bondage which those who are under the power of the law are kept in: 2Tim 1.7, 'God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.' This is not 'the spirit of fear,' or a 'spirit of bondage to fear,' as in Rom 8.15 — that is, in and by the efficacy of the law filling our minds with dread, and those considerations of God that keep us at a distance from him. But in the sons on whom he is bestowed, he is a Spirit of *power*: strengthening and enabling them to all duties of obedience.

This Spirit of power is that by which we are enabled to obedience, which the apostle gives thanks for in 1Tim 1.12, 'To Christ that enables me;' that is, by his Spirit of power. For without the Spirit of adoption, we do not have the least strength or power to behave ourselves as sons in the family of God. And he is also, as thus bestowed, a Spirit of *love*, who works in us that love for God and that delight in him, which becomes children towards their heavenly Father. This is the first genuine consequent of this relation. There may be many duties performed to God where there is no true love to him, or at least no love to him as a Father in Christ, which alone is genuine and accepted. And, lastly, he is also a Spirit of a *modest*, grave, and sober mind. Even children are apt to grow wanton, and curious, and proud in their Father's house. But the Spirit enables them to behave themselves with that sobriety, modesty, and humility, which becomes the family of God.

And in these three things, *spiritual power, love, and sobriety* of mind, consists the whole deportment of the children of God in his family. This is the state and condition of those who, by the effectual working of the Spirit of adoption, are delivered from the 'spirit of bondage to fear,' which the apostle discusses in Rom 8.15.

Those who are under the power of that Spirit, or that *efficacious working of the Spirit by the law*, cannot, by virtue of any aids or assistance, make their addresses to him by prayer in a due manner. For although the means by which they are brought into this state is the Spirit of God acting upon their souls and consciences by the law, yet formally, as they are in the state of nature, the spirit by which they are moved is the unclean 'spirit of the world,' or the influence of him who 'rules in the children of disobedience.' The law that they obey is the 'law of the members' mentioned by the apostle in Rom 7.23. The works which they perform are the 'unfruitful works of darkness;' and the fruits of these unfruitful works are 'sin' and 'death.' Being under this bondage, they have no power to approach God; and their bondage tending to fear, they can have no delight in access to him. Whatever other provisions or preparations such persons may have for this duty, they can never perform it to the glory of God, nor so as to find acceptance with him.

With those who are delivered from this state, all things are otherwise. The Spirit by which they are moved is the Spirit of God — the Spirit of adoption, of power, love, and a sound mind. The law which they are under obedience to is the holy law of God, as written in the fleshy tablets of their hearts. 2Cor 3.3 Its effects are faith and love, with all other graces of the Spirit; from this they receive the fruits in peace, with joy unspeakable and full of glory. 1Pet 1.8

Thirdly. An instance is given of his effectively working these things in the adopted sons of God in the *duty of prayer*, crying 'Abba, Father.' The object of the special duty intended is 'God, even the Father,' Eph 2.18. 'Abba, o Pater.' *Abba* is the Syriac or Chaldee name for Father, then in common use among the Jews; and *Pater* was the same name among the Greeks or Gentiles — so that the common interest of Jews and Gentiles in this privilege may be intended, or rather, a holy boldness and intimate confidence of love is designed in the reduplication of the name. The Jews have a saying in the Babylonian Talmud, in the Treatise of Blessings — 'Servants and handmaids' (that is, bond-servants) 'do not call on such a one, *Abba* or *Ymma*.' Freedom of state, with a right to adoption, which they are incapable of, is required for this liberty and confidence

God gives his adopted sons *nadiyb ru'ach*, 'a free Spirit,' Psa 51.12 — a Spirit of gracious, filial ingenuousness. This is that Spirit which cries 'Abba.' That is the word by which those who were adopted first saluted their fathers, to testify to their affection and obedience. For 'abba' signifies not only 'father,' but 'my father;' for '*ab*,' 'my father,' in the Hebrew, is rendered by the Chaldee paraphrastically, 'abba.' See Gen 19.34, and elsewhere constantly. To this purpose, Chrysostom says: 'Being willing to show the ingenuousness' (that is, in this duty), 'he also uses the language of the Hebrews, and says not only 'Father,' but 'Abba, Father;' which is a word proper to those who are highly ingenuous.'

And the Spirit effects this in two ways:

1. By the excitation of graces and gracious affections in their souls in this duty, especially those of faith, love, and delight.
2. By enabling them to exercise those graces and express those affections in vocal prayer; for *chrazon* denotes not only crying, but an

earnestness of mind expressed in vocal prayer. It is praying 'with a loud voice,' as it is said of our Savior in Mat 27.50; for the whole of our duty in our supplications is expressed in this.

Now, we are not concerned, nor do we at present inquire, what course those take, what means they employ, or what helps they use in prayer, who are not as yet partakers of this privilege of adoption. It is only those who are adopted, whom the Spirit of God assists in this duty. The only question is, what such persons are to do in compliance with his assistance, or what it is that they obtain by it.

And we may compare the different expressions used by the apostle in this matter, by which the general nature of the work of the Spirit in this will further appear. In this place he says, 'God has sent forth into our hearts the Spirit of his Son, crying, Abba, Father.' In Rom 8.15. he says we have received 'the Spirit of adoption,' — the Spirit of the Son, given to us *because* we are sons — 'by which,' or in whom, 'we cry, Abba, Father.' His acting in us, and our acting by him, are expressed by the same word. And the inquiry here is how, in the same duty, he is said to 'cry' in us, and we are said to 'cry' in him. And there can be no reason for this except that the same work is both his and ours in diverse respects. As it is an act of *grace* and spiritual power, it is his, or it is worked in us by him alone. And as it is a duty performed by us, by virtue of his assistance, it is ours — by him *we cry*, 'Abba, Father.' To deny his actings in our duties is to overthrow the gospel.

And it is prayer formally considered, as comprising the gift of prayer with its outward exercise, which is intended. The mere excitation of the graces of faith, love, trust, delight, desire, self-abasement, and similar animating principles of prayer, cannot be expressed by *crying*, though it is included in it. Their actual exercise in prayer,

formally considered, is that which is ascribed to the Spirit of God. And those who will not allow that the work here expressly assigned to the Spirit of adoption, or the Spirit of the Son, is sufficient for its end, or for the discharge of this duty — either in private or in the assemblies of the church — seem to deal somewhat severely with the church of God and all believers. There is no more required for prayer either way, than our crying, 'Abba, Father,' — that is, making our requests known to him as our Father in Christ— with supplications and thanksgivings, as our state and occasions require. And is the aid of the Spirit of God not sufficient to enable us to do this? It was so of old; and that was for *all* believers as they were called to this duty with respect to their persons, families, or the church of God. If it is not so now, then it is either because God will not now communicate his Spirit to his children or sons, according to the promise of the gospel; or it is because, indeed, this grace and gift of his is despised by men, neglected, and lost. The former cannot be asserted on any safe grounds whatever; and it is our interest to consider the latter.

This twofold testimony, concerning the *promise* of the communication of the Holy Spirit or a Spirit of supplication to believers under the New Testament, and its *accomplishment*, sufficiently evinces our general assertion that there is a *particular work or special gracious operation of the Holy Ghost in the prayers of believers, enabling them to this*. For we intend no more by this than that they receive him by virtue of that promise (which the world cannot do), in order to [receive] his gracious efficiency in the duty of supplication. And so he actually inclines, disposes, and enables them to cry 'Abba, Father,' or to call upon God in prayer, as their Father, by Jesus Christ. To deny this, therefore, is to rise up in contradiction to the express testimony of God himself, and to make him a liar by our unbelief. If we had nothing further to plead in this cause, this would be abundantly sufficient to reprove the petulant folly of those

by whom this work of the Holy Ghost, and the duty of believers thereby to 'pray in the Spirit,' is scorned and derided (if we may use that despised and blasphemed expression of the Scripture).

For as to the ability of prayer which is thus received, there are some who know no more of it (as exercised in a way of duty) than the outside, shell, and appearance of it. And even that is not from their own experience, but from what they have observed in others.

There are not a few of these who confidently assert that such prayer is wholly a work of fancy, invention, memory, and wit, accompanied with some boldness and elocution, that is unjustly fathered on the Spirit of God, who is in no way concerned in this. And, it may be, they persuade many who are no better skilled in these things than themselves, that it is so indeed. However, those who have any experience of the real aids and assistances of the Spirit of God in this work and duty, any faith in the express testimonies given by God himself to this, cannot help but despise such fabulous imaginations on the part of those who are unskilled in it. You may as soon persuade them that the sun does not give light nor the fire give heat, that they do not see with their eyes nor hear with their ears, as to persuade them that the Spirit of God does not enable them to pray, or assist them in their supplications.

There might be some probability given to these assertions of the unskilled, as to the total exclusion of the Holy Ghost from any concern in prayer, if the persons whose prayerful duties they judge, were generally known to excel others in those natural endowments and acquired abilities to which this faculty of prayer is ascribed. But will this be allowed by them? Namely, will they allow that those who are thus able to pray, do so only by virtue of a spiritual glib — that they excel others in imagination, memory, wit, invention, and

elocution? It is known that those who are unskilled in such prayer will admit no such thing. Rather, in all other instances they represent those who pray in this way, as dull, stupid, ignorant, unlearned, and brutish. It is only in prayer that they somehow gain the advantage of those natural endowments! These two things are hardly consistent with common ingenuousness. For is it not strange that those who are so otherwise contemptible with respect to natural and acquired endowments in all other things — whether of science or of prudence — should in this one duty or work of prayer, be so improved as to outdo the imitation of them by those who despise them? For just as these despisers *do not*, as they *will not*, pray as these skilled ones do, so the despisers' own hearts tell them they *cannot*. This is the true reason why they so despitely oppose this praying in the Spirit, whatever pride or passion pretends to the contrary.

But things of this nature will again occur to us, and therefore it will not be further insisted on here. It has been proved that God promised a plentiful dispensation of his Spirit to believers under the New Testament to enable them to pray according to His mind. And it has been proved that, in general, this promise is accomplished in and towards all the children of God. Therefore, it remains in the second place, as to what we have proposed, that we declare *what the work of the Holy Ghost is in them*, to this end and purpose — or how he is a Spirit of prayer or supplication to us.

Chapter IV.

The nature of prayer — Rom 8.26 explained and vindicated.

Prayer at present I take to be a *gift and ability, or a spiritual faculty of exercising faith, love, reverence, fear, delight, and other graces, in a way of vocal requests, supplications, and praises to God*: 'In everything ... let your requests be made known to God,' Phi 4.6.

I affirm this gift and ability is bestowed; and by virtue of this, this work is wrought in us by the Holy Ghost, in the accomplishment of the promise insisted on, crying 'Abba, Father,' in those who believe. And this is what we are to give an account of. In this we will assert nothing but what the Scripture plainly goes before us in, and what the experience of believers confirms, duly exercised in duties of obedience. And in the issue of our endeavor, we will leave it to the judgment of God and his church, whether they are 'ecstatic, enthusiastic, unaccountable raptures' that we plead for, or a real gracious effect and work of the Holy Spirit of God.

The first thing we ascribe to the Spirit in this, is that he supplies and furnishes the mind with a due comprehension of *the matter of prayer*, or what ought to be prayed for, both in general and as to all our particular occasions. Without this, I suppose it will be granted that no man can pray as he should; for how can any man pray who does not know what to pray for? Where there is not a comprehension of this, the very nature and being of prayer is destroyed. And in this, the testimony of the apostle is express:

Rom 8.26, 'Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we do not know what we should pray for as we should: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.'

It is this expression alone which I urge at present: 'We do not know what we should pray for as we should.' This is generally supposed to be otherwise — namely, that men know well enough what they should pray for. Only, they are wicked and careless, and *will not* pray

for what they know they should. I will make no excuse or apology for the wickedness and carelessness of men, which without a doubt, are abominable. Yet I must abide by the truth asserted by the apostle, which I will further evidence immediately: namely, that without the special aid and assistance of the Holy Spirit, no man knows what to pray for as he should.

Yet there is another relief in this matter, and so there is no need for any work of the Holy Ghost in this. And we will be accounted impudent if we ascribe anything to him of which there is a token pretense that it may be otherwise effected or provided for. There is such a great unwillingness to allow him either place, work, or office in the Christian religion or the practice of it! It is therefore pretended that, although men do not know what to pray for of themselves, this defect may be supplied in a prescribed form of words, prepared on purpose, to teach and confine men to what they are to pray for.

We may, therefore, dismiss the Holy Spirit and his assistance as to this concern of prayer. For the due matter of it may be so set down and fixed on ink and paper, that the lowliest capacity cannot miss his duty in this! This, therefore, is what is to be tried in our ensuing discourse: namely, that because it is plainly affirmed that 'we do not know' of ourselves 'what we should pray for as we should' (which I judge to be universally true for *all* persons, those who prescribe prayers, as well as those for whom they are prescribed), and because the Holy Spirit helps and relieves us in this, we may or should relinquish and neglect his assistance, and rely only on those supplies which are invented or used to that end for which he is promised. Plainly put, the question is whether the word of God is to be trusted in this matter or not.

It is true, that whatever we ought to pray for is declared in the Scripture; and yes, it is summarily comprised in the Lord's Prayer. But it is one thing to have what we ought to pray for in the book, and another thing to have it in our minds and hearts — without which it will never be the due matter of our prayer. It is out of the 'abundance of the heart' that the mouth must speak in this matter, Mat 12.34. There is, therefore, a threefold defect in us with respect to the matter of prayer, which is supplied by the Holy Spirit, and this cannot be supplied in any other way nor by any other means. And in this, he is a Spirit of supplication to us, according to the promise. For —

1. *We do not know our own wants;*
2. *We do not know the supplies of them, that are expressed in the promises of God; and,*
3. *We do not know the end to which what we pray for is to be directed,* which I add to the former.

Without the knowledge and understanding of all these, no man can pray as he should; and we can in no way know them except by the aid and assistance of the Spirit of grace. And if these things are manifest, it will be evident how in this first instance, we are enabled to pray by the Holy Ghost.

First. Our *wants*, as they are to be the *matter of prayer*, may be referred to three heads. And we *know* none of them *rightly* of ourselves, so as to make them the due subject of our supplications; and we know nothing at all about some of them:

1. This first consists in our *outward restraints*, pressures, and difficulties, which we desire to be delivered from, with all other temporal things in which we are concerned. In those things, it should

seem wondrously clear that of ourselves we know what to pray for. But the truth is, whatever our sense may be of them and our natural desires about them, we do not know how and *when*, under what conditions and limitations, with what frame of heart and spirit, with what submission to the pleasure of God, they are to be made the matter of our prayers. Therefore, God calls most prayers about such matters a 'howling,' and not crying to him with the heart, Hos 7.14. There is indeed a voice of nature crying in its distress to the God of nature; but that is not the duty of evangelical prayer which we inquire after. And men oftentimes most miss it when they think they are most ready and prepared for it. To know our temporal wants so as to make them the matter of prayer according to the mind of God, requires more wisdom than we are furnished with of ourselves. For 'who knows what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spends as a shadow?' Ecc 6.12. Often, believers are never more at a loss than [knowing] how to rightly pray about temporal things. No man is in pain or distress, or under any wants, where continuance would be destructive to his being, that he may not, indeed, he *ought* to make deliverance from them the matter of his prayer. So in that case he knows in some measure, or in general, what he ought to pray for, without any special spiritual illumination. Yet men cannot understand of themselves the circumstances of those things, and in what respect they stand to the glory of God, and to the supreme end or highest good of the persons concerned. And it is with regard to these things alone that the matter of prayer can be made acceptable to God in Christ. They need an interest in that promise made to the church, that 'they will all be taught by God.' And this is so much more in those things which belong only to the conveniences of this life — of which no man, of himself, knows what is good for him or useful to him.

2. We have *internal wants* that are discerned in the light of a *natural conscience*: such is the *guilt of sin* which the conscience accuses us of — sins against natural light and the plain outward letter of the law. We know something about these things without any special aid of the Holy Spirit, Rom 2.14-15; and desires for deliverance are inseparable from them. But we may observe two things:

(1.) That the knowledge which we have of this, of ourselves, is so *dark* and *confused* that we are in no way able to thereby rightly manage our *wants* in prayer to God. A natural conscience, awakened and excited by afflictions or other providential visitations, will reveal itself in unfeigned and severe reflections of guilt upon the soul. But until the Spirit convinces us of sin, all things are in such disorder and confusion in the mind, that no man knows how to make his address to God about it in a due manner. There is more required to rightly deal with God about the guilt of sin, than a mere sense of it. Men can proceed under that sole conduct and guidance, just as the heathens did in dealing with their supposed gods, without a due respect for the propitiation made by the blood of Christ. Indeed, prayer about the guilt of sin, discerned in the light of a natural conscience, is but an 'abomination.' Besides,

(2.) We all know how small a portion of the concern of believers lies in those things which fall under the light and determination of a natural conscience; for —

3. The things about which believers do and ought to principally address and deal with God in their supplications, are the *inward spiritual frames and dispositions of their souls*, with the actings of grace and sin in them. Concerning this, David was not satisfied with the confession of his original and all known actual sins, Psa 51.1-5;

nor with an acknowledgment that 'no one knows his own wanderings,' which is why he desires cleansing from 'unknown sins,' Psa 19.12. But moreover, he begs God to undertake the inward search of his heart, to find out what was amiss or not right in him, Psa 139.23-24, knowing that God principally required 'truth in the inward parts,' Psa 51.6. Such is the work of sanctification carried on in the whole spirit and soul, 1Thes 5.23.

The inward sanctification of all our faculties is what we want and pray for. Supplies of grace from God for this purpose, with a sense of the power, guilt, violence, and deceit of sin in its inward actings in the mind and affections, with other innumerable things belonging to this, make up the principal matter of prayer as it is formally a supplication.

Add to this that everything in which we have intercourse with God in faith and love, belongs to prayer; this is largely understood to be the whole duty of prayer. Similarly comprised in this duty are the acknowledgment of the whole mystery of his wisdom, grace, and love in Christ Jesus, along with all the fruits, effects, and benefits which we receive from it; all the workings and actions of our souls towards him, along with their faculties and affections; in brief, every thing and every conception of our minds in which our spiritual access to the throne of grace consists, or which belongs to it, along with all occasions and emergencies of spiritual life.

Few are so ignorant or profane as to assert that we can have such an acquaintance with these things as to manage them acceptably in our supplications, without the grace of spiritual illumination from the Holy Ghost. Some, I confess, seem to be strangers to these things — yet this renders them of no less weight or moment.

Hence it comes to pass that the prayers of believers about these things, especially their confessions of what sense they have of the power and guilt of the inward actings of sin, have been exceedingly maligned and reproached by some. For out of their ignorance they cannot understand such things; out of their pride, heightened by sensuality of life, they despise and condemn them.

Secondly. The *matter of prayer* may be considered with respect to the promises of God. These are the measure of prayer, and they contain the matter of it. We are to pray for what God has promised, all that he has promised, and nothing else. For 'secret things belong to the Lord our God' alone. But the declaration of his will and grace belongs to us, and it is our rule. Deu 29.29 Therefore, there is nothing that we really do or may stand in need of, that God has not promised to supply, in such a way and under such limitations as may make it good and useful to us. And there is nothing that God has promised that we do not stand in need of, or that in some way or other we are not concerned with as members of the mystical body of Christ. Therefore, 'we do not know what we should pray for as we ought,' unless we know or understand the goodness, grace, kindness, and mercy, that is prepared and proposed in the promises of God. For how could we, seeing that we are to pray for *all* that God has promised, and for nothing *except* what God has promised, and *as* he has promised it?

The inquiry that remains, therefore, is whether we of ourselves, without the special assistance of the Holy Spirit, understand these things or not. The apostle tells us that the 'things of God,' spiritual things, 'no one knows, except the Spirit of God;' and we must receive the Spirit of God to 'know the things that are freely given to us by God,' 1Cor 2.11-12. These are the grace, mercy, love, and kindness of the promises, 2Cor 7.1. To say that of ourselves we can perceive,

understand, and comprehend these things, without the special assistance of the Holy Ghost, is to overthrow the whole gospel and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, as demonstrated elsewhere.

But it may and will be said, 'There is more stirred than needs to be in this matter. God help poor sinners, if all this is required for their prayers! Surely men may pray at a cheaper rate, and with much less trouble, or else very few will continue long in that duty.' For some can see no necessity to thus understand the grace and mercy that is in the promises, as to prayer, and suppose that men know well enough what to pray for without it.

But those who speak in this way, do not know what it is to pray, nor are they willing to learn, it seems. For we are to pray *in faith*, Rom 10.14; and faith respects God's promises, Heb 4.1, Rom 4. Therefore, if we do not understand what God has promised, we cannot pray at all. It is marvellous what thoughts such persons have of God and themselves, who without a due comprehension of their own wants, and without an understanding of God's promises, in which all their supplies are laid up, 'say their prayers,' as they call it, continually. And indeed, in the poverty, or rather, in the misery of devised aids to prayer, this is not the least pernicious effect or consequent: that they keep men from searching the promises of God, by which they might know what to pray for. Let the matter of prayer be so prescribed to men that they never need either to search their own hearts, or God's promises about it, and this whole work is dispatched out of the way. The soul is rightly prepared for this duty only when it understands its own condition, the supplies of grace provided in the promises, the suitability of those supplies for its wants, and the means of its conveyance to us by Jesus Christ. It will immediately be declared that we have all this by the Spirit, and not otherwise.

Thirdly. As to the *matter* of prayer, I join the *end* we aim at in the things we pray for, and which we direct them to. And in this, also, we are at a loss in ourselves. Men may lose all the benefit of their prayers by proposing undue ends for themselves in the things they pray for. Our Savior says, 'Ask, and you will receive.' But the apostle James affirms of some, Jas 4.3, 'You ask, and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it on your pleasures.' To pray for anything, and not to expressly pray for the end to which God designed it, is to *ask amiss*, and to no purpose. Yet, whatever confidence we may have in our own wisdom and integrity, if we are left to ourselves, without the special guidance of the Spirit of God, our aims will never be suited to the will of God. There are countless ways and means by which we may and do fail in this way, when we are not under the actual conduct of the Spirit of God — that is, when our own natural and distempered affections intermix themselves in our supplications. There is nothing so excellent in itself, so useful to us, so acceptable to God, in the matter of prayer, that it may not be vitiated and corrupted, and prayer itself be rendered vain, by applying it to false or mistaken ends. In its proper place, we will see what the work of the Spirit is, to guide us in this.

Chapter V.

The work of the Holy Spirit as to the matter of prayer.

These things are considerable as to the *matter of prayer*. And with respect to them, *we do not know of ourselves what* we should pray for, nor *how*, nor *when*. The first work of the Spirit of God, as a *Spirit of supplication* in believers, is to give them an understanding of all their *wants*, and of the *supplies* of grace and mercy in the promises. This causes such a sense of them to dwell and abide on their minds that, according to their measure, they are continually furnished with the *matter of prayer*, without which men *never* pray, and by which, in some sense, they pray *always*; for —

First. The Spirit alone gives us, and he alone is able to give us, such an understanding of our *own wants*, that we may be able to make our thoughts about them *known to God* in prayer and supplication. And what is said concerning our wants, is likewise said with respect to the whole matter of prayer by which we give glory to God, either in requests or prayers. I will manifest this in some instances, to which others may be reduced.

1. The *principal matter* of our prayers *concerns faith and unbelief*. So the apostles prayed in a particular manner, 'Lord, increase our faith;' and so the poor man prayed in his distress, 'Lord, help my unbelief.' I cannot think that those who never pray for the pardon of unbelief, for its removal, and for the increase of faith, ever pray rightly. If unbelief is the greatest of sins, and if faith is the greatest of the gifts of God, we are not Christians if these things are not one principal part of the matter of our prayers. To this end we must be convinced of the nature and guilt of unbelief, and also of the nature and use of faith. Without that conviction, we can neither know our own highest wants, nor what to pray for as we ought. Our Savior expressly declares that this is the special work of the Holy Ghost, Joh 16.8-9, 'He will convince the world of sin, because they do not believe in me.' I deny and *must* deny that anyone is or can be convinced of

the nature and guilt of that unbelief, either in the whole or in its remainders — which the gospel condemns, and which is the great condemning sin under the gospel — without a special work of the Holy Ghost on his mind and soul. For unbelief, as it respects Jesus Christ — not believing in him, or not believing in him as we should — is a sin against the gospel. And it is by the gospel alone that we may be convinced of it; and that is by the ministration of the Spirit.

Thus, neither the light of a natural conscience nor the law will convince anyone of the guilt of unbelief with respect to Jesus Christ, nor instruct them in the nature of faith in him. No innate notions of our minds, no doctrines of the law, will reach to this. To think to teach men to pray, or to help them in praying, without a sense of unbelief, or of the remainders of it in its guilt and power — and without a sense of the nature of faith, with its necessity, use, and efficacy — is to say to the naked and the hungry, 'Be warmed and filled,' and not to give them those things that are needful for the body. Therefore, this belongs to the work of the Spirit as a Spirit of supplication. Let men tear and tire themselves night and day with a multitude of prayers, if a work of the Spirit of God in teaching the nature and guilt of unbelief, and the nature, efficacy, and use of faith in Christ Jesus, do not go with it, all will be lost and perish. Yet it is marvellous to consider how little mention of these things occurs in most of those compositions which have been published to be used as forms of prayer. They are generally omitted in such endeavors, as if they were things in which Christians were very little concerned. The gospel positively and frequently determines the present acceptance of men with God or their disobedience, with their future salvation and condemnation, according to their faith or unbelief. For their obedience or disobedience are infallible consequents of that. Now, if things that are of the greatest importance to us, and on which depend all other things in which our spiritual estate is concerned,

and these things are *not* a part of the subject-matter of our daily prayer, then I do not know what deserves to be.

2. The *matter* of our prayer respects the *depravation of our nature*, and our wants on that account:

- The darkness and ignorance that is in our understandings;
- Our unacquaintedness with heavenly things;
- Our alienation from the life of God thereby;
- The secret workings of the lusts of the mind under the shade and covert of this darkness;
- The stubbornness, obstinacy, and perverseness of our wills by nature;
- Our wills' reluctance toward and dislike of spiritual things;
- Innumerable latent guiles arising from this reluctance.

All of these keep the soul from a due conformity to the holiness of God. And so they are things which believers have a special regard to in their confessions and supplications. They know this is their duty, and find by experience that the greatest concern between God and their souls, as to sin and holiness, lies in these things. And they are never more concerned for themselves than when they find their hearts least affected with them. To give up entreating God about them — for mercy in their pardon, for grace in their removal, and the daily renovation of the image of God in them thereby — is to renounce all religion and all designs of living for God.

Therefore, without a knowledge, a sense, a due comprehension of these things, no man can pray as he should, because he is unacquainted with the matter of prayer, and he does not know what to pray for. But we cannot attain this knowledge of ourselves. Our nature is so corrupted as not to understand its own depravation. Hence some absolutely deny this corruption, thus taking away all

necessity for laboring after its cure and the renovation of the image of God in us. And hereby they overthrow the prayers of all believers, which the ancient church continually pressed the Pelagians with. Without a sense of these things, I must profess that I do not understand how any man can pray. And as was said, we do not have this knowledge of ourselves. Our nature is blind, and cannot see them; it is proud, and will not own them; it is stupid, and senseless of them. It is the work of the Spirit of God alone to give us a due conviction of, a spiritual insight into, and a sense of the concern of these things. I have so fully proved this elsewhere, as not to insist on it here again.

It is not easy to conjecture how men pray, or what they pray about, who do not know *the plague of their own hearts*. Indeed, this ignorance, lack of light into, or conviction of, the depravation of their nature — and the remainders of it even in those who are renewed, with the fruits, consequents, and effects of it — are the principal cause of men's barrenness in this duty. It is such that they can seldom go beyond what is prescribed to them. And from this, they can also satisfy themselves with a set or frame of well-composed words. They might easily discern that their own condition and concern are not at all expressed in these, if they were acquainted with them. I do not fix measures for other men, nor give bounds to their understandings. Only, I will take leave to profess, for my own part, that I cannot conceive or apprehend how any man does or can know what to pray for as he should, in the whole compass and course of that duty, if he has no spiritual illumination enabling him to discern, in some measure, the corruption of his nature, and the internal evils of his heart. If men judge that the faculties of their souls are undepraved, their minds are free from vanity, their hearts are free from guile and deceit, their wills are free from perverseness and carnality, I do not wonder on what grounds they despise the

prayers of others, but would wonder on what grounds they might find real humiliation and fervency in their own.

To this I may add the irregularity and disorder of our affections. These, I confess, are discernible in the light of nature. And rectifying them, or attempting to, was the principal end of the old philosophy. But the chief respect it had to them on this principle, is that they disquiet the mind, or erupt into outward expressions by which men are defiled, dishonored, or distressed. This is how far natural light will go. And by this light, in the working of their consciences, as far as I know, men may be *put to prayer* about them. But the chief depravation of the affections lies in their aversion to spiritual and heavenly things.

They are, indeed, sometimes ready to like spiritual things under false notions of them, and to like divine worship under superstitious ornaments and meretricious dresses. In this respect, they are the spring and life of all that devotion which is in the church of Rome. But take heavenly and spiritual things in themselves, with respect to their *proper* ends, and there is a dislike of them and an aversion to them in all our affections, which are corrupted. These variously act themselves, and influence our souls to vanities and disorders in all holy duties. No man knows what it means to pray, who is not exercised in supplications for mortifying, changing, and renewing these affections which are spiritually irregular. And yet it is the Spirit of God alone which reveals these things to us, and gives us a sense of our concern in them. I say, the spiritual irregularity of our affections, and their aversion to spiritual things, is discernible in no other light than supernatural illumination. For if spiritual things cannot be discerned without that, as the apostle assures us they cannot, 1Cor 2.14, then it is impossible that the disorder of our affections can do so. If we do not know the true nature of an object, we cannot know

the actings of our minds towards it. Therefore, although there is an innate, universal aversion to spiritual things in our affections, seeing that by nature we are wholly alienated from the life of God, it cannot be *discerned* by us in any light except that which reveals these spiritual things to us. Nor can any man be made sensible of the evil and guilt of that disorder, who does not also have a love implanted in his heart for those things which the heart finds obstructed thereby. Therefore, the mortification of these affections, and their renovation with respect to spiritual and heavenly things — being no small part of the matter of the prayers of believers, and a special part of their duty — they have no other acquaintance with them or sense of them except as they receive them by light and conviction from the Spirit of God. Those who are destitute of this, must necessarily be strangers to the life and power of the duty of prayer itself.

As it is with respect to sin, so it is with respect to God and Christ, and the covenant, grace, holiness, and privileges. We have no spiritual conceptions about them, no right understanding of them, no insight into them, except what is given to us by the Spirit of God. Without an acquaintance with these things, what are our prayers, or what do they signify? Men without such an acquaintance, may pray on to the world's end, without giving anything of glory to God, or obtaining any advantage for their own souls.

And this I place as the *first part* of the work of the Spirit of supplication in believers: enabling them to pray according to the mind of God, which *they do not know how to do* of themselves, as insisted on afterward in this passage of the apostle. When this is done, when a right apprehension of sin and grace and of our concern in them is fixed on our minds, then in some measure we always have the *matter of prayer* in readiness. Its words and expressions will

easily follow, though the aid of the Holy Spirit is also necessary for this, as we will afterward declare.

And this is why the duty performed with respect to this part of the aid and assistance of the Spirit of God has lately been vilified and reproached by some (as said before). Formerly all their exceptions lay against some expressions, or against the weakness of some persons in conceived prayer, which they did not like. But now scorn is poured out on the matter of prayer itself, especially the humble and deep confessions of sin (upon its discovery mentioned before) which are made in the supplications of ministers and others. The things themselves are maligned as absurd, foolish, and irrational, as all spiritual things are to some sorts of men. Nor do I see how this disagreement is capable of any reconciliation. For those who have no light to discern those respects of sin and grace which we mentioned, cannot help but think it is uncouth to have them continually made the matter of men's prayers. On the other hand, those who have received a light into sin and grace, and are acquainted with them by the Spirit of God, are troubled at nothing more than this: that they cannot sufficiently abase themselves under a sense of them, nor in any words can they fully express that impression on their minds which is made by the Holy Ghost, nor can they clothe their desires for grace and mercy with words sufficiently significant and emphatic. And therefore this difference is irreconcilable by any except the Spirit of God himself. While it abides, those who respect in their prayers only what is discernible in the light of nature, or from a natural conscience, will keep themselves to general expressions and outward things. They will use words prepared for that purpose by themselves or others, do what we can to the contrary; for men will not be led beyond their own light, nor is it fitting that they should. And those who receive the supplies of the Spirit in this matter, will principally be conversant in their prayers, about the spiritual, internal concerns

of their souls in sin and grace, however pleased others may be to despise and reproach them for it.

It is in vain to contend much about these things, which are regulated not by arguments but by principles. Men will invincibly adhere to the capacity of their light. Nothing can put an end to this difference except a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit from above. According to the promise, this is what we wait for.

Secondly. We *do not know what to pray for as we ought*, but the Holy Ghost acquaints us with the *grace and mercy* which are prepared in the *promises* of God for our relief. I declared before, that the knowledge of this is necessary to enable us to direct our prayers to God in a due manner, and I suppose it will not be denied. For, what do we pray for? What do we have as a prospect and design in our supplications? What is it that we desire to be made partakers of? Praying only by saying or repeating so many words of prayer, whose sense and meaning are perhaps not understood by those who make use of them (as in the Papacy) — or doing so to rest in the saying or repetition of them, without having a special design to obtain something or things which we make known in our supplications — is unworthy the disciples of Christ, indeed of rational creatures. 'Deal this way with your governor; will he be pleased with you, or accept you?' Mal 1.8. Neither ruler, friend, nor neighbor, would accept it from our hands, if we were to constantly make solemn addresses to them without any special design. We must 'pray with our understanding;' 1Cor 14.15 that is, we must understand what we pray for.

And these things are none other than what God has promised. If we are not regulated by them in our supplications, we 'ask amiss.' It is, therefore, indispensably necessary to prayer that we know *what God*

has promised, or that we should have an understanding of the grace and mercy of the promises. God knows our wants, what is good for us, what is useful to us, what is necessary to bring us to the enjoyment of himself, infinitely better than we do ourselves. Indeed, we know nothing of these things except what he is pleased to teach us. These are the things which he has 'prepared' for us, as the apostle says in 1Cor 2.9; and what he has prepared, he declares in the promises of the covenant, for they are the declaration of the grace and good pleasure which he has purposed in himself. From this, believers may learn what is good for them, and what is lacking for them in the promises, more clearly and certainly than by any other means whatever. Therefore, we learn from them what to pray for as we should. And this is another reason why men are so barren in their supplications: they do not know what to pray for, but are forced to take themselves to a confused repetition of the same requests — namely, their ignorance of the promises of God, and the grace exhibited in them.

Our inquiry, therefore, is by what way or means we come to an acquaintance with these promises. All believers have this in some measure, some more full and distinct than others, but all have it in a useful sufficiency. And we say this acquaintance is by the Spirit of God, without whose aid and assistance we can neither understand them nor what is contained in them.

I confess that some, by frequent reading of the Scripture and only by the help of a *faithful memory*, may be able to express in their prayers the promises of God, without any spiritual acquaintance with the grace of them. By this they minister to others, but not to themselves. This remembrance of words or expressions does not belong to the special work of the Holy Ghost in supplying the hearts and minds of believers with the matter of prayer. Rather, this is what he does in

this work: he opens their eyes, he gives an understanding, he enlightens their minds, so that they will perceive the things that are prepared for them by God, and that are contained in the promises of the gospel. And in this he represents them in their beauty, glory, suitableness, and desirableness to their souls. He makes them see Christ in them, all the fruits of his mediation in them, all the effect of the grace and love of God in them; the excellence of mercy and pardon, of grace and holiness, of a new heart, with principles, dispositions, inclinations, and actings — all as they are proposed in the truth and faithfulness of God.

Now, when the mind and heart are continually filled with an understanding and due apprehension of these things, it is always furnished with the matter of prayer and praise to God. Persons make use of this as they have actual assistance and utterance given to them. And because the Holy Spirit implants a love for these things on the minds of believers, together with the knowledge of them, they are not only directed what to pray for by this, but they are excited and stirred up to seek the enjoyment of them with ardent affections and earnest endeavors. *This* is to pray. Among those on whose hearts these things are not implanted, some may, as observed before, make an appearance of it by expressing in prayer the words of the promises of God retained in their memories. Yet for the most part, they are not able to pray in any tolerable and useful manner; and they either wonder at or despise those who are so enabled.

But it may be objected that,

'Where there is any *defect* in this, it may be easily supplied. For if men are not acquainted with the *promises* of God themselves, in the manner described before, and do not know what they ought to pray for, others who understand the promises may *compose prayers* for

their use, according to their apprehensions of the mind of God in them, which they may read. And so they will have the *matter of prayer* always in readiness.'

I answer —

1. I do not know that anyone has a command or a promise of assistance to make or compose prayers that are to be said or read by others as their prayers. And therefore I expect no great matter from what anyone will do of that kind. The Spirit of grace and supplication is promised, as I have proved, *to enable us to pray*, not to enable us *to make or compose prayers for others*.

2. It savors of some unacquaintance with the promises of God and the duty of prayer, to imagine that the *matter* of them, in order to suit the various conditions of believers, can be pent up in any one *form* of man's devising. Much of what we are to pray about may be in general and doctrinally comprised in a form of words, as they are in the Lord's Prayer. This gives directions in and a boundary for our requests. But it is a fantasy to think that the things themselves could be prepared and suited for the condition and wants of those who are to pray.

3. There is a vast difference between *objectively proposing* good things to be prayed for in consideration of those who are to pray (which men may do), and implanting an acquaintance with them, and a love for them, upon the mind and heart: this is the work of the *Holy Ghost*.

4. When things are so prepared and cast into a *form of prayer*, those by whom such forms are used, no more understand them than if they had never been cast into any such form, unless the Spirit of God gives them an understanding; but the form itself is not a sanctified

means for this. And where that understanding is given, there is no need for the form.

5. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to give believers such a *comprehension* of promised grace and mercy, that they may constantly apply their minds to it, or to those things which, in a special way, are suited to their present daily wants and occasions, with the frame and dispositions of their souls and spirit. This is what gives spiritual beauty and order to the duty of prayer — namely, suiting the wants and supplies of a thankful disposition and praises, of love and admiration, to the excellencies of God in Christ, and all by the wisdom of the Holy Ghost. But when a person is made to pray by his directory, for things that, although good in themselves, are not suited to his present state, frame, inclination, wants, and desires, there is nothing but spiritual confusion and disorder.

Again; what we said concerning the *promises* must also be applied to all the *precepts* or commands of God. These in like manner are the *matter of our prayers*, both as to confession and supplication. Without a right understanding of them, we can perform no part of this duty as we should.

This is evident in the apprehension of those who, repeating the words of the Decalogue, subjoin their acknowledgments of a desire for mercy with respect to the transgression of the law, I suppose, and their desire to have their hearts inclined to keep the law. But the law with all the commands of God are spiritual and inward. We cannot have a useful acquaintance with their true sense and importance, in their extent and latitude, except by the enlightening, instructing efficacy of the grace of the Spirit. And where this is given, the mind is greatly supplied with the true matter of prayer. For when the soul has learned the spirituality and holiness of the law — its extent to the

inward frame and disposition of our hearts, as well as to our outward actions — and learned that it requires absolute holiness, rectitude, and conformity to God at all times and in all things, *then* the soul sees and learns its own discrepancy from it and its coming short of it — even when it is unblamable as to its outward acts and duties. And from this proceed those confessions of sin, in the best and most holy believers, which those who do not understand these things, deride and scorn. By this means, therefore, the Holy Spirit helps us to pray, by supplying us with the due and proper matter of supplications — even by acquainting us and affecting our hearts with the spirituality of the command, and of our coming short of this in our dispositions and frequent inordinate actings of our minds and affections. The one who is instructed in this, will on all occasions be prepared with a fullness of matter for confession and humiliation, and also with a sense of that grace and mercy which we stand in need of with respect to the obedience required of us.

Thirdly, He alone guides and directs believers to pray or ask for anything *according to right and proper ends*. For there is nothing so excellent in itself, so useful to us, and so acceptable to God, as the matter of prayer. But it may be vitiated, corrupted, and the prayer itself be rendered vain, by applying it to false or mistaken ends. And it is plain in the text under consideration, that in this case we are relieved by the Holy Ghost. For he 'makes intercession for us according to God,' helping our infirmities, and teaching us what to pray for as we should — that is, according to God's mind or his will, Rom 8.27. He does this in us and by us, or he enables us to do so.

For the Spirit himself, *without us*, has no office to be performed immediately towards God, nor any nature that is inferior to the divine, in which he might intercede. The whole of any such work with respect to us is incumbent on Christ. He alone, and in his own

person, performs what is to be done with God *for us*. What the Spirit does, he does *in and by us*. He therefore directs and enables us to make supplications 'according to the mind of God.' And in this, God is said to 'know the mind of the Spirit;' that is, to know his end and design in the matter of his requests. God knows this; that is, he approves of and accepts it. So it is the Spirit of God who directs us as to the design and end of our prayers, that they may find acceptance with God.

Yet there may be, and I believe there is, more in that expression, 'God knows the mind of the Spirit.' For he works such high, holy, spiritual desires and designs in the minds of believers in their supplications, that God alone knows and understands them in their full extent and latitude. Of ourselves, we are apt to fail and mistake, as declared from Jas 4.3.

I will not emphasize particulars here, but only mention two general ends of prayer to which the Holy Spirit keeps the minds of believers in all their requests, where he has furnished them with the *matter* of their requests according to the mind of God. For he not only makes *intercession in them* according to the mind of God with respect to the matter of their requests, but also with respect to the *end* which they aim at, that it may be accepted with him. He therefore guides them to design,

1. That all the *success of their petitions* and prayers may have an immediate tendency to the glory of God. It is he alone who enables them to subordinate all their desires to God's glory. Without his special aid and assistance, we would aim *at self only and ultimately*, in all we do. Our own profit, ease, satisfaction, mercies, peace, and deliverance, would be the end to which we would direct

all our supplications; and by this, they would all be vitiated and become abominable.

2. He keeps them to this also: that the issue of their supplications may be the *improvement of holiness* in them, and thereby their conformity to God, with their nearer access to him. Where these ends are not found, the matter of prayer may be good and according to the word of God, and yet our prayers would be an abomination.

We may pray for mercy and grace, and the best promised fruits of the love of God; and yet for lack of these ends, we will find no acceptance in our supplications. To keep us to them is His work, because it consists in casting out all self ends and aims, bringing all natural desires in subordination to God, which he works in us if he works in us anything at all.

And this is the first part of the work of the Spirit towards believers as a Spirit of grace and supplication — he furnishes and fills their minds with the matter of prayer, teaching them thereby what to pray for as they should. And where this is not worked in some measure and degree, there is no praying according to the mind of God.

Chapter VI.

What the due manner of prayer consists in.

The Holy Spirit gives the *mind* a due apprehension of the *things we ought to pray for*, or furnishes it with the *matter of prayer*. Having done that, he moreover works upon the will and affections a due

sense and valuation of them, with desires for them; the *due* manner of prayer consists in this. But these things are *separable*. The mind may have light to discern the things that are to be prayed for, and yet the will and affections may be dead to them, or unconcerned in them. There may be a gift of prayer founded on this, but the soul does not spiritually act towards God in its exercise — for light is the matter of *all* common gifts. And by virtue of a perishing illumination, a man may attain a gift in prayer which may be of use for the edification of others; for 'the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit with.' 1Cor 12.7 In the meantime, for the man who thus prays, it is not much different than it was with those of old who prayed in an unknown tongue: 'his spirit prays, but his understanding is unfruitful.' 1Cor 14.4 He prays by virtue of the light and gift that he has received, but his own soul is not benefited or improved by it. Only sometimes God makes use of men's own gifts to convey grace into their own souls. But prayer, properly so called, *is the obediential acting of the whole soul towards God*. Therefore, —

First. Where the Holy Spirit completes his work in us as a Spirit of grace and supplication, he works on the will and affections to act obedientially towards God in and about the matter of our prayers. Thus, when he is poured out as a Spirit of supplication, he fills those to whom he is communicated, with mourning and godly sorrow. They are to be exercised in their prayers as the matter requires, Zec 12.10. He not only enables them to pray, but he works affections in them that are suitable to what they pray about.

And in this work of the Spirit lies the fountain of that inexpressible fervency and delight, of those enlarged laborings of mind and desires, which are in the prayers of believers, especially when they are under the power of more than ordinary influences from him. For these things proceed from the work of the Spirit on their wills and

affections, stirring them up and carrying them forth to God, in and by the *matter* of their prayers. This is done in such a *manner* that no vehement working of natural affections can reach it. And therefore the Spirit is said to 'make *intercession* for us with groanings which cannot be uttered,' Rom 8.26-27; he *intercedes*. He had just expressed his work in general by *helping*, which intends help by working, by carrying us on in our undertaking in this duty beyond our own strength (for he helps us onward under our infirmities or weaknesses). And then his special acting is declared here by *making intercession*; that is, by an additional interposition, like that of an advocate for his client, pleading in his case what the client is not able to do by himself. This same word is used once in the service of a contrary design: speaking of the prayer of Elijah, the apostle says, 'How he makes intercession to God *against* Israel,' Rom 11.2. In the same way, the Hebrew word *basar* is constantly used in the Old Testament to 'declare good tidings, tidings of peace;' Nah 1.15 but it is applied once in a contrary meaning, for tidings of evil and destruction, 1Sam 4.17. The man that brought the news of the destruction of the army of the Israelites and of the taking of the ark by the Philistines is called *hamebasar*. But the proper use of this word is to intercede for grace and favor; and the Spirit does this with unutterable groans. We ourselves are said to 'groan,' Rom 8.23; that is, to humbly, mournfully, and earnestly desire. And here the Spirit is said to 'intercede for us with groanings;' which can be nothing other than his working in us, and acting by us, that frame of heart and those fervent, laboring desires, which are thus expressed. And this is done with such a depth of intension and laboring of mind, that they cannot be uttered. He does this by the work now mentioned.

Secondly. Having truly affected the whole soul — having enlightened the mind in the perception of the truth, beauty, and excellence of spiritual things; engaged the will in the choice and prevalent love of

them; excited the affections to delight in and desire them — there is worked in the soul, in the actual discharge of this duty of prayer, by the power and efficacy of His grace, such an inward laboring of heart and spirit, such a holy, supernatural desire and endeavor for a union with the things prayed for, in the enjoyment of them — that no words can utter or expressly declare it; that is, express it fully and completely. That is the sense of the place.

To avoid the force of this testimony, some (at least one) would have this intercession of the Spirit, be *the intercession of the Spirit in Christ for us, now at the right hand of God* — so that no work of the Spirit itself *in believers* is intended by it. Men sometimes make use of such irrational evasions to escape the convincing power of light and truth. For this would be such a description of the intercession of Christ at the right hand of God, that it can scarcely be reconciled to the analogy of faith. I declared elsewhere, and it is the common faith of Christians, that this is not a *humble, oral* supplication, but a blessed representation of Christ's oblation, by which its efficacy is continued and applied to all the particular occasions of the church, or believers. But here it would be *reported as the laboring of the Spirit in Christ with unutterable groans*; the highest expression of a humble, burdened, concerned endeavor. Nothing is more unsuited to the present glorious condition of the Mediator. It is true that 'in the days of his flesh' he prayed 'with strong crying and tears,' in a humble deprecation of evil, Heb 5.7. But a humble prostration and praying with unutterable groans is altogether inconsistent with his present state of glory, his fullness of power, his right to dispense all the grace and mercy of the kingdom of God. Besides, this exposition is as adverse to the context as anything that could be invented. In Rom 8.15, it is said that we 'receive the Spirit of adoption by which we cry, Abba, Father,' the Spirit which 'God sends forth into our hearts,' Gal 4.6. And the blessed work of this Spirit in us is further

described in Rom 8.16-17. And upon that, verse 23, having received 'the first-fruits of this Spirit,' we are said to 'groan within ourselves;' to which it is added, that we do not know of ourselves what we ought to pray for, 'that very Spirit,' so given to us, so received by us, so working in us, 'makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.' Therefore, without offering violence to the context, there is no place for the introduction of the intercession of Christ in heaven, especially under an expression that is contrary to its nature. It is mentioned afterward by the apostle, in its proper place, as a consequent and fruit of his death and resurrection, verse 34. And there he is said simply to plead, *entugchanein*; but the Spirit here, in verse 26, is said to super-plead, which implies an additional supply to what is in ourselves.

Yet, to countenance this other uncouth exposition, emphasis is put on the beginning of both verses 26 and 27: for though *astheneia* constantly in Scripture denotes any kind of infirmity or weakness, spiritual or corporeal, it is said here to be taken in the latter sense — for diseases, with troubles and dangers — which it nowhere signifies. The meaning would then be that, in such conditions, we do not know what to pray for, whether wealth, health, peace, or the like; but Christ intercedes for us. And this, they say, must be the sense of 'helps in our weaknesses.'

Yet in the text it plainly denotes a help and assistance given to our weaknesses (that is, to us *who are weak*) in the discharge of the duty of *prayer* — as both the words themselves and the ensuing reasons for them evince. Therefore, neither the grammatical sense of the words, nor the context, nor the analogy of faith, will allow this new and uncouth exposition.

In like manner, it may be inquired why it is said that 'the one who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is' Rom 8.27 — which plainly refers to some great and secret work of the Spirit in the heart of man. If the intercession of Christ is intended by this, then nothing is offered but this paraphrase: 'And then God, by being a searcher of hearts, knows our wants exactly, and thus also understands the desire and intention of the Spirit of Christ.' But these things are absurd, and have no dependence on one another; nor would there be any need to mention the searching of our hearts in order to introduce the approbation of the intercession of Christ. But to return.

What is worked in the hearts of believers in their duty, is pervious to none but Him that searches the heart. We ought to aim at this frame in all our supplications, especially in time of distress, troubles, and temptations. Such was the season especially intended here, when we are commonly most sensible of our own infirmities. And when we come short of this frame in some measure, it is from our unbelief, or carelessness and negligence; which God abhors. I acknowledge that there may be, that there *will* be, more earnestness and intension of mind, and of our natural spirit in this duty, at one time than another, as outward occasions or other motives excite or stir them up. So our Savior in his agony prayed more earnestly than usual — not with a higher exercise of grace, which always moved itself in him in perfection — but with a greater vehemence in the working of his natural faculties. So it may be with us at special times. And yet we are always to endeavor after the same aids of the Spirit, the same actings of grace, in every particular duty of this kind.

Thirdly. The Holy Spirit gives the soul of a believer a *delight in God* as the *object of prayer*. I will not insist on His exciting, moving, and acting all other graces that are required in the exercise of this duty,

such as faith, love, reverence, fear, trust, submission, waiting, hope, and the like. I have proved elsewhere that the exercise of them all, in all duties, and of all other graces in like manner, is from him; and therefore I will not confirm the same truth here again. But this delight in God as the object of prayer, has a particular consideration in this matter. For without it, the duty ordinarily is not accepted with God, and it is a barren, burdensome task to those who perform it.

Now, this delight in God as the *object of prayer* is, for its substance, included in that description of prayer given to us by the apostle — namely, that it is crying 'Abba, Father.' A filial, holy delight in God is included in this, such as children have in their parents in their most affectionate addresses to them, as declared. And we are to inquire what this delight in God consists in, or what is required for it, as the object of prayer. In this delight there is —

1. A sight or prospect of God as on a *throne of grace* — a prospect, I say, not by carnal imagination, but spiritual illumination. 'By faith we see him who is invisible,' Heb 11.27. For it is the 'evidence of things not seen' that makes its proper object evident and present to those who believe. Such a sight of God on a throne of grace is necessary for this delight. Under this consideration, he is the proper object of all our addresses to him in our supplications: Heb 4.16, 'Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.' The duty of prayer is described by its subject-matter, namely, 'mercy' and 'grace,' and by its only object, 'God on a throne of grace.'

And this 'throne of grace' is further represented to us by the place where it is erected or set up, and that is in the holiest or most holy place. For in coming to God on that throne, we have 'boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,' Heb 10.19. And hereby

the apostle shows in the expression, that he respects or alludes to the mercy-seat on the ark, covered with the cherubims, which represented a throne; and because of God's special manifestation of himself on that seat, it was called His throne; and it was a representation of Jesus Christ, as I have shown elsewhere.

Therefore, God on a throne of grace is ready, through Jesus Christ, to dispense grace and mercy to suppliant sinners. When God comes to execute judgment, his throne is represented otherwise. See Dan 7.9-10. And when sinners take a view in their minds of God as he is in himself, and as he will be to all outside of Christ, it ingenerates nothing but dread and terror in them, with foolish contrivances to avoid him or his displeasure, Isa 33.14; Mic. 6.6-7; Rev 6.16-17. All these places and others testify that when sinners engage in serious thoughts and conceptions of the nature of God, and what they will encounter from him, all their apprehensions issue in dread and terror. This is not a frame in which they can cry, 'Abba, Father.' If they are delivered from this fear and bondage, it is by that which is worse — namely, carnal boldness and presumption, whose rise lies in the highest contempt of God and his holiness.

When men give themselves only to a perfunctory performance of this duty, 'saying their prayers,' — out of what conviction I know not, and without a due consideration of God and the regard He has for them — they but provoke him to his face in taking his name in vain. Nor do they have any delight in God in their approaches to him, however they may satisfy themselves in what they do.

Therefore, what is required in this, is a prospect of God, by faith, as being on a 'throne of grace,' as exalted in Christ to show mercy to sinners. So he is represented in Isa 30.18: 'Therefore the Lord will wait, that he may be gracious, and therefore he will be exalted, that

he may have mercy.' Without this, we cannot draw near to him, or call upon him with delight, as becomes children crying, 'Abba, Father.' And by whom is this revealed to us? Is this a fruit of our own fancy and imagination? It may be so with some, to their ruin. But it is the work of the Spirit, who alone, in and through Christ, reveals God to us, and enables us to discern him in a due manner. Hence our apostle prays for the Ephesians that 'the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; that the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, they might know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,' Eph 1.17-18.

All the acquaintance which we have with God, in a way of grace, is from the revelation made in us by his Spirit. See Col 2.1-2. By him God says to us that 'fury is not in him,' and that if we lay hold on his arm, we may have peace, we *will* have peace, Isa 27.4-5.

2. A sense of God's *relation to us as a Father* is required for this *delight*. By that name, and under that consideration, the Lord Christ has taught us to address ourselves to him in all our supplications. And although we may use other titles and appellations in speaking to him, even those which he has given himself in the Scripture, or those which are analogous to it, it is this consideration that principally influences our souls and minds, that God is not ashamed to be called our Father, that 'the Lord Almighty has said that he will be a Father to us, and that we will be his sons and daughters,' 2Cor 6.18. Therefore, as a Father, he is the ultimate object of all evangelical worship, of all our prayers. So it is expressed in that holy and divine description of it given by the apostle in Eph 2.18: 'Through Christ we have access by one Spirit to the Father.' No tongue can express, no

mind can reach, the heavenly placidness and soul-satisfying delight which are intimated in these words.

How full of sweetness and satisfaction it is to come to God as a Father, through Christ, by the help and assistance of the Holy Spirit, revealing him as a Father to us, and enabling us to go to Him as a Father! Without a due apprehension of God in this relation, no man can pray as he should. And we have no sense of this, we have no acquaintance with it, except by the Holy Ghost. For we do not consider God in a general manner, as he may be said to be a Father to the whole creation, but in an especial, distinguishing relation — as he makes us his children by adoption. It is 'the Spirit that bears witness with our spirit that we are thus the children of God,' Rom 8.16, giving us the highest and utmost assurance of our estate of sonship in this world. And thus being the *Spirit of adoption*, it is by him alone that we have any acquaintance with our interest in that privilege.

Some may apprehend that these things belong but little, and very remotely, to the duty of prayer, and the assistance we receive by the Spirit in this. But the truth is, those who are so minded, upon consideration, know neither what it means to pray nor what belongs to prayer. There is nothing more essential to this duty than, in the performance of it, we address ourselves to God under the notion of a Father — that is, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him, our Father also. Without this, we cannot have that holy delight in this duty which is required of us; and the lack of it ordinarily ruins our design in prayer. We can have no spiritual, satisfactory sense of this, except what we receive by and from the Spirit of God.

3. There belongs to prayer, that boldness which we have in our access into the holy place, or to the throne of grace: 'Having therefore

boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,' Heb 10.19, 22. Where there is a 'spirit of fear to bondage' on men, they can never have any delight in their approaches to God. This fear is removed by the Spirit of grace and supplication: Rom 8.15, 'You have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry, Abba, Father.' These things are opposed, and the one is only removed and taken away by the other. And so, where the 'spirit of bondage to fear' abides, we cannot cry, 'Abba, Father,' or pray in a due manner. But 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,' 2Cor 3.17. And this, as we render the word, consists in two things:

(1.) *In orandi libertate*; in the liberty of prayer.

(2.) *In exauditionis fiducia*; in the confidence of being heard.

(1.) There is an *enlarged liberty* and freedom of speech in prayer to God; so the word signifies. Boldness is the same as freedom to say all that is to be spoken, a confidence that countenances men in the freedom of speech according to the exigency of their state, condition, and cause. So the word is commonly used, as in Eph 6.19.

Where there is servile fear and dread, the heart is restricted, bound up. It does not know what it may or may not utter, and it is pained about the results of all it thinks or speaks — or it cannot pray at all beyond what is prescribed for it to say, as it were, whether it will or not. But where this Spirit of liberty and boldness is found, the heart is enlarged with a true, genuine openness and readiness to express all its concerns to God as a child to its father. I do not say that those who have this aid of the Spirit always have this liberty in exercise, or that it is equally exercised. Its exercise may be variously impeded by temptations, spiritual indispositions, desertions, and by our own

negligence in stirring up the grace of God. But believers always have it in the root and principle — all who have received the Spirit of adoption, and are ordinarily assisted in its use. Hereby they are enabled to comply with the blessed advice of the apostle: Phi 4.6, 'Be concerned for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.' The whole of our concerns in this world are to be committed to God in prayer, so that we will not retain any dividing cares in our own minds about them. And in this, the apostle would have us use a holy freedom and boldness in speaking to God on all occasions, as the one who concerns himself with them. Hide nothing from God, which is what we do when we do not present it to him in our prayers. But use a full, plain-hearted, open liberty with him: 'In everything let your requests be made known to God.' He is ready to hear all that you have to offer him or plead before him. And in so doing, the 'peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ,' verse 7. This is ordinarily the condition of those who are found in diligent obedience to this command.

(2.) There is also a *confidence of acceptance* in it, or of being heard in prayer — that is, that God is well pleased with their duties, accepting both them and their persons in Jesus Christ. Without this, we can have no delight in prayer, or in God as its object, which vitiates the whole duty. When Adam thought there was no acceptance with God for him, he had no confidence of having access to him. Rather, as the first effect of folly that ensued upon the entrance of sin, he went to hide himself. And all those who have no ground of spiritual confidence for acceptance with Christ, only endeavor in their prayers to hide themselves from God by the duty they perform. They cast a mist about them, to obscure themselves from the sight of their own convictions, in which alone they suppose

that God sees them also. But in such a frame, there is neither delight, nor enlargement, nor liberty, nor indeed prayer itself.

Now, this confidence or boldness which is given to believers in their prayers, by the Holy Ghost, does not respect the answer of every particular request, especially in their own understanding of it. Rather, it consists in a holy persuasion that God is well pleased with their duties, that he accepts their persons, and delights in their approaches to his throne. Such persons are not terrified with apprehensions that God will say to them, 'Why do you take my name into your mouths, or to what purpose are the multitude of your supplications? When you make many prayers, I will not hear.' 'Will he,' says Job, 'plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me,' Job 23.6. Indeed, they are assured that the more they are with God, the more constantly they abide with him, the better is their acceptance. For just as they are commanded to pray always and not to faint, so they have a sufficient warrant from the encouragement and call of Christ, to be frequent in their spiritual addresses to him. So he says to his church, Song 2.14, 'O my dove, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for sweet is your voice and your countenance is attractive.' And also comprised in this is a due apprehension of the goodness and power of God, by which he is, in all conditions, ready to receive them and able to relieve them. The voice of sinners by nature is that God is austere, and not capable of condescension or compassion — let presumption and superstition pretend what they please to the contrary. And the proper acting of unbelief lies in limiting the Most Holy, saying, 'Can God do this or that thing, which the supplies of our necessities call for; are they possible with God?' So long as either of these works in us with any kind of prevalence, it is impossible that we would have any delight in calling upon God. But we are freed from them by the Holy Ghost, in the representation he makes of the engaged goodness

and power of God in the promises of the covenant; and this gives us boldness in his presence.

Fourthly. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer, to keep the souls of believers intent upon Jesus Christ, as the only way and means of acceptance with God. This is the fundamental direction for prayer now, under the gospel. We are now to *ask in his name*; this was not done expressly under the Old Testament. Through him we act faith on God in all our supplications; by him we have an access to the Father. We enter into the holiest through the new and living way that he has consecrated for us. The varied respect which faith has to Jesus Christ as mediator in all our prayers, is a matter worthy a particular inquiry, but it is not our present consideration, which is to declare the work of the Spirit alone. But this is a part of it: that He keeps our souls intent upon Christ, according to what is required of us, as he is the way of our approach to God, the means of our admittance, and the cause of our acceptance with him.

And where faith is not actually exercised to this purpose, all prayer is vain and unprofitable. Thus it is worth our inquiry, whether our duty in this is fulfilled with a few words, in which his name is expressed with little spiritual regard to him.

It is the work of the Holy Ghost to enable us for this. He glorifies Jesus Christ in the hearts of believers, Joh 16.14. And he does this when he enables them to act faith on him in a due manner. So the apostle expressly says: Eph 2.18, 'Through him we have access by one Spirit to the Father.' It is through Jesus alone that we have our access to God, and that is by faith in him. So we have our access to God in justification: Rom 5.2, 'By whom we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.' And by Jesus we have our actual access to God in our supplications, when we draw near to the throne of grace.

But this is by the Spirit. He is the one who enables us to this, by keeping our minds spiritually intent on Jesus in all our addresses to God. This is a genuine effect of the Spirit *as* he is the 'Spirit of the Son.' Under this consideration, in a special manner, he is bestowed on us to enable us to pray, Gal 4.6. And believers have a refreshing experience of this in themselves; nor does anything leave a better savor or relish on their souls than when, in the exercise of faith, they have had their hearts and minds kept close on Christ, the mediator in their prayers.

I might provide more instances in the declaration of the work of the Holy Ghost in believers, like being a Spirit of grace and supplication. But my design is not to declare what may be spoken, but to speak what ought not to be omitted. Many other things might be added, therefore, but these will suffice to give an express understanding of this work to those who have any spiritual experience of it. And those who do not, will not be satisfied with volumes to the same purpose.

Yet something may be added here to free our passage from any just exceptions. For it may be that some think these things are not pertinent to our present purpose, which is to discover the nature of the duty of prayer, and the assistance which we receive in it by the Spirit of God. Now, this is only in the words that we use to God in our prayers, and not in that spiritual delight and confidence which have been spoken to. Those, with other graces (if they may be so esteemed), are of another consideration.

Ans. 1. It may be that some think so; and it may also be (and is very likely) that some who will be talking about these things, are utterly ignorant of what it is to pray in the Spirit, and of the whole nature of this duty. Not knowing the thing, therefore, they hate the very name

of it. Indeed, it will be uncouth to all who are in no way interested in the grace and privilege intended by it.

The objections of such persons are like the strikes of blind men: whatever strength and violence are in them, they always miss the mark. Such are the fierce arguings of most against this duty. They are full of fury and violence, but never touch the matter intended.

Ans. 2. My design is to reveal the nature of praying in the Spirit in general, so that with it I may declare what furthers it and what hinders it. For if there are any such ways of praying which men use or oblige themselves to, which do not comply with, or are not suited to promote, or are unconcerned in, or do not express those workings of the Holy Ghost which are so directly assigned to Him in the prayers of believers, then they are all nothing but means of quenching the Spirit, of disappointing the work of his grace, and of rendering the prayers themselves unacceptable to God. It is at least apparent that most of the ways and modes of prayer used in the Papacy are inconsistent with, and exclusive of, the whole work of the Spirit of supplication.

Chapter VII.

The nature of prayer in general; its forms — Eph 6.18

The nature of prayer in general, with respect to forms of prayer and vocal prayer — Eph 6.18 explained and vindicated.

The duty I am endeavoring to express is that enjoined in Eph 6.18, 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching to this with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.' Some have boldly advanced a fantasy (what will enmity to the holy ways of God not put men upon?) that 'praying in the Spirit' intends only praying by virtue of an extraordinary and miraculous gift. But the use of it is enjoined here for *all* believers, none excepted, men and women; and I suppose all and every one of them did not have that extraordinary, miraculous gift which some fancy is intended in that expression. And the performance of this duty is enjoined in the manner prescribed: 'always,' or as we say, 'in every season' — that is, in those just and due seasons of prayer as duty and our occasions call for. But the apostle expressly confines the exercise of extraordinary gifts to some certain seasons when, under some circumstances, they may be needful or useful for edification, 1Cor 14. There is therefore a 'praying in the Spirit,' which is the constant duty of all believers. And it is a great reproach to the profession of Christianity, where that term itself is a matter of contempt.

If there is anything in it that is 'foolish, conceited, fanatical,' the holy apostle must answer for it — indeed, the One by whom he was inspired. But if this is the expression of God himself, of that duty which he requires of us, then I would not willingly be among the number of those by whom the term is derided, whatever their pretenses may be. Besides, in the text all believers are said 'to pray in the Spirit at all seasons,' and 'with all prayer and supplication'— that is, with all manner of prayer, as our own occasions and necessities require. Certainly by virtue of this rule, a man can scarcely judge himself obliged to confine his performance of this duty, to a prescribed form of words. For a variety in our prayers is enjoined here, commensurate with the various occasions of ourselves and of the church of God. Thus I do not know how we can comply with it in

the constant use of any one form. Those who do, are left to their liberty. And we are obliged to this, 'diligently watching to this very end,' so that our prayers may be suited to our occasions. The one who can divide this text, or cut it out to make a garment with which to clothe set forms of prayer, will reveal an admirable dexterity in the use and disposal of a text of Scripture.

Yet neither do I conclude from this that all such forms of prayer are unlawful — only that another way of praying is enjoined here. I suppose this is unquestioned for all impartial searchers of truth. And doubtless, those who endeavor to comply with it are not to be blamed. If persons in the daily, constant reading of any book whatever, merely of a human composition, are able to rise up in response to this duty of 'praying always with all manner of prayer and supplication in the Spirit,' or in the exercise of the aid and assistance received from Him, and His holy acting of them as a Spirit of grace and supplication, endeavoring, laboring, and watching to this, then I will say no more than this: they have attained what I cannot understand.

The sole inquiry remaining is this: how believers are enabled to pray, those in whose minds the Holy Ghost thus works as a Spirit of grace and supplication. And I say in answer to this, that those who are thus affected by him never lack a gracious ability to make their addresses to God in *vocal prayer*, so far as needful for them in their circumstances, callings, states, and conditions. And this is what is called the *gift of prayer*. I speak of ordinary cases; for there may be such interpositions of temptations and desertions, that the soul, being overwhelmed by them, may for the present be able only to 'mourn as a dove,' or to 'chatter as a crane' Isa 38.14 — that is, not to express the sense of their minds clearly and distinctly, but only, as it

were, to mourn and groan before the Lord in brokenness of spirit and expressions.

But this also is sufficient for their acceptance in that condition. There are few believers that have not more or less experienced this, at one time or other. As for those whose devotion discharges itself in a formal course of the same words, as it necessarily is in the Papacy — in which for the most part they do not understand the meaning of the words they use — they are strangers to the true nature of prayer, or at least to the work of the Spirit in it. And those supplications which are not variously influenced by the varying spiritual conditions of those who make them, according to the variety of our spiritual exercises, are like one constant tone or noise, which has no harmony or music in it. I say, therefore that —

1. The things insisted on are in some *degree* and *measure* necessary to all acceptable prayer. The Scripture assigns them to prayer and, by their own experience, believers find they are necessary to it. For we do not discuss prayer as the working of nature, in its restrictions and difficulties, towards the God of nature — thereby expressing dependence on him, and acknowledging his power. In this sense, *all flesh* comes to God in one way or other, under one notion or other. Nor is prayer coming to God upon those cries which legal convictions wrest from those who fall under their power. Rather, we treat prayer only as it is required of believers *under the gospel*, as they have 'access through Christ by one Spirit to the Father.' Eph 2.18 And,

2. Those in whom this work is wrought by the Holy Spirit in any degree, do not ordinarily lack an ability to express themselves in this duty, so far as it is needful for them. It is acknowledged that an ability in this will be greatly increased and improved by exercise. That is not only because the exercise of all moral faculties is the

genuine way to strengthen and improve them, but principally because it is instituted, appointed, and commanded by God to that end. God has designed the *exercise of grace* for the means of its growth; and he gives his blessing in answer to his institution. But the nature of the thing itself requires a performance of the duty that is suitable to the condition of the one who is called to it. If men do not grow up to further degrees in that ability, by exercise in the duty itself — by stirring up the gifts and graces of God in them — it is their sin and folly. And hence it follows,

3. That although *set forms of prayer* may be *lawful* for some, as it is pretended, they are *necessary* to none — that is, to no *true believers* — as to acceptable, evangelical prayer. But whoever is made a partaker of the work of the Spirit of God in this — which He infallibly effects in everyone who is enabled through Him to cry, 'Abba, Father' (as every child of God is) — will be able to pray according to the mind and will of God, if he does not neglect the aid and assistance offered to him for that purpose.

Therefore, to plead for the necessity of forms of prayer for believers, beyond what may be doctrinal or instructive in them, is a fruit of inclination to parties, or of ignorance, or of the lack of due attendance to their own experience.

What use *forms of prayer* may be to those who are not *regenerate*, and therefore have not received the Spirit of adoption, does not belong directly to our disquisition. Yet I must say that I do not clearly understand the advantage they provide to them, except as a contrivance to *relieve them in that condition*, without a due endeavor to *deliver them from it*. For these persons are of two sorts:

(1.) Those who are *openly* under the power of sin, for their minds are not being effectively influenced by any convictions. These seldom

pray unless it is under dangers, fears, troubles, pains, or other distresses. When they are struck, they will cry — 'even to the Lord they will cry,' Psa 18.41 and not otherwise. Their design is to address their special occasions, and the present sense which they have of it. How can any man conceive that they should be supplied with forms of prayer that express their sense, conceptions, and affections, in their particular cases? It is easily supposed how ridiculously they may mistake themselves in reading those prayers which are in no way suited to their condition. A *form* to such persons may prove little better than a *charm*; and their minds may be diverted by it from that performance of duty which the light of nature would direct them to. Jonah's mariners in the storm 'cried every one to his god,' and called on Jonah to do so too Jon 1.5-6. The substance of their prayer was that God would 'think upon them, that they might not perish.' Men in such condition, if not diverted by this pretended relief (which indeed is none) will not lack words to express their minds, so far as there is anything of prayer in what they do — and beyond that, whatever words they are supplied with, they are of no use or advantage to them. It is possible when they are left to work naturally towards God, however unskilled and rude their expressions may be, a deep sense may be left upon their minds, with a reverence for God, and remembrance of their own error, which may be of use to them. But the bounding and directing of the workings of natural religion by a form of words — perhaps little suited to their occasions and not at all to their affections — tends only to stifle the operation of an awakened conscience, and to release them to their former security.

(2.) There are others who, by education and the power of convictions from the word, by one means or another, are so far brought under a sense of the authority of God, and of their own duty, as to *conscientiously* attend to *prayer* according to their light, as they do to other duties also.

Now, the case of these men will be more fully determined afterward, when the whole use of the forms of prayer will be spoken to. For the present, I will only say that I cannot believe, until further convinced, that anyone whose duty it is to pray, is not able to express his requests and petitions in [his own] words, so far as he is affected with the matter of them in his mind. And what he does beyond that, by any advantage, does not belong to prayer. Men may, by sloth, and other vicious distempers of mind — especially by negligence in getting their hearts and consciences duly affected with the matter and object of prayer — keep themselves under a real or supposed disability in this matter. But because prayer in this sort of person is an effect of common illumination and grace, which are also from the Spirit of God, if persons really and sincerely endeavor for a due sense of what they pray for and about, the Spirit will not be lacking to help them express themselves so far as it is necessary for them, either privately or in their families. But those who never enter the water except with flotation devices under them, will scarcely ever learn to swim. And it cannot be denied that the constant and unvaried use of set forms of prayer may become a great occasion to quench the Spirit, and hinder all progress or growth in gifts or graces. When each one has done what he can, it is his best, and it will be accepted by Him, it being according to what he has, before that which is none of his.

Chapter VIII.

The duty of external prayer by virtue of a spiritual gift, explained and vindicated.

What we have discussed up to here concerning the work of the Spirit of grace and supplication in enabling believers to pray, or to cry 'Abba, Father,' belongs principally to the *internal, spiritual nature of the duty*, and the exercise of grace in this duty. In this, we have only diverted occasionally to consider the *interest of words*, and the use of *set forms*, either freely or imposed. And indeed, what has been evinced from Scripture testimony on the matter, renders all further dispute about these things needless. For if the things mentioned are required for all acceptable prayer, and if they are truly effected in the minds of all believers by the Holy Ghost, then it is evident how little use remains for such pretended aids.

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But moreover, prayer falls under another consideration: namely, as to its *external performance*, and as the duty is discharged by anyone in lesser or greater societies, in which their conjunction with him, their communion in the duty, and consequently their edification in the whole, depend on his words and expressions. This is the will of God: that in assemblies of his appointment, such as churches and families, and occasional meetings of two or more gathered in the name of Christ, one should pray on behalf of himself and the rest who join with him. Thus ministers are enabled to pray in church-assemblies, as other Christians pray in occasional meetings of the disciples of Christ in his name, parents in their families, and every believer privately for himself.

There is a spiritual ability given to men by the Holy Ghost, by which they are enabled to express the matter of prayer, as taught and revealed in the manner described before, in words fitted and suited to lead their own minds and the minds of others on to a holy

communion in the duty, to the honor of God and their own edification.

I do not confine the use of this ability to assemblies. Everyone may, and usually is to make use of it for himself also, according to the measure which he has received. For if a man does not have an ability to pray for himself in private and alone, then he can have none to pray in public and in societies. Therefore, take prayer as *vocal*, without which adjunct it is not complete, and this ability belongs to the nature and essence of prayer. And this also is from the Spirit of God.

This is what meets with such contradiction and opposition from many, and which has other things set up in competition with it, indeed, to the exclusion of it, even from families and prayer closets. We will examine what those are afterward. Vocal prayer is judged by some not only to be separable from the work of the Spirit of prayer, but in no way belonging to it. They say, 'it is a fruit of wit, fancy, memory, elocution, volubility and readiness of speech' — namely, in those in whom, on other accounts, they acknowledge none of these things exist, at least in no considerable degree! Some time ago, they indeed defended themselves against any esteem of this ability, by crying out that 'all those who thus prayed by the Spirit, as they call it, only babbled and talked nonsense.' But those who have any sobriety and modesty are convinced that most of those who pray according to the ability received, use words of truth and soberness in its exercise. It is but a sorry relief that any can find in cavilling at some expressions which, perhaps good and wholesome in themselves, do not suit their palates. Or if they seem to miss having due order and decency, their failure is not to be compared with the extravagances of some (considering the nature of the duty) in supposedly quaint and elegant expressions used in this duty.

But in this, they resort to this claim: that this ability is only the effect of the natural endowments mentioned before, which they think are offset by a boldness and confidence that are little less than intolerable impudence. It seems that it is this way with all those who desire to pray as God enables them, that is, according to His mind and will — if anything in the light of nature, the common voice of mankind, examples of Scripture, and express testimonies and commands, are able to declare what that is. I will therefore make way for the declaration and confirmation of the truth asserted, by the ensuing observations.

1. *Every man is to pray or call upon God, as he is able*, with respect to his own condition, relationships, occasions, and duties. Certainly there is not a man in the world who has not forfeited all his reason and understanding to atheism, or utterly buried all their operations under the fury of brutish affections, that is not convinced it is his duty to pray to the deity he owns, in words of his own, as well as he is able. For this, and none other, is the genuine and natural notion of prayer. This is implanted in the heart of mankind, which they need not be taught or directed to. I would hope there are but few in the world, especially of those who are called Christians, that at one time or other do not so pray. The artificial help of constant forms is an arbitrary invention. And there are those who, for the most part, resort to other reliefs. They may read prayers composed for some good end and purpose, though not absolutely for their situations, as to the present state of their minds, and the things they would pray for (which is absolutely impossible). As I conceive of it, they cannot help but be conscious sometimes, not only of the weakness of what they do, but of their neglect of the duty which they profess to perform. And there are those who are diverted from the dictates of nature, and the light of Scripture directions, by the prevalence of ignorance, the power of prejudice, and an infatuation with

superstition. They say a 'paternoster' for their prayer, maybe an 'ave' or 'credo,' intending it for this or that end, or for the benefit of this or that person maybe, or to obtain what is in no way mentioned or included in what they utter. There is nothing of prayer in it, but a mere taking of the name of God in vain, with the horrible profanation of a holy ordinance. Exo 20.7

Persons tied to such rules and forms never pray in their lives, except in their occasional ejaculations which break from them almost by surprise. And there has not been any one more effectual means of bringing unholiness into the Christian world, with an ungodly course of behavior, than this one of teaching men to satisfy themselves in this duty of prayer, by saying, reading, or repeating the words of other men, which they may not understand, and certainly are not affected by in a due manner. For it is this duty by which our whole course is principally influenced.

Let men say what they will, our conduct in walking before God, which principally regards the frame and disposition of our hearts, is influenced and regulated by our attendance to and performance of this duty. The one whose prayers are hypocritical, is a hypocrite in his whole course. And the one who is only negligent in them, is equally negligent in all other duties. Now, because our whole obedience to God ought to be our 'reasonable service,' Rom 12.1, how can it be expected that it would be so when the foundation of it is laid in such an irrational supposition, that men should not pray themselves what they are able, but instead should read the forms of others — forms which they do not understand?

2. All the *examples* we have in the Scripture of the prayers of the holy men of old, either under the Old Testament or the New, were all the *effects of their own ability* in expressing the gracious conceptions of

their minds, worked in them by the Holy Ghost in the way and manner described before. I call it *their own ability*, in opposition to all outward aids and assistances from others, or an antecedent prescription of a form of words to them. Not one instance can be given to the contrary. Sometimes it is said they 'spread forth their hands,' sometimes that they 'lifted up their voices,' sometimes that they 'fell upon their knees and cried,' sometimes that they 'poured out their hearts' when overwhelmed — all according to present occasions and circumstances. The solemn benediction of the priests, instituted by God, like the present forms in the administration of the sacraments, were of another consideration, as will be shown. And as for those who, by immediate inspiration, gave out and wrote discourses in the form of prayers which were mystical in part and prophetic in part, we have given an account concerning them before. Some indeed plead that the church of the Jews, under the second temple, had various forms of prayers in use among them, even at the time when our Savior was conversant in the temple and their synagogues. But they pretend and plead what they cannot prove; and I challenge any learned man to give but a tolerable evidence for the assertion. For what is found to that purpose among the Talmudists, is mixed with such ridiculous fables that it fully defeats its own evidence — such as the first, suiting the number of their prayers to the number of the bones in the back of a man!

3. The *commands* which are given to thus pray according to our own *abilities*, are no more or less than *all the commands* we have in the Scripture to pray at all. Not one of them has any regard or respect to outward forms, aids, or helps of prayer.

And the manner of prayer itself is so described, limited, and determined, that no other kind of prayer can be intended. For we are commanded to 'pray in the Spirit;' to pray earnestly and fervently

with 'the spirit and understanding;' continually, with all manner of 'prayer and supplication;' to 'make our requests known to God,' so as not to take care ourselves about our present concerns; to 'pour out our hearts to God;' to cry, 'Abba, Father,' by the Spirit, and the like. And thus I do not understand how these things are suited to any kind of prayer except that which is from the ability which men have received for the entire discharge of that duty. For there are evidently intimated in these precepts and directions, such varied situational workings of our minds and spirits, such actings of gracious affections, that they will not comply with a constant use of a prescribed form of words.

4. When we speak of men's *own ability* in this matter, we include the conscientious, diligent use of all means which God has appointed for the communication of this ability to them, or to help them in the due use, exercise, and improvement of it. There are such means, and they are to attend to such, as —

(1.) The diligent *searching of our own hearts*, in their frames, dispositions, inclinations, and actings, that we may in some measure be acquainted with their state and condition towards God. Indeed, the heart of man is absolutely unsearchable for any but God himself — that is, as to a complete and perfect knowledge of it. Hence David prays that God would 'search and try him,' and lead and conduct him by his grace according to what he found in him, and not leave him wholly to act or be moved according to his own apprehensions of himself, Psa 139.23-24. Yet where we sincerely inquire into them by the help of that spiritual light which we have received, we may discern so much of them as to guide us rightly in this and all other duties. If this is neglected, if men live in the dark for themselves, or satisfy themselves only with an acquaintance with those things which an accusing conscience will not allow them to be utterly ignorant of,

they will never know how to pray, or what to pray for, in a due manner. The lack of a due discharge of this duty is a cause of that barrenness in prayer which is found among most, as we observed. We should be continually exercised in it, especially on account of that unspeakable variety of spiritual changes which we are subject to. The one who would abound in all manner of that supplication which is enjoined of us, who would have his prayers be proper, useful, and fervent, must be diligent in the search and consideration of his own heart, with all its dispositions and inclinations, and the secret guilt which it variously contracts.

(2.) Constant, *diligent reading of the Scriptures* is another duty that this ability greatly depends on. From the precepts of God in them, we may learn our own wants; and from his promises, we may learn the relief he has provided for them. These things, as it has been shown, supply us with the matter of prayer. Moreover, from there we learn what words and expressions are fit and proper to be used in our accesses to God. No words or expressions, in themselves or in their meaning, are fit or acceptable in this, except as they are analogous to those in the Scripture, which are of God's own teaching and direction. And where men are very conversant in the word, they will always be ready for and furnished with fit expressions of their desires to God. This is one means by which they may come to be so; other helps of a like nature might be insisted on.

5. In this spiritual ability *use* is made of the *natural abilities* of invention, memory, and elocution. Why should men not use in the service and worship of God, what God has given them, that they may be able to serve and worship him? Indeed, it sets off the use and excellence of this spiritual gift, that in the exercise of it we use and act our natural endowments and abilities, *as spiritualized by grace*. If it is set up in competition with it, this cannot be done. The more

the soul is engaged in its faculties and powers, the more intent it is, in and to the duty.

Nor do I deny that this gift may be varied in degrees and diverse circumstances according to these abilities, even though it has a being of its own, distinct from them. Even in extraordinary gifts, as in receiving and imparting immediate revelations from God, there was variety in outward modes and circumstances. It followed the diversity and variety of the natural abilities and qualifications of those who were employed in that work. This difference may appear much more in the exercise of ordinary gifts, which do not so absolutely influence and regulate the faculties of the mind as the other does.

And we find this difference by experience among those who are endowed with this spiritual ability. All men who have the gift of prayer, do not pray alike as to the *matter* of their prayers, nor as to the *manner* of their praying. But some greatly excel others — some in one thing, some in another. And in part, this proceeds from that difference between them in their natural abilities of invention, judgment, memory, and elocution — especially as these are improved by exercise in this duty. Yet this is not absolutely so, nor does the difference in this matter depend solely on this, as we observe in constant experience.

For if it did, then those who receive this spiritual ability, and who excel others in these natural endowments, would also constantly excel them in the exercise of the gift itself. This is not so, as all who have observed anything in this matter will know. But the exercise of these abilities in prayer depends on the special assistance of the Spirit of God. For the most part, the gift, like the scion that is ingrafted or inoculated, turns the nature of those abilities into itself,

and modifies them according to its own efficacy and virtue, and is not itself changed by them. Evidently, what makes any such difference in the discharge of this duty — such as that in which the edification of others is concerned — is the frequent conscientious exercise of the gift received. Without this, whatever stock of natural abilities it may be planted into, it will neither thrive nor flourish.

6. *Spiritual gifts* are of two sorts:

(1.) Those which are *distinct from* all other abilities, having their whole foundation, nature, and power in themselves. Such were the extraordinary gifts of miracles, healing, tongues, and the like. These were entire in themselves, not built upon or adjoined to any other gifts or graces whatsoever.

(2.) Those which were *adjuncts of*, or annexed to, any other gifts or graces, without which they could have neither place nor use. For example, the gift of utterance depends on wisdom and knowledge. For utterance without knowledge, or anything that does not express sound knowledge for the benefit of others, is folly and babbling.

The gift of prayer is of this latter sort, under our present consideration with respect to the interest of words in that duty. And we affirm that this is a unique gift of the Holy Ghost, and will now further prove it to be so; for —

(1.) It is an inseparable adjunct of that work of the Spirit which we have described. It is from him as its author; for the one who is the author of anything, as to its being, is the author of all its inseparable adjuncts. It has been proved that the work of enabling us to pray is the work of the Spirit; and it is an immeasurable boldness for anyone to deny it, and yet pretend to be a Christian. And he is not the author of any *one part* of this work, but of the *whole*, all that by which we

cry, 'Abba, Father.' The expression of the desires of our souls, in words suited to the acting of our own graces and the edification of others, inseparably belongs to prayer. When we are commanded to pray, if our necessity, condition, and edification, along with the advantage and benefit to others, requires the use of *words* in prayer, then we are to pray with words. For instance, when a minister is commanded to pray in the church or congregation, so as to go before the flock in the discharge of that duty, he is to use words in prayer. Yet even in such cases, we are not required to pray other than as the Spirit is promised to enable us to pray, and as we do, that we may still be said to 'pray in the Holy Ghost.' Therefore, praying falls under the command and promise, *and* it is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

And the nature of the thing itself — that is, the duty of prayer — manifests it. For all that the Spirit of God works in our hearts, with respect to this duty, is in order for us to express it; for what he does, is to enable us to pray. And if he does not give that expression, then all that he does besides may be lost as to its principal end and use. Indeed, all that he does in us where this is lacking, or that he does in fixed meditation, which in some particular cases is equivalent to this, does not rise beyond that frame which David expresses by keeping silence. He declares an estate of trouble by this, in which he was not yet freely brought to deal with God about it, as he later did by prayer; and he found relief in this.

What can be objected to this with any pretense of reason, is this: not only a part, but the whole duty of prayer, as we are commanded to pray, is an effect in us of the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of grace and supplication — i.e., the *grace* of prayer and the *gift* of prayer, as some distinguish them, are inseparable. The objection consists in two unsound consequents which, it is supposed, will ensue from this; such as —

(1.) 'That everyone who has the *grace of prayer*, as it is called, or in whom the Holy Spirit works the gracious disposition described before, also has the *gift of prayer*, seeing that these things are inseparable.' And,

(2.) 'That everyone who has the *gift of prayer*, or who has an *ability to pray* vocally for the edification of others, also has the *grace of prayer*, or the actings of saving grace in prayer,' which is the thing intended. But these things, it will be said, are manifestly otherwise, and contrary to all experience.

Ans. 1. For the first of these inferences, I grant that it follows from the premises, and therefore I affirm that it is most true, under the ensuing limitations:

1st. We are not speaking of what is called the *grace of prayer* in its *habit* or principle, but in its actual exercise. In the first respect, *grace* exists in all who are sanctified, even in those infants who are sanctified from the womb. It does not follow from this, that they must also have the *gift* of prayer, which respects grace only in its *exercise*. And thus our meaning is that all those in whom the Spirit of God graciously acts faith, love, delight, and desire, by way of *prayer* to God, have an ability from Him to express themselves in vocal prayer.

2dly. It is required for this, that such persons be found *in a way of duty* [to pray]; and so they are fit to receive the influential assistance of the Holy Spirit in it. Whoever would use or have the benefit of any spiritual gift must himself, in a way of duty, stir up by constant and frequent exercise, the ability in which that gift consists:

'Stir up the gift of God which is in you,' 2Tim 1.6. And where this duty is neglected — for which an account must be given — it is no

wonder if any who may have, as they say, the 'grace of prayer,' yet do not have the gift or faculty to express their minds and desires in prayer by words of their own. Some think there is no such ability in anyone. And therefore they never look for it in themselves, and despise whatever they hear said to that purpose. What assistance such persons may have in their prayers from the Spirit of grace, I do not know; but it is not likely they would have much of his aid or help in doing what they despise him for. Some are so accustomed to and so deceived by pretended helps in prayer — such as making use of or reading prayers composed for them by others — that they never attempt to pray for themselves. But they always think they *cannot* do that which, indeed, they *will not* do. It is as if a child, being raised among none but impotent persons who go about on crutches, were to refuse to try his own strength, and resolves to make use of crutches also. But by good instruction, or some sudden surprise with fear, removing his prejudice, he would cast away this needless help, and make use of his strength. Some gracious persons brought up where forms of prayer are in general use, may have a spiritual ability of their own to pray. But they neither know it, nor ever try it, because of complying with the principles of their education — indeed, they think it is impossible for them to pray otherwise. But when instruction frees them from this prejudice, or some sudden surprise with fear or affliction forces them to enter into an exercise of their own ability in this kind, their *former* aids and helps will quickly grow into disuse with them.

3dly. The *ability* which we ascribe to all who have the gracious assistance of the Spirit in prayer is not absolute, but is suited to their occasions, conditions, duties, callings, and the like. We do not say that everyone who has received the Spirit of grace and supplication must necessarily have a gift enabling him to pray as becomes a minister in the congregation, or any person on a like solemn occasion

— nor yet may he be enabled to pray in a family, or in the company of many, if he is not called to this in his condition of life. But everyone has this ability according to his necessity, condition of life, and calling. One who is only a private person has it; and one who is the ruler of the family has it, and he that is a minister of the congregation has it also. And as God enlarges men's occasions and calls, so he will enlarge their abilities, provided they do their duty to that end and purpose. For the slothful, the negligent, the fearful, those who are under the power of prejudices, will have no share in this mercy.

This, therefore, is the sum of what we affirm in this particular: Every adult person who has received and is able to exercise grace in prayer, or any saving grace — without which prayer itself is an abomination — if he does not neglect the improvement of the spiritual aids communicated to him, so far partakes of this gift of the Holy Spirit as to enable him to pray according as his own occasions and duty require. The one who wants mercy for the pardon of sin, or supplies of grace for the sanctification of his person, and the like, if he is sensible of his wants, and has gracious desires for their supply to be worked in his heart, will be enabled to ask them of God in an acceptable manner, if he is not woefully and sinfully lacking in himself and his own duty.

Ans. 2. As to the second inference, namely, that if this *ability is inseparable from the gracious assistance of the Spirit of prayer, then whoever has this gift and ability, has that gracious assistance in the exercise of it*, or he has received the Spirit of grace, and he has saving graces acted in him, I answer —

1st. This does not follow from what we have asserted. For although wherever the *grace* of prayer is, there also is the *gift* in its measure, it does not follow that where the *gift* is, there also must be the grace;

for the gift is for the grace's sake, and not the contrary. Grace cannot be acted without the gift, but the gift may be acted without the grace.

2dly. We will assent that this gift does grow in another soil, and it does not have its root in itself. It follows on and arises from one distinct part of the work of the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of supplication, from which it is inseparable. And this is his work on the mind: in acquainting it with the things that are to be prayed for, which he does both in the inward convictions of men's own souls, and in the declaration made of this in the Scripture. Now, in some this may be only a common work of illumination, which the gift of vocal prayer may flow from and accompany, when the Spirit of grace and supplication works no further in them. Therefore, it is acknowledged that men in whom the Spirit of grace never resided or savingly operated, may have the gift of utterance in prayer to their own and others' edification. For they have the gift of illumination, which is its foundation, and from which it is inseparable. Where this spiritual illumination is not granted in some measure, no abilities, no industry, can attain the gift of vocal prayer unto edification. For spiritual light is the matter of all spiritual gifts, which in all their variety are but the various exercise of it. And to suppose that a man has a gift of prayer *without* it, is to suppose that he has a gift to pray for he knows not what — we abhor such real or pretended enthusiasm. Thus, wherever this gift of illumination and conviction is, there is such a foundation of the gift of prayer, that it is not ordinarily absent in some measure, where due use and exercise are observed.

Add to what has been said, that the duty of prayer ordinarily is not complete unless it is expressed in words. It is called 'pleading with God,' 'filling our mouths with arguments,' 'crying to him,' and 'causing him to hear our voice.' These things are so expressed, not

that they are in any way needful to God, but to us. And because it may be said that all this may be done in prayer by internal meditation, where no use is made of the voice or of words, as it is said of Hannah that 'she spoke in her heart, but her voice was not heard,' 1Sam 1.13, I grant that in some cases it may be so. This is where the circumstances of the duty do not require it to be otherwise, or where the vehemence of affections, which causes men to cry out and roar, will permit it to be so. That being said, in this prayer by meditation, the things and matter of prayer are to be formed in the mind into that sense and those sentences which may be *expressed*; and the mind can conceive no more in this way of prayer than it can express. So it is said of Hannah, when she prayed in her heart, and as she said herself, 'out of the abundance of her meditation,' verse 16, that 'her lips moved,' though 'her voice was not heard;' she not only framed the sense of her supplications into petitions, but she tacitly expressed them to herself. Obligating anyone to prescribed forms, is as destructive of prayer by inward meditation, as it is of prayer that is conceived and expressed. For it takes away the liberty, and it prevents the ability, of framing in the mind those petitions or other parts of prayer, according to the sense which the person praying has of them. Therefore, if this expression of prayer in words necessarily belongs to the duty itself, then it is an effect of the Holy Spirit, or else he is not the Spirit of supplication to us.

(2.) *Utterance* is a particular gift of the Holy Ghost as mentioned in 1Cor 1.5; 2Cor 8.7; Eph 6.19; Col 4.3. There are two parts, or two duties, to be discharged by virtue of this gift:

[1.] An ability to speak to men in the name of God in the preaching of the word;

[2.] An ability to speak to God for ourselves, or in the name of and on behalf of others.

There is the same reason for utterance in both these duties; and in each of them it is equally a particular gift of the Spirit of God. See 1Cor 1.5; 2Cor 8.7; Eph 6.19; Col 4.3. The word used in these places is *logos*, 'speech,' which is well rendered 'utterance,' — that is, an ability and liberty to speak out the things we have conceived: Eph 6.19 — 'Utterance in opening the mouth with boldness,' or rather freedom of speech. In sacred things, in praying and preaching, this is the gift of the Holy Spirit. And as such we are enjoined to pray for it, that it may be given to us or others, as the edification of the church requires.

Although this gift may be despised by some, the whole edification of the church depends on it; indeed, the foundation of the church was laid in it, as it was an extraordinary gift, Acts 2.4; and its superstructure is carried on by it — for it is the sole means of public or solemn intercourse between God and the church. It is so if there is such a thing as the Holy Ghost, and if there are such things as spiritual gifts. The matter of them is *spiritual light*; and the manner of their exercise is *utterance*.

This gift or ability, as it is with all others of like nature, may be considered either as to the *habit* of it, or as to the external *exercise* of it. Those who have received the habit of it, have experienced great variety in its exercise; yet it does not usually appear in natural and moral habits, even where the same preparations precede it. For just as the Spirit of grace is free, and acts arbitrarily with respect to the persons to whom he communicates the gift himself — for 'he divides to every man as he wills' 1Cor 12.11 — so he also acts as he *pleases* in the exercise of those gifts and graces which he bestows. Hence

believers sometimes find a greater evidence of his gracious working in them in prayer (or evidence of his assistance in praying), and also enlargement in utterance, than at other times. For in both these, he breathes and acts as he pleases. These things are not their own, nor absolutely in their own power. The habitual grace they received will not enable them to pray graciously, nor will their gift of utterance enable them for edification, without the Spirit's actual excitation of that grace, and his assistance in the exercise of that gift. Both conceiving, and uttering our desires in an acceptable manner, are from him; and so are all spiritual enlargements in this duty. The vocal prayer of which we speak, whether private or public, is the uttering of our desires and requests to God, called 'making our requests known to him,' Phi 4.6. This utterance is a gift of the Holy Ghost; so too is prayer, as to the manner of its performance by words, in supplication. If anyone says he *cannot* thus pray suitably to his own occasions, he only says that he is a stranger to this gift of the Holy Ghost; and if anyone *will not* thus pray, then it is despised by him. If these things are denied by any because they do not understand them, we cannot help it.

(3.) *It is the Holy Spirit that enables men to discharge and perform every duty that is required of them in a due manner; so that without the Spirit's enabling, we can do nothing as we should.* As this has been sufficiently confirmed in other discourses on this subject, we will not always contend with those by whom such fundamental principles of Christianity are denied or called into question. The Spirit enables men with respect to all sorts of duties, whether those required of us by virtue of a special office and calling, or on the more general account of a holy conduct according to the will of God. Vocal prayer is a duty under both these considerations; for —

[1.] It is the duty of the *ministers* of the gospel by virtue of special office. 'Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks,' are to be made in the assemblies of the church, 1Tim 2.1. In this, it is the office and duty of ministers to go before the congregation, and to be as the mouth of the church to God. The nature of the office, and the due discharge of it, with what is necessary to the religious worship of public assemblies, manifest that it is so. The apostles, as their example, 'gave themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word,' Acts 6.4. It is therefore the gift of the Holy Ghost by which these are enabled to do so; for of themselves they are not able to do anything. This is one of those 'good gifts' which are 'from above, and come down from the Father of lights,' Jas 1.17. And they receive these gifts 'for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,' Eph 4.12. Therefore, utterance in praying and preaching, is the gift of the Holy Ghost with respect to their office. And that is such a gift, that those who are utterly destitute of it cannot discharge their office for the edification of the church.

Let men pretend what they please, if a spiritual ability in praying and preaching does not belong necessarily to the office of the ministry, then no man can tell what *does* belong to it, or what the office signifies in the church. For no other ordinance can be administered without the word and prayer, nor can any part of rule itself be administered in a due manner. To deny that these are gifts of the Holy Ghost, is to deny the continuance of his dispensation to and in the church. This would at once overthrow the whole truth of the gospel, and the sole foundation that the ministry of the gospel is built upon.

[2.] The same may be said with respect to duties to be performed by virtue of our *general vocation*. Such are the duties of parents and

masters of families. I do not know how far any have gone in ways of profaneness, but I hope none are carried to such a length as to deny it is their duty to pray *with* their families as well as *for* them. Families that do not call on the name of the Lord, are under his curse. And if this is their duty, then its performance must be by the aid of the Spirit of God, by virtue of the general rule we proceed upon.

(4.) The benefit, profit, advantage, and edification of particular persons, and of families, but especially of the church in its assemblies, in and by the use and exercise of this gift, are such and so great, that it is impious not to ascribe it to the operation of the Holy Spirit.

Men are not of themselves, without His special aid, authors or causers of the principal spiritual benefit and advantage which the church receives in the world. If they are so, or may be so, then what need is there of the Spirit or his work for the preservation and edification of the church? But we plead the experience of all who desire to walk before God in sincerity, that it has this blessed effect and fruit; and we leave the determination of the question to the judgment of God himself. Nor will we at present refuse in our plea, a consideration of the different conditions (as to a holy way of life) between those who constantly in their life and at their death, give this testimony, and those by whom this testimony is opposed and denied. None of us are to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, nor of any effect of His grace. It must therefore be said that the experience which believers of all sorts have of the spiritual benefit and advantage of this ability, both in themselves and others, is not to be moved or shaken by the cavils or reproaches of those who dare to profess that they are strangers to it.

(5.) The *event of things* may be pleaded in evidence of the same truth. For if the ability of praying were not a gift of Him who divides to every one according to his own will, 1Cor 12.11 then there would not be such a difference as there is, openly and visibly in the world, as to the sharing of that gift among all those who pretend to faith in the same truth. And if it were a matter purely of men's natural abilities, then it would be impossible that so many, whose highest concern is to be interested in it, should be such strangers to it, so unacquainted with it, and so unable for it. They say, indeed, 'It is but the mere improvement of natural abilities, with confidence and exercise.' Let it be supposed for once that some of them at least have confidence that is competent for such a work; let them test what success mere exercise will furnish them with. In the meantime, I will deny that the ability of the prayer that is addressed here, is attainable by any, without that illumination of the mind which is a unique gift of the Holy Ghost. It will be a hard thing to persuade persons of any ordinary consideration, that the difference which they discover between men, as to this gift and ability, proceeds merely from the difference in their natural and acquired abilities, in which (as it is strenuously pretended) the advantage is commonly on that side which is most defective in them.

Some, perhaps, may say that they know there is nothing in this faculty but the exercise of natural endowments, with boldness and elocution; and that is because they themselves were expert in it, and found nothing else. On that ground, they have left it for what is better.

But for evident reasons, we will not be bound to stand by the testimony of those men, even though they will not be pleaded here. In the meantime, we know that 'whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.' Mat 13.12 It is no wonder if

persons endowed sometimes with a gift of prayer proportionate to their light and illumination, improving neither the one nor the other as they should, have lost both their light and gift also.

And thus, suitable to my design and purpose, I have given a delineation of the work of the Holy Ghost as a Spirit of grace and supplication, promised to and bestowed on all believers, enabling them to cry, 'Abba, Father.'

Chapter IX.

Duties inferred from the preceding discourse.

The result of all our inquiries is how we may improve these duties for obedience in the life of God; for 'if we know them, happy are we if we do them,' and not otherwise. And our practice in this may be reduced to these two heads:

1. A due and constant *returning of glory to God* on account of his grace in that *free gift of his*, whose nature we have inquired into.
2. A constant *attendance* to the duty for which we are graciously enabled by this gift.

And —

1. A due and constant returning of glory to God:

(1.) We ought to continually bless God and give glory to him for this great *privilege* of the *Spirit of grace and supplication* granted to the church. This is the principal means on their part of all holy intercourse with God, and of giving glory to him. The world is destitute of this fruit of divine bounty. How it gropes in the dark and wanders after vain imaginations, while it does not know how to manage its convictions, nor at all how to deal with God about its concerns! That world which cannot receive the Spirit of grace and truth, can never have anything to do with God in a due manner. There are those by whom this gift of God is despised, reviled, and blasphemed; and under the shades of many pretenses, they hide themselves from the light in doing so. But they do not know what they do, nor by what spirit they are moved. It is our duty to pray that God would pour out his Spirit even on them also, which will quickly cause them to 'look on him whom they have pierced, and mourn.' Zec 12.10

It appears in two ways, how great a mercy it is to enjoy and improve this privilege:

[1.] In that both the psalmist and the prophet pray directly, in a spirit of prophecy, and without limitation, that God would 'pour out his fury on the families that do not call on his name,' Psa 79.6; Jer 10.25. And,

[2.] In that the whole work of faith in obedience is designated from this duty of prayer; thus it is said that 'whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved,' Rom 10.13 — for invocation or prayer, in the power of the Spirit of grace and supplication, is an infallible evidence and fruit of saving faith and obedience. And therefore, the promise of salvation is so eminently annexed to it; or by a *synecdoche*, it is used for the whole worship of God and

obedience of faith. It would be endless to declare the benefits that the church of God and everyone who belongs to it, has by prayer. No heart can conceive of that treasury of mercies which lies in this one privilege: in having the liberty and ability to approach God at all times, according to his mind and will. This is the relief, the refuge, the weapons, and the assured refreshment of the church in all conditions.

(2.) It is a matter of praise and glory to God, in a special manner, that he has granted an *amplification* of this privilege under the gospel. The Spirit is now poured forth from above, and enlarged in his dispensation, both intensively and extensively. Those on whom he is bestowed, receive him in a larger measure than they did formerly under the Old Testament. From there comes that liberty and boldness in their access to the throne of grace, and their crying 'Abba, Father,' which the apostle reckons among the great privileges of the dispensation of the Spirit of Christ, which those of old were not partakers of. If the difference between the Old Testament state and the New lay only in the outward letter and the rule of it, then it would not be so easily discerned on which side the advantage lay. I think, especially, that it would not be so discerned by those who seem really to prefer the pomp of legal worship, before the plainness and simplicity of the gospel. But the one who understands that it is *not* to 'receive the spirit of bondage to fear,' but to 'receive the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry, Abba, Father;' Rom 8.15 and who understands what it means to 'serve God in the newness of the Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter,' Rom 7.6 understands their difference well enough. I cannot help but admire that some make use of arguments, or a pretense of them, for those helps and forms of prayer which do not seem compliant with the work of the Spirit of supplication from the Old Testament, described before, and the practice of the church of the Jews before the time of our Savior;

though indeed they can prove nothing from that. For do they not acknowledge that there is a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit on the church under the New Testament than under the Old? To deny it is to take away the principal difference between the law and the gospel. And is not the performance of duties to be regulated according to the supplies of *grace*?

Suppose that those people, then being carnal and obliged to observe carnal ordinances in this particular, needed *forms* of prayer — which indeed they did not (ones that were merely and only formal); nor did they use them that we know of. Does it therefore follow that believers under the New Testament, who unquestionably have a larger portion of the Spirit of grace and supplication poured out on them, would either need them, or be obliged to them? It is in vain to pretend there was a different dispensation of the Spirit to them than to us, where different fruits and effects are not acknowledged. The one who has been under the power of the law, and has been set free by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, knows the difference; and he will be thankful for the grace that is in it.

Again; the privilege of the Spirit is extensively enlarged, in that it is now communicated to multitudes, while of old it was confined to a few. Then its dews only watered the land of Canaan and the posterity of Abraham according to the flesh; now its showers are poured down on all nations, even on 'all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.' 1Cor 1.2 In every assembly of mount Zion throughout the world, called according to the mind of Christ, prayers and supplications are offered to God through the effectual working of the Spirit of grace and supplication (unless he is despised). And this is done in the accomplishment of that great promise, Mal 1.11, 'From the rising of the sun even to its going down, my name will be great among the Gentiles; and in every

place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the heathen, says the Lord of hosts.' Prayer and praises in the assemblies of the saints is the pure offering and that sacrifice which God promises will be offered to him. And this oblation is not to be kindled without the eternal fire of the Spirit of grace. No sacrifice was to be offered of old, except with fire taken from the altar. Be that what it may, if it was offered with strange fire, Lev 10.1 it was an abomination; hence they were all called *esh*, the 'firings' of the Lord. And this was a semblance of the Holy Ghost; which is why Christ is said to 'offer himself to God through the eternal Spirit.' And so must we offer our prayers. In the fruits and effects of his works, lies all the glory and beauty of our assemblies and worship. Take them away, and they are contemptible, dead, and carnal. And he carries this work into the families of those who believe. Every family separately is enabled to pray and serve God in the spirit; and those which are not, live in darkness all their days. He is the same to believers all over the world, in their closets or in their prisons. Wherever they are, they all have 'access by one Spirit to the Father,' Eph 2.18. And for this enlargement of grace, God justly expects a revenue of glory from us.

2. A constant *attendance* to the duty for which we are graciously enabled by this gift.

(1.) It is assuredly our duty to *make use* of the gift of the Spirit, as that which is purchased for us by Christ, and is of inestimable advantage to our souls. There are two ways by which men may be guilty of the neglect of this heavenly favor:

[1.] They are guilty of neglect when the gift itself is not valued or sought after, nor endeavored to be attained. And this is done under various pretenses. Some imagine that it is not a gift of the Spirit, and

so they despise it. Others think either that it is not attainable by them, or that if it is attained, it will not match the labor and diligence it requires. And therefore they take up with another way and means which they know is easier, and hope is as useful. The whole duty is despised by some; and consequently, all assistance in its performance is also despised. I will speak to none of these at present. But,

[2.] We are guilty of this neglect when we do not constantly and diligently, on all occasions, make use of it for the end to which it is given to us, and indeed, abound in its exercise. Do you have an ability to pray always, freely given to you by the Holy Ghost? Then why do you not pray always, in private, in families, according to all occasions and opportunities administered? What concern prayer has to the glory of God, and in living to him, will be owned by all. It is that single duty alone in which every grace is acted, every sin is opposed, every good thing is obtained, and the whole of our obedience in every instance of it is concerned. It is widely known to those who are in any way exercised in these things, what difficulties lie in the way of its due performance, what discouragements rise up against it, how unable we are of ourselves to discharge it in a due manner, what aversion there is to it in our corrupted nature, and what distractions and weariness are apt to befall us under it. Yet the blessedness of our present and future condition much depends on prayer.

This gift of the Spirit of grace and supplication is given to us by Jesus Christ to relieve us against all these things, to 'help our infirmities,' to give us freedom, liberty, and confidence in our approaches to the throne of grace, to enable us as children to cry, 'Abba, Father,' with delight and contentment. Who can express how great a folly and sin it is not to be found in the constant exercise of prayer? Can we, by

any means, more 'grieve this Holy Spirit' and damage our own souls? God having given us the Spirit of grace and supplication, will we be remiss, careless, and negligent in prayer? Is this not the worst way by which we may 'quench the Spirit,' which we are so cautioned against?

Can we go from day to day in the neglect of opportunities, occasions, and just times of prayer? How will we answer for the contempt of this gracious aid offered to us by Jesus Christ? Do others go from day to day in neglect of this duty in their closets and families? Do not blame them, or at least they are not worthy of as much blame as we are: for they do not know how to pray; and they have no ability for it. But for those to walk in neglect of this, who have received this gift of the Holy Ghost enabling them for it, and making it easy for them and pleasant to the inner man, how great an aggravation it is of their sin!

Will others, at the tinkling of a bell, rise and run to prayers to be said or sung — prayers in which they can have no spiritual interest, doing it only to pacify their consciences, and to comply with the prejudices of their education — and yet will we be found in neglect of that spiritual aid which is graciously afforded to us? How will the blind devotion and superstition of multitudes, with their diligence and pains in this, rise up in judgment against such negligent persons? We may see in the Papacy how, upon ringing a bell, or lifting up any ensign of superstition, some of them will rise at midnight; others in their houses, indeed, in the streets, fall on their knees to their devotions. Having lost the conduct of the Spirit of God, and his gracious guidance for performing this duty in its proper seasons, they have invented ways of their own to keep up a frequency in this duty, in their manner, to which they are true and punctual. And will those who have received that Spirit which the world cannot receive, be treacherous and disobedient to his motions, or to what he constantly inclines and enables them to do? Besides all other

disadvantages which accrue to our souls by it, who can express the horrible ingratitude of such a sin? I press it all the more, as to all sorts of prayer — in private, in families, in assemblies for that end — because the temptations and dangers of the days in which we live, particularly and eminently call for it. If we would talk less and pray more about them, things would be better than they are in the world; or at least we would be better enabled to bear them, and undergo our portion in them with more satisfaction. To be negligent in this, at such a time as this, is a sad token of a [false] security that foreruns destruction.

(2.) Have any received this gift of the Holy Ghost? — let them know that it is their duty *to cherish it, to stir it up and improve it*. It is freely bestowed, but it is to be preserved carefully. It is a gospel talent given to be traded with, and thereby to be increased. Mat 25.14f There are various degrees and measures of this gift in those who receive it. But whatever measure anyone has, from the greatest to the least, he is obliged to cherish, preserve, and improve it. We do not assert such a gift of prayer that would render our diligence in it unnecessary, or render the exercise of our natural abilities useless.

Indeed, the end of this gift is to enable us to diligently exercise the faculties of our souls in prayer in a due manner. And therefore, as it is our duty to use it, so it is our duty to improve it. It is one reason against the restraint of forms, because there is too little exercise of the faculties of our minds in the worship of God in them. Therefore, this being our duty, it may be inquired by what way or means we may stir up this grace and gift of God, so that if we do not thrive much in the outward part of it (through any weakness or infirmity of mind), at least we do not decay in or lose what we have received. The gifts of the Holy Ghost are the fire that kindles all our sacrifices to God. Now, although of old that fire on the altar first came down from

heaven, or it 'came forth from the Lord,' Lev 9.24, once it was placed there, it was always to be kept alive with care and diligence. For otherwise it would have been extinguished like any other fire, Lev 6.12-13. Hence the apostle warns Timothy, 2Tim 1.6, to excite and 'quicken the fire of his gift,' by blowing off the ashes and adding fuel to it. Now, there are many things that are useful and helpful to this end; such as —

[1.] A constant *consideration and observation of ourselves*, our own hearts, with our spiritual state and condition. The matters of our requests or petitions in prayer are to be taken from there, Psa 16.7., Our state in general, because of the depths and deceitfulness of our hearts, with our darkness in spiritual things, is such that it will find us matter for continual search and examination all the days of our lives, as it is expressed in those prayers in Psa 19.12, 139.23-24. And so we are subject to various changes and alterations in our spiritual frames and actings every day, and also to temptations of all sorts. As our occasions and necessities require, we are to deal with God about these things in our supplications, Phi 4.6. How will we be ready for this, and prepared with the proper matter of prayer, if we neglect a constant and diligent observation of ourselves in it, or of the state of our own souls? This being the food of the gift, where it is neglected, the gift itself will decay. If men consider only a *form* of things in a course of action, they will quickly come to a form of *words*.

To assist us in this search and examination of ourselves, to give light into our state and wants, to make us sensible of this, is part of the work of the Spirit as a Spirit of grace and supplication. And if we neglect our duty towards him in this, how can we expect him to continue his aid to us, as to the outward part of the duty? Therefore, let a man speak in prayer with the tongues of men and angels, to the highest satisfaction, and maybe the good edification of others; yet if

he is negligent, if he is not wise and watchful in this duty of considering the state, actings, and temptations of his own soul, he has but a perishing, decaying, outside and shell of this gift of the Spirit.

And those by whom this self-search and judgment is attended to, will ordinarily thrive in the power and life of this duty. By this means, we may know the beginnings and entrances of temptation; the deceitful actings of indwelling sin; the risings of particular corruptions, with the occasions that yield them advantages and power; the supplies of grace which we daily receive, and the ways of deliverance. Just as the one who prays without a due consideration of these things, prays at random, 'fighting uncertainly as one beating the air,' 1Cor 9.26 so the one whose heart is filled with a sense of them, will always have in readiness the due matter of prayer; and he will be able to fill his mouth with pleas and arguments by which the gift itself will be cherished and strengthened.

[2.] *Constant searching of the Scripture* to the same purpose is another subservient duty to this duty of prayer itself. That is the mirror in which we may take the best view of ourselves, because it at once represents both what we *are*, and what we *ought* to be; what we are in ourselves, and what we are by the grace of God; what our frames, actions, and ways are, and what their defect is in the sight of God. A higher instruction as to what to pray for, or how to pray, cannot be given to us, Psa 19.7-9. Some imagine that to 'search the Scriptures,' to take forms of speech or expressions from there, that are accommodated to all the parts of prayer, and to set them in order, or retain them in memory, is a great help to prayer. Whatever that is, it is *not* what I intend at present. It is most true that if a man is 'mighty in the Scriptures,' singularly conversant and exercised in them, abounding in their senses and expressions, and has the help of

a faithful memory with it, it may greatly further and assist him in the exercise of this gift for the edification of others. But I do not know what use this collection of phrases, speeches, and expressions is, where perhaps the mind is barren in the *sense* of the Scripture. What I press for, is a diligent search into the Scriptures as to the things revealed in them — for in doing that, our wants in all their circumstances and consequents, are revealed and represented to us; and so are the supplies of grace and mercy which God has provided for us. The wants are revealed with authority, to make us sensible of them; and the supplies are revealed with that evidence of grace and faithfulness which will encourage us to make our requests for them. The word is the instrument by which the Holy Spirit reveals our wants to us, when we do not know what to ask for; and so he enables us to make intercessions according to the mind of God, Rom 8.26-27. Indeed, who is it that, almost any time reading the Scripture with a due reverence for God, and a subjection of his conscience to Him, does not have some particular matter of prayer or praise effectively suggested to him?

Christians would find no small advantage, on many accounts that are not to be insisted on here, if they would frequently, if not constantly, turn what they read, into a prayer or praise to God. By doing this, the instructions to faith and obedience would be further confirmed in their minds, and their hearts would be more engaged in their practice. We have an example of this in Psalm 119, in which all considerations of God's will and our duty are turned into petitions.

[3.] A due *meditation on God's glorious excellencies* greatly tends to the cherishing of this gracious gift of the Holy Spirit. There is no example we have of prayer in the Scripture, that the entrance into prayer does not consist in expressions of His name, and most commonly, of some of the glorious titles of God, to which is usually

added the remembrance of some mighty acts of his power. The nature of the thing requires that it should be so; for besides God having revealed his name to us for this very purpose — that we might call upon him by the name which he owns and takes to himself— it is necessary that we should, by some external description, determine our minds toward the One to whom we make our addresses, seeing that we cannot conceive any image or idea of him in this. Now, the end of this is twofold:

1st. To ingenerate in us that reverence and godly fear which is required of all who draw near to this infinitely holy God, Lev 10.3; Heb 12.28. The most signal encouragement to boldness in prayer, and having access to God thereby, is in Heb 10.19-22, with Heb 4.16. We may go into the holy place with boldness, and to the throne of grace. And it is upon a throne of grace that God in Christ is represented to us; yet it is still a throne on which majesty and glory reside, and God is always to be considered as being on a throne.

2dly. Faith and confidence are excited and acted toward a due frame by this; for prayer is taking ourselves to God as our shield, our rock, and our reward, Pro 18.10. Therefore, a due and previous consideration of those holy properties of his nature is necessary, which may encourage us to do so, and assure us in our doing so. Because this is so great a part of prayer, and the great foundation of supplication and praise, frequent meditation on these holy excellencies of the divine nature is a necessary and excellent preparation for the whole duty. It fills the heart with a sense of those things which the mouth is to express, making those graces ready for their exercise, which is required in this.

[4.] Meditation on the *mediation and intercession of Christ*, for our encouragement, has the same importance and tendency. To this end,

spiritually, he is proposed to us as abiding in the discharge of his priestly office, Heb 4.15-16, 10.19-22.

This is not only an encouragement to our supplications, and in them, but a means to increase and strengthen the grace and gift of prayer itself. For the mind is thereby made ready to exercise itself about the effectual interposition of the Lord Christ at the throne of grace on our behalf, which has a principal place and consideration in the prayers of all believers. And hereby, principally, we may test our faith as to what race and kind it is, whether it is truly evangelical or not. Some say that the eagle tests the eyes of her young ones by turning them to the sun; if they cannot look steadily on it, she rejects them as spurious. We may truly test our faith by immediate intuitions of the Sun of Righteousness. Direct faith to act immediately and directly on the incarnation of Christ and his mediation; and if it is not of the right kind and race, then it will turn its eye aside to anything else. It can bear a fixed consideration of God's essential properties, his precepts and promises; but it cannot fix itself on the person and mediation of Christ with steadiness and satisfaction. There is, indeed, much profession of Christ in the world, but little faith in him.

[5.] *Frequency in exercise* is the immediate way and means of the increase and improvement of this gift. All spiritual gifts are bestowed on men to be employed and exercised; for 'the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone to profit with,' 1Cor 12.7. God requires that his talents be traded with Mat 25.14f (that his gifts be employed and exercised); and he will also call us to account for the discharge of the trust committed to us in them. See 1Pet 4.10-11. Therefore, the exercise of this and like gifts tends to their improvement on a double account:

1st. Because they reside in the mind in the manner and nature of a habit or a faculty, it is natural that they would be increased and strengthened by exercise, as all habits are by multiplying acts proceeding from them. So also by disuse they will weaken and decay, and in the issue, they will be utterly lost and perish. So it is with many as to the gift of prayer. They were known to receive it in some good measure of usefulness, for their own edification and that of others. But upon neglecting the use and exercise of it in public and private — which seldom goes alone, without some secret or open enormities — they have lost all their ability, and cannot open their mouths on any occasion in prayer, beyond what is prescribed to them or composed for them. But the just hand of God is also in this matter, depriving them of what they had, for their abominable neglect of his grace and bounty in this. Mat 13.12

2dly. The increase will be added to, by virtue of God's blessing on his own appointment; for having bestowed these gifts for that end, where persons are faithful in the discharge of the trust committed to them, he will graciously add to what they have. This is the eternal law concerning the dispensation of evangelical gifts, 'To everyone that has, more will be given, and he will have abundance: but from him that does not have, even what he has will be taken away,' Mat 25.29.

It is not the mere having or not having that is intended, but using or not using what we have received, as is plain in the context. Now, I do not say that a man may or ought to exercise himself in prayer merely with this design that he may preserve and improve his gift. In some cases, it may indeed be lawful for a man to consider it, but not only this. For example, a master of a family may have someone in his family who is able to discharge that duty and can attend to it. Yet he will find it his wisdom not to omit his own performance of it, unless he is content that his gift, as to its use to his family, *should* wither

and decay. But all that I plead is this: that the one who conscientiously, with respect to all the ends of prayer, abounds in the exercise of this gift, will assuredly thrive and grow in it, or at least he will preserve it in response to the measure of the gift of Christ. For I do not propose these things as though every man in the diligent use of them may constantly grow and thrive in that part of the gift which consists in utterance and expression. For there is a 'measure of the gift of Christ' assigned to everyone, whose bounds he will not pass, Eph 4.7. But in these paths and ways, the gift which they have received will be preserved, kept thrifty and flourishing. And from the least beginnings of a participation in it, they will be carried on to their own proper measure, which is sufficient for them.

[6.] *Constant fervency and intension of mind and spirit* in this duty, works directly towards the same end. Men may multiply prayers as to the outward work in them, and yet not have the least spiritual advantage by them. If they are dull, dead, and slothful in them, if these are done under the power of habit and formality, what result can they expect? Fervency and intension of mind quickens and enlarges the faculties, and leaves vigorous impressions on them of the things addressed in our supplications. The whole soul is cast into the mould of the matter of our prayers, and it is thereby prepared and made ready for continual fresh spiritual engagements about them. And this fervency that we intend, does not consist in the vehemence or loudness of words, but in the intension of the mind. For the earnestness or vehemence of the voice is allowable only in two cases:

1st. When the edification of the congregation requires it, which being numerous, they cannot hear what is spoken unless a man lifts up his voice;

2dly. When the vehemence of affections will bear no restraint, Psa 22.1, Heb 5.7.

Now, just as all these are means by which the gift of prayer may be cherished, preserved, and improved, so all of them are the ways by which grace acts itself in prayer. And therefore, they have an equal respect to the whole work of the Spirit of supplication in us.

(3.) It is our duty to use *this gift of prayer for the ends to which it is freely bestowed on us.* And it is given —

[1.] With respect to those who receive it; and,

[2.] With respect to the benefit and advantage of others.

[1.] With respect to those who receive it, its end is (and it is a blessed means and help) to stir up, excite, quicken, and act all those graces of the Spirit by which they have communion with God in this duty. Such are faith, love, delight, joy, and the like; for,

1st. Under the conduct of this gift, the mind and soul are led to the consideration of, and are fixed upon, the proper objects of those graces, with the due occasions of their exercise. When men are bound to a form, they can act grace only by the things that are expressed in that form. Whatever any may apprehend from it is strait and narrow, compared with the extent of that divine intercourse with God which is needful for believers in this duty. But in the exercise of this *gift*, there is no concern of faith, or love, or delight, that will not be presented to them, and they are excited to a due exercise about them. Therefore, it is to be used to this end: — namely, as a means to stir up and act those graces and holy affections, in whose working and exercise the life and efficacy of prayer consists.

2dly. The exercise of the gift itself should be nothing but the way of those graces acting themselves towards God in this duty. For words are supplied only to clothe and express gracious desires; and when they wholly exceed them, they are of no advantage. Yet, just as by virtue of the gift, the mind is able to comprehend and manage the things about which those graces and gracious desires are to be exercised, so in the use of expressions they are quickened and engaged in this. For when a man has heard of a miserable object, he is moved with compassion towards it; but when he comes to behold it 'his own eye affects his heart,' as the prophet says in Lam. 3.51. By beholding it, his compassion is actually moved and increased. So too, although a man may have a comprehension in his mind about the things of prayer, and he is affected with them, his own words will also affect his heart; and by reflection, they will stir up and inflame spiritual affections. So too, even in private, many find advantage in the use of their own gift, beyond what they can attain in mere mental prayer; which must be addressed afterward. Again,

[2.] This gift respects others, and it is to be used to that end. For just as it is appointed by God to be exercised in societies, families, church assemblies, and on occasion for the good of any, so it is designed for their edification and profit. For there is an ability in it to express the wants, desires, and prayers of others also. And as this discharge of the duty is particularly incumbent on ministers of the gospel, and also on masters of families and others, as they are called to it on occasion, so they are to attend to a fourfold direction in it:

1st. To their own *experience*. If such persons are believers themselves, they have experienced in their own souls, all the general concerns of those who are in the same condition. As sin works in one, so it works in another; as grace is effectual in one, so it is effectual in another; as he that prays, longs for mercy and grace, so do those who

join with him. His hatred of sin, his love for Christ, his laboring after holiness and conformity to the will of God, are of the same kind as those in other believers also. Hence, persons 'praying in the Spirit' according to their own experience, are often supposed by everyone in the congregation to be praying over their condition, rather than their own. And so it will be while the same corruption in kind, and the same grace in kind, with the same kind of operations, are in them all. But this does not extend itself to particular sins and temptations, which are left to everyone to deal with between God and their own souls.

2dly. To *Scripture light*. This is what lively expresses the spiritual state and condition of all sorts of persons — namely, both those who are unregenerate, and those who are converted to God. Whatever that light expresses concerning either sort, may safely be pleaded with God in their behalf; and abundant matter for prayer may be taken from this for all occasions. May it be especially so, and in a particular manner, from that holy summary of the church's desires to God that are given to us in the Lord's Prayer. All we can duly apprehend, spiritually understand, and draw out of that mine and heavenly treasury of prayer, may be safely used in the name and on behalf of the whole church of God. But without understanding the things intended, the use of the words will not profit.

3dly. To an *observation of their ways and walking*, with whatever overt discovery they make of their condition and temptations. The one who is constantly the mouth of others to God, is not to pray at random, as though all persons and conditions were alike to him. No one prays for others constantly, by virtue of special duty, that he is not also called to watch over them and observe their ways. In doing so, he may know something of their state which may be a great direction to his supplications with them and for them. Indeed,

without this, no man can ever rightly discharge this duty in behalf of others, such that they may find their particular concerns in it. And if a minister is obliged to consider the ways, light, knowledge, and walking of his flock, in his preaching to them — so that what he teaches may be suited to their edification — he is no less bound to the same consideration in his prayers *with* them and *for* them, if he intends to pray to their use and profit. The same may be said of others in their capacity. I may not insist on here, the wisdom and caution which are to be used in this.

4thly. To the *account which others receive from them concerning their wants*, their state and condition. In some cases, persons are obliged to give this account to those whose duty it is to help them by their prayers, Jas 5.16. If this duty were more attended to, the minds of many might receive inconceivable relief by it.

(4.) Let us take heed —

[1.] That this gift is not *solitary* or alone; and,

[2.] That it is not *solitarily acted* at any time.

[1.] When it is solitary — that is, where the gift of prayer is in the *mind*, but no grace to exercise in prayer is in the *heart* — it is at best but a part of that form of godliness which men may have, and yet deny its power.²Tim 3.5 It is therefore consistent with all sorts of secret lusts and abominations. It would be easy to demonstrate that whatever advantage others may have by this gift in those who are destitute of saving grace, yet they themselves are worsted by it in many ways. For from this they are lifted up with spiritual pride, which is the ordinary consequence of all unsanctified light. And by this, they countenance themselves against the reflections of their consciences on the guilt of other sins, thus resting and pleasing

themselves in their own performances. But to the best observation I have been able to make, of all spiritual gifts which may be communicated for a time to unsanctified minds, this one soonest decays and withers. Whether God takes it away from them judicially, or they are not able to bear the exercise of it because it is diametrically opposite to the lusts in which they indulge themselves, for the most part it quickly and visibly decays. This is especially so where, because of open sins and apostasy, its continuance in them might be a matter of danger or scandal for others.

[2.] Let it not be acted solitarily. Persons in whom there is a principle of spiritual life and grace, who are endowed with those graces of the Spirit which ought to be acted in all our supplications, may yet, even in the use and exercise of this gift, neglect to stir them up and act them. There is no greater evidence of a weak, sickly, spiritual constitution, than to often be surprised into this miscarriage. Now, this is so when men in their prayers engage only their light, invention, memory, and elocution, without special actings of faith and delight in God. The one who watches his soul and its actings may easily discern when he is sinfully negligent in this matter, or when outward circumstances and occasions have made him attend more to the *gift* than to the *grace* in prayer — for this, he will be humbled.

And these few things I thought fit to add concerning the due use and improvement of this gift of the Spirit of God.

Chapter X.

Of mental prayer as pretended to by some in the Church of Rome.

Having described or given an account of the *gift of prayer*, and the use of it in the church of God, and the nature of the work of the Spirit in this, it will be necessary to consider briefly what some have set up in competition with it, as a more excellent way in this part of divine worship. In the first place, *mental prayer*, as described by some devout persons of the church of Rome, is preferred above it. They call it 'pure spiritual prayer, or a quiet repose of contemplation; that which excludes all images of the fancy, and in time, all perceptible actuations of the understanding; and it is exercised in signal elevations of the will, without any force at all, yet with admirable efficacy.' And to dispose a soul for such prayer, there is previously required 'an entire calmness and even death of the passions, a perfect purity in the spiritual affections of the will, and an entire abstraction from all created things.' — Cressy, *Church Hist. pref. par. 42, 43.*

1. The truth is, I am fixed in a dislike of that mere outside, formal course of reading or singing prayers which is in use in the Roman church. Though in Mr. Cressy's esteem, it has a show of a very civil conduct with God, it is indeed accompanied with the highest contempt for God's infinite purity and all divine excellencies. And I so much more abhor that *magical incantation* which many among them use, in the repetition of words which they do not understand, or of applying what they repeat to an end other than what the words signify. It is saying so many prayers for such an end, or for such purpose, of which there may be not one word of mention in the prayers themselves. And thus I must approve of any search for a *real internal intercourse of soul* with God in this duty. But men must be careful of two things in this:

(1.) That they do not assert what they can *fancy*, but what indeed, in some measure, they have an *experience* of. It is always dangerous for men to conjecture about what others experience (for they can do no more), and from there, to form rules or examples of duty; and it may be pernicious to those who follow such instructions. And in this, Mr. Cressy fails. He gives nothing but his own fancies of others' pretended experience.

(2.) That what they pretend to have an experience of, is confirmable by Scripture rule or example. For if it is not, then we are directed to the conduct of all extravagant imaginations in everyone who pretends to a spiritual experience.

Attend to these two rules, and I will grant in prayer all the ways by which the soul, or its faculties, can rationally act itself towards God in a holy and spiritual manner.

But if you extend it to the kind of actings that our nature is not capable of, at least not in this world, it is the open fruit of a deceived fancy, and it makes all that is tendered from the same hand, to be justly suspect. And such is that instance of this mental prayer: *it is in the will and its affections without any actings of the mind or understanding*. For I grant that the adhesion of the will and affections to God, by love, delight, contentment, rest, and satisfaction, in prayer, belongs to the improvement of this duty. And yet, to imagine that they are not guided, directed, or moved by the understanding in the contemplation of God's goodness, beauty, grace and other divine excellencies, is to render our worship and devotion brutish or irrational, where it is, and ought to be, our '*reasonable service*.' Rom 12.1

This very description of prayer given here, is a mere effect of fancy and imagination, and not what its author was led to by the conduct of

spiritual light and experience. That is evident from this: that it is borrowed from those contemplative philosophers who, after preaching the gospel in the world, endeavored to refine and advance heathenism to comply with it — at least it is fancied in imitation of what they ascribe to a perfect mind. One of them, and his expressions in one place, may suffice for an instance — Plotinus in his *Enneads*. For after many other ascriptions to a soul that has attained union with the highest good, he adds this: —

'A mind thus risen up is in no way moved, no anger, no desire of anything is in it' (a perfect rest of the affections); 'no, neither reason nor understanding' (are acted), 'nor, if I may say so, itself. But being ecstasied and filled with God, it comes into a quiet, still, immovable repose and state, in no way declining' (by any sensible actings) 'from its own essence, nor exercising any reflex act upon itself; it is wholly at rest, as having attained a perfect state;'

— or to this purpose, with much more of the same. And as it is easy to find the substance of our author's notion in these words, so the reader may see it further declared at large in that last chapter of his *Enneads*. And in design, all his companions at about that time speak to the same purpose.

2. The spiritual *intense fixation of the mind*, by contemplation on God in Christ, until the soul is, as it were, swallowed up in admiration and delight. And being brought to an utter loss through the infiniteness of those excellencies which it admires and adores, it returns again into its own abasements, out of a sense of its infinite distance from what it would absolutely and eternally embrace. And with that come the inexpressible rest and satisfaction which the will and affections receive in their approaches to the eternal Fountain of goodness. These are things to be aimed at in prayer, and which are

frequently enjoyed through the riches of divine condescension. The soul is hereby raised and ravished, not into ecstasies or unaccountable raptures, not activated into motions above the power of its own understanding and will; but it is filled with rest in all its faculties and affections, through the effectual workings of the Spirit of grace and the lively impressions of divine love, with intimations of the relations and kindness of God — in 'joy unspeakable and full of glory.' 1Pet 1.8 And these spiritual acts of communion with God, of which I may say with Bernard, *Rara hora, brevis mora*, may be enjoyed in mental or vocal prayer indifferently.

But because the description given here of mental, spiritual prayer has no countenance given to it from the Scriptures — indeed, those things said about it are expressly contrary to it, such as 'perfect purity' and the like — and as it cannot be confirmed by the rational experience of anyone, it in no way takes away from the necessity and usefulness of vocal prayer, to which it is opposed. For the use of words is still necessary in this duty, from the nature of the duty itself, the command of God, and the edification of the church.

And it has fallen out unhappily, as to the exaltation of the conceived excellence of this mental prayer, that our Lord Jesus Christ not only instructed his disciples to pray by the use of words, but did so himself, and that was constantly so far as we know, Mat 26.39, 42. Indeed, when he was most intense and engaged in this duty, instead of this pretended *still prayer of contemplation*, he prayed 'with a strong outcry,' Heb 5.7, which in Psa 22.1 is called the 'voice of his roaring.' And all the reproaches which this author casts on fervent, earnest, vocal prayer — namely, that it is a tedious, loud, impetuous, and uncivil conduct with God, a mere artificial slight and facility— may with equal truth be cast on the outward manner of the praying of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was often long, and

sometimes loud and vehement. And to the example of their Lord and Master, we may add the example of the prophets and apostles, who mention nothing of this pretended elevation, but constantly made use of, and desired God to hear in their supplication, their '*voices*,' their '*cry*,' their '*words*' — the words of many of them were accordingly recorded. Therefore, words proper, suggested by the Spirit of God, and taken either directly or analogically out of the Scripture, help the mind, and enlarge it with supplications.

The use of such words, being first led to by the desires of the mind, leads the mind on to express its further desires also; and it increases those which are so expressed. It is from God's institution and blessing, that the mind and will of praying lead to the words of prayer, and the words of prayer lead on the mind and will, enlarging them in their desires and supplications. Without this aid, many would often be restrained in acting their thoughts and affections towards God, or be distracted in them, or diverted from them. We have experienced that an obedient, sanctified persistence in the use of gracious words in prayer, has prevailed against violent temptations and injections of Satan, which the mind in its silent contemplations was not able to grapple with. And holy affections are thus also excited by it. The very words and expressions which the mind chooses to declare its thoughts, conceptions, and desires about heavenly things, reflect upon the affections, increasing and exciting them. Not only do the things themselves that are fixed on affect the heart, but the words of wisdom and the sobriety by which they are expressed also affect it. There is a recoiling of efficacy, if I may say so, in deep impressions on the affections, from the words by which those affections are expressed. But we address prayer principally as it is to be performed in families, societies, assemblies, and congregations, where this mental prayer would do as well to promote

edification, as that which is attainable in the silent meetings of the Quakers.

And because this kind of 'prayer,' as it is called, is not only recommended to us, but preferred before all other ways and methods of prayer, and chosen as an instance to highlight the devotion of the church of Rome, and to invite others to it, I will inquire into it a little more particularly. And I must say that, on the best view or examination I can take of it, it seems to be a matter that is altogether useless, uncertain, an effect of the vain curiosity which it entertains, and by which men 'intrude themselves into those things which they have not seen, being vainly puffed up by their own fleshly mind.' Col 2.18 For (not to go over what was intimated before about practical things in religion) no man can understand anything which he cannot experience. And so nothing is rejected by virtue of this rule, which some men have no experience of through their own default; but everything is justly rejected which no man can attain any experience of in the discharge of his duty. If any such things belonged to our condition in this world, and someone speaks of them to others, he must be a barbarian to them in what he says. And because he speaks of that in which his own reason and understanding have no interest, he must also be a barbarian to himself.

For no man can understand by the use of reason, however advanced by spiritual light, such actings of the souls of other men, or of his own soul, where there is no exercise of reason or understanding, as these raptures are pretended to consist in. Thus one of them says, 'The ground of my soul, touches the ground of the essence of God.' It would certainly have been better for him to keep his apprehensions or fancy to himself, than to express himself in words which, in their own proper sense, are blasphemous, and whose best defense is that they are unintelligible. And even if it is not unlawful, it is doubtless

inexpedient for anyone, in things of religion, to utter what it is impossible for anybody else to understand, with this plea alone: that indeed, they do not understand it themselves, for it is what they enjoyed without any acts or actings of their own understanding. To allow such pretenses is the ready way to introduce Babel into the church, and to expose religion to scorn. I have known some among us, pretending to such raptures; for a while they stirred up the admiration of weak and credulous persons. But through a little observation of what they did, spoke, and pretended to, with an examination of it all by the unerring rule, they quickly came into contempt.

All I intend at present is that, whatever is in this pretense, it is altogether useless for edification; and therefore its declaration ought to have no regard in the church of God. If the apostle would not allow the use of words, though miraculously suggested to those who used them, without an immediate interpretation of their meaning, then what would he have said of such words and things that are capable of no interpretation, such that any man living could understand them? For those who so extol and commend these to us at present, discuss them at random, as blind men talk of colors — for they do not pretend to have any experience of these things themselves. It is somewhat an uncouth way of proceeding, to enhance the value of the communion of their church, and to invite others to it, by declaring that there are some among them who enjoyed such spiritual ecstasies which could not be understood either by themselves or any others. For nothing can be understood where there is no exercise of reason or understanding. Therefore, the old question, *cui bono?* will discharge this pretense from being of any value or esteem in religion with considerate men.

Again, the whole of this kind of prayer is useless as to the benefit and edification of the church or any member of it. So it is impossible for there to ever be any certainty about the raptures in which it is pretended to consist. Rather, they must everlastingly be the subject of contention and dispute. For who will assure me that the persons pretending to these duties or enjoyments are *not* mere pretenders?

Any man that lives, if he has a mind for it, may say such things, or use such expressions concerning himself. If a man, indeed, pretends and declares that he does or enjoys those things which are expressed in the word of God as being the duty or privilege of *anyone* — and upon that, they are acknowledged by all to be things that are true and real in themselves, and likewise attainable by other believers — then he is ordinarily, so far as I know, to be believed in his profession (unless he can be convicted of falsehood by anything inconsistent with such duties or enjoyments). Nor do I know of any great evil in our credulity in this, if we happen to be deceived in or by the person professing it; because he speaks of no more than what all acknowledge as their duty to endeavor after. But when anyone pretends to spiritual actings or enjoyments which are neither prescribed nor promised in the Scripture, nor are investigable in the light of reason, no man is obliged to give credit to this upon his mere profession. Nor can any man tell what evil effects or consequences his doing so may produce. For once men are taken away from that sure ground of Scripture and their own understandings, putting themselves afloat on the uncertain waters of fancies or conjectures, they do not know how they may be tossed, nor where they may be driven.

If it is said that the holiness and honesty of the persons by whom these special privileges are enjoyed are sufficient reason why we should believe them in what they profess, I answer that they would

be holy and honest in good measure, if they did not pretend to things that are repugnant to reason and unwarranted by the Scripture — this is sufficient to crush the reputation of any man's integrity. Nor can their holiness and honesty be proved to be such that it renders them absolutely impregnable against all temptations; that was the pre-eminence of Christ alone. Nor is there any more strength in this plea than what may be reduced to this assertion: that there are not nor were there ever any hypocrites in the world who are undiscoverable to the eyes of men. For if there may be such, then some of these pretenders may be of their number, notwithstanding the appearance of their holiness and honesty. Besides, if the holiness of the best of them were to be examined by evangelical light and rule, perhaps it would be so far from being a sufficient countenance for other things, that it would not be able to defend its own reputation. Nor is it lack of charity which makes men doubtful and unbelieving in such cases; but it is godly jealousy and Christian prudence, which require them to take care that they not be deceived or deluded. These not only warrant that they stay on their guard, but make it their necessary duty also. For it is not a new thing, that pretenses of raptures, ecstasies, revelations, and unaccountable, extraordinary enjoyments of God, should be made use of for corrupt ends — indeed, abused to the worst ends imaginable.

The experience of the church, both under the Old Testament and the New, witnesses to this, as the apostle Peter declares in 2Pet 2.1. For among those of old, there were multitudes of those who falsely pretended to have visions, dreams, revelations, and such spiritual ecstasies — some of whom wore a 'rough garment to deceive.' Zec 13.4 And this was not alone, but it was accompanied with all those apparent austerities that might produce an opinion of sanctity and integrity in them. And when the body of the people had grown corrupt and superstitious, this sort of men had credit with them

above the true prophets of God; yet for the most part they showed themselves to be hypocritical liars. We are abundantly warned about such spirits under the New Testament, as we are foretold that many would be deluded by them. We are commanded to test, by the unerring rule of the word, all such pretenders to extraordinary intercourse with God. And we desire only the liberty to do so.

But suppose that those who assert these devotions and enjoyments of God in their own experience, are *not* false pretenders to what they profess; nor do they design to deceive; but they are persuaded in their own minds of the reality of what they endeavor to declare. Yet this will not give us the least security of their truth either. For it is known that there are so many ways, partly natural, partly diabolical, by which the fancies and imaginations of persons may be so possessed with false images and apprehensions of things — and with so vehement an efficacy as to give them a confidence of their truth and reality — that no assurance of these things can be given by being persuaded of the sincerity of those by whom they are pretended. There are so many ways by which men are disposed to such a frame and actings, or by which they are imposed on by such delusions, especially where they are prompted by superstition, and are encouraged doctrinally to expect such imaginations. Thus it is a far greater wonder that more have not fallen into the same extravagances, than any that have done so. We find by experience that some, by satanic delusions, have had their imaginations so fixed on things that are evil and noxious, that they have confessed to things and crimes that have rendered them liable to capital punishments — things they were never really and actually guilty of. Therefore, seeing that these acts or duties of devotion are pretended to be such that there is no sensible actuation of the mind or understanding in them, and so they cannot rationally be accounted for, or rendered perceptible to the understanding of others — it is not

unreasonable to suppose that they are only fantasies of deluded fancies, which superstitious, credulous persons have gradually raised themselves to. Or they are such that these persons exposed themselves to being imposed on by Satan, through a groundless, unwarrantable desire for them, or an expectation of them.

But whatever there may be in the height of this 'contemplative prayer,' as it is called, it is not prayer; nor on any account can it be esteemed prayer. It was declared before that we allow for mental prayer, and all actings of the mind in holy meditations. Nor do we deny the usefulness or necessity of those other things — of mortifying the affections and passions, of an entire resignation of the whole soul to God, with contentment in him, so far as our nature is capable of these things in this world. But what we inquire into is that incomparable excellence of prayer in the silence of the soul, and the pure adhesion of the will, without any actings of the understanding. And I say, whatever else there may be in this, it does not have the nature of prayer, nor is it to be esteemed as prayer, even though it is recommended to us under that name and notion. Prayer is a *natural* duty, the notion and understanding of which is common to all mankind; and the concurrent voice of nature does not deceive. Therefore, whatever is not compliant with it, at least what is contradictory to or inconsistent with it, is not to be esteemed prayer.

Now, in the common sense of mankind, this duty is that acting of the mind and soul in which they address their desires to God, with faith and trust; or they ascribe praise and glory to him for what he is in himself, and what he is to them. This is done from an acknowledgment of the sovereign being, self-sufficiency, rule, and dominion of God, with his infinite goodness, wisdom, power, righteousness, omniscience and omnipresence. And it is with a sense of their own universal dependence on God, on his will and pleasure,

as to their beings, lives, happiness, and all their concerns, as their state and condition require. This is the general notion of prayer, which the reason of mankind centers in; nor can any man conceive of it under any other notion whatever. The gospel directs the performance of this duty in an acceptable manner with respect to the mediation of Christ, the aids of the Holy Ghost, and the revelation of the spiritual mercies we all desire. But it changes nothing in the general nature of it. It does not introduce a duty of another kind, and call it by the name of that which is known in the light of nature, but which is quite another thing. All men in whom the first innate principles of natural light are not extinguished, or woefully depraved, universally understand this general nature of prayer well enough. Prayer may be done among some by a long traditional course of an atheistic and brutish conduct. But as large and extensive as the convictions of men are, concerning the being and existence of God, so are their apprehensions of the nature of this duty. For the first actings of nature towards a Divine Being are in *invocation*. Every one of Jonah's mariners knew how to call on his god when they were in a storm.

And where there is no trust or affiance in God acted, by which men glorify him as God, and where desires or praises are not offered to him — neither of which can be done without express acts of the mind or understanding — there is no prayer, whatever else there may be. Therefore, this contemplative devotion — in which it is pretended that the soul is ecstasied, and the will and affections are advanced above all the actings of the mind or understanding — this does not have one property of prayer, as the nature of prayer is manifested in the light of nature and the common agreement of mankind. Prayer without an actual acknowledgment of God in all his holy excellencies, and the actings of faith in fear, love, confidence, and gratitude, is a monster in nature, or a side-effect of imagination, which has no

existence *in rerum natura*. These persons, therefore, had best find some other name with which to impose this kind of devotion on our admiration; for it is utterly excluded from the whole precincts of prayer or invocation on the name of God. What place it may have in any other part of the worship of God, we will immediately inquire into.

But this examination of prayer *by the light of nature* will be looked at as most absurd and impertinent. For our measures of all matters of spiritual communion with God will be false and perverse if we must try them by this rule and standard — and that is in those things which wholly depend on divine, supernatural revelation. I say, no doubt they would. Therefore, we call only that concern about it to a trial hereby, whose true notion is confessedly fixed in the light of nature. Without extending that line beyond its due bounds, we may take by it a just measure of what prayer is and is not; for in this it cannot deceive nor be deceived. And this is all we engage in at present. In the pursuit of the same inquiry, we may also bring it to the Scripture, from which we will find that such mental prayer is as foreign to it, as it is from the light of nature. For as it is described, so far as anything intelligible may be collected from that, it exceeds or deviates from whatever is said in the Scripture concerning prayer. This is true even in those places where the grace and privileges of prayer are most emphatically expressed, and as it is exemplified in the prayers of the Lord Christ himself, and of all the saints recorded in it.

Therefore, the light of nature and the Scripture, by common consent, exclude it from being prayer of any kind. Prayer, in the Scripture's representation of it, is the soul's access and approach to God by Jesus Christ, through the aids of his Holy Spirit, to make known its requests to him, with supplication and thanksgiving. And that on

which it is recommended to us, are its external adjuncts, and its internal grace and efficacy. Of the first sort (external adjuncts), the principal ones are earnestness, fervency, importunity, constancy, and perseverance. No man can attend to these, or any of them, in a way of duty, except in the exercise of his mind and understanding. Without this, whatever looks like any of them, is brutish fury or obstinacy.

And as to the internal form of it (grace and efficacy), in that description which is given of its nature in the Scripture, it consists in the special exercise of faith, love, delight, fear, and all the graces of the Spirit, as occasion requires. And in that exercise of these graces, in which the life and being of prayer consists, a continual regard is to be had to the mediation of Christ and the free promises of God. Through these means, he exhibits himself to us as a God who hears prayer. These things are both plainly and frequently mentioned in the Scripture, as all of them are exemplified in the prayers of those holy persons which are recorded in it. But for this *contemplative* prayer, as it is described by our author and others, there is neither precept for it, nor direction about it, nor motive for it, nor example of it, in the whole of Scripture. It must seem marvellous, to some at least, that although this duty and all its concerns are more insisted on in Scripture than any other Christian duty or privilege whatever, that in the height and excellency of contemplative prayer (in comparison to all other kinds of prayer), all the actings of the mind and soul are decried — and yet this has not obtained the least intimation in Scripture.

For if we were to take a view of all the particular places in which the nature and excellence of this duty are described, and the grace and privilege with which it is accompanied — for instance, in Eph 6.18, Phi 4.6, Heb 4.16, 10.19-22 — there is nothing that is consistent with

this contemplative prayer. Neither is there anything in the prayers of our Lord Jesus Christ, nor of his apostles, nor of any holy men from the beginning of the world, either for themselves or the whole church, that gives the least countenance to it. Nor can any man declare what is or can be the work of the Holy Spirit in this, *as* he is a Spirit of grace and supplication; nor is any gift of his, mentioned in the Scripture, capable of the least exercise in it. So in no sense can this be that act of 'praying in the Holy Ghost' which is prescribed for us. There is therefore no example proposed for our imitation, no mark set before us, nor any direction given, for attaining this pretended excellence and perfection. Whatever is fancied or spoken concerning it, is utterly foreign to the Scripture, and it must owe itself to the deluded imagination of a few persons.

Besides, the Scripture does not propose to us any other kind of access to God under the New Testament, nor any nearer approaches to him than what we have in and through the mediation of Christ, and by faith in him. But in this pretense, what is aimed at seems to be such an immediate enjoyment of God in his essence, that it is regardless of Christ, and it leaves him quite behind.

But God will not be 'all in all' immediately to the church, until the Lord Christ has fully delivered the mediatory kingdom to him.^{1Cor 15.28} And, indeed, the silence concerning Christ in the whole of what is ascribed to this contemplative prayer, or rather the exclusion of him from any concern in it as mediator, is sufficient with all considerate persons to evince that it does not have the least interest in the duty of prayer, whether name or thing.

Nor does this imagination belong any more to any other part or exercise of faith in this world; and yet here we universally walk by faith, and not by sight. The whole of what belongs to it may be

reduced to these two heads: what we do towards God, and what we enjoy of Him in this. As to the first, all the actings of our souls towards God belong to our 'reasonable service,' Rom 12.1; more is not required of us in a way of duty. But that in which our minds and understandings have no concern, is no part of our reasonable service; nor is it any part of our enjoyment of God in this life. For no such thing is promised to us anywhere; and it is by the promises alone that we are made partakers of the divine nature, or have anything from God communicated to us. Therefore, there seems to be nothing in the bravery of these affected expressions, than an endeavor to fancy something above the measure of all possible attainments in this life, and yet falling unspeakably beneath those of future glory. It is therefore a kind of purgatory in devotion — something that is out of this world and yet not in another; it is above the earth and beneath heaven, where we may leave it in clouds and darkness.

Chapter XI.

Spiritual ability in prayer, in opposition to prescribed forms of prayer

There are also great pleas for the use of *prescribed, limited forms of prayer*, in opposition to that spiritual ability in prayer which we have described and proved to be a gift of the Holy Ghost. Where these forms are contended for by men with respect to *their own use and practice only*, as suitable to their experience, and judged by them as serving God with the best that they have, I will not take the least notice of them, nor of any dissent about them. But because a persuasion not only of their lawfulness but of their *necessity* is made

use of for other ends and purposes, in which the peace and edification of believers are highly concerned, it is necessary that we should make some inquiry into this. I say, it is only with respect to such a sense of their *nature*, and the *necessity* of their use, that gives occasion or a supposed advantage for men to oppose, deny, and speak evil of that way of prayer, with its causes and ends, which we described, that I will in any way consider these *forms of prayer* and their use.

For I know well enough that I have nothing to do with judging or condemning the persons or duties of men in such acts of religious worship as they choose for their best, and hope for acceptance in, unless they are expressly idolatrous. For unless it is in such cases or the like, which are plain either in the light of nature or Scripture revelation, it is a silly apprehension, and tending to atheism, that God does not require all men to regulate their actions towards him according to that sovereign light which he has erected in their own minds.

What the *forms* intended are, how they are composed, how they are used, and how in some cases they are *imposed*, are things so well known to all, that we will not need to speak to them. *Prayer is God's institution*; and the reading of these *forms* is what men have made and set up in the likeness of this institution, Exo 20.4 or in compliance with it. For it is said that 'the Lord Christ having provided the *matter of prayer*, and having commanded us to pray, it is left to us or others to *compose prayer*, as to the manner of it, as we or they see cause.' But there is no appearance of truth in the inference; rather, the direct contrary ensues from the proposition laid down. It is built on the supposition that, besides the provision of the matter of prayer, and the command of the duty to pray, the Lord Christ has not further promised, and he does not communicate to his

church, those spiritual aids and assistances that will enable them to pray according to the mind of God, without any other outward pretended helps. We must not admit this if we intend to be Christians. In like manner, he has provided the whole subject-matter of preaching, and commanded all his ministers to preach. But it does not follow from this that all or any of them may make one sermon, which is to be constantly read in all assemblies of Christians, without any variation — that is, unless we also grant that he ceases to give gifts to men for the work of the ministry. Our inquiry will therefore be, what place or use *forms* may have in this, or in our duty as performed by virtue of this. It may be expressed in the ensuing observations:

1. The Holy Ghost as a Spirit of grace and supplication, is nowhere, that I know of, promised to any to help or assist them in *composing prayers* for others. And therefore we have no ground to *pray for Him* or his assistance to that end in particular, nor any foundation on which to build faith or expectation of receiving him for that. Therefore, He is not concerned in that work or endeavor in any special or gracious manner. Whether this is a duty that falls under his care as communicating gifts in general for the edification of the church, will be examined afterward.

What we plead at present is that he is nowhere particularly promised for that end; nor do we have either command or direction to ask for his assistance in it. If anyone says that he is promised to this purpose *as* a Spirit of grace and supplication, I answer that he is promised directly to those who are to pray, and not to those who make prayers for others — they themselves say this is not praying. This is besides what has already been pleaded at large in the explication and vindication of the proper sense of that promise. But supposing it is a duty in general to compose prayers for our own use or for the use of

others, it is lawful and warrantable to pray for the aid and guidance of the Holy Ghost in this — but that is not as to his particular assistance in prayer; and it is not as he is a Spirit of supplication to believers. Rather, it is as he is our sanctifier, the author and efficient cause of every gracious work and duty in us.

It may be that the prayers composed by some holy men for the use of the church under the Old Testament, by the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost, will also be pretended. But because the inspiration or assistance which they had in their work was of quite another kind than anything that is ordinarily promised, or that any persons can now pretend to, it may yet be further inquired into, whether they were dictated to them by the Holy Ghost to be used afterward by others as mere forms of prayer.

The great plea for some of these external aids of prayer, is utterly removed out of the way by this one consideration. It is said that 'some of these prayers were prepared by great and holy men; it may be that some of them were martyrs for the truth of the gospel and testimony of Jesus.' And indeed, if any men in the world had a promise of special assistance by the Spirit of God in such a work, I would not contend that the persons referred to were not as likely to partake of that assistance as any others in these latter ages. But they did *not* have extraordinary, supernatural inspiration. And the holy apostles, who were always under the influence and conduct of the Spirit, never made use of it for any such purpose as to prescribe forms of prayer, either for the whole church or for single persons. Therefore, because there is no such special promise given to any, this work of composing prayers is foreign to the duty of prayer, as to any interest in the gracious assistance which is promised for it — however much it may be a common duty, and fall under the help and blessing of God in general. Thus some men may set down and

express a prayer — that is, the matter and outward form of it — that declares the substance of things to be prayed for. This is done from their acquaintance with the matter of prayer, which is above others. And they attain this by spiritual light, knowledge, and experience, and their comprehension of the arguments which the Scripture directs are to be used and pleaded in our supplications.

Their [composed] prayer may much more accommodate the conditions, wants, and desires of Christians, than the compositions of others who are not so clearly enlightened as they are, and who have not had the experience which they have had. As for those 'prayers,' as they are called, which men without such light and experience compose, of phrases and expressions gathered from others, taken out of the Scripture, or invented by themselves, they are cast into a contexture and method which they suppose is suited to prayer in general. However well-worded these are, however quaint and elegant in expression — they are so empty and jejune, that they can be of no manner of use to anyone, except to keep them from praying while they live. We have a good store of such books, filled with them, easy enough to be composed by those who never in their lives prayed according to the mind of God. Much may be learned from the former enlightened sort, as they doctrinally exhibit the matter and arguments of prayer. But the composition of prayers for *others*, to be used as *their* prayers, is what no man has any promise of particular spiritual assistance in, with respect to prayer in particular.

2. No man has any *promise of the Spirit* of grace and supplication to enable him to *compose a form or forms of prayer for himself*. The Spirit of God helps us *to pray*, not to *make prayers* in that sense. As before, suppose in doing so, that men may have His assistance in general as they do in other studies and endeavors; they still do not

have that special assistance which he gives as a Spirit of grace and supplication, enabling us to cry, 'Abba, Father.' For men do not compose forms of prayer, however they may use them, by the immediate actings of faith, love, and delight in God, with the other graces which he excites and acts in those supplications, according to the divine will. Nor is God the immediate object of the actings of the faculties of the souls of men in such a work. Their inventions, memories, and judgments, are immediately exercised about their present composition; and there they rest. The exercise of grace immediately on God in Christ, under the formal notion of prayer, is not a part of men's work or design when they compose and set down forms of prayer for themselves or others. Therefore, if any do so, they are not under a promise of special assistance in this, in the manner declared before.

3. As there is no assistance promised for the composition of such forms, it is not an *institution* of the law or gospel. Prayer itself is a duty of the *law of nature*. And being of such singular and indispensable use to all persons, the commands for it are reiterated in the Scripture beyond those concerning any other particular duty whatever. And if it has respect to Jesus Christ, with various ordinances of the gospel that are to be performed in his name, it falls under a *new* divine institution.

On this, commands are given to us to pray, to pray continually without ceasing, to pray and not faint, to pray for ourselves, to pray for one another, in our closets, in our families, in the assemblies of the church. But as for this work of making or composing forms of prayers for ourselves, to be used as prayers, there is no command, no institution, and no mention in the scriptures of the Old Testament or the New. It is a work of human extract and origin; nor can anything be expected from it except what proceeds from that fountain. There

may possibly be a blessing on it, but not one that issues from the special assistance of the Spirit of God in it, nor from any divine appointment or institution whatever. But the reader must observe that I do not urge these things to prove forms of prayer are unlawful to be used. At present I only declare their nature and origin with respect to that work of the Holy Spirit which we have described.

4. This being *the origin* of forms of prayer, the *benefit* and *advantage* of their use, which alone is pleadable in their behalf, comes next under consideration. And this may be done with respect to two sorts of persons:

(1.) Those who have the *gift* or *ability* of *free prayer* bestowed on them, or who have attained it somehow.

(2.) Those who are *mean and lowly in this ability*, and therefore incompetent to perform this duty without the aid and assistance of forms.

And forms are pleaded to be of use and advantage to both sorts.

(1.) It is pleaded that there is so much good and so much advantage in the use of forms, *that it is expedient that those who can otherwise pray for their own and others' edification, should still sometimes use them.* What this benefit is has not been distinctly declared; nor do I know, nor can I divine, what it would consist in. Sacred things are not to be used merely to show our liberty. And there seems to be in this a neglect of stirring up the gift, if not also the grace of God, in those who have received them. 'The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every one to profit with.' 1Cor 12.7 And so, to forego its exercise on any just occasion does not seem warrantable. We are bound at all times, in the worship of God, to serve him with the best we have. If we have a male in the flock and we sacrifice what, by

comparison, is a corrupt thing, then we are deceivers. Free prayer for those who have an ability for it, is more suited to the nature of the duty in the light of nature itself, and to Scripture commands and examples, than to the use of any prescribed forms. Therefore, to omit the exercise of a spiritual ability in this, and to voluntarily divert to the other relief — which, in that case at least, is no relief — does not readily present its advantage to a sober consideration. The reader may observe that at present I do not examine what men or churches may agree upon by common consent, judging and avowing what is best for their own edification (which is a matter for another consideration); but I only examine the duty of believers as such, in their respective stations and conditions.

(2.) It is generally supposed that the use of such forms is of singular advantage to those who are *low and mean in their ability to pray of themselves*. I propose it this way, because I cannot grant that anyone who sincerely believes there is a God, who is sensible of his own wants and his absolute dependence on Him, is utterly unable to make requests to Him for relief, without help beyond what is suggested to him by the working of the natural faculties of his own soul. What men wilfully neglect is one thing; and what they cannot do, if they seriously apply themselves to their duty, is another. Nor do I believe there is any man who is so far instructed by the gospel in the knowledge of Christ, that he can make use of a composed prayer with understanding, who is not also able in some measure to call upon God in the name of Christ, with respect to what he feels in himself and is concerned in — and no man's prayers are to be extended further than this.

Therefore, I speak of those who have the least measure and lowest degree of this ability, seeing that none are absolutely uninterested in this. I do not know of what use these forms are to this sort of

persons, unless it is to keep them low and mean all the days of their lives. For because in both the state of nature and the state of grace (and every man is in one or the other), there are certain heavenly sparks suited to each condition, the main duty of all men is to stir them up and increase them. Even in the remainders of lapsed nature, there are 'celestial fires,' in notices of good and evil, in accusations and apologies of conscience. None will deny that they ought to be stirred up and increased; and this cannot be done other than in their sedulous exercise. Nor is there any effectual way to exercise them, but in the soul's applying itself to God with respect to them; and this is done in prayer only. But as for those whom we principally regard in this matter — that is, professed believers in Jesus Christ — there are none who do not have such principles of spiritual life; and in this, they have principles of all obedience to God and communion with him. Being improved and exercised under those continual supplies of the Spirit which they receive from Christ their head, these will enable them to discharge every duty that is required of them, in every condition or relation, in an acceptable manner. Among these duties is that of an ability for prayer. To deny that they have it, assuming they are true believers, is to expressly contradict the apostle affirming that 'because we are sons, God sends forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, by which we cry, Abba, Father.'

But this ability, as I have shown, is in no way to be improved except by constant exercise. Now, it is not hard to determine whether the use of the forms inquired into, which certainly takes men away from the exercise of whatever ability they have, directly tends to keep them low and mean in their abilities.

'But suppose those spoken of are not yet real believers, but only those who profess the gospel, who have not yet sincerely converted to God, whose duty it also is to pray on all occasions. These have no such

principle or ability to improve; and therefore this advantage is not to be neglected by them.'

I answer, that the matter of all spiritual gifts is spiritual light. Therefore, according to their measure in the light of the knowledge of the gospel, such is their measure in spiritual gifts also. If they have no spiritual light, no insight into the knowledge of the gospel, then prayers framed and composed according to that light will be of little use to them. If they have any such light, it ought to be improved by exercise in this duty, which is such an indispensable necessity to their souls.

5. Yet the advantage that all sorts of persons may have by this, in having 'the *matter of prayer* prepared for them and suggested to them,' is also insisted on. 'They have much to seek in this who yet have *sincere desires to pray*, and whose *affections* comply with what is proposed to them.' And this, indeed, would carry a great appearance of reason with it, except that there are other ways appointed by God to this end. And they are sufficient for it under the guidance, conduct, and assistance of the blessed Spirit, whose work must be admitted in all parts of this duty — unless we intend to frame prayers that will be an abomination to the Lord. Such ways are men's diligent and sedulous consideration of themselves, of their spiritual state and condition, their wants and desires; a diligent consideration of the Scripture, or its doctrine in the ministry of the word. By these they will be both instructed in the whole matter of prayer, and convinced of their own concern in it, with all other helps of coming to the knowledge of God and of themselves — all of which those who intend to pray in a due manner are to attend to.

But to furnish men with prayers to be said by them, seeking to satisfy their consciences while they live in the neglect of these things, is to

deceive them and not to help or instruct them. If they will conscientiously attend to these things mentioned, they will have no need of those other pretended helps. For men to live and converse with the world, not once inquiring into their own ways, or reflecting on their own hearts (unless under some charge of conscience, accompanied with fear or danger); never endeavoring to examine, try, or compare their state and condition with the Scripture, nor scarcely considering either their own wants or God's promises; to have a book lie ready for them in which they may read a prayer — and by doing so, assume they have discharged their duty in that matter — this is a course which surely should not be countenanced or encouraged.

Nor is the perpetual rotation of the same words and expressions suited to instruct or carry men on in the knowledge of anything. Rather, it diverts the mind from the due consideration of the things intended; and therefore it commonly results in formality. Where men have words or expressions prepared for them and suggested to them, that really signify the things in which they are concerned, and yet the light and knowledge of those principles of truth from which they are derived, and into which they are resolved, is not in some measure fixed and abiding in their minds, they cannot be much benefited or edified by their repetition.

6. *Experience* is pleaded in the same case. For me, where persons are evidently conscientious, this is of more moment than a hundred notional arguments that cannot be brought to that trial. Some therefore say that, in the use of such forms, they have had a spiritual advantage, the exercise of grace, and holy intercourse with God; and they have had their affections warmed and their hearts much bettered by it. They take this to be a clear evidence and token that

they are not disapproved by God; indeed, that they are a great advantage in prayer, at least for many.

Ans. Whether they are approved or disapproved by God, whether they are lawful or unlawful, we do not consider; but only whether these forms are for spiritual benefit and advantage — whether they are for the good of our own souls and the edification of others, *as set up in competition with the exercise of the gift described before.* And in this, I am very unwilling to oppose the experience of anyone who seems to be under the conduct of the least beam of gospel light; only, I desire to propose a few things for their consideration: such as —

(1.) Whether they rightly understand the difference between *natural devotion* that is occasionally excited, and the due actings of *evangelical faith* and *love*, with other graces of the Spirit, in a way directed to by divine appointment? All men who acknowledge a Deity or Divine Power which they adore, when they seriously address themselves to perform any religious worship to this deity in their own way, be that what it may, they will have their affections moved and excited suitably to the apprehensions they have of what they worship, even though it has no existence except in their own imaginations. For these affections ensue on the general notion of a Divine Power, and not on the application of them to such idols that indeed are nothing in the world. In such persons there will be dread, and reverence, and fear, as there were in some of the heathen, even to an unspeakable horror when they entered into the temples and the merely imaginary presence of their gods; the whole work was begun and finished in their fancies.

And sometimes great joys, satisfactions, and delights, ensue on what they do; for just as what they do is suited to the best light they have, so their consciences find relief in the discharge of their duty. For men

are apt to be complacent in their own inventions (as Micah was, Jdg 17.13), and from inveterate prejudices, which are the guides of most men in religion. These things, I say, are found in persons of the highest and most dreadful superstitions in the world, indeed, heightened to inexpressible agitations of mind — in horror on one side, and raptures or ecstasies on the other. And they are all tempered and qualified according to the mode and way of worship in which men are engaged. But in themselves, they are all of the same nature; that is, they are natural, or they are effects and impressions upon nature. So it is with the Mohammedans, who excel in this devotion; and so it is with idolatrous Christians, who place the excellence and glory of their profession of Christ in this. Therefore, such devotion, such affections, will be excited by religious offices, in all who are sincere in their use, whether they are of divine appointment or not. But the actings of faith and love on God through Christ, according to the gospel, or the tenor of the new covenant, with the effects produced by it in the heart and affections, are things of quite another kind and nature. Unless men know how to really distinguish between these things, it serves no purpose to plead that there is a spiritual benefit and advantage in the use of such forms; for the benefit and advantage is possibly of no other kind than what all false worshippers in the world have, or may experience.

(2.) Let them diligently inquire whether the effects on their hearts, which they plead, proceed from a *precedent preparation*, a good design and upright ends, that are occasionally excited. Let it be supposed that those who make use of and plead for forms of prayer, especially in public, prepare themselves for it in a due manner by holy meditation, with an endeavor to bring their souls into a holy frame of fear, delight, and reverence of God; let it also be supposed that they have a good end and design in the worship which they address themselves to — namely, the glory of God and their own

spiritual advantage — the prayers themselves, even though they would be irregular in some things, may give occasion to exercise those acts of grace which these persons were otherwise prepared for. And I say yet further —

(3.) That while these forms of prayer are clothed with the general *notions of prayer* — that is,

- they are esteemed as such in the minds of those who use them;
- they are accompanied in their use with the motives and ends of prayer;
- they express no matter that is unlawful to be insisted on in prayer;
- they direct the souls of men to none but lawful objects of divine worship and prayer (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit);
- men make use of them with the true design of prayer, looking for due assistance in prayer;

— I do not judge that there is any such evil in them that God will not communicate his Spirit to any in their use, such that they would have no holy communion with Him in and under them.

Much less will I say that God never regards their persons in this, or rejects their praying as unlawful. For the persons and duties of men may be accepted with God when they walk and act in sincerity according to their light; even though in many things, and those being of no small importance, various irregularities are found both in *what* they do, and in the *manner* of doing it. Where persons walk before God in their integrity, and practice nothing contrary to their light and conviction in his worship, God is merciful to them, even though they do not order everything according to the rule and measure of the word. So it was with those who came to the Passover in the days of Hezekiah. They had not cleansed themselves, but 'ate the Passover

contrary to what was written,' 2Chr 30.18. The good king made a solemn prayer for them, suited to their occasion, 'The good Lord pardon everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he is not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people,' verses 18-20. Here was a duty that, for its *substance*, was appointed by God; but there was a failure in the *manner* of its performance— they did not do it according to what was written, which is the sole rule of all religious duties. God was displeased with this, and yet He graciously passed by the offense, and accepted those whose hearts were upright in what they did. In the meantime, I still judge that the use of forms is in itself obstructive of all the principal ends of prayer and sacred worship. Where they alone are used, they are opposite to the edification of the church; and where they are imposed to the absolute exclusion of other prayer, they are destructive of its liberty, and they render a good part of the purchase of Christ, of no effect.

Things being thus stated, it will be asked whether the use of such forms of prayer is lawful or not. To this inquiry something will be returned briefly in way of an answer, and an end will be put to this discourse. I say —

1. To *compose and write forms of prayer to be directive and doctrinal helps* to others, as to the matter and method to be used in the right discharge of this duty, is lawful; and in some cases it may be useful. It would be better, maybe, if the same thing were done in another way, suited to give *direction* in the case, and not cast into the *form of a prayer*, which is apt to divert the mind from the due consideration of its proper end and use to that which is not so. But this way of instruction is not to be looked at as unlawful merely for

the form and method into which it is cast, while its true use, only, is attended to.

2. To *read, consider, and meditate* upon such *written prayers*, as to the matter and arguments of prayer expressed in them, composed by persons from their own experience and the light of Scripture directions; or to make use of expressions set down in them, where the hearts of those who read them are really affected, because they find their state and condition, their wants and desires, declared in them, *is not unlawful*, but may be of good use to some — though I must acknowledge, I never heard any expressing any great benefit which they received by this. But it is possible that some may do so. For no such freedom of prayer is asserted that would make it unlawful for men to make use of any proper means to better enable them to pray. Nor is any such ability of prayer granted, that supersedes the duty of using means to increase and further it.

3. To set up and prescribe the use of such forms *universally*, in opposition and to the exclusion of *free prayer* by the aid of the Spirit of grace, is contrary not only to many divine precepts insisted on before, but to the light of nature itself, which require every man to pray, and on some occasions necessitating them to pray. But whatever may be the practice of some men, I do not know that any such opinion is pleaded for, and so I will not further oppose it.

4. It is not inquired whether *forms of prayer*, especially as they may be designed and used for other ends, and not to be read *instead* of prayer, have in their composition anything of *intrinsic evil* in them; for it is granted that they have not. But the inquiry is whether in their use as *prayers* they are hindrances to the right discharge of the duty of prayer according to the mind of God, and so may be unlawful in that respect. For I take it as granted that they are nowhere appointed

by God for such a use, and nowhere commanded to be so used. From this, an argument may be formed against their having any interest in divine, acceptable worship; but this is not part of our present consideration. For if on the accounts mentioned, they do not appear contrary to, or inconsistent with, or are not used in a way exclusive of, that work of the Holy Spirit in prayer which we have described from the Scripture, nor are reducible to any divine prohibition, then while I may enjoy my own liberty, I will not contend with any about them. Nor will I now engage in the examination of the arguments pleaded on their behalf, which some have greatly multiplied, and which I suppose are not much to the advantage of their cause. For in things of religious practice, one testimony of Scripture rightly explained and applied, with the experience of believers upon that testimony, is of more weight and value than a thousand dubious reasonings which cannot be evidently resolved into those principles. Therefore a few additional considerations will put an exit to this discourse.

1. Some observe that there are forms of prayer composed and prescribed to be used both in the Old Testament and the New. Such, they say, was the form of blessing prescribed to the priests on solemn occasions, as in Num 6.22-26, and the Psalms of David, and also the Lord's Prayer in the New Testament.

(1.) If this is so, then it proves that forms of prayer are not intrinsically evil, which is granted; yet the *use* of them may be unnecessary.

(2.) The argument will not hold, so far as it is usually extended at least: 'God himself has prescribed some forms of prayer to be used by some persons on some occasions; therefore, men may invent, yes, and prescribe those forms that will be for common

and constant use.' The One who forbade all images, or all use of them, in sacred things, appointed the making of the cherubims in the tabernacle and temple.

(3.) The argument taken from the practice under the Old Testament in this matter (if anything could be taken from there), when the people were carnal and tied to carnal ordinances, and applied to the duty and practice of believers under the New Testament and a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit, has been disproved before.

(4.) The words prescribed to the priests were not a prayer, properly speaking, but an authoritative benediction, and an instituted sign of God's blessing the people. For it is added in the explication of that ordinance, 'Thus they will put my name on the children of Israel; and I will bless them,' Num 6.27.

(5.) David's Psalms were given by immediate inspiration, and most of them were mystical and prophetic, appointed to be used in the church as all other Scriptures are; only some of them were to be used in a certain manner (namely, singing); and that manner was also determined by divine appointment.

(6.) That any form of prayer is appointed in the New Testament, to be used as a form, is neither granted nor can it be proved.

(7.) Give us prayers composed by divine inspiration, with a command for their use, with the time, manner, and form of their usage — which these instances prove to be lawful — and if they prove anything in this case, there will be no contest about them.

(8.) All and every one of the precedents or examples which we have in the whole Scripture, of the prayers of any of the people

of God, men or women, all being accommodated to their present occasions, and uttered in the freedom of their own spirits, give testimony *for* free prayer, if not *against* the use of forms in that duty.

2. Moreover, it is said that 'when anyone prays, his prayer is a form for all who join with him, whether in families or church-assemblies.' Some lay great weight on this, though I am not able to discern the force of it in this case: for —

(1.) The question is solely about the one who prays, and his discharge of duty according to the mind of God, and not concerning those who join with him.

(2.) The conjunction of others with the one who prays according to his ability, is an express command of God.

(3.) Those who join him are at liberty, when it is their duty, to pray themselves.

(4.) Whatever is not a form in itself, is not a form to anyone; for more is required to make it a form than merely having the words and expressions not be of their own present invention. For them, it is the benefit of a gift, bestowed for their edification in its present exercise, according to the mind of God. Only that is a form of prayer, which someone *uses* as a form; for its nature depends on its use.

(5.) This argument is not cogent: 'God has commanded some to pray according to the ability they have received, and others to join with them in this; therefore, it is lawful to invent forms of prayer for ourselves or others, to be used as prayers by them or us.'

3. What those who pretend to moderation in this matter plead, is that 'prayer itself is a commanded duty; but praying by or with a prescribed form is only an outward manner and circumstance of it, which is indifferent; it may or may not be used as we see occasion.' If a general rule to this purpose might be duly established, it would be of huge importance. But,

(1.) It is an easy thing to invent and prescribe such outward forms and manner of outward worship, as to leave nothing of the duty prescribed except the empty name.

(2.) Praying before an image, or worshipping God or Christ by an image, is but an outward mode of worship; yet it renders the whole of it idolatrous.

(3.) Any outward mode of worship, the attendance to which, or the observance of which, is prejudicial to the due performance of the duty to which it is annexed, is inexpedient. And what there is of this in the present instance, must be judged from the preceding discourse.

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